A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH:
THE VITAE OF THE MULIERES RELIGIOSAE OF LIÈGE

by

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A Thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Centre for Medieval Studies
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This thesis examines a corpus of twelve innovative Latin vitae and the twelve thirteenth-century women from the southern Low Countries, the mulieres religiosae, whose pioneering mystical sanctity they celebrate. The corpus comprises the vitae of Marie d'Oignies, Lutgard of Aywières, Christina Mirabilis, Juette of Huy, Ida of Nivelles, Margaret of Ypres, Ida of Louvain, Alice of Schaerbeek, Ida of Gorsleeuw, Juliana of Cornillon, Beatrice of Nazareth and Elizabeth of Spalbeek.

The first chapter provides historical and literary context for the vitae of the mulieres religiosae by tracing the development of Christian biography of women from the Gospel texts to the fifth century. Particular attention is given to the role of the apocryphal Acts of the Apostles, the passiones of the female martyrs and the literature of Egyptian monasticism in establishing women's place within hagiography, and to the development of sex-specific themes in the narration of female sanctity.

The second chapter argues that the re-emergence of mysticism in high-medieval religious life brought profound changes to female biography by placing new importance on women's self-reporting of their inner experience, and on the male spiritual friend who recorded the interior life of his saintly friend. These changes are traced in the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, which represent some of the earliest examples of mystical biography.

The third chapter considers the mulieres religiosae as dedicated early witnesses of the arresting spiritual practice of vicarious suffering. The mulieres religiosae acted on the supremely confident conviction that their own penance, in the form of physical or sometimes emotional suffering, would be of specific and objective spiritual benefit to others because they
could bestow their own meritorious suffering on their neighbours, especially, though not exclusively, those who were in purgatory.

Chapter Four investigates the interaction between motherhood and the perfect Christian life by exploring motherliness and sanctity in the life of Juette of Huy, a widow, recluse and mother. The chapter first examines the ideas about saintliness and mothering to which Juette and her biographer were heirs, and then explores the deep ambivalence towards motherhood which the *Life* of Juette depicts its subject as experiencing.
Acknowledgments

This thesis was begun amongst the bustling, gridded streets of a large and lively metropolis in the middle of the great North American land mass, whose comfortably predictable, if extreme, weather marched thousands of miles across the continent before it came to us. It was finished flanked by the hills, seals, penguins and albatross of a much smaller city, perched on the eastern edge of a island isolated in the vast south Pacific, whose superbly melodramatic skies change hourly. I have been fortunate indeed to have had the help I needed to write this thesis in both these wonderful places.

At the University of Toronto, in Canada, my supervisor, Joseph Goering provided the kind of unfailing wisdom which every graduate student dreams of, and few receive. As members of my thesis committee, David Townsend offered encouragement and cheer when they were most in need, and Robert Sweetman responded to my work with characteristic intellectual intensity. Brian Stock will be gratefully remembered for teaching the most stimulating graduate seminars I had the pleasure to attend; I am saddened by the fact that the Basilian fathers Michael Sheehan and Walter Principe, both sadly now deceased, will never know how much of a contribution their teaching made to this thesis. The friendships I made with Ruth Wehlau, John Corbett, Ann Kuzdale, Georges Whalen, Joanne Findon, Peter Binkley, Liz Wall and Claire Fanger, to name only the closest, in the unique environment created for graduate students at the Centre for Medieval Studies at Toronto have helped me find intellectual and emotional companionship to last a lifetime. While in Toronto, I also embarked on the enjoyable process of collaboration with Sally-Beth MacLean, who can only be described as a perfect co-editor, which lead to the publication of Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women (1995). I would like to thank the University of Illinois Press for permission to reprint my essay from that volume, "Juette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228): Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life" as the fourth chapter in this thesis.

At the University of Otago, in Dunedin, New Zealand, I have known nothing but kindness and encouragement from all of the Department of History, and for both I am deeply grateful. I would like to extend especially warm thanks to my Head of Department, Dr Dorothy Page, who in the last three years has gone out of her way to clear the crucial time away from teaching I needed to complete this thesis, and whose confidence that it would be finished never seemed to flag. The friendship and the courageous example offered by my colleague and office neighbour at Otago, Kathy Hermes, has been especially important to me in my time in New Zealand.

And finally, my husband Andrew Connolly has been an unshakeable constant across these two continents, and I find it hard to express all that I owe to him. No one, not even a mulier religiosa, could have borne the burdens of another as faithfully as he has borne mine in these last years.

J. H. C.
# A New Heaven and a New Earth:
## The Vitae of the Mulieres Religiosae of Liège

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Introduction

As we look back in wonder at the profound changes which the fast-disappearing twentieth century has brought to the social and cultural position of women in Western societies, the task of understanding the sources of the revolutionary changes of our times appears at least as compelling as that of understanding the roots of the entrenched sexism from which liberation has been sought. The present study of twelve innovative hagiographical texts from the Low Countries in the thirteenth century and of the women, known as the *mulieres religiosae*, whose pioneering mystical sanctity inspired their composition, is a contribution to our understanding of the reservoirs of strength and opportunity available to women within Western culture, and of the process by which women drew upon this heritage in order to bring about change. For this study of the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae* has led me to explore the historical development of several areas within Western culture in which an authorised space could be found for women's thought, actions and expressions of self: namely, Christian biography, mystical religion and mystical biography, the practice of redemptive suffering and Christian motherhood. At the same time, I have tried to understand the *mulieres religiosae* as social actors, who while undoubtedly confined within cultural narratives they had inherited from the past, were nevertheless able to shape new forms of religious and literary expression from and within existing ones.¹

The first two chapters of this work focus on two pivotal periods in the history of the genre of Christian biography of women. This is a literary form which gave the West its first full-length heroic narratives of the lives of historical women, and in so doing provided a means by which women were able to reflect on their own lives as women and find models for female religious activity, usually outside traditional family roles; in time it also served as a framework for women's own autobiographical narratives. Chapter One argues that the new roles women assumed within the first Christian centuries ensured that women, who had had almost no place as subjects of Greco-Roman biography, would figure as heroines in early Christian biography: the lives of the female followers of Jesus found a place in the Gospels: the biographical narratives of the apocryphal Acts of the apostles reflect the importance of women as early converts to the church; the heroic suffering of female martyrs was recorded in passiones; and women who were participants and patrons of the monastic world were given a place in the literature of the Egyptian desert. By the fifth century, biographical narratives such as those by Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome about Monica, Macrina and Paula would provide vivid portraits of the emotional and religious lives of women intimately known to their biographers.

Chapter Two considers a second turning point in the history of female biography, the development of the highly influential sub-genre of mystical biography, through an examination of vitae of the mulieres religiosae which represent some of the earliest examples of that new form of biography. The private, interior focus of mystical religious experience brought with it a new respect for the inner lives of saintly women, and for their own roles as narrators of that experience. The chapter charts in the vitae of the mulieres religiosae the growing importance of the autobiographical contribution of a mystical saint to her own vita, and a growing confidence amongst women that their own mystical experience was worthy of record. These developments culminated in the autobiographical account that Beatrice of Nazareth made of her

own mystical experience, and which forms the basis of the surviving *vita* of which she is the subject. Mystical biography, then, gave women a new way in which to value their own lives, and a new avenue to self-expression. At the same time, the importance placed on women’s self-reporting also encouraged new kinds of relationships between subjects and authors, and the chapter follows the steps that both the *mulieres religiosae* and their biographers took in furthering the spiritual friendship between a saintly woman and the male spiritual friend or director who recorded her holy life.

Chapter Three presents the *mulieres religiosae* as early exponents of redemptive piety, and especially of the extraordinary practice of vicarious suffering, which rested on their belief that in recompense for their suffering there came into being positive spiritual value which God was bound to redistribute for the benefit of others. The chapter first examines the history of vicarious suffering, tracing the elements of this cultural narrative from its roots in the writing of Paul into its role within monastic penitence and then gauging the influence on the practice of the new understandings of Christ developed in the high Middle Ages. The chapter then follows the development of the themes of spiritual charity and vicarious suffering in the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*, looking at how each of the *mulieres religiosae* combined an individual blend of narrative and symbolic elements into an innovative religious concept around which she formed a distinctive social practice. In their zeal for souls, the *mulieres religiosae* created new roles for themselves as intimate co-workers of Christ and as patrons of a clientele both inside and outside their communities.

As a shared female experience, motherhood has long been a source of authority upon which women have drawn to support their right to act in social, political and literary spheres. Yet in the Christian tradition, as Chapter Four argues, the close links between mothering, family and sexuality meant that mothering could also be seen as an impediment to the saintly life. The chapter examines the interaction between motherliness and sanctity in the life of the *mulier religiosa*, Juette of Huy, a widow, recluse and mother of three children. Juette shaped her life into a saintly one not through her motherliness, but by rejecting the demands of
worldly motherhood, by leaving her young children behind as she entered the religious life in the leper house outside her town. Yet motherliness is not rejected entirely in the vita: Juette's biographer praises her continuing concern for the souls of her children, and her success in guiding her sons into the monastic life. Spiritual motherhood proved much less problematic for Juette than biological motherhood, and motherhood served as a positive model for the care and authority she exercised over her spiritual daughters within the leper community.

The remainder of this introduction gives a table with basic information about the twelve *mulieres religiosae* and their *vitae*, an introduction to the social and institutional world of the *mulieres religiosae* and a brief account of the manuscript tradition of the *vitae*.

II

The *Mulieres Religiosae*

Twelve thirteenth-century holy women from the southern Low Countries, and the *vitae* which their contemporaries wrote to record their lives, form the subject of this study. The table below summarises information on the institutional life of each of the twelve *mulieres religiosae*, sets out the dates and authors of their *vitae*, and gives the reference number given to each of the *vitae* in the Bollandists' *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiquae et medieiae aetatis*.2

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2 Discussion of the dating and authorship of the *vitae*, and bibliography for each, will be given in the body of the thesis. The *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina* was first published in Brussels in 1898 and 1901; see also the two later supplements to the initial work, *Bibliotheca hagiographica latina antiqua et medieiae aetatis: Supplementi editio altera auctior*. (Brussels, 1911) and *Bibliotheca Latina Antiqua et Mediae Aetatis: Novum Supplementum*, ed. Henryk Fros (Brussels, 1986).
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The Mulieres Religiosae in their Social and Institutional Context

The particularity of the society in which the mulieres religiosae were born, and of the historically unprecedented women's religious movement which grew out of that society in the late twelfth century and the thirteenth century, forms an essential backdrop to the lives of the twelve mulieres religiosae. The buoyant precocity of the social, economic and religious life of the southern Low Countries set it apart from much of the rest of Western Europe during the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the period from the eleventh century to the beginning of the fourteenth, the southern Low Countries underwent extraordinarily rapid economic development and urbanisation, a revolution which created one of the most highly urbanised and industrialised areas in medieval Europe. While Italy, whose development most closely resembles that of the southern Low Countries, could boast of much larger cities, the northern area was unrivalled for the density of its urban centres and the proportion of the population in

them: more people in the southern Low Countries lived in towns, or had close access to them, than in any other region of Europe.

The "urban revolution" which was to transform the southern Low Countries began in the county of Flanders, where technological breakthroughs in the manufacture of cloth, agricultural surpluses and extremely rapid population growth in the eleventh century provided the impetus for the emergence of a highly successful urban cloth industry directed at the international market. Flemish industry provided a secure foundation for a class of international merchants, who came to play a prominent part in Flemish economic and political life. By the twelfth century, Flanders was a region of great and small cities, which drew their wealth from their specialised export cloth industries: one of the greatest of these, the city of Ypres, was home to mulier religiosa Margaret of Ypres, who lived and died as a laywoman there.

In the twelfth century, Flanders' eastern neighbour, the duchy of Brabant, also began to experience rapid urban development. During the thirteenth century, many Brabantine towns grew into centres of textile industry and international trade, and began to compete with the Flemish towns for business. Antwerp, Brussels, Louvain and Mechelen all grew to new importance during this period, with the development of the last three spurred by a new road built in the twelfth century linking Bruges on the North Sea with Maastricht in the Rhineland, by way of Ghent, Brussels and Louvain. A number of the mulieres religiosae were born or lived in urban settlements on this new route: Alice of Schaerbeek lived in a Cistercian

4 Jansen, "Handel en nijverheid," 156-175; Herman Van der Wee, "Structural Changes and Specialization in the Industry of the Southern Netherlands, 1100-1600," Economic History Review 28 (1975), 203-05; and Nicholas, Medieval Flanders, 97-123.

5 Nicholas, Medieval Flanders, 124-49.

6 Jansen, "Handel en nijverheid," 175-76.

7 Ibid., 161; Doehard, L'Expansion, 49.
community just outside Brussels; Ida of Louvain was born and lived much of her recorded life in Louvain, a large commercial centre with a population of some tens of thousands.

Beyond Louvain, the new road crossed from Brabant into the north of the bishopric-principality of Liège. Along this last stretch of the Bruges-Maastricht road was the prosperous town of Tienen, the birth-place of Beatrice of Nazareth; further on towards Maastricht was St Truiden, another thriving town, which owed its original impetus to the Benedictine abbey of St Truiden, was the home of laywoman Christina Mirabilis; and further on still was the old Roman city of Tongeren, birth-place of Lutgard of Aywières, which also prospered during the thirteenth century.

The valley of the Meuse river, a predominantly French-speaking region which ran along the southern and eastern edges of the southern Low Countries, was the third natural economic area within the region. Meuse valley towns, such as Liège, Huy, Dinant (all in the southern part of the bishopric of Liège), had had a long history of commercial and industrial activity, stretching back into Carolingian times; many more Meuse towns developed successful cloth industries during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Marie d'Oignies and Ida of Nivelles were both from the town of Nivelles, a French-speaking town within the borders of Brabant, but whose economic ties were with the Meuse valley region. Juette of Huy found her religious vocation in her home-town of Huy, a large and long-established urban centre by the thirteenth century, with an internationally-oriented metal and cloth industry. Juliana of

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8 Schaerbeek is a small village not far from Brussels; it is possible that Alice's family had already moved from Schaerbeek to Brussels, as it was quite common for urban families to be known by the name of the village from which they had migrated (cf. Van Uytven, "Het stedelijk leven, 11de-14de eeuw," 206).

Comillon was born in the small town of Retinne, near Liège, and became prioress of the leper community of Mont Cornillon on the outskirts of the city.\textsuperscript{10}

The political, linguistic and ecclesiastical units into which the southern Low Countries was divided in the thirteenth century rarely coincided with each other, nor indeed with the three economic regions I have just described, the result being the peculiarly complex patchwork of competing allegiances which Henri Pirenne urged his fellow Belgians to see as the unifying feature of their history.\textsuperscript{11} The \textit{vitae} of the \textit{mulieres religiosae} give some support to Pirenne's notion of a region united in its disunities. The \textit{mulieres religiosae} rarely travelled

\textsuperscript{10}Despy, "Naissance de villes et de bourgades," 105-29, includes discussions of the growth of Nivelles, Liège and Huy.

\textsuperscript{11}The main political units were the county of Flanders (a fief of the French king), the duchy of Brabant, and the prince-bishopric of Liège. Much smaller were the counties of Namur and Loon (these two and Brabant and Liège owed allegiance to the German Empire). The three largest units contained both French- and Flemish-speaking inhabitants. The dioceses of the region coincided with neither linguistic nor political boundaries. The county of Flanders was divided amongst four bishoprics, one Dutch and three French, but no bishop had a seat in the county; while the principal diocese of Brabant, the diocese of Cambrai, formed part of the archdiocese of Rheims; the diocese of Liège, which belonged to the archdiocese of Cologne, took in both the prince-bishopric of Liège and a large part of the duchy of Brabant. Pirenne's \textit{Histoire de Belgique, Volume 1: Des origines au commencement du XIVe siècle} takes as its major theme the development of this mess (see esp. 10-22). For the political history of the southern Low Countries, see T. de Hemptinne, "Vlaanderen en Henegouwen onder de erfgenamen van de Boudewijns 1070-1244;" P. Avonds, "Brabant en Limburg 1100-1403," J. Baerten, "Luik en Loon 1100-1390," and his "Het graafschap Namen 1100-1391," all in \textit{Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden, 2:} 372-398; 452-82; 483-498 and 499-503 respectively. See also, André Uyttebrouck, "Le morcellement du pouvoir central: de pagus à la principauté," in \textit{La Wallonie, le pays et les hommes}, 63-92.
outside the southern Low Countries, yet they frequently moved across diocesan, linguistic and political borders within the area in their search for the religious life. Marie d'Oignies moved from the duchy of Brabant into the prince-bishopric of Liège, when she left Nivelles for Oignies. Ida of Nivelles crossed the linguistic border between German- and Romance-speaking Europe, which had bisected the southern Low Countries since the fifth century, when she moved from her French-speaking hometown, Nivelles, to the Flemish-speaking Cistercian community at Kerkom. Lutgard of Aywières crossed the language border in the other direction, leaving her Flemish-speaking home of Tongeren in the north of the prince-bishopric of Liège to join the French-speaking community of Aywières in the duchy of Brabant, while, likewise, Ida of Gorsleeuw moved from the Flemish-speaking village of Gorsleeuw in the county of Loon, to the French-speaking convent of La Ramée in the duchy of Brabant. Beatrice of Nazareth began and ended her life as a Cistercian in communities located in the diocese of Cambrai, namely, Roosendaal and Nazareth, whereas her own hometown of Tienen had been part of the diocese of Liège. The unity of the southern Low Countries is further demonstrated by the close connections the mulieres religiosae had with


13 For the development of the linguistic frontier, see André Dasnoy, "Les Germains dans la Romanité," in La Wallonie, le pays et les hommes, 37-38 and Pirenne, Histoire de Belgique. 1: 10-14.

14 The few words of Ida of Gorsleeuw which her biographer gives in the vernacular are Flemish. See [Vita] De B. Ida Lewensis, ed. R. de Buck, Acta Sanctorum, October vol. 13 [October 29] (Paris, 1867), 100-35, at chap. 3, par. 26, p. 115; Ida also composed verse in Flemish (Ibid., chap. 2, par. 20, p. 113).
like-minded men and women throughout the region, though rarely with those beyond its borders.

Partly as a cause, and partly as a result of the importance and economic power of the towns and cities of the Low Countries, the social structure of the region differed considerably from most other parts of Western Europe. Seigneurialism and concomitantly serfdom died an early and quiet death, first in Flanders and then in the other areas too, with the result that a mobile workforce was available for the cloth and service industries of the towns.\textsuperscript{15} The real economic power in the Low Countries from the twelfth century was in the urban rather than the rural economies, and this fact was reflected in the strong social and economic position of the urban middle classes. By the twelfth century, the position of the rural aristocracy, for the most part locked out of these newer avenues to power and wealth, suffered in relation to the bourgeoisie, and was never as strong as in most areas of contemporary Western Europe.\textsuperscript{16}

The social composition of the southern Low Countries is reflected in the predominantly urban, non-noble origins of the \textit{mulieres religiosae}, and explains why the \textit{vitae} of the \textit{mulieres religiosae} are some of the earliest hagiographical texts in which the lives of middle class women are recorded. Ten of the twelve \textit{mulieres religiosae} were born or lived as adults in towns of considerable size; and where we have information about their families, we find that they were most often bourgeois of some wealth and standing in their communities.\textsuperscript{17}


\textsuperscript{16} Van Uytven, "Het stedelijk leven, 11de-14de eeuw," 245-53.

\textsuperscript{17} "Mediocris," that is "middling" or "middle class," and "honestus," that is "respectable," are the adjectives used to describe the families of the \textit{mulieres religiosae}, while several of the families are also described as "wealthy." Cf. Ernest McDonnell, \textit{The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture}, (1954, reprint New York, 1969), 81-100.
fathers of Marie d'Oignies, Ida of Nivelles and Ida of Louvain were substantial members of the commercial bourgeoisie; while Juette of Huy's father worked as the bishop of Liège's financial representative in Huy, one of the considerable number of ministeriales who lived in the cities of the southern Low Countries. Only two of the mulieres religiosae are not closely associated with urban life, although the villages in which they were born were close to larger centres. Elizabeth of Spalbeek was from the small village of Spalbeek in the northern county of Loon; her social origins are unclear, although we are told that she is related to her confessor, William, abbot of St Truiden. The other exception to the urban rule, the only mulier religiosa whose father we know descended from noble blood, was Ida of Gorsleeuw, the child of a younger son of a minor noble family whose seat was at the small village of Gorsleeuw, also located in the county of Loon.

The urban revolution of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the southern Low Countries brought enormous changes not only to the social and economic relations, but also to the religious lives, of its inhabitants. The deracination which was an inevitable part of city

18 For a description of the social make-up of the cities in the southern Low Countries, see Van Uytven, "Het stedelijk leven, 11de-14de eeuw," 204-08.
21 Here I am arguing that the growth in urbanisation changed the Belgian social and religious world as a whole, that is, for both country and city people, rather than that city people by nature thought about religion differently. Of course, there was much interaction between city and country, interaction which was made even easier by the short distances between Belgian towns. For a salutary reminder of the dangers of overemphasising urban-rural differences, see Miri Rubin, "Religious Culture in Town and Country: Reflections on a Great Divide," in
life, as people moved to the cities and took up new jobs, the novel social mix found in the cities, and the social and political consequences of a concentrated, mobile, and in many cases, newly prosperous population offered the townspeople and those who ministered to them many difficulties, but urban life also, it seems clear, provided considerable opportunity, and also incentive, to create new forms of religious life.22 Spurred by the breathtaking vision of a newly-purified church promoted by the Gregorian reformers, the Christian world, which had formerly been suspicious of change, now began to think that innovation in religious life could be part of God's continually changing plan for a changing world, and, further, that the church was obliged to provide for the specialised needs of the urban populations.23

It has long been established that women in highly urbanised areas such as the southern Low Countries and northern Italy played a leading role in the "women's religious movement," the name given to the extraordinary enthusiasm with which women across Europe sought the religious life in a variety of forms during the late twelfth and the thirteenth century.24

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22 This is the argument of Ludo Milis, "De Kerk tussen de Gregoriaanse hervorming en Avignon," in Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden, vol. 3 (Haarlem, 1982), 165-211.
the hallmarks of the women's religious movement in the Low Countries was the variety in the forms of religious life which the women chose to follow, motivated partly by the practical need to create space for themselves within the religious life, and partly by the desire to create new kinds of communal life, more in keeping with the communities of the New Testament. Writers sympathetic to the movement, needing new, positive ways of describing this diverse, yet nevertheless unified, group of women, coined the phrases "mulieres sanctae" and "mulieres religiosae," in an effort to find a label which did not specify the women's marital or institutional status. The considerable diversity in the forms of religious life led by the twelve of a more general current in high medieval religious life to which the "women's movement" belonged.


25 See McDonnell's discussion of the ideals of the vita apostolica, Beguines and Beghards, 141-53.

26 Jacques de Vitry used the term "mulieres sanctae" as a generic term for the women he described in the Prologue of the Life of Marie d'Oignies, one of the earliest descriptions of the
mulieres religiosae who are the subject of this study, and the efforts they made to fashion a place for their religious lives, exemplify the institutional creativity of women in their region. Not all of the institutions with which the women were affiliated were urban in origin or location, but the opportunities for innovation and specialisation which the towns seem to have provided were important factors in the considerable success the religious women of the Low Countries had in shaping new forms of institutional life.27 The evidence from the vitae also confirms that the diversity of the external forms of women's religious lives did not reflect deep women's movement of the southern Low Countries. See [Vita] De B. Maria Oigniacensi in Namurcensi Belgii Dioecesi, ed. D. Papenbroeck in Acta Sanctorum, June vol. 5 [June 23] (Paris and Rome, 1867), 542-72, at Prologue, pars. 3-8, pp. 547-550. For the earliest uses of the term "mulieres religiosae" see Mens, Oorsprong en Betekenis, 317-18. See also Martinus Cawley, "Mulieres religiosae in Goswin of Villers," Vox Benedictina 9 (1992), 99-107. Early writers such as Jacques de Vitry and Goswin also needed to avoid using the term "beguine" whose connotations seem still to have been derogatory.

27 The distinctive social, economic and psychological needs of urban women have all been put forward as explanations of the women's religious movement. Grundmann asserted that the psychological tensions felt by the newly-prosperous sections of urban society partly explained the enthusiasm of the mulieres religiosae for the vita apostolica (Religious movements, 82-88). He was countering the prevailing opinion, whose locus classicus is Karl Bücher's Die Frauenfrage im Mittelalter (Tübingen, 2nd ed. 1910), that behind the religious movement lay the need for women unable to find husbands because of a demographic imbalance between the sexes to find social and economic security. Walter Simons has recently revived the demographic side of the Frauenfrage, by focusing attention on the overrepresentation of rural-born women in the urban beguine communities ("The Beguine Movement in the Low Countries: A Reassessment," Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome 59 [1989], 63-105).
differences in religious outlook nor act as an impediment to the many lines of communication and ties of friendship between *mulieres religiosae* of differing institutional affiliations.\(^{28}\)

Three of the *mulieres religiosae*, Marie d'Oignies, Juette of Huy and Juliana of Cornillon, began their religious careers as members of leper houses, mixed-sex communities which sprang up outside the gates of the cities and towns of the southern Low Countries during the twelfth century; by the late twelfth century and early thirteenth century, when the number of new foundations reached its peak, dozens of leper houses and similarly organised hospitals had been built across the region.\(^{29}\) These new, quintessentially urban, institutions were founded by the civic authorities and for the most part remained under their control. Yet since the members of the hospital communities lived a type of semi-regular life (the only form of communal life that unrelated people in the twelfth century could be envisaged as living), women who aspired to the religious life soon understood that such communities could serve as religious communities for all those who joined them, sick or healthy. For both Juette and Marie, the flexibility of the religious life in the leper communities would offer a vital first stage in the creation of their religious lives, when both gave up their identities as bourgeois matrons to enter the leper houses on the edge of their hometowns. Juette seems to have played a pivotal role in creating a religious community out of the leper community of Huy, as her biographer

\(^{28}\) The evidence of the *vitae* suggests that there were strong ties between hospital sisters, recluses, Cistercian nuns, laywomen and beguines. In contrast, apart from the Benedictine nuns of St Catherine's at Truiden, who play a role in both the *Lives* of Lutgard of Aywières and Christina Mirabilis, neither Benedictine nuns nor canonesses, regular or secular, have any place in the *vitae*. These older institutions placed firmer barriers to the entry of non-noble women; they would also have been less appealing to women inspired by the ideals of the *vita apostolica* to search out new forms of religious community.

\(^{29}\) I am following here Griet Maréchal, "Armen- en ziekenzorg in Zuidelijke Nederlanden," in *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 2: 268-80; see also her *De Sociale en Politieke Gebondenheid van het Brugse Hospitaalwezen* (Kortrijk, 1978).
tells us she was the first healthy person to seek the religious life there. Half a century later, the *Life* of Juliana of Cornillon presents the reader with a further stage in the development of leper houses as religious communities: Juliana, who had been brought up in the well-endowed leper community of Mont Cornillon, fought, not to establish the religious credentials of her community, but to strengthen them through the formal adoption of the Augustinian rule.

The enclosed life of the recluse, which was almost as old as monasticism itself, began to enjoy new popularity throughout Western Europe as a form of religious life for women in the twelfth century. Anchorholds offered women in the Low Countries a secure and independent religious life, more easily shaped to the interests of the individual than traditional monastic life, and by the turn of the thirteenth century the demand for licences to enter cells in the diocese of Liège far exceeded supply. While amongst the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae* only the *Life* of Juette of Huy takes a recluse as its subject, recluses are prominent throughout the *vitae* as supporting cast members, and frequently appear as important and respected


31 Juliana's efforts were strongly opposed by the civil authorities in charge of the community, and she was twice forced to flee Mont Cornillon in the ensuing conflict (*Vita Julianae*, Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 22, p. 465; Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 30, p. 467).


partners of the *mulieres religiosae* in the religious life. Eve of Saint Martin and Jutta of Borgloon give important testimony about the lives of Juliana of Cornillon and Christina Mirabilis, to whom they had both offered the hospitality of their cells.\textsuperscript{34} Ida of Louvain also found comfort in the cell of a recluse while she was still living in the world in Louvain, while Marie d'Oignies had formed close links with Hadewijch, the recluse attached to the leper community of Willambrouk.\textsuperscript{35} The life of the recluse offered itself as a last possible alternative for Juliana of Cornillon, who ended her days as a recluse attached to the church of Fosse, in the county of Namur, in a cell generously offered by the brother of its recently-deceased former occupant.\textsuperscript{36}

The most famous of the institutional innovations made by the women of the southern Low Countries in the thirteenth century was the creation of the beguinages: these communities of semi-religious women were one of the very few institutional innovations which medieval woman may claim as wholly their own.\textsuperscript{37} The beguine communities grew out of the same


\textsuperscript{36} *Vita Julianae*, Bk. 2, cap. 7, par. 44, p. 471.

kind of desire for new forms of religious life which motivated women in the southern Low Countries to find alternatives to monastic life in hospital communities and in reclusoria, and those two earlier forms of semi-religious life probably provided inspiration for the early beguines.38

None of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae describe its subject as a beguine in her adult life, and yet at the same time the vitae provide clear evidence of the close connections between the twelve mulieres religiosae and the beguine communities around them.39 The community of women Marie d'Oignies joined at Oignies has been identified as one of the earliest of the beguine communities, although Marie's biographer, Jacques de Vitry paid little attention to the external forms of her religious life, and carefully avoided using the word "beguine" to describe her.40 Several of the later mulieres religiosae lived as beguines for part of their lives, or were educated by beguines as children. Ida of Nivelles spent her adolescent years in a beguine community in Nivelles before becoming a Cistercian at the age of sixteen, and kept up close

Art Patronage: Interpretation and Historiography," Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome (1987), 31-70, both offer excellent introductions to the debates within beguine scholarship.


39 The strong links between the Cistercian nuns of the thirteenth century are discussed by Simone Roisin in her "L'Efflorescence cistercienne et le courant féminin de piété au XIIIe siècle," Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 39 (1943), 342-78.

40 For Marie's place in the early beguine movement, see Greven, Die Anfänge, 53-110 and McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 20-39.
contact with beguine communities as a nun. Ida of Gorsleeuw demonstrated her early interest in the religious life by frequently visiting the recluses and beguines of Borgloon, where she went to school. Beatrice of Nazareth was entrusted to the care of the beguines at Zoutleeuw at the age of seven after the death of her mother in order that she might “make progress in virtue.” Beatrice, we are told, came to love her companions deeply, especially the teacher to whom she had been assigned.

Beguines, like recluses, were clearly seen by the mulieres religiosae and their biographers as like-minded companions in the religious life. The Life of Marie d’Oignies records her deep concern for the communities of “religious women” or “virgins” known to her in Liège and Manne. Ida of Louvain was accompanied to the Night Office at the local Dominican church by a beguine, who stayed the night in her room. Juliana of Cornillon healed beguines who sought her help, a ministry which continued after her death, when Juliana’s linen healed the toothaches of another two beguines. A beguine community sheltered Juliana and her companions after they had been forced to flee their own community at Mont Cornillon for a number of months, before they moved to the Cistercian monastery of


44 Vita Mariæ, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 56, p. 560; Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 57, p. 560; Bk, 2, chap. 11, par. 101, p. 570.

45 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 5 [14], pars. 31-35, pp. 166-67.

46 Vita Julianae, Bk. 1, chap. 6, pars. 38, 41, pp. 454-55; Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 53, p. 475.
Priests who had been prominent as champions of the beguine movement were also held in particularly high regard by Marie d'Oignies and Lutgard of Aywières.48

The beguinages and reclusoria the mulieres religiosae knew were primarily urban institutions: most of the communities of beguines and the recluses mentioned in the vitae were located in towns of considerable size, and were often attached to urban institutions such as the hospital communities. The evidence of the vitae also, however, demonstrates that smaller centres could boast their own recluse or beguines. Fosse, where Juliana of Cornillon retired as a recluse, Borgloon, where the recluse Jutta was enclosed, and Court St Etienne, the home of a recluse healed by Lutgard of Aywières were all smaller centres.49 Similarly, while the beguine life would be almost exclusively associated with towns by the beginning of the fourteenth century, this was not always the case in the thirteenth century. Oignies, the home of

47 Vita Julianae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 32, p. 468.
48 Marie consoled John of Nivelles when he was anxious for the welfare of the community of "holy virgins" in Liège whose souls he had won (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 57, p. 560). John of Dinant and Richard of Manechan, both priests associated with the beguine movement, appeared to Marie in glory after their death (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 53, p. 559). John of Lier, a close associate of John of Nivelles, who died crossing the Alps to Rome to intercede with the Pope for the religious women of Liège, appeared to Lutgard after his death, in the glory of his heavenly state (Thomas of Cantimpré, [Vita] De S. Lutgarde virgine, ed. J. Pinius, in Acta Sanctorum, June vol. 3 [June 16] [Paris, 1867], 189-210, at Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 197-98). For Lutgard's relationship with John of Lier, see A. Deboutte, "Sint Lutgard en Magister Johannes de Liro," Sinte Lutgart Schutsvrouw van Vlaanderen 18 (1979), 46-53.
49 For the recluse at Court St Etienne, see Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 37, p. 202
one of the first beguine communities was only a small settlement, as was Manne, where there
was a community of religious women with whom Marie was in touch.50

It was not only urban religious institutions which the mulieres religiosae of the
southern Low Countries made their own. In 1200, the area could only boast of one
community of Cistercian nuns. However, the opportunity to participate in a new, austere and
enthusiastic form of female monastic life, and one which would be open to women of the
urban middle classes, held extraordinary appeal for the mulieres religiosae.51 Moreover,
Cistercian abbots in the area offered considerable encouragement and pastoral support to the

50 For the community in Manne, see Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 56, p. 560. Simons
notes that beguine communities were not uncommon in rural areas in the thirteenth century,
making them unsuitable indicators of urbanisation in the Low Countries for that period
("Beguine Movement," 73 n. 27). This suggests that it was not just the number of its towns
which set the southern Low Countries apart, but also the relatively short distances between its
population centres, large and small, and the easy connections its geography allowed between
them.

51 For the Cistercian nuns in Belgium, see Greven, Die Anfänge, 151-58; Roger De Ganck,
"The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century Seen Against the Background of
the Second Wave of Cistercian Spirituality," Cistercian Studies 5 (1970), 169-87, his "The
Integration of Nuns in the Cistercian Order Particularly in Belgium," in Cîteaux: Commentarii
Cistercienses (1984), 235-47 and Roisin, "L'Efflorescence cistercienne."

For general accounts of the Cistercian nuns, see Micheline de Fonette, Les Religieuses
à l'âge classique du droit canon: Recherches sur les structures juridiques des branches
féminines des ordres (Paris, 1967), 27-63 and Jean de la Croix Bouton, "The Life of the
Twelfth and Thirteenth-Century Nuns of Cîteaux," in Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic
Cistercian nuns, and to communities who desired to affiliate with their order.\textsuperscript{52} By 1244, there were sixty-six houses of Cistercian nuns in the southern Low Countries, with the greatest concentration of new foundations in the 1220s.\textsuperscript{53}

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\textsuperscript{52} Roisin, "L'Efflorescence cistercienne," and De Ganck, "Integration of Nuns," both point to the close relationships between Cistercian nuns and abbots of the local male houses, although it is also clear that the Cistercians became increasingly anxious not to receive communities into the order without adequate material support. The arguments of Roisin and De Ganck tally well with recent studies which question the older orthodoxy that the Cistercians were unwilling to accept women into their order. See Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "The Incorporation of Cistercian Nuns into the Order in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century," in Hidden Springs, 85-134 and Constance Berman, "Cistercian Nuns and the Development of the Order," in The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq, ed. E. Rozanne Elder (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987), 121-56, and her "Men's Houses, Women's Houses: The Relationship Between the Sexes in Twelfth-Century Monasticism," in The Medieval Monastery, ed. Andrew MacLeish (St Cloud, Minn., 1988), 43-52. Two of the most influential exponents of the view that Cistercians were hostile to women are R. W. Southern, in Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages (Harmondsworth, 1970), 314-18 and Sally Thompson in "The Problem of the Cistercian Nuns in the Twelfth and Early Thirteenth Centuries," in Medieval Women, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, 1978), 227-52.

\textsuperscript{53} De Ganck, "Cistercian Nuns," 169. Greven argued that it was the decline in opportunity for women in the Cistercian monasteries as the Cistercian order sought to limit the number of women's communities over which they had pastoral oversight which led women's communities which would have otherwise sought to affiliate with the Cistercian order to organise themselves as beguine communities. The support the Cistercian monks offered these new beguines communities was a way of easing the pressure to accept more female houses (Die Anfänge, 110-58). Greven's thesis was followed by Grundmann, Religious Movements, 80, and by McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 101-119.
Six of the *mulieres religiosae* whose *vitae* are the subject of this study belonged to the Cistercian order, a larger number than those belonging to any other form of religious life.\(^{54}\) Most were involved in the fervent early stages of the growth in Cistercian nunnery, and each of them joined a relatively new foundation.\(^{55}\) While the Cistercians did demand substantial dowries for their entrants, it is clear from the lives of the *mulieres religiosae* that their houses were not restricted to the nobility, but also provided places for the daughters at least of well-to-do townspeople, such as Ida of Nivelles, Lutgard of Aywières, Ida of Louvain and Beatrice of Nazareth.\(^{56}\) The authors of the *vitae* emphasise the firm desire of their subjects to become Cistercians, especially if they had previously followed a different form of religious life: Ida of Louvain became a Cistercian to avoid vainglory after she had gained a reputation for sanctity in Louvain; Lutgard of Aywières, had entered the Benedictine house at St Catherine's of Truiden at twelve, but made the decision to transfer to the Cistercian order at twenty-four; Ida of Nivelles left the beguine community in Nivelles at the age of sixteen to live in stricter poverty

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\(^{54}\) The Cistercian order was also admired by the *mulieres religiosae* who were not themselves nuns. Juette of Huy had close connections with the Cistercian order, which her father and both her sons entered (see below, 310 n. 70). As a child, Marie d'Oignies had admiringly placed her feet in the footsteps of Cistercian monks after they had passed in the street, and had close connections with Cistercian monks as an adult (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 11, p. 550).

\(^{55}\) J.-M. Canivez, *L'Ordre de Cîteaux en Belgique des origines (1132) au XXme siècle*, 149-56 (La Cambre); 172-86 (Aywières); 187-93 (La Ramée); 231-35 (Rosendaal), 236-39 (Nazareth).

\(^{56}\) A close parallel for the Belgian communities may be found in the thirteenth century in the Cistercian nunnery of St Antoine, just outside Paris, which received a number of bourgeois nuns, whose families provided the cash for the community to buy land and its future prosperity. The abbesses and office holders, however, continued to be drawn exclusively from the nobility (Berman, "Cistercian Nuns," 138-39).
as a Cistercian. Beatrice of Nazareth begged to be allowed to make an early profession as a nun, after having spent some years in the community of Bloemendaal, and Ida of Gorsleewu was longing to join the religious life when she entered La Ramée at the age of thirteen.

Finally, for a number of the mulieres religiosae, the family home, especially if it was an urban home, provided a sufficient framework in which they could aspire for the life of perfection. Margaret of Ypres lived all her short life under her mother's roof in the city of Ypres, where her conversion and the form of her religious life was made possible by the arrival in Ypres of her Dominican spiritual father, Zeger of Lille. The intense religious life Ida of Louvain created for herself as a young laywoman in Louvain, before she entered the Cistercian convent of Roosendaal, gives a clear impression of the opportunities cities in the Low Countries could offer. While living in economic independence of her parents, supporting herself by her own work, Ida formed spiritual friendships with beguines and Dominicans of Louvain, and frequently visited their churches, and was also a close friend of a neighbouring recluse. The laywoman Christina Mirabilis, although she sometimes preferred the trees to her sisters' house and the urban amenities in the town of St Truiden, nevertheless depended on the charity offered by the citizens of St Truiden and its community of nuns at St Catherine's. By the time the Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek was recorded in 1267, while she was still alive, the examples of earlier mulieres religiosae would have surely made it much easier to shape a female religious life at home, even if one lived in a village the size of Spalbeek. Elizabeth's

57 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, ch. 7 [22], pars. 37-38, p. 181; Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 194; Bk. 1, chap. 22, p. 195; Vita Idae Nivellensis, chap. 2, pars. 1-5. pp. 9-11.

58 Vita Idae Lewensis, chap. 2, par. 13, p. 112 and Vita Beatricis, Bk. 4, par. 23, pp. 28-29. Only Alice of Schaerbeek, who entered the Cistercian house of La Cambre at the age of seven, is not recorded as having made her own decision to enter her community (Vita Aleydis, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 472).

59 For Ida's religious networks in Louvain, see below, p. 148 n. 203.
confessor, William, abbot of nearby St Truiden, had helped her create a regular form of religious life, and had had a room adapted as an oratory for her use.\textsuperscript{60} Elizabeth was not, however, completely isolated from other religious women: when asked about the harshness of the physical regime she imposed on herself, she modestly pointed to another mulier religiosa, a recluse called Mary, who lived in a village in Flanders, and whose self-inflicted suffering was far more praiseworthy than her own.\textsuperscript{61}

\textbf{The Manuscripts of the Vitae}

The extant manuscripts containing the vitae of the mulieres religiosae suggest that there was considerable variation in the dissemination of the individual vitae during the Middle Ages. The \textit{vita} of Marie d'Oignies achieved the widest popularity and influence outside its homeland in the Low Countries: the Latin text of the \textit{Vita Mariae} survives in at least twenty-six medieval manuscripts,\textsuperscript{62} and the \textit{Vita Mariae} was also translated into English, French and Norwegian.

\textsuperscript{60} \textit{Vita Elizabeth}, par. 18, p. 373.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Vita Elizabeth}, par. 24, p. 376.
\textsuperscript{62} 13th century manuscripts: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS II, 700 [hereafter, Bibliothèque Royal = B. R.]; Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 662; Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MSS 80 and 278; Liège, Bibliothèque de l'université, MS 260; Paris, Bibl. nat., MSS 2695, 2795, 9743; Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, 1434; Vienna, Vindobonensis, MS 488; 14th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS 7917; Brussels, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes, MS 398; Charleville, Bibliothèque municipale, MSS 18 and 244; St Omer, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 769; 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS 8629-39; Liège, Bibliothèque de l'université, MS 135; Mechelen, Groot Seminarie, MS 20; Paris, Bibl. nat., MS 10870; Paris, Bibl. nat., MS 3631; Namur, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 49; The Hague, Royal Library, MS 70 H 49; Troyes, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 401; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MSS 12706-07 and 12831. This survey of
during the medieval period. Knowledge of Marie's Life was greatly advanced by Vincent of Beauvais' inclusion of chapters 10-51 of the Vita Mariae in his extremely popular thirteenth-century compendium, Speculum Historiale, which was quickly translated into French and Dutch.

The vitae of Lutgard of Aywières and Christina Mirabilis were the next most popular, and, like the Vita Mariae, were translated into vernacular languages. There are at least ten extant copies of the Latin text of the Vita Lutgardis from the fourteenth and fifteenth

the medieval manuscript tradition of the mulieres religiosae has been compiled almost exclusively from manuscript catalogues, and should therefore be considered as a guide, rather than a definitive account of the tradition's history. I have not included in the survey the numerous manuscripts in which very brief epitomes of the vitae may be found, and any manuscript copied after the fifteenth century.


64 See Michel Lauwers, "Entre béguinisme et mysticisme: la vie de Marie d'Oignies (+1213) de Jacques de Vitry ou la définition d'une sainteté féminine," Ons Geestelijk Erf 66 (1992), 46-69, at 47.
centuries, and in addition, two separate translations into Dutch have survived. The Latin text of the *Life of Christina Mirabilis* appears to have enjoyed a popularity similar to the Latin text of the *Vita Lutgardis*, surviving in ten fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts. The *Vita Christinae*, a much shorter and more "sensational" text than the *Life of Lutgard*, had

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65 14th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MSS 7917, 8609-20 and 1770-77; Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 661; 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MSS 1638-49 and 8763-74; Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 844; Dijon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 661; Trier, Stadtbibliothek, MS 1170; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07.

66 The Dutch translations are found in Copenhagen, Royal Library, G. K. S. MS 168 4 and Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS I G 57. For an edition of the text of the Amsterdam manuscript, see J. H. Bormans, "Het Leven van Sinte Lutgardis: een dietsch gedicht ten laetste van de tweede helft der XVVe eeuw, naar het oorspronkelijk handschrift van Broeder Geraert," *De Dietsche Warande* 3 (1857), 37-67, 132-165, 285-322; 4 (1958), 155-70, 267-302. A French translation of the *Vita Lutgardis*, which is thought to have been first made in the Middle Ages, is preserved in a sixteenth-century manuscript: Mechelen, Groot Seminarie, MS 124. The audience for the *Life* of Lutgard seems to have been more local than the audience for the *vitae* of Marie and Christine.

67 14th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MSS 7917; 8609-20 and 4459-70; Liège, Grand Séminaire, MS 6. L. 21; 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS II 2328; Cambrai, Bibliothèque municipal, MS 839; Cologne, Stadtsarchiv, MS G. B. Octav. 3; Groningen, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 23; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, MSS Series nova, 12706-07 and 12831.
particular success in vernacular translations: a Dutch translation is preserved in five manuscripts, and there are also English and French translations.68

Surviving translations of the vitae of Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Margaret of Ypres in vernacular languages other than French and Dutch attest to a readership for these vitae beyond the Low Countries, despite a relatively small total number of extant manuscripts containing these vitae. The Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek survives in an English translation, while the Latin vita Elizabeth survives in three fifteenth-century manuscripts.69 The Life of Margaret of Ypres survives in a fourteenth-century German translation,70 while the Latin text of her Life is found in one manuscript from the fourteenth century and two from the fifteenth.

Of the remaining vitae, only the original Latin texts are extant, and the manuscript tradition suggests a relatively small, local audience. The vita of Ida of Nivelles survives in one manuscript from each of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and three from the fifteenth century.71

68 The Dutch versions are found in: Düsseldorf, Staatsarchiv, MS G. V. 1; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliothek, Lett. 1211; Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, Ch. q. MS 144; Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS I G 56; Leiden, Univ., BPL MS 2231; the English translation is in Oxford, Douce MS 114, and the French in Brussels, B. R., MSS 8060-64 and 10487-90.

69 The English version is in Oxford, Douce MS 114. The manuscripts containing the Latin vitae are: Vienna Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12708-09; The Hague, Royal library, MS 70 H 49 and Liège, Bibliothèque de l'Université, MS 135.

70 The German translation is found in: Berlin, Staatsbibliothek der Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz, MS Germ. Oct. 69. For manuscripts with the Latin text of the vita, see Brussels, B. R., MS 4459-70 (14th century); and Brussels, B. R., 3391-99 and 8751-60 (both from the 15th century).

71 13th century manuscript: Brussels, B. R., MS 8895-96; 14th century manuscript: Brussels, B. R., MS 8609-20; 15th century manuscripts: Mechelen, Groot Seminarie, MS 21;
and in three from the fifteenth century. The vita of Juliana of Cornillon survives in one thirteenth-century manuscript, and two from the fifteenth century. The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth survives in one fourteenth-century manuscript and two from the fifteenth century. Alice of Schaerbeek's vita survives in one fourteenth- and two fifteenth-century manuscripts. Survival into the twentieth century for two of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae has been quite precarious: the vita of Ida of Louvain survives only in one fifteenth-century manuscript, while the vita of Juette of Huy is no longer extant in any medieval manuscript, although it was published twice in the seventeenth century before two manuscripts containing the text were lost.

Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova. MS 12706-07; Vienna, Bibl. Caesaris Austriaci MS 7927.

72 13th century manuscript: Brussels, B. R., MS 8895-96; 15th century manuscripts: Liège. Bibliothèque de l'université, MS 135; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07; Vienna, Bibl. Caesaris Austriaci, MS 7927.

73 13th century manuscript: Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 945: 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS II 2759; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07.

74 14th century manuscript: Brussels, B. R., MS 4459-70; 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS 1638-49; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07.

75 14th century manuscript: Brussels, B. R., MS 8609-20; 15th century manuscripts: Brussels, B. R., MS 4459-70; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07.

76 Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12706-07.

77 For a discussion of the manuscript tradition of the vita of Juette of Huy, see below, pp. 305-06.
The manuscript tradition of the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae* confirms the appropriateness of considering the *vitae* as a group, since the *vitae* were quite often copied together during the Middle Ages: seven medieval manuscripts now extant, and one now lost, are known to contain, or have contained, the *vitae* of two or three of the Liège *vitae*. Four manuscripts which survive, and three which are now lost, are known to have included copies of four or more of the *vitae*.78

78 These manuscripts contain two or three of the *vitae*: Brussels, B. R., MS 8895-96 and 7917; The Hague, Royal Library, MS 70 H 49; Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12831; Vienna, Bibl. Caesarii Austriaci, MS 7927, Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova, MS 12708-09 and Oxford, Douce MS 114. A medieval manuscript from the Cistercian monastery of Villers, now lost, contained the *vitae* of Juette of Huy, Ida of Leeuw and Ida of Nivelles. The following contain four or more of the *vitae*: Brussels, B. R., MSS 8609-20 and 4459-70, Liège, Bibliothèque de l'université, MS 135 and Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek, Series nova. MSS 12706-07. Three manuscripts which are now lost also contained four or more of the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*: the contents of a codex containing the *vitae* of Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Gorsleew, Lutgard of Awières, Margaret of Ypres, Marie d'Oignies, Christina Mirabilis, and Juette of Huy are recorded in a seventeenth-century list of the holdings of the monastery of St Truiden (Brussels, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes, MS 98, fol. 345v). A late medieval manuscript held at the library of the Canons regular at Tongeren, which is now lost, contained the *vitae* of Christina Mirabilis, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Ida of Nivelles, Juliana of Cornillon, Juette of Huy, Lutgard of Aywières, Margaret of Ypres and Marie d'Oignies. A manuscript copied in the 15th century for the library of the canons regular at Corsendonck contained the *vitae* of Alice of Schaerbeek, Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Leeuw and Ida of Louvain.
Chapter One
The Development of Christian Biography of Women

I
The vicissitudes of the relationship between the individual and God have always held a
central place in Christian consciousness, a centrality which is well demonstrated by the
importance given in Christian literature to biography, the life-story of the individual. The
human 'life-story' is, of course, at the heart of the Gospel message: the Christian revelation is
precisely concerned with the way in which God became a particular human being and lived a
unique, individual earthly life. The Gospels which record that life are, among other things,
biographies of Jesus which demonstrate how one person imagined, preached and lived the
truth about God and what God desired from his people. The Gospels also record the ways in
which God, on his part, demonstrated his favour towards the person, Jesus, and intervened in
his life to affirm the truth of Jesus' message. In addition to the relationship between Jesus and
God, the Gospels also narrate the ups and downs of Jesus' relationships with his friends and
his enemies: his struggles with his followers on their road to faith, and his struggles with the
opponents who would bring about his death.

The focus given in the New Testament to the reactions of individuals to the life and
death of Jesus placed that life itself at the core of the individual Christian experience. Jesus' life-story was from the earliest times considered as the most cogent spur to conversion to the new faith, as the sermons of Peter and Paul, recorded in the Acts of the Apostles,
demonstrate.¹ At the same time, Jesus' life became important in another way: the writers of
the epistles began to present the life of Christ as an exemplar of the perfect human life.² The

¹ Acts 2:14-40; 3:12-26; 10:34-42; 13:16-42. These tiny biographies of Jesus have long been seen as important steps in the creation of the Gospels.
dramatically close imitation of Christ recorded of the first martyr, Stephen, is a poignant early realisation of what it would mean to take Christ's life seriously as a model.

The life of Christ was not the only biographical narrative recorded in the New Testament: the Gospels also provide details, admittedly rather sketchy, of the lives of the early followers of Christ. And although it is not written strictly as a life-story, the person and activity of Paul provide a strong narrative focus for the Acts of the Apostles. With the composition of the New Testament, the history of Christian biography had begun, and the desire of Christians to understand the Gospel message through its effects on individuals and the faith in biography as a guide to the perfect life were only to increase in the centuries to come.

Women as well as men were numbered amongst the earliest followers of Christ and their relationships with Christ and their role in the first-century church are described in the New Testament; one of the great achievements of Christian biography would be that from these New Testament beginnings, a tradition was created in which the lives of women, as well as men, were held up as exemplars for the Christian community. In this chapter, as a way of providing a broad literary and cultural context for the thirteenth-century biographies of the mulieres religiosae of Liège, I take as my subject the development of Christian biography of women from the New Testament to the mid-fifth century, by which time full-length biographies of women have a firm place within Christian literature.

The path I will trace begins, as I have said, with the Gospels, the paradigmatic Christian biographical texts; I will look at the Gospels as biographies of Jesus, and then go on to examine the narratives about women contained in the Gospels. The first crucial stages in the development of post-New Testament narratives about women, are, I argue, to be found in the biographical narratives of heroic Christian women which are remarkably prominent in the texts of the apocryphal New Testament. I then turn to the passion narratives of the women martyrs

of the second and third centuries which were so important in establishing the worthiness of women to be recorded as Christian heroes and venerated as saints. The ascetic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries began a new phase in Christian biography, and it was this movement which gave us the first full-length biographies of historical women. With the composition of the vita of Macrina of Nyssa in the late fourth century, and of the vitae of Melania the Younger and Olympias of Constantinople in the middle of the fifth century, women had gained a firm place as subjects in the newly-established and flourishing genre of Christian biography.

As I pursue the questions of how and why women were accepted into the Christian biographical tradition, I will also point to some of the themes which were important in early biographies of women, many of which retained their prominence in female biography throughout the Middle Ages.

II

The Gospels are the starting point for any discussion of Christian biography. The importance in Christian theology given to the Gospel accounts of Jesus and to the Gospels as a model of Christian behaviour is the foundation on which the Christian biographical tradition rests. In the discussion that follows, I will be primarily interested in the literary context and form of the Gospels viewed as biographical narratives.

Much scholarly attention has been paid in recent years to the literary and cultural context in which the Gospels were written.3 The Gospels, it now appears evident, bear witness to the interest in the Hellenistic world in religious and philosophical truth as embodied in the lives of leading religious and philosophical figures. Biographies of these holy men, who were depicted as ideal teachers, sages, social reformers, miracle-workers and prophets, were

the most natural and persuasive way of presenting the truth each represented. Pythagoras was a particularly popular target for this kind of biographical treatment. A later example is the first-century neo-Pythagorean holy man, Apollonius of Tyana, who is described in Philostratus' third-century biography as a divinely-inspired travelling ascetic, at whose birth portents of greatness were witnessed, and whose life was dedicated to the spread of religious reform. In terms of structure and other formal literary characteristics, the ancient biographies

4 The question of the origin and originality of the Gospel as a narrative form follows almost exactly the same lines as the question of the origin and originality of the genre of Christian hagiography. In a recent article, Marc van Uytfanghe has argued that instead of arguing over questions of priority and influence, one should simply see "hagiographical discourse" (a discourse which includes the Gospels), whether Christian or pagan, as characteristic of the late antique period ("L'hagiographie: un 'genre' chrétien ou antique tardif?" Analecta Bollandiana, 111 [1993]: 135-188).


6 Philostratus, The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, trans. F. C. Conybeare, 2 vols. (London, 1913). Apollonius is noted for his ascetic approach to food, clothing and material possessions, his life of chastity, and, especially, his healing powers and ability to work miracles. His life was, naturally enough, compared with that of Christ, a comparison which was strongly countered by Eusebius (The Treatise of Eusebius ... Against the Life of Apollonius, included with The Life of Apollonius of Tyana, trans. F. C. Conybeare, 2: 485-605). The lives of the poets, who like the philosophers and Jesus, lived "outside" rather than inside society (as did the politicians and emperors), were also closer in form and content to the Gospels than the political biographies of the ancient world. Patricia Cox studies the literary and social context of the lives of the philosopher-sages, with special attention to the Life of Plotinus and Eusebius'
of holy men, including the Gospels, formed part of the broad generic category of Greco-Roman biography.⁷

The late antique interest in the lives of philosophers and sages should also be seen in the context of the consciousness of ancient philosophy, and particularly neo-platonism, of the importance of philosophy as a "way of life," which has been eloquently drawn to our attention by Pierre Hadot.⁸ If philosophy was a discipline designed to transform one's moral life and to enable one to make progress in the rediscovery of one's true soul, then naturally students of

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*Life of Origen* in her *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man* (Berkeley, 1983).

⁷ Recent scholarship has shown a renewed interest in setting the Gospels in the generic context of traditional Greco-Roman biography. The Gospels, it is argued, were not a completely new form of literature, and should be seen as belonging to the biographical traditions of the ancient world. In particular, these scholars stress the Gospels' use of the formal characteristics of biography: the structure of the work and the use of smaller literary units, such as anecdotes and speeches. Indeed, the comparisons between the Gospels and Greco-Roman biography are most persuasive when they confine themselves to these broad generic features, as it is clear that the ethos of the Gospels is quite different from any surviving Greek biography which pre-dates them. See Aune, *The New Testament in Its Literary Environment*, chaps. 1 and 2; Richard Burridge, *What are the Gospels? A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Cambridge, 1992). The connection between the Gospels and Greco-Roman biography is called into question by Albrecht Dihle, "Die Evangelium und die biographische Tradition der Antike," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, 80 (1983): 33-49. On the history of Greek biography, see Arnaldo Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971).

philosophy would be interested in the progress made by especially adept practitioners, despite the fact that the philosophical journey itself was supposed to help one lose one's individuality.

The Gospel-writers were also heirs to the strong tradition of biographical narrative recorded in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Bible included many stories whose psychological sophistication rested on the complexity of the individual's response to God. The Old Testament provided models of figures accepting the religious missions for which they were destined, narratives of trials and opposition set in religious terms, and miracle stories which demonstrated God's intervention in his servants' lives. Of particular significance as models for the life of Christ were the Old Testament depictions of Moses, Elijah and Elisha.

While we may always lack the information which would give us a clear understanding of the communities which produced the Gospels, the Jewish biographical literature composed around the time of Christ helps reconstruct part of the literary context in which the Gospels were written. Fourth Maccabees, for example, written in the first century B.C., provided portraits of wise, miracle-working teachers whose martyrdoms were a sign of divine favour, while Philo's first-century A.D. Life of Moses gave readers a super-human hero whose life was composed with an eye to both Greek and Jewish literary traditions.9

In structure, the Gospels are extended, chronological (rather than typological) narratives of the birth, public mission and death of the historical person, Jesus. As in many later hagiographical texts, the biographical framework of the Gospels brings together under an overarching narrative structure many smaller literary forms, which probably had their origin in different sorts of oral texts about Jesus which were in circulation. The work of the form critics

has usefully divided these texts into two categories: "narratives" (miracle stories, stories about Jesus) and "discourses" (parables, sayings). It is the former category, the narrative forms of the miracle story and the "revealing anecdote" about the subject of the biography, which would be the most important in later Christian biography. It is characteristic of the Gospel stories that they are in the main realistic ones from everyday life; the miraculous breaks into this ordinary world, rather than transforming it into a marvellous "other-world." Much of our understanding of Christ is built up from our own interpretation of the stories about Jesus, which though carefully structured are presented with little editorial comment from the Gospel writers.

The Gospels have two interlinked "plots," one of which depends on development over time, and one which does not; each of these plots would be used as models in hagiographical writing. There is a "tragic" chronological plot traced in the train of events which lead to Jesus' death, a plot driven by the conflict between Jesus and those around him as to his true identity and mission: we follow Jesus' baptism as the start of his ministry; his public mission announcing the coming of the kingdom of God, teaching and performing miracles; the growing opposition to his teaching on the part of his enemies, and the misunderstandings of his friends; the growing danger of Jesus' position and his prediction of his own death; his betrayal and unjust death. Alongside this plot is another theme which intersects with the "tragic" plot: here the reader is persuaded of the unchanging nature of Jesus, the Son of God, which is revealed in every aspect of his life-story. Jesus' miraculous birth, childhood, his baptism by the Holy Spirit, his personal virtues of kindness, compassion and humility, the wisdom of his preaching, his miraculous command over nature, his knowledge of the future, his transfiguration and his triumph over death in the resurrection all testify to his identity as the

10 This sense of the everyday embued with divine meaning which is characteristic of the Gospels is brilliantly described in Erich Auerbach's discussion of Peter's betrayal of Jesus, (Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask [Princeton, 1953], 40-49).
son of God, in all that signifies. The two narrative parts come together to make a "comic" ending in the resurrection: Jesus, son of God, is able to transcend his own tragic death.

Finally, the Gospels provided future generations of Christian biographers with a picture of the activities which were appropriate to a charismatic religious figure: Jesus preached publicly, calling people to repentance and "belief," offering ethical teaching, new ways of interpreting past religious practices and values, social criticism, and advocating religious reform; he performed miracles and made prophecies about the future; he gathered followers whom he commissioned to continue his work; he suffered temptations, trials, and eventually death. Elements of this picture would help form the lives and biographies of Christian holy men and women for centuries.

III

The important place women were to find as subjects of Christian biography marks a significant shift in the social and literary culture of the West, for the tradition of female biography which developed within Christian literature had no parallel in Greco-Roman literature, in which the lives of historical women had played little part. Biographies of women in the pagan Greek and Roman worlds were astonishingly few and far between. The new

11 The stability of Christ's nature and his mission are in sharp contrast to the effects of the knowledge of Jesus' identity on others: they understand the ignorance of their past lives, and turn to follow Jesus. Thus the Gospels, while they portray Jesus as a character who does not develop over time, nevertheless stress the possibilities of change, repentance and conversion in his followers. The changes wrought in the converts themselves, after coming into contact with Jesus, are of course one more indication of the divine nature of Jesus.

12 There are brief notices to be found on a small number of women poets and writers. For examples, see the notices on Erinna, Cleobuline, the Sibyls, the three Corinnas, Muia, Sappho, Pamphile, Arignote, Myro, Hypatia, the two Theanos and Cleitagora in Vitarum Scriptores Graeci Minores, ed. Antonius Westermann (Brunswick, 1843, reprint Amsterdam,
literary interest of the Christians in the lives of women was of course an indication of the new possibilities which Christianity had brought for women to act in ways which were deemed worthy of recording; there was very little a woman could do, apparently, in the ancient world which would attract the attentions of a biographer. As a disciple of Christ, however, a woman could do just that.

The first portraits of female followers of Christ are found in the New Testament. The Gospels record the intimate devotion and service offered to Jesus by four women who are recurring characters: the Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, and Mary and Martha of Bethany. Individually identified women are named as part of Jesus' travelling "household." We are told that Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna and a number of other women accompanied Jesus and the twelve disciples on Jesus' preaching mission, and that the women helped support the group through their own means (Lk 8:1-3; Mk 15:41). This was surely a new role, a new social opportunity for these women, being part of the travelling "family" of Jesus.

And yet despite the presence of these significant women in Jesus' entourage, there are no examples of women being "called" to follow Christ, as happens to a number of male followers. The women of the Gospels are not included in the twelve closest disciples, nor then are they mentioned as being included in activities which seem to be restricted to the twelve (or to some of the twelve): they do not receive the special teaching given to the disciples about Jesus' mission and coming death, they do not see the transfiguration, their feet are not washed (1964). The longest of these notices, still tiny at 17 lines, records the life of the poet Sappho, and probably represents an epitome of a longer biography, now lost (Ibid., 111-12). It is difficult to agree with Mary Lefkowitz' suggestion that Sappho's biography differs from those of the male poets because it concentrates on her family and friends; these were also standard concerns in the lives of male poets (The Lives of the Greek Poets [Baltimore, 1981], 36-37). In addition to these notices of the female poets and philosophers, Tacitus records that he has made use of an autobiography written by Agrippina the Younger (15-59 AD), a work that does not survive (Ann. 4. 54).
by Jesus, we are not told they are present at the Last Supper nor that they are initiated into the new rite of the breaking of bread, and they are not present at the ascension. There is no indication that these women are regarded as having spiritual authority of their own, and, unlike the male disciples, they are not commissioned as apostles to continue Christ's work of teaching and working miracles after his death.  

Alongside the more active roles of Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Susanna, the Virgin Mary and Mary of Bethany are depicted in contemplative roles: the Virgin, we are told, accepts the angel Gabriel's news of her pregnancy quietly and treasures the words of the Christ child in her heart (Lk 2:19, 51); Mary of Bethany is praised for receiving teaching at the feet of Jesus while Martha bustles (Lk 10:38-41). Women are also depicted in prophetic roles: Luke has Elizabeth, Mary and Anna prophesy about the future role of the baby Jesus (Lk 1:41-45, 46-55; 2:36-38).

Jesus' female followers often serve him in intimate, domestic, ways: they are given the tasks of anointing Christ in preparation for his death, of keeping vigil at Christ's crucifixion.

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13 In general, women are given a much smaller place in the Gospels than men: the named male followers of Jesus outnumber the female; women feature as the main characters in fewer parables and in fewer of the accounts of Jesus' interactions with people; women initiate less dialogue, make fewer decisions, ask fewer question about doctrine and generally do less than the men.

Amongst the Gospel writers, women are best served by John, whose extended narratives of intimate dialogues with Christ given in direct discourse are a feature of his Gospel. We owe to John the picture of the Samaritan woman at the well, the closest the Gospels come to having a woman teach (Jn 4:1-42), the story of the woman taken in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), the realistic treatment of the assertive Martha and Mary in the raising of Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44), and the extended narrative of Mary Magdalene's meeting with the risen Christ (Jn 20:10-18).
and of preparing his body for burial. And yet the devotion revealed by these simple acts is made sublime in its contrast to the absence and dispersal of so many of the male disciples around the time of Christ's death, and by the reward this faithfulness was awarded when the women became the first witnesses to his resurrection. The tremendous significance of the women's small, faithful actions, of which they were themselves unaware, is a variation on the constant theme of the Gospels, both in the stories attributed to Jesus, and the Gospel writers' narrative of his death: that the quiet faithfulness of the weak will in fact be valued much more highly, and will be far more significant, than the publicly acclaimed actions of the powerful. In his parables Jesus constantly depicts women, and especially widows, as being faithful and valuable in their very powerlessness. This positive evaluation of women, in comparison with men, because of their social and economic dependence is a theme which would become very important in Christian narratives about women.

It is particularly striking in reading the Gospels that there is no hint in any of the reported conversations and parables of Jesus that women as a group are to be viewed with moral suspicion, or that their sexuality was a barrier to their own faith, or a threat to the faith of men. Sexual abstinence was presumably a discipline Jesus himself, and also his predecessor, John the Baptist, practised, and he also taught that those who could accept the practice of abstinence for the sake of the kingdom of heaven should do so (Mt 19:10-12). This is an undeniable indication of Jesus' approbation of the life of chastity. Yet this passage in

14 The anointing of Christ at Bethany is recounted by all the Gospel writers except Luke: the presence of women (all the accounts place Mary Magdalene amongst them) at the death and burial of Jesus is recorded in all four Gospels.

15 See, for example, the parables of the persistent widow (Lk 18:1-6), the lost coin (Lk 15:8-10), and the story of the widow's offering (Mk 12:41-44; Lk 21:1-4). An example of a woman whose social position deserves Jesus' pity and help is found in the story in which Jesus stops the funeral procession of a young man whose death had left his widowed mother childless, and restores the man to life (Lk 7:11-16).
Matthew is the only record of Jesus’ teaching on this theme: the value of chastity, still less virginity, was not an important part of his message, as we find it recorded in the Gospels.  

In addition to their roles as servants of Christ, Jesus’ female followers are pictured as having an emotional hold over Jesus which is not usually attributed to the male disciples.  

Mary and Martha are portrayed as intimate friends of Christ, whom we are told he loves, who feel able to press the claims of their friendship when their brother is sick, and whose mourning moves Jesus deeply (Jn 11:1-44); the fate of the Virgin Mary concerns the dying Christ more, it seems, than the fate of the movement he has begun (Jn 19:26-27); the passion of Mary Magdalene and the gentleness of Christ which John portrays in their meeting after Christ’s resurrection evokes a close, emotional bond between the two which is very rare in the Gospel portrayals of Christ’s relationships (Jn 20:10-18). These kinds of emotional relationships between men and women would play a prominent part in Christian biography of women.

16 Jesus of course was striking in his acceptance and defence of sinful women, including those whose past sins were sexual (see the stories of the Samaritan woman [Jn 4:1-42]; the woman taken in adultery [Jn 8:1-11]; the anointing woman with a sinful past [Lk 7:36-50]; see also the parable in which Jesus speaks of the value of reformed tax collectors and prostitutes [Mt 21:28-31]). It should nevertheless be pointed out that women are more often than men recorded in the Gospels as being guilty of sexual sin: this kind of identification of sexual sin with women would have a long history.

17 This is not to underplay the closeness of Christ’s relationship with Peter, especially as it is portrayed by John. The disciple "whom Jesus loved" is a more difficult case; we are told about that love rather than shown it.

18 The episode also gives Martha a chance to declare faith in the divinity of Jesus; she calls him the "Christ" and "Son of God," the same terms used by Peter in his confession of Christ (Mt 16:16).
The Gospels' portrayal of the relationship between the Virgin Mary and her son Jesus also helped establish the role of mother, and the virtue of motherliness, as a theme in biographical treatment of Christian women. Mary's extraordinary part in Jesus' birth, her deep, steadfast concern and care for her son and her endurance of the great anxiety and suffering Jesus brought to her were the foundations on which Mary's reputation for sanctity rested. Moreover, Luke's powerful account of Mary's joy at being chosen to bear Jesus firmly emphasised the value of mothering as a role. And yet the Gospels also offer a more ambivalent picture of Mary, and of the ties which bound mother to son: although she is sometimes shown as having a special understanding of her son's unique nature and mission, Jesus is also quick to point out Mary's failures to comprehend his activities, and quick to refuse to be restrained by his relationship to his mother or family.

Taken as a whole, the Gospels provided portraits of women as faithful followers and close friends of Christ who witnessed and supported his ministry to the end, whose steadfast support put the faith of men to shame. In doing so, they supplied clear models of women as

19 The place given to the mother of the main protagonist in the Gospels is unusual in Greco-Roman biography, though of course Sarah, Rebecca and Hannah had been important Old Testament models for mothers of famous sons.

20 The absence of Joseph from Jesus' adult life as described in the Gospels was to be prophetic of the place of fathers in later saintly literature: the role of father, except of course, when spiritual fatherhood was meant, would not become an established role for male saints until the end of the Middle Ages, when Joseph himself gained new popularity.

21 In the birth narratives, Mary is depicted as having prophetic understanding of the significance of her son's birth, while in the story of the wedding at Cana, she assumes Jesus can solve their hosts' problems, and supports the actions he takes (Jn 2:1-11). On the other hand, Mary fails to understand her son's absence at the temple (Lk 2:41-51), and during Jesus' active ministry he firmly rejects her attempts to bring the son her family assumes is mad safely home (Mk 3:20-35; cf. Lk 8:19-21 and Mt 12:46-50).
disciples, and of a discipleship which gave them a family beyond, or instead of, their own household. There are, however, some marked differences between the portrayal of Jesus' male and female disciples in the Gospels: the public role of the women is very slight and they are not perceived as having spiritual authority of their own to preach or heal. Of Christ's female disciples, only his mother is mentioned (once) as a member of the early church in the canonical books of the New Testament (Acts 1:14). As members of a subordinate social

22 Philostratus' Life of Apollonius of Tyana. by comparison, makes no mention of any female disciples or supporters of the philosopher, though bands of "youths" dedicated to his teaching and person did form around him. The life mentions women only rarely and in insignificant ways. Amongst Apollonius' ninety-seven letters there is only one addressed to a woman (trans. Conybeare, 2: 385-87 [the bands of followers]; 2: 477 [the letter to Idomena]).

Nevertheless, Philostratus tells us that he wrote his work at the command of Julia Domna, wife of Septimius Severus (Ibid., 1: 11). Porphyry's Life of Plotinus, on the other hand, mentions the "women who were greatly devoted to him" and names Gemina, who owned the house he lived in, her daughter, also called Gemina, and Amphiclea, "all of whom had a great devotion to philosophy." Boys and girls of high rank were also left with Plotinus to be educated (Porphyry on the Life of Plotinus in Plotinus, trans. A. H. Armstrong, 6 vols. [Cambridge, Mass., 1966], 1: 31, 37).

23 The female disciples of Christ, the Virgin Mary, Salome, Martha and Mary Magdalene are included amongst the followers of Christ to whom, according to the Gnostic Gospels and other Gnostic texts, Jesus imparted special knowledge after his resurrection. See Elaine Pagels, The Gnostic Gospels (New York, 1979) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Word. Spirit and Power: Women in Early Christian Communities," in Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Traditions, ed. Rosemary Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York, 1979), 30-70, esp. 44-57. Mary Magdalene is given a position of special importance. As Jesus declares in the third-century Pistis Sophia, "But Mary Magdalene
group, women were often portrayed as embodiments of positive moral force which was
connected with their position of weakness; the virtues of women could provide a foil against
which to show up the inadequacies of men, and to help men better understand their own
lives.24

and John, the maiden, will surpass all my disciples and all men who shall receive mysteries in
the Ineffable, they will be on my right hand and on my left," (Pistis Sophia, ed. Henri-Charles
Schneemelcher [London, 1963], 1: 256-57); in this same text Mary asks thirty-nine of the
forty-six questions put to Christ on matters of doctrine. The second-century Coptic Gospel of
Mary, records a revelation that Jesus makes known to Mary alone. Her authority to receive
revelations is defended by Levi when it is questioned by Andrew and Peter (Gospel of Mary in
Women and Religion: A Feminist Sourcebook of Christian Thought, ed. Elizabeth Clark and
Herbert Richardson [New York, 1977], 50-52; see also New Testament Apocrypha, ed.
Schneemelcher, 1: 340-44). The Gnostic texts are essentially records of the hidden teaching of
Christ, and so tend to concentrate on the revelations, collections of sayings or answers to
questions rather than biographical narratives. They do, however, picture women as visionaries
alongside men, receiving hidden knowledge, a tradition which would regain importance in the
later Middle Ages.

Mary Magdalene is pictured as a forceful Christian leader and a persuasive preacher to
the people of Marseilles in the tradition represented in the widely circulated thirteenth-century
collection of saints' lives known as the Golden Legend. In this account Mary does, however,
publicly defer to Peter as her teacher (Jacobus de Voragine, The Golden Legend: Readings on
Golden Legend).

24 Caroline Bynum has explored the ways in which men use images and concepts about
women to help describe their own lives in "... And Woman his Humanity": Female Imagery
IV

The impetus to the writing of Christian biography provided by the Gospels proved to be a powerful one, and the biblical narratives were soon supplemented by texts which expanded on the biographical material in the Gospels. 25 Infancy narratives such as the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, which provides stories of the miraculous doings of Jesus before he reached the age of twelve, were composed to supplement the Gospel accounts of Jesus. 26

The Protoevangelium of James, written in the second half of the second century, similarly added greatly to the Gospels' account of the Virgin Mary. It gives details of the long-awaited birth of Mary to Joachim and Anna, her childhood, her betrothal to Joseph, and recounts the nativity in greater detail than does the account of Luke, which is used as a framework for the Protoevangelium. 27 One important aim of this text is to provide a detailed,


25 Jewish exegetical traditions as embodied in the Midrashic literature provided models for the explanation of canonical texts by means of narrative extrapolations of the original text. This was a model which was useful for all of the apocryphal literature which sought to expand on characters and incidents found in the Gospels. For a recent introduction to Rabbinical literature, including the Midrash, see H. L. Strack and G. Sternberger, Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash (Minneapolis, 1992), esp. part 3.


27 The Protoevangelium of James, in ANT, 57-67. For discussions of this text, see Marina Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary (London, 1976), chaps.
realistic narrative to support the belief in the perpetual, intact virginity of Mary. The text moves considerably beyond the Gospels in this emphasis on Mary's virginity: Mary is dedicated at the temple as a virgin at the age of three; she is given in marriage to an elderly widower, Joseph, as his "ward" whose virginity he must guard; her hymen remains intact even after the birth of Jesus, a fact to which two midwives testify.

Mary herself is pictured as an overwhelmingly passive creature: quite apart from being confined to her bedroom, to the temple, and to Joseph's house from the age of six months to sixteen (the flight to Egypt must have been quite a relief!), she is a shadowy creature, to whom far fewer words, feelings and decisions are attributed, than to her very active husband Joseph. Mary's virginity, rather than her character or will, drives the narrative. Her passivity as a child is in stark contrast to the rather unappealing picture of the child Jesus in the contemporary Gospel of Thomas, which has a distinctly assertive Christ killing or maiming a number of the local village children, as well as a couple of his teachers, when they thwart his will.28

The Protoevangelium of James is one of the earliest biographical texts in which the growing concern for sexual abstinence amongst second-century Christians is made explicit.29 The virginity of Mary was, of course, in a different category to that of other women: her purity is important not primarily because it represents her own act of self-denial, but rather because

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28 Paul J. Achtemeier observes that although accounts of non-biblical miracles were composed about the infant Jesus, very few new miracles are attributed to the mature Jesus in the apocryphal New Testament writings ("Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers in the Apocryphal New Testament," in Aspects of Religious Propaganda in Judaism and Early Christianity, ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza [Notre Dame, 1976], 156-57; 61-62).
her virginity served as a vehicle for the miraculous birth of a sinless Jesus. Nevertheless, the strengthening of the emphasis on Mary's virginity which is seen in the *Protoevangelium of James* occurred at the same time in which sexual purity was coming to be an important value in Christian thought as a whole, and itself contributed to that emphasis.

V

During the second and third centuries, alongside the elaborations on the Gospel accounts of Christ and Mary, the biographical narratives known as the apocryphal Acts of the apostles appeared. These texts recount the post-resurrection missions of Paul, Peter, John, Andrew and Thomas and form some of the earliest Christian biographies. They provided extended life narratives for each apostle, more or less integrating into a biographical text the apostles' heroic adventures as missionaries, which included a martyr's death for all but John.

The apocryphal Acts responded to the needs of the early believers to make "familiar" the story of the Gospels by focusing on the personal reaction to that gospel of Jesus' most important disciples. In addition, they provided models of people who had success as Christians, and experienced some exciting adventures along the way.

The Acts are very much a popular form of literature: there is much concentration on miracles, wonders, and an equal measure of salacity and melodrama. One of the apostle's main roles in the apocryphal Acts is that of miracle worker: it is by his miracles that he will convince others of the truth of his message, and the might of Christ.30 While the apostles do preach extended sermons, the apocryphal Acts were not primarily designed as vehicles for doctrine, and their teaching is for the most part unexceptional. Yet they were not merely designed as entertainment: they were propaganda for the faith, and especially for the life of chastity.

30 See Achtemeier, "Jesus and the Disciples as Miracle Workers," 149-186.
The apocryphal Acts have particular importance to the history of female biography because of the remarkable prominence accorded in them to a number of female characters. These women were almost certainly not historical, at least not as represented in our texts, but they are presented as being so, and at least one of them was venerated as a saint in Late Antiquity. They include some of the earliest substantial post-New Testament accounts of Christian women. The heroines of the Acts very often become, for a time, the main protagonists of the narratives, while the apostles slip into the role of being their advisers and clients.

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31 On the role of women in the apocryphal Acts see Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston, 1987) and Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the ApocryphalActs* (Carbondale, Ill., 1980), esp. 50-69. The prominence given to women and to the life of chastity in the apocryphal Acts had led Davies to postulate that the Acts "derive from the communities of continent Christian women, the widows of their church, who were both the adherents of apostles and participants in a stable church structure" (p. 50).

32 The cult of Thecla is discussed below. An examination of the place of the women of the Apocryphal Acts in the *Golden Legend* gives some impression of later medieval knowledge of these women: the role played by Maximilla in the story of her conversion by Andrew, her defiance of her husband, who has Andrew killed, and her bravery in burying Andrew's body is compressed into two sentences (*Golden Legend, 1: 16-18*); the complex narrative of Drusiana in the *Acts of John* is reduced to a paragraph in which John raises his "dear friend." Drusiana, from the dead (*Golden Legend, 1: 51*); the story of Mygdonia's conversion by Thomas, and her role in converting her sister the queen, which lead to Thomas' death is told in somewhat greater length (*Golden Legend, 1: 33-35*). There is no account of Thecla either in her own right or as part of the life of Paul. In contrast to these abbreviations, a story about Peter's daughter from the *Acts of Peter* is lengthened into a short account of the girl, who has become "St Petronilla" (*Golden Legend, 1: 315*).
Some examples from the Acts will demonstrate my point. The entire surviving text of the Acts of Andrew, for which an early third-century date is suggested,\(^{33}\) is a long account (sixty-five paragraphs) of the story of Maximilla, wife of the proconsul Aegeates, and her relationship with Andrew. Andrew eventually meets his death at the hands of Aegeates who blames Andrew for Maximilla's refusal to have sex with him.\(^{34}\) The late second-century Acts of John includes a lengthy treatment (thirty-seven paragraphs) of the threats made to the virtue of the faithful Drusiana, a member of John's entourage; it also appears certain that the story of the conversion of Drusiana and her husband Andronicus has been lost from the original text of the Acts.\(^{35}\) The longest single episode in the early third-century Acts of Thomas, which survives in its entirety, has as its central character Mygdonia, the wife of Charsius; Mygdonia is Thomas' first convert in her country. Thomas is eventually martyred at the hands of King Misdaeus, who is angry at the conversion of his wife Tertia, which is brought about by her friend, Mygdonia.\(^{36}\) By far the longest single narrative which survives from the late second-century Acts of Paul is the famous Acts of Saint Paul and Thecla, which is much more the story of Thecla than of Paul.\(^{37}\) The Acts of Peter, which rival those of Paul for the earliest date amongst the apocryphal Acts (sometime in the late second century), does not have any single female character of similar importance.\(^{38}\) However, the Acts of Peter includes many instances of women who are notable for their sympathy to the preaching of Peter.\(^{39}\) The

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33 ANT, 235-36.
34 Ibid., 245-67.
35 Ibid., 316 (the fragment of the story of Drusiana's conversion); 327-35.
36 Ibid., 479-511.
37 Ibid., 364-74. I will discuss the story of Thecla at length below.
38 Ibid., 397-426.
39 Candida, the wife of Quartus the prison warder, instructs her husband in the faith she has received from Peter (Ibid., 399); Eubola is a wealthy Judaean woman, who is converted by
martyrdom of Peter is the result of a series of events which begin with the story of Xanthippe, the believer, who refuses to sleep with her husband; he is enraged and spurs Agrippa into chasing down Peter "so that we may get our wives back and avenge those who cannot kill him but whose wives he has also alienated." 40 By the third century, the suggested date for the minor Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, there is no pretence that the story is really the acts of the four apostles who appear in the text besides Xanthippe and Polyxena, and the women are the stars of the show. 41

The prominence of women in the apocryphal Acts is matched by the authors' sympathy towards the female characters. Women in the Acts are much more likely than men to be portrayed as open to the preaching of the apostles, and are frequently portrayed as eager and enthusiastic new believers: men, on the other hand, are far more frequently portrayed as the

Peter, and goes on to renounce the world and provide support for widows and orphans (Ibid., 411-12); Peter defends his acceptance of gifts from the wealthy Chryse, even though she is rumoured to be a fornicator (Ibid., 421). When Peter raises two young men from the dead, the grief and subsequent pleasure of the men's mothers at Peter's miracle-working, and their conversion to Christianity are important elements in the stories (Ibid., 418-21).

40 Ibid., 423.

41 W. A. Craigie, trans., "Life and Conduct of the Holy Women, Xanthippe, Polyxena, and Rebecca," in Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Additional Volume 9, ed. A. Menzies (Edinburgh, 1897); ANT, 524-25. The Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena narrates the stories of the conversions of Xanthippe, wife of a ruler of Spain, and her sister Polyxena. The story of Xanthippe concentrates on her interior emotional life and her passionate longing to find the truth about God and receive baptism. Visionary and other kinds of heightened emotional experience are frequent in her story. The story of Polyxena, which occupies the second half of the Acts, is very close to pagan romance. Polyxena is abducted and taken by ship to a foreign land, where she has various adventures (including being thrown into an arena with wild beasts) before eventually finding her way back to Spain, her virginity intact.
enemies of true religion. Women are invariably the first in their families or their countries to be converted and are eager to tell others of their new faith. They often support the mission of the apostles through both their social influence and their wealth.

The major female characters in the apocryphal Acts are, like the heroines of romance, of high social status and sexually attractive. Their sexuality is almost invariably renounced, however, in favour of the celibate life; the Encratite influence on all the Acts is marked. Thecla, Xanthippe, Mygdonia, Tertia and Maximilla are all portrayed as forming very close, highly emotional relationships with the apostle who led them to conversion. The apostles' relationships with the women are also dangerous: of the deaths of the four apostles who are martyred, three (those of Thomas, Peter and Andrew) are instigated by jealous husbands who want to punish the men who had caused their wives to forsake them and the marital bed.

What accounts for the importance and the sympathy with which women are treated in the apocryphal Acts, the earliest post-New Testament biographical literature? And what kinds of literature might have offered models for the kinds of female protagonists found in the Acts?

It is probably true that the importance given to women as conduits and patrons of Christianity in the apocryphal Acts reflects something of the actual role of women in the Christian church in the first centuries after the death of Christ. Women already appear as financial patrons of Paul in the canonical Acts of the Apostles. They are thought to have been over-represented in the early Church, where they might have found a social and spiritual identity which was more liberating than that offered in pagan society. The prominence given

42 One of the few stories which casts a woman in a negative light is the story of the gardener's daughter who is seduced by a man who pretends to be a believer after she has been raised from the dead. In the story, the gardener is blamed for bringing this misfortune onto her by asking Peter that she be raised (ANT, 398-99).

43 The one exception is Xanthippe, whose husband, hostile at first, eventually converts.

44 According to the evidence of the New Testament, the support of women, and especially of women of a higher social or economic status, seems to have been instrumental in the
in the apocryphal Acts to the theme of sexual renunciation probably encouraged the inclusion of female characters, as chastity quickly became a virtue most closely associated with women. while women themselves took up the call for sexual renunciation with particular gusto.45

Apart from the models offered by the lives of historical Christian women for the depiction of women in the apocryphal Acts, the models offered in contemporary literature were also of great importance to the portrayal of Christian heroines. The portraits of female believers provided in the Gospels demonstrated that women could be portrayed as faithful followers, with close relationships with their religious leader. But there were also other sources for the heroines of the Acts. Several scholars have pointed out the strong affinities between the apocryphal Acts and the Hellenistic genre of adventure-romance, especially as exemplified in the Hellenistic Greek novel, which was a close literary contemporary of the expansion of Christianity in the first century. Women held "house-churches" in their homes (Mary, mother of John-Mark [Acts 12:12]; Nympha [Acts 4:15]; Apphia [Phil 2]) and they were church leaders and missionaries (Prisca [Acts 18:2-3,18,26; Rom. 16:3; Cor. 16:16]). They acted as patrons offering hospitality, money and probably social protection to Paul and his colleagues (Phoebe [Acts 16:1]; Lydia [Acts 16:14-15]). Paul is described as being successful in converting a number of "prominent women" in both Thessalonica and Berea (Acts 17:4,12). See Fiorenza, "Word, Spirit and Power," 32-39, Gail R. O'Day, "Acts" in The Women's Bible Commentary, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (London, 1992), 305-12 and Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven, 1983), 51-73. Meeks argues that a significant proportion of the prominent members of the Pauline Christian communities consisted of members who experienced social dissonance as a result of their ambiguous social status; this includes the wealthy women who nevertheless still suffered under the disadvantage of being women.

45 Chastity was also seen as important for men, but it is not such a major concern for them. See ANT, 337-38 (the story of how John preserved his chastity) and 324-26 (the story of a man who castrated himself to rid himself of sexual temptation).
apocryphal Acts. While writers are now wary of positing a direct link between the Greek novel and early Christian biographical literature, the importance of romance elements in Christian biography, especially Christian biography of women, is undisputed.

The narrative features of the Hellenistic Greek novel were quite closely defined: the works are romances which treat the triumph over obstacles to love. They usually begin with a young, well-born and beautiful couple who fall in love at first sight, and then are separated by a host of marvellous misadventures, usually including shipwrecks; they must endure trials, travels and grave threats of physical harm before a series of miraculous escapes allows them to be reunited and marry, to the delight of all. The trials they endure are tests of the lovers' fidelity to each other: during their separation, others fall in love with them and the need to escape these rejected and angry suitors often supplies the story with its dangers.

Women protagonists are given an important place as equal partners of great energy and initiative in the action of Greek romance; the romances probably paint a more attractive picture

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47 Recent scholarship on the audience of the Greek novel has challenged the older idea of the Greek novel as a "popular" literary form, and so called into question the notion that novels were widely influential as literary models. There is no evidence of a wide readership for these works, and instead, they seem to have been read by the cultivated few. See Susan A. Stephens, "Who Read Ancient Novels?" and Ewen Bowie, "The Readership of Greek Novels in the Ancient World," both in The Search for the Ancient Greek Novel, ed. Tatum, 405-18 and 435-59 respectively.
of the possibilities of female independence and equality than the reality which faced women in contemporary Greco-Roman society. The novels are dependent on the ability of a young woman to choose her own lover, a right that was not recognised under Greek law, and yet this potentially subversive model for female behaviour was mitigated by the fact that the woman's choice was always acceptable to her parents or guardians, as well as to society at large.\textsuperscript{48} The sphere of the romance narratives is private and psychological rather than public: the novels stress domestic virtues and celebrate sexual love, but of course, sexual love in the proper confines of marriage. Chastity is often an issue in the novels, as the lovers struggle to remain sexually faithful to the lover they have been parted from despite the threats offered by violent or seductive would-be lovers.

The romance genre thus offered models of narratives centred on the activities of resourceful, well-born, beautiful women, who struggle heroically and single-mindedly in pursuit of their goals: usually the retention of their chastity and reunion with their lost love.\textsuperscript{49} The Christian heroines, equally well-born and sexually desirable, are steadfast and loyal in their commitment to their new faith, to the apostles to whom they owe that faith, and to the chastity which is the clearest sign of their new devotion. They are as determined and resourceful as any novelistic heroine in their determination to triumph over the adversities which threaten their fidelity. Romance provided a generic structure for heroic activity by


women; Christian romance elevated the heroic activity of its female protagonists by presenting their heroine's struggles as religious in nature. The strongly novelistic character of the biographical narratives of the apocryphal Acts would be an important model for much later hagiographical treatment of women.

In addition to the Greek novels, another ancient romance genre is to be found in the Jewish "novellas" composed in the first century before Christ: these works include the Books of Judith, Tobit, Esther, and the story of Susanna (which all had a place in the Vulgate), as well as the tale of *Joseph and Aseneth*, all works which claim to be about historical figures.\(^{50}\) Larger than life adventures, dramatic escapes from danger, the prominence of women characters and an interest in the entanglements of emotion and sexuality tie these works to the genre of romance. However, rather than a celebration of love triumphant, as is found in the Greek novel, the Jewish novellas celebrate the heroic defeat of evil which threatens the Jewish community.\(^{51}\)

The role of the erotic in the Jewish novellas, though just as prominent, differs from that given to it in the Greek novels. The sexual attractiveness of the women characters (and never the men; the women have quite a separate role to male characters) is a vital element in the stories of Judith, Susanna, Esther and Aseneth in *Joseph and Aseneth*. And yet, in the cases of Susanna and Judith, the sexual interest they arouse in men is illicit, and is severely


\(^{51}\) Ibid., 235-36.
punished. Esther and Judith must risk death to save their own Jewish communities from harm by resorting to the allure of their beauty, while Susanna is unaware of the lust she has provoked. And yet Judith, Susanna and Esther are all pious, modest Jewish women, without any sexual thoughts of their own. The sexually modest, yet enticing, heroine of the Jewish novella who triumphed in adventures of transcendent, rather than personal, significance is an important model for later Christian biography of women.

The story of Judith, for example, is a lengthy biographical narrative celebrating Judith's achievements for her community. After the historical background of Judith's adventure is given, the focus of the Book of Judith is entirely on Judith: the story begins with her genealogy, and ends with details of her life after the death of Holofernes, her death and burial, and even the division of her property (Judith 8:1; 16:21-25). Judith is anything but a passive heroine: she is quick-witted, self-controlled, determined and decisive in her actions, eloquent and cunning in her speech. Judith's victory, like those of many of the later heroines of hagiography, is a victory over evil and sexuality, a victory won for God and the greater good of her community.

Jewish literature had provided in the novellas an important model for female protagonists acting in a romance-like adventure narrative, but in pursuit of religious goals. At the same time, the novellas established one way in which female characters would be differentiated from male, and that was in the attention paid to their sexuality.

The Greek and Jewish sources of romance narratives about women, then, would have provided models for female protagonists from which the Christian heroine grew. To some extent at least, the women of the apocryphal Acts were part of a literary genre which was designed to replace non-Christian forms of romance with a Christian popular literature. In the

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52 This sometimes sits oddly, as when Judith must seduce Holofernes without us feeling she is doing anything unseemly for a pious widow. As in the Greek novels, the theme of voyeurism is quite marked: Holofernes and the Jewish elders look with longing at Judith and Susanna, respectively (Judith 12:16-17; Daniel 13: 8-12; 32).
next section. I will concentrate on one female heroine of the apocryphal Acts to look at the themes which were important in the depiction of women. I have chosen to concentrate on the life of the most famous, Thecla, the disciple of Paul.

VI

Towards the end of the second century, *The Acts of Paul and Thecla*, part of the longer apocryphal *Acts of Paul*, gave the Christian world one of its first virgin saints, and one of its first extended biographical accounts of an exemplary female follower of Christ.53 Although there is no external evidence of the historical existence of Thecla, the account of her life purports to be a description of a historical woman, and was treated as such by many, if not all, late antique Christians. For this reason, and also because the account of Thecla's conversion and mission includes themes which would be of enduring relevance to Christian biography of women, I will discuss the life of Thecla at some length.

Thecla is described in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* as a woman of high social standing and great beauty, who is converted to Christianity when she hears Paul preach in her home town of Iconium.54 Following her conversion, Thecla is fiercely determined to remain virginal, and renounces her fiancé, the rich Thamyris, to follow Paul. Thamyris, enraged at his loss, reports Thecla to the local governor, who orders her death at the stake (which she must face naked); but God provides a miraculous escape from this fate. Reunited with Paul, she travels with him to Antioch, where a Syrian, Alexander, falls in love with her in the street.


54 Thecla's high birth ("Among the Iconians I am one of the first") is also a characteristic of the Greek romance heroines, as well as the later virgin martyrs. The other characters, Thamyris and Alexander, are also leaders of their cities.
When she rejects him, he convinces the governor of Antioch to have Thecla brought to fight the wild beasts (once again, naked); these trials too she miraculously escapes. Thecla's deliverance, and her sturdy defence of Christianity impress the governor, and she is released by him. Thecla then once more seeks out her spiritual guide, Paul, who exhorts her to go and teach the word of God. She dies at Seleucia, after "enlightening many with the word of God." Some manuscripts add further details, composed at a later date, of Thecla's life in Seleucia, where she gathers a group of virgins around her, who join her in the "ascetic life."  

Thecla's conversion to Christianity is primarily a conversion to the renunciation of sex, and to a passionate personal devotion to Paul. The opposition to her new-found faith she encounters is embodied in men who wish to deprive her of her sexual purity, and who are willing to torture and kill her as a punishment for her determination to renounce sex. In this context, the beauty of Thecla, like the beauty of the heroines of Greek romance, has become a vital part of her story. It is the reason why Thamyris is so desperate to rescue her from Paul and why Alexander falls in love with her at first sight, and Paul himself sees her as a liability to his group. It is characteristic of the Acts of Paul and Thecla that emotional or sexual

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55 Ibid., 364.
56 Ibid., 372-74.
57 "Thecla ... listened day and night to the word of the virgin life as it was spoken by Paul" (Ibid., 365).
58 The passio of Saints Ptolemaeus and Lucius (who died before 150/60) tells us a parallel story of a man whose wife, a recent convert to Christianity, now refused to share his vices or bed. The husband laid a complaint against her, and finally denounced her instructor, Ptolemaeus, to the authorities (Herbert Musurillo, "Introduction" to Acts of the Christian Martyrs [Oxford, 1972]), xvi-xvii; "The Martyrdom of Saints Ptolemaeus and Lucius").
59 In the Acts of Xanthippe and Polyxena, one of the characters relates the story in this way. "And a certain maid, whose name was Thecla, believing him followed him, and encountered
passions, rather than, say, intellectual or ideological issues, are the key forces which propel both Thecla and her opponents.

A striking example of the importance of emotional relationships in the story of Thecla is her relationship with Paul. Thecla is presented as besotted by Paul from the moment she hears his voice: her mother tells her fiancé that after hearing Paul preach Thecla "lays hold of what is said by him with a strange eagerness and fearful emotion."60 Thecla is described as "chained to him in affection," she repeatedly seeks Paul out "as a lamb in the wilderness looks around for the shepherd" and, when on the stake, she is comforted when she sees "the Lord sitting in the likeness of Paul."61 Her relationship with Paul is certainly more passionate and far more important in her story than her relationship with Christ. We have seen that this kind of emphasis on emotional relationships is characteristic of the apocryphal Acts, and this theme will reappear in later vitae.62 The vitae of many late antique and medieval female saints feature an intense relationship between the woman and a male spiritual "guide": the person who converts them, as with Thecla, or later, their confessors.

dangers on account of her beauty, of whom I have heard that she was condemned to the wild beasts" (Craigie, Life and Conduct, 216).

60 ANT, 366.
61 Ibid., 367-68.
62 Maximilla, the disciple of Andrew, is also described as being passionately attached to her apostle. This is her exultation on learning she will be able to visit Andrew in gaol, "Glory be to you, O Lord, for I am about to see your apostle again without fear. Even if an entire legion kept me locked up under key, it would not be strong enough to prevent me from seeing your apostle. It would be blinded by the radiant appearance of the Lord and by the boldness of his servant before God" (ANT, 254). When Xanthippe saw Paul for the first time, "She was greatly delighted in him and her heart leaped continually, and as possessed with an unexpected joy" (Craigie, Life and Conduct, 206-07).
In the Acts of Paul and Thecla, something of the special importance given to bodily suffering in the depiction of saintly women to which historians have recently drawn our attention is already in evidence. It is true that Thecla herself, though she faces a series of violent, life-threatening situations, manages miraculously to escape from all hurt and pain, and ends her life peacefully. But it is also true that Thecla's main activity as it is related in the Acts is to confront this kind of threat to her body; nothing else Thecla does during her life to prove her faith is as important as the suffering she faces. Although four of the five apostles around whom an apocryphal Acts was composed suffered martyrdom, all of these "violent" deaths are described in a sentence or two, with little indication at all being given of pain, bodily mutilation, or indeed of the physicality of their deaths. Moreover, although all the other heroines of the apocryphal Acts, like Thecla, renounce sex, Thecla alone is subject to physical threat as a result of her decision. The detailed, description of bodily suffering was not yet given the same prominence it would attain in Christian literature of the fourth century. Something undeniably different from an account of the almost bodiless death of a male apostle emerges in a story of a beautiful virgin who is to be mauled or burnt to death by men who sexually desire her, and who, we are specifically told, must face these tests naked. The emphasis on Thecla's body, even if its suffering is in her case only potential, is unmistakable. Suffering and sexual renunciation were both activities which were open to women; they would both be crucial elements in the biographical tradition of women.

63 See the death of Andrew: "When he had said these things and further glorified the Lord, he handed over his spirit, so that we wept and everyone grieved his departure" (ANT, 266); of Paul: "... and after having conversed in Hebrew with the fathers during prayer he bent his neck, without speaking any more. When the executioner cut off his head milk splashed on the tunic of the soldier" (ANT, 387); of Peter: "When the multitude surrounding him cried Amen, Peter, during this Amen, gave up his spirit to the Lord" (ANT, 426); and of Thomas: "And the four came and pierced him with their spears, and he fell down and died" (ANT, 510).
Another noteworthy aspect of the *Acts of Thecla and Paul* is the considerable support. Thecla is offered from other women during her ordeals in Antioch. She is first befriended by a wealthy queen, Tryphaena, who adopts her as her own daughter, and will later finance Thecla’s teaching mission. In addition, the women of Antioch who hear the sentence passed against her express their outrage at the injustice done to Thecla. The women sitting together in the arena at Antioch who are watching her battle with the wild beasts also express their disapproval of Thecla's punishment; they cheer her triumphs against the animals, and throw petals, nard, cassia and amomum into the arena "so that there was an abundance of perfumes." Even the animal who helps her in the arena is female: it is a lioness who protects Thecla from the other animals. In addition, when the text is explicit about those to whom Thecla ministers, we find they are all women: she prays for Tryphaena, she converts the majority of Tryphaena's maidservants whom she instructed in the Lord and she returns to Iconium to exhort her own mother, Theoclia to believe. The later addition to the text of the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* describes some "well-born" women of Seleucia gathering about

64 ANT, 369-72.

65 ANT, 370-71. The theme of the crowd lamenting the fate of the martyr is quite common in *passiones*: the married women watching the martyrdom of Irenaeus, Bishop of Sirmium, weep "for his good looks and body" ("The Martyrdom of Irenaeus Bishop of Sirmium," ACM, 297); the crowd who watched Agathonice remove her clothing and saw her beauty "grieved in mourning for her" ("The Acts of Carpus, Papylius, and Agathonice," ACM, 35). There is something here of the voyeurism of Thecla's near-martyrdoms, yet undressing before facing death was also something men did. See the passions of Polycarp ("The Martyrdom of Polycarp," ACM, 13) and Pionius ("The Martyrdom of Pionius," ACM, 163). Perpetua and Felicitas, on the other hand, were stripped of their clothes before the crowd, but were dressed again in belted tunics when the crowd was horrified at their nakedness ("The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas," ACM, 129).
Thecla to live the "ascetic life" with her. This kind of prominence given to women as supporters, sympathisers and converts is often found in the lives of female saints, especially of course, those who found female monastic communities.

We have already noted that the Virgin Mary, especially in the Protoevangelium of James, is pictured as an extraordinarily passive woman, who would not easily be seen as a model for an active life of any sort. Thecla is a far more active heroine, much more able to control her own life, and to affect the lives of others, though there are real limits to her activity. Much of Thecla's activity could be best described as "active reaction:" often Thecla does not so much seek out areas in which to act, as react with fierce determination to the dangers which threaten her; in this she resembles the heroines, and heroes, of the Greek novels. Thecla responds courageously to Paul's preaching, and to the two threats to her life. Thecla's activity is not, however, entirely reactive. Unlike any of the women of the Gospels, she has spiritual authority of her own which is demonstrated in her active roles: she preaches and converts, prays efficaciously for the dead, and is of sufficient spiritual stature to merit God's direct intervention in her life in order to save her from death. All these features are important to the development of the figure of the female saint, who must demonstrate the special grace and power she possesses.

An important difference between the portrayal of Thecla and the apostles in the apocryphal Acts is that the life Thecla leads deviates further from the accepted norms of female activity than the lives of the male heroes deviate from the norms of male behaviour. While the early male missionaries and apostles often depart from the norms of contemporary family life, economic activity, and religious life, their new roles as teachers and preachers did not mean taking on roles normally denied to men. When they chose to live under domestic arrangements which differed from the norm, they were not defying the legal authority of their parents in the same way as women would by acting in a similar way.

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66 ANT, 370 (the lioness), 371 (Tryphaena's household), 372 (Thecla's mother), 373 (Thecla's followers).
The life Thecla is portrayed as living is very far from the contemporary norms for upper-class women of Asia Minor. She defied the clear authority of her family to choose her husband when she decided on a life of celibacy, and chose to live outside of any family structure; she travelled alone, and according to the later addition to her life, lived alone in a cave till she was joined by female followers. Paul and his entourage formed, for a while, a quasi-family group for her; Paul's authority was greater than her own family's. Thecla undertook significant public roles which were also outside the norm for women: she taught publicly, and again in the longer version of her life, was the healer and local holy person for her community. Some of Thecla's actions placed her in the role of a male: she dressed temporarily as a man, and entered the arena as a gladiator to fight wild beasts. Thecla is described as leading a life which includes many more possible activities and avenues for expression than those normally available to a woman of her time, and the gap between normative behaviour and the life of the saint was greater in her case than for the men described in the apocryphal Acts. It was a more liberating, or perhaps more fantastic, model for female behaviour than that offered by the portraits of the male apostles for male behaviour.

Biographies like that of Thecla often had an importance beyond the world of literature. The history of the cult of Saint Thecla brings to our attention the crucial interaction between the development of the Christian biography and the cult of the female saint: a biography helped create a saint, while a saint would often create the need for a biography. The story of Thecla may have had some basis in the actual life of a woman, possibly a woman whose cult was centred at Iconium or Seleucia. Be that as it may, as a result of the Acta, the Thecla whose life was recorded in it gained widespread popularity as one of the earliest post-New Testament female saints. In entering into the biographical tradition as subjects, then, women also gained a role in the cult of the saints as people worthy of veneration, who were already in heaven, and whose prayers could be sought by those on earth. Thecla's saintly power of intercession is described in the Acts of Paul and Thecla: Tryphaena asks Thecla to pray for her deceased
daughter, which she does, and Thecla then assures Tryphaena her daughter will live "in eternity."  

We have much evidence of the popularity of Thecla as a saint and role model in late antiquity. The Acts of Paul and Thecla was separated from the rest of the Acts of Paul, and circulated separately. The later additions to the story of Thecla give the date of her "commemoration" as 24 September, indicating that a cult was already in place when the addition was written. Thecla often appears in the writings of the third and fourth century as a model of female virtue and virginity. The Lives of Macrina of Nyssa (d. 380) and Olympias of Constantinople (d. 408) both invoke Thecla as a model for the subject of their biographies. When Egeria makes her pilgrimage of the holy sites of Palestine and Asia

67 ANT, 369-70. Tryphaena's daughter had asked her in a dream to ask for Thecla's prayers so that she might "come to the place of the just."


69 ANT, 353. Elliott also records the existence of a fifth-century Greek panegyric to Thecla.

70 ANT, 374.

71 Thecla is the only one of the virgins at Methodius of Olympus' "symposium" on virginity (written between 260 and 290) who is known to us: Thecla has great evangelical and theological competence, we are told, because she was taught by Paul (Symposium, para. 170). Jerome mentions Thecla as a model for virginity in his letter to Eustochium on the subject of virginity (The Principal Works of St Jerome, trans. W. H. Fremantle with G. Lewis and W. G. Martley, Nicene and Post -Nicene Fathers 6 [Oxford, 1893], Letter 22.

Minor in 381-84, she is determined to see the popular shrine at Seleucia dedicated to Saint Thecla.73

VII

By the end of the second century, then, the long history of Christian biography of women was well on its way. The extended treatment of Thecla’s life alongside that of Paul helped to establish the female saint in her public, literary form. During the second and third centuries, the recording of the passions of those who suffered martyrdom provided a powerful boost to the recording of the lives of Christian women.74 Women had at last found a sphere of activity which would make their lives worthy of memory, and in which their activities would be placed equally beside those of men, and women are numbered amongst the martyred in the earliest passiones.75

75 See Stuart G. Hall, "Women among the Early Martyrs," and Chris Jones, "Women, Death and the Law During the Christian Persecutions," both in Martyrs and Martyrologies, ed. Diana Wood, Studies in Church History 30 (Oxford, 1993), 1-21 and 23-34 respectively. Jones argues that female Christians were subject to the same punishment as their male counterparts during the persecutions.
A slave girl, Blandina, is the heroine of the lengthy "Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne" which describes the persecution of Christians in Gaul in 177. The author of the letter is aware of the novelty of the importance that Blandina has won for herself by her willingness to be martyred, and explains to his audience that through her Christ proved that "the things that men think cheap, ugly, and contemptuous are deemed worthy of glory before God, by reason of her love for him." Though Blandina's "earthly mistress" fears that Blandina will weaken under torture, she in fact survives a gruesome and prolonged series of torments. The author of the "Letter" movingly identifies the martyrs he describes with Christ in his suffering, and Blandina, despite her sex, is also described as Christlike. Blandina's identification with Christ becomes quite literal when she is placed in the middle of an arena of wild beasts on a pole and hangs from the pole in the form of a cross; her companions, watching her, "saw in the person of their sister him who was crucified for them." Once again making use of the imagery of inversion, in which the weak are made powerful, the author continues: "tiny, weak and insignificant as she was she would give inspiration to her brothers, for she had put on Christ, that mighty and invincible athlete, and had overcome the Adversary in many contests, and through her conflict had won the crown of

The letter, which purports to be an encyclical letter addressed to the churches of Asia and Phrygia, is regarded as substantially authentic, though it may have been reworked by a third-century editor (Musurillo, "Introduction" to ACM, xx-xxi; "The Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne," Ibid., 62-85).

Ibid., 67.

Ibid. It is worth remembering that very many of the early passiones describe the death of their subject quite perfunctorily, as if the physicality of the act had little relevance after the decision to die had been made. Some seem to want to avoid comment on the body, while concentrating (at some length) on the words and mental disposition of the martyr, and the effect of those words on those surrounding him.

Ibid., 75.
immortality." The final image of Blandina is as a community-leader whose former lack of authority and low-birth has been cast off: strengthening her fellow-sufferers she is "like a noble mother encouraging her children." Portraits of women martyrs such as Blandina helped people imagine that ordinary women, and even ordinary servant girls from Gaul, could become Christian heroes of the first rank, courageous imitators of Christ, whose actions were of the highest importance to the community.

Amongst the early passiones which feature women, the passio of Perpetua and Felicitas deserves special attention. This text contains two first-person narratives, one written by a young well-born African Christian, Perpetua, and one by her fellow-martyr Saturus, both framed by an editorial third-person text. Perpetua describes her arrest, her trial and her imprisonment up till the day before her execution, including details of four separate visions she is granted during that time; Saturus also supplies an account of a vision, and the editor gives further details of the martyrdom of Perpetua and her friends at the hands of the African authorities, in about 203. The passio of Perpetua breathes the air of a heady kind of religious enthusiasm, a concern with prophecy, visionary experience and the imminence of the

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80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 79.
next world, and determination not to shrink from martyrdom, which were all current in Montanist circles, to which Perpetua and her associates almost certainly belonged.83

Perpetua's moving record of her inner life while awaiting her trial and death is one of the few autobiographical texts available from the pen of an ancient woman. Furthermore, the ecstatic outlook revealed in the sensual imagery and allegorical complexity of Perpetua's visions place her at the beginning of a visionary tradition which would be of great importance to medieval religious women.84 Perpetua and her brother both believe that her present trials have given her a status with God that will allow her to request and receive visions; this is the same kind of connection which will later enable visionary experience to substantiate the religious authority of a holy woman.85 Perpetua uses the stories and symbolism of her visions to predict her own future, to help her comprehend, interpret, and prepare for her fate, to reassure herself and her companions of their final reward and to acquire knowledge of the worlds of the after-life. They allow her to recast herself as a naked, well-oiled male gladiator.

83 On the Montanism of the text, see Barnes, Tertullian, 77-84 and Klawitzer, "The Role of Martyrdom," 257 and n. 23. On the Montanist movement, see the last two mentioned works. and Heinrich Bacht, "Montanisme," in Dictionnaire de spiritualité, vol. 10 (Paris, 1980), cols. 167-76.

84 Petroff, Medieval Women's Visionary Literature, 63.

85 "Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," ACM, 111. At the same time, she believes that her new status as imminent martyr will give her power to help her dead brother Dinocratus in his suffering (Ibid., 115-17). It was widely held by both Catholics and Montanists that those who were imprisoned and awaiting martyrdom were granted the "power of the keys," the priestly power to forgive the sins of others. Klawitzer argues that it was in this role that Perpetua was able to forgive the sins of Dinocratus (Klawitzer, "The Role of Martyrdom," 257-58). Certainly Perpetua has little need for the mediation of the church in her pursuit of heaven (See Rader, "The Martyrdom of Perpetua," 6).
triumphant over her opponent, the Devil in the form of an Egyptian, or to imagine herself received into heaven and fed by a God-like shepherd.  

Perpetua's spiritual self-assurance may have found particular encouragement in the Montanist movement, which venerated its first leaders, Montanus, and notably two women, Prisca and Maximilla, as spirit-filled "interpreters and revealers" of God to his people, who left their followers authoritative oracles and descriptions of their visions as records of the knowledge they had attained. Klawitzer's description of the hopes of the Montanists form an appropriate context for Perpetua: "Christians in the New Prophecy [were led] to envision the appearance of a new world, a world symbolized by the unity of male and female in Christ, a world in which Christ appeared to them in the form of a woman as well as in the form of a man."  

The passions of the martyrs are not fully biographical in the sense that they do not trace the whole life of a person, and usually offer only very meagre information about their life until this very intense moment of martyrdom, locked in a battle with the forces of evil. Setting aside the sui generis autobiographical narrative of Perpetua, there was little to distinguish the

86 ACM, 111-13, 117-19.
87 The Montanist interest in visionary experience (and chastity) is demonstrated in the oracle of Prisca quoted by Tertullian: "'Purity brings harmony [of the soul],' she [Prisca] says, 'and they [the pure] see visions, and turning their faces down they also hear clear voices, which are as salutary as they are hidden'" (De Exhortatione Castitatis 10.5). For a commentary on this rather obscure passage, see Tertullian, Exhortation à la chasteté: Introduction, texte critique et commentaire, ed. Claudio Moreschini, trans. Jean-Claude Fredouille (Paris, 1985), 177-79.
88 Klawitzer, "The Role of Martyrdom," 260. Prisca received a vision of Christ as a woman who revealed to her the location of the new Jerusalem (Ibid., 253).
89 Elliott, Roads to Paradise, chap. 2.
early accounts of women martyrs from those describing men. Rather than emphasising the sexuality of the martyr, the passiones tended to neutralise it. This would not continue to be the case. The influential legends of the virgin martyrs, whose passiones belong to the group Delehaye has categorised as "epic" (in contrast to the earlier "historical" passiones), were one of the most sex-specific forms of hagiography. The passiones of the virgin martyrs emphasise the high-birth, virginity, sexual attractiveness and suffering of their subjects and owe more to the model of persecution depicted in the Acts of Paul and Thecla, than to the passiones of the martyrs which date from the second and third centuries.

90 Two sex-specific punishments are mentioned in the passiones: the proconsul Anullinus threatens to have Crispina's head shaved, so that her beauty is "brought to shame" ("The Martyrdom of Crispina," ACM, 307); Irene is placed naked in a public brothel as punishment before she is finally burnt to death ("The Martyrdom of Agape, Irene, Chione, and Companions," ACM, 291-93); Sabina, the disciple of Pionius, is threatened with the same punishment of being put in a brothel ("The Martyrdom of Pionius," ACM, 147). See Jones, "Women, Death and Law," 32.

91 The "epic" passiones are characterised by a more fantastic or at least vaguer chronological and geographical setting, a much more hostile account of the martyr's persecutors, a more stereotyped account of the interrogation of the martyr, an inclusion of the martyr's exposition of their faith or their final prayers, greater emphasis on supernatural events surrounding the martyr's death and an account of the punishment of the persecutors (Delehaye, Passions des Martyrs, 171-226).

92 Some indication of the extraordinary popularity of the lives of the virgin martyrs during the Middle Ages may be obtained from the thirteenth-century collection of saints' lives, the Golden Legend, in which twenty-one of the thirty-two women saints whose lives are included in the collection are martyrs, and sixteen of the martyrs are virgins. It should be noted that martyrs also made up a disproportionate number of the male saints in the collection.
The importance of the martyrs for the history of biography of women does not stop with the influence of the *passiones* themselves. The respect paid to the bones of the martyrs who were killed in the persecutions of the second and third centuries was the beginning of the cult of the relics. The veneration of the memory of the martyrs, the celebration of the anniversaries of their deaths and the belief in the special efficacy of the intercession of the dead martyrs were all crucial developments in the cult of the saints. It is hard to know whether the cult of the saints would have developed its importance in the west without the impetus of the martyrs; certainly the eyes of Christians were now firmly directed to other humans as the focus for much of their religious attention. If Christianity had started with a tradition which emphasised the biographical in Jesus, the cult of the martyrs added to that tradition a firm stress on the acts of other human beings. Peter Brown has explored with much care the vital importance of personal guides and protectors, be they one's personal teacher, local patron or holy person.93 The growing importance of the saints in religious life was naturally a spur to biographical literature, as churches and individuals sought to satisfy the demand for information. The suffering of the martyrs had helped create a focus in the anxious world of late antiquity, and women's place amongst the martyrs would help ensure that they too would be part of the biographical tradition their martyrdoms helped to encourage.

Virgin martyrs are by far the most numerous group of female saints whose lives survive in French: we have Old French versions of the lives of saints Agnes, Barbara, Catherine of Alexandria, Christine, Euphrosina, Juliana, Margaret of Antioch and Marina, all of whom are virgin martyrs who suffer gruesome deaths. See Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographical Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1991).

In the last decades of the third century, Christianity began to be a truly mass movement which encompassed rural as well as urban populations. The age of the martyrs had helped in the development of a popular, literal kind of Christianity, a religion "of the martyrs and the elect, inspired by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God contained in the Bible." The extreme asceticism of Egyptian monasticism, which started to develop in the early fourth century, was both a symptom and a cause of this new religious feeling, and would provide new opportunities for heroic activity even when state persecution of Christians had ceased. As the Egyptian desert was establishing itself as a place of Christian retreat, a similar emphasis on physical renunciation and a disciplined daily life was to be found in other parts of the Christian world, in the monastic experiments of Basil of Caesarea and his family in Asia Minor, and amongst a small group of Roman aristocratic women, known to us through the letters of Jerome.

VIII

The ascetic movement which engaged the passions and creativity of so many Christians in the fourth century, and which did so much to shape the course of Western religious history, was of equally great importance to the history of Christian biography and to the possibilities which would be available to women within Christianity. The new intensity with which the ascetic movement taught Christians to view the decision to take up the ascetic life, and the details of their daily routine made it natural for people to look for religious truth embodied in the life-stories and life-routines of other people. When Melania the Elder, herself an ascetic and patron of monasticism, visited the virgin Alexandra to find out about Alexandra's life - how she had made the decision to become a recluse and what she now did with her life - Alexandra told her about her adolescent conversion, and then offered this picture of her daily routine:

From morn until the ninth hour I weave linen, and recite the Psalms and pray; and during the rest of the day I commemorate in my heart the holy fathers, and I revolve in my thoughts the histories of all the prophets and Apostles, and Martyrs; and during the remaining hours I work with my hands and eat my bread.95

The monks and nuns of the desert, as well as those that recorded their lives, were, above all, interested in the acting-out of religious truth. The literature which arose from Egyptian monasticism demonstrates this very clearly: it consists largely of biographical narratives of individual monks and nuns. The earliest surviving literary document from the desert is the Life of Saint Anthony, written in about 357, one of the first, and most influential, Christian biographies ever written; the author of the Life of Saint Anthony gave the world an arresting kind of new saint, whose heroic struggle was with temptation, rather than the beasts of the arena.96 In addition to the Life of Saint Anthony, two key documents of desert monasticism. the Lausiac History of Palladius (written in 419/20) and the Lives of the Monks of Egypt (written c. 405) are collections of biographical narratives. Palladius's work provides us with seventy-one chapters most of which deal with the life of one individual, though sometimes two or more are described; while the Lives of the Monks of Egypt contains substantial accounts of twenty-four monks, plus accounts of the brothers and sisters in two monastic

communities. Even the apophthegmata or "sayings" collected in the Sayings of the Desert Fathers are very often biographical or autobiographical episodes, and are sometimes quite lengthy. The monks are, moreover, always much more concerned with advice on how to live one's daily life than with matters of theological interpretation or speculation.

The conception of God's power, and of the perfect Christian life which characterises the biographical literature of the desert have had an enormous influence on later generations: the monastic interest in renunciation of the body, a disciplined daily life, and on repentance through penance were of fundamental importance. Beyond these features, the literature of the desert conveyed a powerful kind of literalism in religious life. The will of God manifested itself starkly in small, but powerfully clear, ways in the lives of the monks through events or visions whose symbolism or imagery gave material form to God's thoughts. Similarly, spiritual forces, temptations and emotions are all given concrete substance. Macarius battles with his "demons" of vainglory, which are suggesting he go to Rome, by shuffling about the desert with two baskets of sand on his shoulders, to keep him firmly in the desert. Elias


98 The biographical element is emphasised in the collections of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers which are arranged by author (the alphabetic collection) rather than by subject matter (the systematic collection).

prays for relief against lust, and knows that his request has been answered when he is granted a vision in which he sees himself castrated.100 Nathanael faces his own restlessness in the shape of a demon who has chased him out of his previous cells.101 Evagrius has to prove his orthodoxy against three demons dressed as clerics who identified themselves as an Arian, a Eunomian and an Apollinarian.102 The monastic idea of devout action was often, as well as being physically very austere, a way of making internal feelings of devotion concrete and actual. Every evening in Lent Adolius would stand on the Mount of Olives where Jesus ascended and keep a vigil for hours.103

This kind of understanding of God's miraculous intervention in daily life, and also the kind of devotional activity which turned literature into concrete, literal-minded action, would be easily recognisable in much of the hagiographical and devotional literature of the thirteenth century. Another aspect of the monastic literature which influenced later hagiographical and exempla literature is its heavy reliance on the "telling anecdote." Like the stories the evangelists used to describe Jesus, the stories told about the desert holy people were meant to reveal a truth about the person whose character they illustrated, or else a truth which the holy person's actions and words reveal.

Amongst the literature of the desert, the Lausiac History is the most important source of biographical narratives of women.104 Palladius writes of communities of nuns he has

100 Ibid., 89-90.
101 Ibid., 52-54.
102 Ibid., 113-14.
103 Ibid., 119-20.
104 In addition to the biographical information on women in the Lausiac History, "sayings" are recorded from three nuns, Theodora, Sarah and Syncletica (Sayings of the Desert Fathers, trans. Benedicta Ward [London, 1975], 71-72, 192-97; see Elm, "Virgins of God," 253-82). The Lives of the Monks of Egypt do not record the lives of any women in detail, but they do mention large communities of nuns ("twenty-thousand nuns") at Oxyrhynchus (Desert
visited, and gives a few stories about individual women who live in the desert as nuns or solitaries. One "crazy" kitchen nun who performed menial services for the other nuns, and was not highly regarded by them was praised to the community by the anchorite Saint Piteroum as "spiritual mother to both you and me." "I pray," he added, "I may be deemed as worthy as she on the Day of Judgement:" the nun's mental state, sex and work had made her a potent symbol of humility. Piamoun the virgin was able to prevent an attack on her village when an angel gave her forewarning. Palladius also tells us of three nuns of the monasteries of Antinoë in Egypt. Amma Tallis, who was abbess over eighty nuns, and her disciple, the virgin Taor who dressed in rags and never went out, and another nun had completed sixty years in the ascetic life and was called by name by Antinoë's patron martyr on the day of her death. Though the women monastics of the desert are greatly outnumbered by the men, the accounts of their lives in the Lausiac History do not differ greatly from those of their male counterparts.

The most important women in the Lausiac History are, however, not those who have taken up the monastic life in the desert, but the wealthy women who live ascetic lives in the cities, and who act as patrons of the monastic movement and their local churches. For Palladius, the most significant of these women is Melania the Elder (342-411). Melania was a very wealthy Spanish widow who followed her interest in monasticism to Egypt, where she toured the monastic sites and used her wealth to support the monks. She later settled in

\[\text{\textit{Fathers}, trans. Russell, 67; see also Paphnutius' rescue of a nun about to be raped, Ibid., 95};\]
\[\text{female solitaries in the desert (Ibid., 82-83); and describe the wife of Amoun, who turned her household in the town of Nitria into an monastery (Ibid., 111). On women in the \textit{Lausiac History} and \textit{The Lives of the Monks in Egypt}, see Elm, "Virgins of God," 311-330.}\]

105 For the women's monastery, see \textit{Lausiac History}, trans. Meyer, 95-96.
106 Ibid., 96-98.
107 Ibid., 90-91.
108 Ibid., 140-41.
Jerusalem, where she gave alms to the local clergy and hospitality to bishops, monks and virgins who came to the Holy Land on pilgrimage, and she became head of a community of virgins. Palladius describes Melania as a strict ascetic and enthusiastic student of monasticism whose wealth and spiritual authority allowed her to play a considerable role in the monastic movement and within her own extended family.

The life of Melania the Younger, who as a strict ascetic, monastic leader and generous patron followed in the footsteps of her grandmother, Melania the Elder, is also described at some length. In addition to Melania, Palladius writes notices for Olympias of Constantinople, who is noted for her high-birth, her virginity, her distribution of her goods to the needy and her influence in Constantinople, and Candida, who is praised for the ascetic life she and her virgin daughter live, and for her distribution of her wealth. Two more women are recorded as protectors of the church: a virgin of Alexandria hid saint Athanasius (and kept him in books) for seven years, while Juliana of Cappadocia kept Origen for two years at her own expense when he was in exile in Asia Minor. Lastly, Palladius describes the ascetic life of Bosphoria (and her husband Verus) and Magna in the Galatian town of Ancyra; both women are described as giving large amounts of charity to the churches, hospitals and to the poor. The role of wealthy ascetic and patron of monasticism is one that is almost entirely confined to women; only one man, Bosphoria's husband Verus, is recorded as being a patron, rather than a monk, in the Lausiac History.

109 Ibid., 123-25.
110 Ibid., 112-13 (for Melania's role in strengthening the resolve of Evagrius to become a monk), 134-36 (for Melania's influence in her family).
111 Ibid., 141-44.
112 Ibid., 137-38.
113 Ibid., 144-46.
114 Ibid., 147-49.
Some indication of the role the *Lausiac History* played in the establishment of holy reputations and as an impetus to sacred biography is demonstrated by the fact that two of the wealthy ascetic patrons whose lives are recorded in the *Lausiac History*, Melania the Younger (380-434) and Olympias of Constantinople (361-408), were both later the subjects of full-length individual biographies. These *Lives*, written by near-contemporaries of their subjects, are some of the earliest extant biographies of individual historical women, and help us understand the consolidation of the genre of the female biography in the fifth century.  

The *Life of Olympias*, written before the middle of the fifth century, celebrates Olympias as a benefactor and protector of the Church at Constantinople and as the founder of a community of nuns. Although it is thought that the author may have known Olympias, her biography is rather lifeless and vague, often offering little more than a catalogue of her gifts, or the bishops to whom she offered hospitality. Nevertheless, her *vita* helped make Olympias one of the first women founder-saints, whose memory as the founder of her community of women was kept alive in an account of the translation of her relics and her miracles written by Abbess Sergia, a seventh-century successor to Olympias.

The *Life of Melania the Younger*, which is thought to have been written by Gerontius in 452 or 453, provides a much fuller, more intimate, and much more lively picture of its subject's life and piety, than that offered in the *Life of Olympias*. Melania is a wealthy

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115 They follow the first extant work, Gregory of Nyssa's late fourth-century *Life of Macrina of Nyssa*, which will be discussed below.


heiress who persuades her husband to live with her in a chaste marriage, and who establishes a monastic foundation in Jerusalem. The *Life of Melania the Younger* reads as a successful adaptation of earlier Christian biographical narratives, such as the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, to suit the life of an historical woman who was in fact, like many of the earlier fictional heroines, aristocratic, wealthy and involved in dramatic travels and adventures for her great passion, the ascetic life. At the same time, the *Life of Melania the Younger*, as Elizabeth Clark has pointed out, is intended to instruct its readers, as well as to fulfil the political purpose of presenting Melania as a champion of orthodoxy.¹¹⁹ Melania's *Life* is also itself a witness to the importance of the cult of the saints in the fifth century: Melania reads not only the scriptures, but the "Lives of the [desert] fathers;" she places relics of the martyrs in the altar of her oratory, constantly visits the shrines of martyrs, and asks for their intercession.¹²⁰

The literature of desert monasticism, as we have seen, did much to encourage writers of the fifth century to see holiness worthy of note in the lives of the women around them and yet some of the most famous and influential accounts of heroic monastic women of the Egyptian desert were written of women whose historical existence is doubtful. The lives of these women are not recorded in the earliest Greek text of the *Lausiac History*, though a number are represented in the considerably expanded seventh-century Syriac version of Palladius' work.¹²¹ They are the "harlot" saints, famous for their conversions from a life of


¹²⁰ Gerontius, *The Life of Melania the Younger*, trans. Elizabeth Clark, 45, 60-61, 63-64, 70-72, 76-78.

¹²¹ The Greek *Lausiac History* does have a story which demonstrates God's pleasure at the repentance of an unnamed virgin ascetic who lost her virginity and fell pregnant, though the characteristic role of the male spiritual guide is absent (Ibid., 150-51). There is also a story of a male lector who is considered virtuous because, like many of the cross-dressing saints I
sexual promiscuity or prostitution to life-long repentance for their former ways. and the "crossing-dressing" saints: that is, women who dress as men in order to join a male monastic community, and take up a religious life unavailable to them as women. After they become monks, cross-dressing saints are often falsely accused of seduction, and their female identity, and therefore their innocence, are not revealed till their deaths.

The high value placed on sexual purity in these stories and the emphasis of the benefits of repentance are themes which are certainly found elsewhere in the desert
literature. However, the lives of the "harlot" and the "cross-dressing" saints both tended to depict female sanctity in ways which would be highly influential: they associated women with

122 The Syriac version of the Lausiac History includes the story of Thais, a beautiful harlot who is converted by a monk and who is then enclosed in a tiny cell to ask continually for the mercy of God (Paradise of the Fathers, trans. Budge, 1: 140-42). The earliest extant version of this story is a Greek text of the fifth century. The story of Thais is quite similar to another in the Syriac collection, in which Abba Serapion gains access to the harlot he converts by pretending to be a customer (Ibid., 1: 268-69). The motif of the client-mönk is also found in the story of Abraham and his niece Mary: Mary is brought back to the ascetic life from the brothel she fled to by her uncle who poses as a customer. Also included in the Syrian collection is a story of a harlot whose conversion is aided by a bishop who does not spurn her when she tries to enter his church (Ibid., 1: 269). This story has elements in common with the life of Pelagia, a fifth-century text, which describes a beautiful harlot who is converted by the legendary Bishop Nonnus. Pelagia is also a "cross-dressing" saint, as she ends her life as a monk, known as Pelagius (see, "Pelagia the Harlot," in The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, 3 vols. [Oxford, 1991] 3: 1618; BHG 1478-1479). Our first known reference to the most famous desert "harlot," Mary the Egyptian, is in the Life of Kyriakos, by Cyril of Skythropolis, and the story is reworked by Sophronius of Jerusalem in the seventh century ("Mary of Egypt," The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium, 2: 1310; BHG 1041-44). See also Benedicta Ward's Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources (Kalamazoo, 1987).

On the numerous "cross-dressing" virgin saints, see J. Anson, "The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif," Viator, 5 (1974): 1-32. The Syriac Lausiac History includes the story of Mary, whose father dresses her as a boy ("Maryana") so they can enter a monastery together. "Maryana" is falsely accused of
sexual sin, and, by concentrating on women as penitents, tended to cast holy women primarily in the role of heroic sufferers. The holy "harlots" are pictured as passive creatures who speak and decide very little. Like the women of the apocryphal Acts, their relationships with their male spiritual guides who bring them to repentance are often of great importance. Indeed, the conversions of the "harlots" are often given as illustrations of the saintly zeal of the holy men who convert them, so that sometimes the women appear to be merely examples of the virtue of these men; the reform programmes they adopt are similarly worked out by their male mentors. The reformed "harlots" are rarely portrayed as having spiritual authority of their own to teach or heal; their main virtue is in their prolonged and strict penance. The "cross-dressing" saints are similarly praised for chiefly passive virtues: their silent endurance of false accusations and undeserved penance. Nevertheless, the powerful pathos of the suffering

seducing a woman, and does penance for this crime till "his' death (Paradise of the Fathers, trans. Budge, 1: 253-55).

123 Abba Bassarion (Paphnutius in the Greek version) who converts Thais, determines that her penance should be lived out in a tiny cell, instructs her on the prayers she should say, and decides when she would be allowed out of her cell (Paradise of the Fathers, trans. Budge, 1: 140-42); Bishop Nonnus brings Pelagia to conversion, baptises her, stands as her godfather and acts as her spiritual guide ("Life of Saint Pelagia," in Harlots of the Desert, trans. Ward, 66-75); Mary, the niece of Abraham, is guided by her uncle ("Life of Maria the Harlot," in Harlots of the Desert, trans. Ward, 92-101). The lives of the holy "harlots" are, once again, examples of the close relationship between female saints and their male mentors which is so often portrayed in biographies of women.

124 One partial exception to the rule of passivity is the life of Mary of Egypt, at least as it is told in the seventh-century version written by Sophronius of Jerusalem. Mary tells us her story in her own voice; she owes her conversion and her repentance to no one; she sought the radical life of the desert of her own accord. Her relationship with Zosimus, the monk whose
and the triumph which came to these saints only after death helped to ensure the popularity of these vitae. The stories of the cross-dressing saints, moreover, provided a rare stimulus for women and men to ponder the consequences of women taking on male identity. 125

IX

Alongside the monastic literature of the desert, the last decades of the fourth century produced biographical accounts of Christian women of considerable psychological spiritual life she revives by her example, helps us understand that her life is primarily to be understood as an object lesson for despondent monks: if Mary, a mere woman, can do and teach a monk like Zosimus so much, how much more should a monk take her life to heart (Sophronius, "Life of St Mary of Egypt," in Harlots of the Desert, trans. Ward, 35-56). In a similar way, Anson has pointed to the role the lives of the "cross-dressing" saints may have played in expressing the sexual fears, temptations and tensions felt by the monks (Anson. "The Female Transvestite").

125 Some indication of the popularity of these female saints is given by the fact that the story of Mary, the niece of Abraham was worked into a play by the tenth-century poet Hrotswitha. (The Plays of Hrotsvit of Gandersheim, trans. Katharina Wilson [New York, 1989]), while the lives of both Mary the Egyptian and Thais served as sources for French narrative poems in the thirteenth century (Cazelles, The Lady as Saint, 258-73: 274-88). The lives of Mary of Egypt, Thais, Pelagia, Marina and Margaret (the last two being virgins who become cross-dressing monks) and Theodora (a penitent cross-dressing monk) form a significant proportion of the thirty-two female saints whose lives are collected in the Golden Legend (Golden Legend: 1: 227-29; 2: 234-35; 2: 230-32; 1: 324-25; 2: 232-33 and 2: 365-68.

See also, Ruth Mazo Karras, "Holy Harlots: Prostitute Saints in Medieval Legend," Journal of the History of Sexuality 1 (1990): 3-32, who points out that the medieval church added few penitent saints from its own time to the calendar, but continued to tell the stories of the chronologically-distant desert harlots, especially that of Mary of Egypt.
sophistication, from the pens of three of the most influential Christians of the fourth century: Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome and Augustine of Hippo. These men all wrote intimate, personal portraits of women they had known well: Gregory of Nyssa wrote the Life of his sister, Macrina; Augustine wrote of his mother, Monica; and Jerome of the ascetic women who were his companions and mentors for much of his life, his longest biographical narrative recounting the life of Paula. We even learn details of the childhoods of Macrina and Monica, provided in order to illustrate the subject's character. These are some of the first substantial accounts of women which succeed in providing the life-stories of contemporary Christian women. The biographical accounts all share one important feature: the subjects about whom Gregory, Jerome and Augustine write were significant to the writers' own lives, and also, at least in the cases of Gregory and Augustine, their spiritual development. These narratives are the first in

126 Augustine's Confessions have ensured the knowledge of Monica's life story in the West. In the century after her death, a monument inscribed with verse was placed on her grave at Ostia, of which a fragment was unearthed in 1946. Walter of Arrouaise, writing in the twelfth century claimed that his monastery had received Monica's relics; but an important cult dedicated to Paula was not established until the fifteenth century (Agostino Trapé, "Monica - Il Culto," Bibliotheca Sanctorum, 9 [1967]: cols. 556-57). Paula's date and place of death were recorded in the Martyrologium Hieronymian. In the twelfth century, a pilgrim guide to the Holy Lands described a church dedicated to Paula and Eustochium in which their tombs were to be found; the cathedral of Sens possesses some relics of Paula which were given to the church by Charlemagne, and has honoured her feast (Giuseppe De Ton, "Paola di Roma VIII: Il Culto", Bibliotheca Sanctorum, 10 [1968], cols. 135-36). An epitome of Jerome's letter on Paula is included in the Golden Legend, where Paula takes her place as one of only three non-biblical women saints included in the collection who did not die as martyrs or who are not included in the group of penitent harlot and cross-dressing saints (Golden Legend, 121-26). It seems that Macrina, by contrast, was not honoured by any lasting cult (Bibliotheca Sanctorum 8 [Rome, 1966]: col. 456).
which the author figures as a character in the narrative, a character whose life the subject has changed; they also reinforce in different ways the importance of intimate male-female, guide-disciple relationships in female biography which we first saw in the Acts of Paul and Thecla.

Gregory of Nyssa's *Life* of his elder sister Macrina, written soon after her death in 380, is the earliest extant full-length Christian biography of an historical woman.127 Gregory's life comes at the end of a century which has seen the rapid growth and diffusion of the cult of the saints throughout the Christian world, and it presupposes a highly developed notion of Christian sainthood. In the *Life of Macrina*, Gregory presents a new kind of holy woman: one whose complete otherworldliness and direct mystical communion with the divine bridegroom were earthly foretastes of the life in heaven for which she had been chosen.128 For Gregory, Macrina is already living in imitation of the "life of the angels" through her practice of ascetic and moral discipline.129 Her body he considers to be a holy and powerful relic, even before she dies. Before he visits Macrina on her deathbed, Gregory has a vision in which he is holding the relics of martyrs from which brilliant light is shining; after he has been with his sister, Gregory knows how to interpret the vision, for his sister "was in truth the

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128 Gregory's description of Macrina's progress away from every-day life of the body to the celestial life of the soul and its union with the One, through her disciplined exercise of moral virtue, is a clear example of the way in which late antique Christians with philosophical training, such as the Gregory of Nyssa, were able to fuse together the ideals and practices of the monastic movement and the "spiritual exercises" of ancient philosophy (Pierre Hadot, "Ancient Spiritual Exercises and 'Christian Philosophy'" in his *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase, (Oxford, 1995), 126-44.

129 Ibid., chap. 11, lines 7-13, pp. 176-77.
relics of a holy martyr which had been 'made dead to sin' [Rom 6:11; 8:10] and were shining with the 'grace of the spirit dwelling within it' [Rom 8:11]. As he speaks to his dying sister, he feels as if Macrina had already "transcended the common nature" and that he is talking to an angel in human form, who had no experience of flesh; she merely longed to go quickly to the One she was longing for. Gregory carefully describes the burial of the holy body of his sister, over which he presided, and speaks of the ring and small cross which were taken from her body to be kept as relics as "a great inheritance."

The angelic quality of Macrina's life enables her to guide the lives of others, a role which Gregory emphasises. Macrina draws her own mother into a monastic experiment in which Macrina organised their whole household into a daily routine of asceticism, manual labour and liturgical prayer. Her guidance in the "life of philosophy" was especially important to her brother Basil, whose pride in his public achievements was in stark contrast to the private, ascetic virtues taught by Macrina. Macrina's younger brother Peter also received guidance in the ascetic life from Macrina, and went on to found his own monastic community on the family estate. Macrina is a careful leader and guide to her community of women, who are devastated by her death: Gregory tells of his interviews with two women of her community, Vetiana and Lampadion, who recount the effect Macrina had on their spiritual lives. Gregory's own dialogue with the living and dead Macrina are recorded in considerable detail in the biography.

\begin{itemize}
  \item[Ibid., chap. 19., lines 13-15, pp. 202-03.]
  \item[Ibid., chaps. 22-23, pp. 212-19. The quotation is from chap. 22, line 21, pp. 214-15.]
  \item[Ibid., chaps. 30-35 for the burial of Macrina; chap. 30 (pp. 238-243) contains the account of the ring and cross; the quotation is from chap. 31, lines 22-26, pp. 242-43.
  \item[Ibid., chap. 7, pp. 164-65; chap. 11, pp. 174-81 (Macrina's direction of her mother); chap. 6, pp. 160-65 (direction of Basil); chap. 12, pp. 180-85 (direction of Peter); chap. 28, pp. 234-35 (direction of Vetiana) and chap. 29, pp. 237-39 (direction of Lampadion).]
\end{itemize}
In Gregory's *Life* of his sister Macrina we have the first extant full-length biography of a Christian woman; at the same time, Gregory's *Life* was the first *vita* of an historical woman. Less than half a century after the *Life of Saint Anthony* had introduced its manly, demon-fighting hero to the Christian world, Gregory depicted a saint whose most important virtues were private and interior, and whose most important achievement was the spiritual guidance of others. It was a model of sanctity which would be highly influential in the lives of later women.

While Jerome did not write any biographies of women properly speaking, he did compose a number of letters in which he described the lives of his ascetic female friends. Most of these letters were eulogies, written to those who mourned the dead woman, but also intended for public distribution. 134 Jerome's eulogies of Lea, Blaesilla, Fabiola, Paula and Marcella all contain substantial information about their lives. 135 In addition to these eulogies,

134 Jerome uses Horace's words to describe his letter about Paula as "a monument more lasting than bronze" (Letter 108: 212 in *The Principal Works of St Jerome*, trans. W. H. Fremantle with G. Lewis and W. G. Martley, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers 6 [Oxford, 1893]; all references to Jerome's letters will be to this translation). In his letter to Principia about Marcella, Jerome writes of his own desire and that of Principia to record the life of Marcella "for others to know and imitate" (Letter 127: 253). In his letter on Blaesilla, whose name he promises "shall be forever on my tongue," Jerome imagines the readers of the letter to be "virgins, widows, monks and priests," Christians who are probably already committed to the ascetic life (Letter 39: 54).

135 See Letters 23 (to Marcella, on the death of Lea), 39 (to Paula, on Blaesilla), 77 (to Oceanus, on Fabiola), 108 (to Eustochium, on Paula) and 127 (to Principia, on Marcella). These letters were written over a period of nearly thirty years: the earliest two, on Lea and on Asella in 384, the latest, on Marcella, in 412. For Jerome and his circle of women friends, see Anne Yarborough, "Christianization in the Fourth Century: The Example of Roman Women." *Church History*, 45 (1976), 149-65 and Rosemary Ruether, "Mothers of the Church: Ascetic
the life of Asella was described, while she was still alive, in a letter to Marcella, which Jerome intended Marcella to show to young women as a model for their own lives.136

Jerome's biographical sketches describe the lives of a circle of wealthy, high-born Roman women whose renunciation of their wealth and their families in their pursuit of the monastic life have, for Jerome, made their lives worthy of memory: "[f]or we judge of people's virtue not by their sex but by their character, and hold those to be worthy of the highest rank who have renounced both rank and wealth."137 The focus on the material and sexual renunciation and the pious patronage of these wealthy, upper-class women place Jerome's accounts in the tradition of the apocryphal New Testament, which also dwelt on the conversions of aristocratic women to the ascetic life.138 The originality of Jerome's contribution to the tradition of female biography was in his creation of realistic, and sometimes intimate, portraits of women he knew personally, and whose life and virtues were admirable.


136 Letter 24: 42.
137 Letter 127: 255.
138 Jerome's fascination with the rejection of aristocratic privilege is perhaps the single most important theme in his accounts of the women of his circle: some examples of the theme are his descriptions of Marcella's high-birth, her illustrious family and beauty, her rejection of a wealthy suitor and her adoption of the monastic life (Letter 127: 253-55); his account of Fabiola's noble family, and her determination to break up and sell her property (Letter 77: 158, 160); and his description of Lea as the servant of many, though she had once been the mistress of many (Letter 23: 42); and of Blaesilla's renunciations of aristocratic pleasures (Letter 38: 48). The theme is also prominent in Jerome's account of Paula, which begins with a lengthy account of her exalted family tree, and that of her husband, and ends with the inscription on Paula's tomb which her lineage also dominates (Letter 108, 196; 212).
but not extraordinary in the extreme. By contrast, Jerome also wrote three vitae of male saints who were early adherents of the monastic movement, men he had never known.139 The mythic tone and content of these biographical narratives differ markedly from the sobriety of Jerome's letters: Paul, Hilarion and Malchus are heroic, larger than life yet also rather two-dimensional figures. They are all pioneers of the monastic life, whose spiritual authority is not only marked by their rigorous asceticism, but by the miraculous interventions God makes in their lives.140

Unlike the saintly monks, the women of Jerome's circle are not described as being especially chosen by God for their mission,141 nor do they, as a rule, have special access to or knowledge of, God. God does not offer miraculous acknowledgment of his favour towards


140 Jerome writes both of miracles which are primarily demonstrations of God's favour towards the monks, such as the supernatural provision of bread for Paul and Anthony or the miraculous labour of the lions on Paul's grave ("The Life of Paulus The First Hermit," 301: 302) and also of the many miracles, especially miracles of healing, performed by the wonder-working Saint Hilarion ("The Life of S. Hilarion," 305-10). The extraordinary nature of the journeys, trials, chaste marriage and death-defying escapes Malchus experienced on his search for the monastic life, recorded in the romance-inspired "Life of Malchus, The Captive Monk." gives the entire narrative the air of the miraculous, although there is no explicit supernatural invention in the story.

141 Jerome does record the favourable portent of a dream Asella's father had about her while she was yet unborn, but discounts the importance of such a "blessing" in comparison to her own ascetic labour (Letter 29: 42-43).
them, nor work miracles through them, before or after their deaths. Their virtue, which Jerome certainly expected other upper-class women, at least, to imitate, is primarily their battle against the external and internal barriers to the ascetic life, and their struggles are the struggles of ordinary Christians. In his letters, Jerome provides concrete models of heroic sanctity for women of all positions: virgins, married women, widows; there is even a place for women who remarry after divorce who may eventually learn to be like Fabiola. Jerome understands something of the novelty of the form he is creating when he insists on calling his account of Paula a "memoir;" it is not a "panegyric" which would not include details of Paula's weaknesses.

Jerome, unlike Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, acted in the formal role of teacher to Marcella, Paula and Fabiola, who had sought him out as a teacher of scripture, and received generous praise from him for their scholarly efforts. Jerome also acted as spiritual guide

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142 This is despite the fact that Jerome usually specifies that the woman about whom he is writing is now in heaven (for Blaesilla, see Letter 39: 49, 51, 53-54; for Fabiola, see Letter 77: 161; for Lea, see Letter 23: 42 and for Paula, see Letter 108: 195). Jerome does, however, recognise the potential influence those in heaven may have over the living when he credits Blaesilla with the ability to intercede with God on behalf of Paula and himself (Letter 39: 54).
143 See especially Jerome's defence of his account of Fabiola, "the soul who fell among the thieves," which he admits is a departure from the praise he has offered to "virgins and widows and married women who have kept their garments always white" (Letter 77: 162-23).
144 Letter 108: 207.
145 Marcella seeks out Jerome's teaching, and becomes so proficient at the interpretation of Scripture that she guides others, though always claiming her ideas come from Jerome (Letter 127: 255); Marcella later becomes the teacher of all Rome when she demonstrates how widespread and dangerous the teachings of Rufinus had become amongst the Romans (Ibid., 256-57); Jerome describes the probing questions on the scriptures Fabiola puts to him (Letter
and adviser to most of the women whose lives he recorded, although that guidance clearly varied in intensity from person to person. Jerome's letters stand as one of the earliest surviving extended literary records of male spiritual direction of female holy women.\textsuperscript{146} Moreover, since his accounts of some of the women he advised at length (especially that of Paula) depend on his knowledge of their spiritual lives, Jerome may be counted as the first of the spiritual director-biographers who are such an important presence in the writing of female biographies from the high Middle Ages, and whose work is a precursor of the "confession-vitae" they produce.

Despite his close relationships with many of the women he describes, Jerome, unlike Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, does not emphasise the spiritual debt he himself may have owed to the women whose lives he recounts.\textsuperscript{147} He does, however, seem to accept Paula's teaching as superior to his own when he records her defence of her decisions to continue in

\textsuperscript{77: 160-61); Paula convinces Jerome, who at first refuses, to agree to allow Eustochium and her to read the Old and New Testaments under his guidance (Letter 108: 209-210). \textsuperscript{146} The most extended example of this kind of writing is Jerome's letter to Eustochium on the subject of virginity, Letter 22. \textsuperscript{147} Jerome emphasises his own role as Paula's protector and authoritative intellectual guide when he describes at length a threat to that role: when an unnamed man has been discussing troubling questions about the resurrection of the body with Paula, Jerome seeks him out, and answers his questions with orthodox responses. Paula demonstrates her saintliness, and her understanding of her relationship with Jerome, by dropping the man from her acquaintance (Letter 108, 207-09). We see something of the firmness of Jerome's spiritual direction of Paula in the letter in which he admonishes Paula for her grief over the death of Blaesilla. The issue there was partly the claims each had over the dead Blaesilla, as Jerome wished to assert his superior claim to the control of her memory as "Blaesilla's father in the spirit, foster-father in affection" (Letter 39, quote on p. 49).
intemperate almsgiving or ascetic deprivation against his advice.\textsuperscript{148} He also acknowledges his own role as recipient when writes of the benefit he will gain from writing his account of Marcella, and of Blaesilla's intercession with God for the forgiveness of his sins, which she makes in return for the guidance and advice Jerome offered her on earth.\textsuperscript{149}

Jerome wrote his longest and most intimate eulogy of Paula, his student and companion of many years; it is in his narration of Paula's life that Jerome's close knowledge of the spiritual and emotional life of his subject is most evident. Jerome's account of Paula's quest for the perfect Christian life includes a number of themes which will continue to be more closely associated with the lives of saintly women than with those of men. Paula, a widow and mother of five, is praised for her eagerness to leave her family for the desert, after valiantly overcoming her love of children.\textsuperscript{150} "Motherliness," as a virtue, or as a temptation to be overcome, has a place in the lives of women saints that "fatherliness" will never develop. Paula is also commended for her hospitality to bishops, her patronage of monasteries and her success as a founder and leader of a monastic community, themes which were also prominent in the lives of Melania the Younger and Olympias of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{148} Letter 108: 203. 206-07.
\textsuperscript{149} Letter 127: 253; for Blaesilla's intercession see Letter 39: 54.
\textsuperscript{150} Letter 108: 197. At the same time, as noted above, Jerome criticises Paula sternly for what he argues is immoderate mourning for her daughter, Blaesilla (Letter 39: 53-54).
\textsuperscript{151} Letter 108: 197 (hospitality to the clergy): 198 (patronage of monks): 206 (founder and leader of a monastic community of women). Like Paula, Fabiola was also known as a patron of the clergy, monks and virgins (Letter 77: 160); she is also praised for founding, with Pammachius, a charitable house at Portus (Letter 77: 163).

Since Paula's skilful leadership of the community she founded in Palestine is described in detail, it is surprising that Jerome does not emphasise, or sometimes even mention, the formal leadership of Lea, Marcella and Asella, who all headed monastic communities. He does, however, more often mention the devoted instruction these women gave to their
One of the key impressions one gains from reading Jerome's life of Paula is Paula as sufferer of either physical pain or of deep emotion. Jerome dwells at some length on Paula's responses to the hardships she has endured in life. He introduces a significant new theme in Christian biography, though a relatively minor one in his account of Paula, when he praises Paula for her endurance of the suffering and pain imposed by her "bodily weakness." Jerome also writes at some length of the profound emotional suffering Paula endured because of the death of her children, which seems to have expressed itself in dangerous physical illness. Salutary suffering through illness in hagiographical texts would continue to be very largely associated with women rather than men. Illness was a much more private, and perhaps more easily available form of suffering than the public sufferings of Thecla and the other virgin martyrs.

Paula's piety, as well as her family relationships, is portrayed as richly emotional: she has something of the emotional and mystical sensibility which we can also see pictured in Augustine's Monica and Gregory of Nyssa's Macrina. For example, we are invited to look on, as her companion Jerome himself seems to, as Paula makes a pilgrimage to the holy sites companions: Marcella, who pioneered the monastic life in Rome, acted as a guide to her "daughter," Principia, and Eustochium (Letter 127: 225,256); Lea is called the "mother of virgins" for her role as a monastic leader (Letter 23: 42).

152 Letter 108: 204-05.

153 Ibid., 196; 205. Illness, or its lack, could have a number of meanings for Jerome. He argued that Blaesilla's fever, from which she suffered for more than thirty days, was sent as a lesson to her: "The Lord Jesus has come to her in her sickness, and has taken her by the hand" (Letter 48: 48). On the other hand, he praises Asella for the good health she kept, despite the rigours of her asceticism (Letter 24: 43).

154 The death of Paula's daughters caused her grief which "endangered her life:" "her feelings overpowered her and her maternal instincts were too much for her confiding mind" and she grew sick from grief (quotations from Letter 108: 205; see also Ibid., 207).
of Palestine, which encourage within her intense, contemplative experience. She is overcome with emotion at the foot of the cross, and throws herself down in front of it; entering the grave of Christ, she kisses the stone that sealed the tomb and licks the place where Christ's body had lain. In Bethlehem, Paula pioneers the kind of affective piety associated with St Francis when she contemplates the nativity:

- she protested in my [Jerome's] hearing that she could behold with the eyes of faith the infant Lord wrapped in swaddling clothes and crying in the manger,
- the wise men worshipping Him, the star shining overhead, the virgin mother,
- the attentive foster-father, the shepherds coming by night.

Overcome by her emotion, Paula then utters a speech reminiscent of the Magnificat and the prophecy of Anna in which she praises Bethlehem, rejoices that she has been able to visit its holy sites, and promises to stay there, with, of course, Jerome.

Paula is praised for her generosity in almsgiving, and Jerome notes how many poor and sick people have been helped by the money she has given. He is, however, very careful to specify that it is Paula's money which assists the poor, not her personal labour. The distinction is necessary because Jerome particularly praises the widow Fabiola for helping the sick with her own hands, providing nursing care which was normally the duty of servants. Jerome tells us Fabiola "was the first person to found a hospital, into which she might gather sufferers out of the streets, and where she must nurse the unfortunate victims of sickness and want." While the example of Christ had already helped establish healing the sick as an important task of the saintly, Fabiola appears to be one of the first saints to have sought out a

156 Ibid.
157 "What poor man, as he lay dying, was not wrapped in blankets given by her? What bedridden person was not supported with money from her purse?" (Letter 108: 197). Paula does, however, personally nurse her own sick nuns (Ibid., 206).
158 Letter 77: 160.
public role as nurse to the sick, following the example of the intimate domestic service offered by the women of the Gospels. Nursing was a role which would also be more commonly filled by saintly women than saintly men during the Middle Ages. Like many later female saints who would heroically welcome the revulsion of disease, Fabiola is noted for her strong stomach: she often washed away "the matter discharged from wounds which others, even though men, could not bear to look at."

Finally, Jerome's biographical narratives provided accounts of women who had stepped outside the usual life-pattern for upper-class Roman women. The subjects of Jerome's accounts all acted independently of a father or husband; they often controlled the finances of their family; they had well-developed intellectual lives; they established monastic and charitable institutions in which they could live; they had close relationships with men such as Jerome or Pammachius, who worked closely with Fabiola in setting up a hostel at Portus.

Jerome's letters were well known during the Middle Ages, but the most famous biographical narrative of the fourth century is probably Augustine's unforgettable portrait of his mother, Monica, in the Confessions, written in 396. Throughout the Confessions, Augustine presents Monica as a foil against which to describe himself and his own life decisions. Her steadfast and emotional struggle for Augustine's salvation is an earthly parallel to the constant intervention of God in his life to which he attributes his conversion.

In Book Nine of the Confessions, Augustine describes the death of his mother, and then gives us a lengthy narrative of Monica's life, a portrait which gave Christian literature an enduring model of the saintly mother and wife. Augustine provides a subtle account of his energetic, uneducated mother and her enthusiastic popular piety, and his own ambivalence towards her and the religious world she represents. Finally, however, it is in conversation with Monica at Ostia that she and Augustine achieve an ecstatic understanding of God, which

159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
he values above all else. Like many a later spiritual director writing of the mystical experience of their spiritual daughters, Augustine learns to regard Monica's simpler, more direct religious experience as the measure by which to judge his own experience.

X

This chapter has examined the rich tradition of biographical writing on holy women which the medieval West inherited from late antiquity by tracing the development of Christian biography of women from its raw beginnings in the Gospel texts through to the fifth century, by which time it was an established genre which could boast of such sophisticated works as Gregory of Nyssa's mystical portrait of Macrina. During this period of the early development, a number of themes emerged in the biographical narratives about holy women which distinguished them from narratives written about their male counterparts. The ways in which female sanctity was conceived and described during the centuries in which the genre of female biography was acquiring its basic shape were to be of enduring importance to medieval women saints' lives; my aim here has been to investigate the themes which characterised the emerging tradition as they appear in their late-antique context.

Biography of women in the West, as we have seen, was a Christian invention, which therefore had no direct Classical models to draw upon. Women owed their new-found position as subjects of biographical narratives partly to the deep Christian commitment to life-story as a path to religious truth, and partly to the new possibilities of equality with men which were accorded to women as followers of Christ. Insofar as women's relationships with God was concerned, theirs were as equally worthy of record as those of men. But would Christian biographies of women emphasise the ways in which their discipleship was indistinguishable from that of men? Or would the ways in which women's lives differed, or were perceived to differ, from the lives of men be reflected in hagiography? And if the differences were reflected, would that be a denial of revolutionary possibilities in Christian doctrine, a

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sanctification of the female concerns and life-patterns, or else a reflection of sex-specific literary models?

With some important qualifications, the recognition of women's ability to serve as examples of heroic discipleship which resulted in their inclusion in Christian biography brought with it confirmation that the female saintly life would in fact differ from the male. Our first accounts of exemplary female followers of Christ, the descriptions of the women of the Gospels, differ in important ways from the accounts of Jesus' male disciples. Mary the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalen, as well as Mary and Martha of Bethany, are noted for the intimate, domestic care they provide for Jesus, and for the glimpses we are given of their close emotional relationships with him, activities which can be seen as extensions of women's traditional social roles. Moreover, the women of the Gospels are not depicted in several important roles which were the preserves of men: they do not exercise leadership or authority, whether social or spiritual. Perhaps the most significant model the Gospels did indeed provide for non-traditional activity by women was that of women's membership in the non-familial social group of believers, which was held up as a rival to traditional family relationships. Throughout the Middle Ages, the rejection or transformation of the family would be a fundamental part of a saintly women's repertoire of unconventional behaviour. But equally significant is surely the fact that Jesus' female disciples are portrayed as among his most steadfast followers, whose small but courageous "womanly" services for him put his male disciples to shame; here we find a new valorisation of women's activities, to which the actions of men may be unfavourably compared.

The second- and third-century apocryphal Acts of the apostles developed the biographical focus of the Gospels into the next generation of Christian literature. These texts played a crucial role in establishing women's place in the heroic narratives of Christianity by providing the first substantial accounts of Christian heroines. Furthermore, it is in these texts that we first see sexual renunciation and endangered chastity established as major themes in biographical accounts of Christian women. The apocryphal Acts, which drew on romance
narrative traditions about women such as those found in the Greek novel and the Jewish novella, made clear distinctions between male and female heroes. The second-century story of Thecla, the first post-New Testament woman for whom a cult is recorded, demonstrates this. Like the women of the Gospel, Thecla is a devoted disciple of a male, in her case, the apostle Paul. The women of the Gospels might have recognised the Roman imperial establishment as their enemy; in the story of Thecla that enemy reaches new depths of evil. Their roles as disciples may have offered the women of the Gospels alternatives to marriage (none of the three Marys or Martha appear to have been married during Jesus' ministry); Thecla goes much further in her rejection of the family. She is converted to the "life of chastity" preached by Paul, and her heroism lies primarily in her battle to remain chaste, despite the violent determination of her persecutors. Yet the emphasis on Thecla's feminine sexual allure is countered by the account of Thecla wearing male clothes, which obscure her female identity.

The story of Thecla demonstrates some of the paradoxes in the development of models of female sanctity: Thecla must act in the sphere traditionally designated as women's, that is, family and sexual life, yet her actions in this sphere, her choice of independent virginity instead of marriage together with her willingness to undergo physical suffering for her choice, bring her public recognition and authority beyond that normally allowed to women. For in marked contrast to the women of the Gospels, Thecla is recognised as a holy person in her own right, who preaches, heals and converts others. One's sexual life, which a woman could renounce, and one's body, which a woman could allow to undergo suffering, were areas in which women had greater opportunity to act, and in which women's activities were more likely to be accepted.

The willingness of women to suffer a martyr's death was an important step in their acceptance as saints in the church, and as the subjects of saints' lives. The persecutions of the second and third century had created desperate circumstances in which the common faith and fate of those who faced martyrdom overshadowed distinctions of class and gender. The historical passiones which record the deaths of the female Christian martyrs reflect this
situation: in contrast to the contemporaneous apocryphal Acts, these early *passiones* do not make important distinctions between their descriptions of the passions of male and female martyrs; some accounts indeed suggested that a woman martyr transcended her gender through her suffering, and became "like a man." These texts, then, generally described the heroism of women and men in equivalent terms.

In contrast with the "historical" *passiones*, the later genre of "epic" *passiones*, whose subjects are considered to be legendary, but which nevertheless included such famous virgin-martyrs as St Catherine and Margaret, made clear distinctions between male and female martyrs. The epic "passiones" depended much more heavily on romance-inspired models of female heroism such as those in the apocryphal Acts; like them, they often emphasised the high birth and sexual attractiveness of the female martyr, her rejection of unwanted male sexual advances and the physical violence to which she was subjected. Passion narratives then both emphasised the essential similarity of men and women in the face of death, but also, in the case of the epic *passiones* supplied highly sex-specific narratives of women's heroism.

The emergence of the monastic movement of the fourth and fifth centuries gave continued impetus to Christian biography. As monks and nuns sought to perfect their own daily observances, they were eager to hear examples of extraordinary monastic life, and to celebrate the lives of the founders and patrons of monasticism. Whereas the obstacles facing the protagonist in a martyr's *passio* had been the vicious intentions of the Roman officials, in the life-stories of the monks, the protagonists first had to overcome anything which hindered their entry into monastic life, and then battle with their own physical desires. The monastic life of daily discipline, poverty and chastity was a form of life which was, in its essentials, equally open to women, and indeed, many of the early accounts of the nuns of the Egyptian desert do not differ significantly from those of men. As in the case of historical female martyrs, the common commitment to a new and demanding challenge thrown up by the church overshadowed the differences of sex. New opportunities were offered to women as supporters of the monastic life: we owe the *vitae* of Melania the Younger and Olympias of Constantinople
to the stature they attained as patrons of the monastic life, and founders of monastic communities.

However, the literature of the desert monks of the fifth century already included stories which would form the core of an influential sub-genre of specifically female monastic saints: the "harlot" and cross-dressing saints. These stories which share some of the sex-specific characteristics of earlier hagiography: they typically associate sexual sin with women, and often emphasise the women's close relationship with a male spiritual adviser. An important innovation, which drew on the New Testament story of the women of the sinful life, was the presentation of women as model penitents, who willingly choose to suffer for their past sins. In contrast to these sex-specific themes, the ability of the cross-dressing female saints to live undetected as monks, demonstrated the equality of the sexes in the monastic life, and once more, the ability of women to serve as examples to men.

Our survey ended with the biographical work of three of the greatest writers of their period, Jerome, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine, all of whom provided accounts of women they had known intimately, and in whose lives they perceived exemplary Christian virtue. Augustine's account of his mother demonstrated that the everyday life of an ordinary North African mother could be sanctified by her efforts on behalf of her faith, while Gregory of Nyssa and Jerome both wrote of women who had successfully domesticated the monastic life, and in so doing had sanctified the usual sphere of women's activity, the home. Family relationships, such as Monica and Augustine's, Paula and her children's, and Macrina's relationships with her mother and brother were also sanctified as they were transformed into relationships between fellow disciples. All three authors focus on the "womanly" nurturing offered by their subjects: Macrina gives spiritual direction to her nuns and to her family; Monica is steadfast in her concern for Augustine; Paula and Eustochium care for Jerome, Fabiola builds hostels to care for the poor and sick; and Lea and Paula care for the members of their monastic communities.
Of special interest is the focus all three authors give to the interior lives of their subjects: the deeply emotional, contemplative responses to Christian faith of Monica and Paula, and the mystical access Macrina has to the realms of the other world were experiences which would be later seen as central to female saintliness. And while Gregory of Nyssa's sublime heroine Macrina would be largely unknown to the Middle Ages, many other late-antique female saints, and the kind of heroic virtue they represented, would not: the overwhelming majority of female saints whose feasts were commonly celebrated in the medieval church lived, or were believed to have lived, before the Middle Ages began.
Chapter Two
Mystical Biography and the Search for the Inner Experience of Women

I

In the last chapter, we examined the birth and early development of biographical writing about women in the West, which owed its existence, as well as its form, to the new value the Christian religion placed on religious biography in general, and on the participation of women in religion in particular. We left our survey at the end of antiquity, with the contemporary accounts of Macrina of Nyssa, Monica and the women of Jerome's circle, not long before the composition in around 520 of the oldest full-length *vita* of a Western female saint, the *Life* of the wonder-working St Genovefa (d. 502), carried the tradition of female biography into the Middle Ages.  

1 Having considered the crucial centuries in which the new *Holy women of the early Middle Ages, like their late antique counterparts, continued to be recognised as saints, and their *vita*e had a place in hagiographical literature, though a considerably smaller one than that allotted to men. Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg has tabulated relative numbers of male and female saints (as recorded in the *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*) for the period 500 to 1099, and finds that the percentage of women saints varied for each century between 9.7 and 23.5 of the total number of saints ("Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500-1100," in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Mary Kowaleski (Athens, Ga., 1988), 102-125; table on p. 104. These figures of course, do not represent the number of *vita*e of women written in the period. For an overview of recent publications on early medieval hagiography, see Julia M. H. Smith, "Review Article: Early Medieval Hagiography in the Late Twentieth Century," *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1991), 69-76. On female saints of the Merovingian period, see Jo Ann McNamara, "A Legacy of Miracles: Hagiography and Nunneries in Merovingian Gaul," in *Women of the Medieval World: Essays in Honor of John H. Mundy*, ed. Julius Kirshner and Suzanne F. Wemple (Oxford, 1985), 36-52 and Marta Christiani, "La sainteté féminine du haut Moyen Age:..."
genre of female biography took shape, I now wish to press forward to the thirteenth century, a period in which the development of mystical hagiography brought changes fundamental to the history of female biography. My investigation will focus on the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, twelve biographies written during the thirteenth century in the southern Low Countries which form the earliest coherent corpus of mystical vitae in Europe, including one of the first surviving mystical vitae, the Life of Marie d'Oignies, written in 1215.²

The lives of the mulieres religiosae are priceless witnesses of the heady beginnings of a new religious vision for women whose consequences were to be as profound as they were long lasting. By the time we come to the end of the thirteenth century, the forms of religious biographie et valeurs," in Fonctions des saints dans le monde occidental (IIIe-XIIIe siècle): actes du colloque organisé par l'École française de Rome avec le concours de l'Université de Rome 'La Sapienza,' Rome, 27-29 octobre, 1988 (Rome, 1991), 385-434. For Carolingian female saints, see Julia H. M. Smith, "The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe c. 780-920," Past and Present 146 (1995), 3-37 and Pierre Riché, "Les carolingiens en quête de sainteté," in Les Fonctions des saints, 217-224.

consciousness which we see emerging a century earlier in the first of the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae* had established themselves as powerfully important forces in medieval religion, bringing in their wake highly influential new forms of religious life, new kinds of spiritual relationships, and new kinds of biography, which would mark female spirituality down to our century. For the first time since Gregory of Nyssa's biography had described the "angelic" inner life of Macrina, or Jerome had recorded Paula's thoughts and emotions at the scene of Christ's nativity, the inner world of the saintly woman would again have a high premium placed on it, and consequently, so too would her own narratives of her inner life.

Furthermore, we see the emergence in these thirteenth-century *vitae* of a newly important element in medieval female biography, and in the lives of the women the biographies record. and that is the male spiritual friend or spiritual director who records the inner life of his saintly friend, and whose own relationship with his subject often forms part of his biographical narrative.\(^3\)

At the centre of the changes considered in this chapter are the consequences for religious women of the remarkable reappearance across Western Europe during the twelfth century of mystical religion as a lived experience, after it had lain virtually dormant as a form of religious life since the fifth century.\(^4\) Mysticism offered powerful new possibilities for

\(^{3}\) The sixth-century *vita* of Saint Radegund, written by her friend and adviser of twenty years, the Italian poet, Venantius Fortunatus, who later became bishop of Poitiers, is an early example of a friendship between a man and a female saint which culminated in a biography of the woman (see *The Life of the Holy Radegund*, in *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*, ed. Jo Ann McNamara, John E. Halborg, and E. Gordon Whatley [Durham, N. C., 1992], 70-86). Fortunatus, however, never mentions his own relationship with Radegund in his *vita*, which is a far less intimate portrait of the saint than that offered by Radegund's fellow nun, Baudovinia, in her later *Life of Radegund* (Ibid., 86-105).

\(^{4}\) While a very slender continuous tradition of theoretical knowledge of mysticism can be traced from late antiquity to the high Middle Ages, there is no continuous tradition of practical
understanding the ways God worked in and through humans. The mystical world view assumed that God could and did choose special souls to be drawn into a close relationship with him which would manifest itself essentially as internal experience. This kind of religious experience, focused on the internal world of the mystic, was to be valued above all others. The mystics turned to their own interior world to be awakened to, and to respond to, the graces they had been granted.


The inner relationship with God was thus the recognised sphere of activity for the favoured soul. This was an enormous change from the early medieval saint of God, for whom the goal of a direct, personal relationship with God was very often entirely absent. Equally significant is the nature of the relationship which God sought to establish with the mystic. As he had sought to reveal himself progressively through creation, the scriptures and through his son, so he sought to draw the mystic into an increasingly deeper understanding of the divine, and an experience of divine love, often conceptualised as a precocious experience of heaven, as the mystic herself grows in perfection. The fundamental notion of progress provided the "plot" for this new story of the inner life: the mystic has been elected for a process of inner growth in love and knowledge, and the purifying temptations, periods of spiritual dryness, and the new graces, revelations and expressions of divine love which the mystic experiences are part of a progressive movement towards the divine.6

A cluster of physical experiences gained new significance as external signs of the progress of the saint in the inner knowledge and love of God. The insensibility of the ecstatic state signalled the complete immersion of the mystic in her own interior experience of God to the exclusion of all external activity; it was often accompanied by overwhelming, and debilitating, waves of sweetness which flooded the mind and body. During ecstasy, a mystic would receive the visions through which God brought her to a more perfect understanding of

6 Romance literature also focused on the subjective experience of its protagonists as they struggled to justify their special election as heroes, and in their progress towards greater self-knowledge, and eventually, love. Chivalric romance not only described the sensations and progress of "love" in new detail and with revolutionary seriousness, but also saw the emotion as faithful guide to the true self. See among others, R. W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (London, 1953, reprint, 1959), chap. 5, "From Epic to Romance;" Robert Hanning, "The Social Significance of Twelfth-Century Chivalric Romance," Medievialia et Humanistica 3 (1972), 3-29, and Peter Dinzelbacher, "Pour une histoire de l'amour au Moyen Age," Le Moyen Age ser. 5.1, 93 (1987), 223-240.
himself and his dealings with humankind, or which enabled her to taste the joys of heaven. Ecstasy, the experience of sweetness, and other physical states such as stigmata or levitation came to be seen as external manifestations of what was in fact extraordinary internal experience, which took the mystic far beyond the understanding of God available to others.

Apart from their exceptional bodily states, the miracles which are most often associated with mystical saints are examples of the miraculous knowledge or understanding of the saints, and stem from the saints' privileged knowledge of the "secrets" of God, ordinarily hidden from humankind. Thus mystics may have special knowledge of the after-life, and the ability to speak to the dead; they may have prophetic ability taken in its widest sense: knowledge of events, or particularly, the states of people's souls, which they cannot have gained in any natural way, as well as knowledge of the future. These kinds of miracles of "knowledge" are in contrast to the healing miracles and the miracles which demonstrate control over the elements and the natural world which were typical of early medieval saints both before and after their deaths. "Mystical" miracles necessitated a saint revealing her knowledge, and so could not easily be performed after death, unless the saint spoke or appeared to her supplicant.

The mystic, chosen by God for his special graces and already partly assimilated to the life of the angels, possessed undeniably cogent claims to consideration as amongst the holiest of Christians. This was of particular importance to women, who figured prominently in medieval mysticism from the early stages of its reemergence in the twelfth century, and who soon came to outnumber male exponents of mysticism. Mysticism, like martyrdom and virginity before it, offered a religious career "open to talent:" all one needed was a receptive soul. In addition, the emotional, relational features of mystical religion were readily accepted as appropriate to women. Mysticism would soon become the main, and most secure, road to sanctity for medieval women. It would also be, as we shall explore in this chapter, an important new path to self-expression.

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7 On the predominance of mystical graces amongst late medieval female saints, see Donald Weinstein and Ruldolph M. Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western
The strongly interior focus of mysticism had important consequences for the new genre of mystical biography which developed to record the lives of the new mystical saints, and for female biography in general, since its female subjects were by far in the majority in this novel form of biography. 8 A mystical saint must share her inner experiences, which are the most highly valued, and to which no one else has access, for them to be made public. The need to have recourse to the inner world of the mystic created a far greater need to have her words put into writing during her lifetime, either by herself, or by someone who is close at hand. The internal, private aspects of the mystical life required new kinds of relationships between the subject and her vita, and they encouraged a much more explicit recognition of that relationship in the text of the vita.

An early indication of the nexus between self-reporting and visionary experience was already observable in the “revelation” literature of the twelfth century, a genre which made an essential contribution to the new genre of mystical biography. 9 The recognised need to record

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9 For the importance of "revelation" literature in the formation of the interior mystical biography, see Peter Dinzelbacher, "Die 'Vita et Revelationes' der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin (d.1315) im Rahmen der Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur ihrer Zeit," in
the directly inspired utterances of twelfth-century women such as Elizabeth of Schönau and Hildegard of Bingen "verbatim" was an important step towards the development of mystical biography based on the self-reporting of the subject. During the thirteenth century, as we shall see in this chapter, the autobiographical contributions the saint made to her own life-story would become a defining feature of mystical hagiography. The mystical biography of the thirteenth-century vitae in turn served as a precedent for the striking number of spiritual autobiographies and quasi-autobiographies which were produced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and which provide the modern reader with some of their immediate experiences of medieval women.10

The author of the mystical vita, or at least whoever it was who had sufficiently gained the mystic's confidence to have access to her private inner life, often gained importance as a character in the new kind of vita, and the relationship of the writer to his subject could now become in itself a major theme in the vita in itself. The emergence in twelfth-century monastic circles of a conscious tradition of "spiritual friendships," relationships designed to foster development in the Christian life through the sharing of spiritual experiences, prepared the way for the friendships between men and women which encouraged mystical biography.11

Frauenmystik im Mittelalter, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter Bauer (Ostfildern bei Stuttgart, 1985), 152-77.

10 Richard Kieckhefer, Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu (Chicago, 1984), 6-8. Kieckhefer coined the phrase "oral autohagiography" to describe the works produced by the biographers and scribes of such fourteenth-century saints as Angela of Foligno, Catherine of Siena, Dorothy of Mantau and Bridget of Sweden.

11 For the development of the interest in friendship in twelfth-century monasticism, see Jean Leclercq, Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France (Oxford, 1978); R. W. Southern, Saint Anselm and his Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130 (Cambridge, 1963), 194-226; John Boswell, Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality (Chicago, 1980), and the work of Brian Patrick McGuire: Friendship and
Friendship between twelfth-century monks had indeed made possible a new kind of "intimate" monastic biography, written by authors who had known their subject intimately, and who offered their readers realistic, individualised portraits of their heroes.  

The renaissance in monastic life in the twelfth century encouraged not only an increased awareness and interest in friendship between monks, but also between men and women in the monastic and eremitical life, though we have much less biographical evidence of these friendships. An important exception is the mid-twelfth-century vita of the recluse Christina of Markyate, which was written during Christina's life by a male author whom she reportedly held very dear, and who was privy to her own accounts of her past and her Community: The Monastic Experience (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1988), "The Cistercians and the Transformation of Monastic Friendships," Analecta Cisterciensa 37 (1981), 1-63 and "The Cistercians and Friendship."


13 Literary evidence of twelfth-century spiritual friendships between men and women is more usually found in the literature of spiritual direction, and especially in letters, than in biography. Examples include the letters of Abelard and Heloïse, Goscelin's Liber confortatorius, written as a letter to Eve of Wilton, Anselm of Canterbury's correspondence with Mathilda, wife of Henry I of England, and Aelred of Rievaulx's Rule of Life for a Recluse. On the spiritual direction of women, see Barbara Newman, From Virile Woman to WomanChrist (Philadelphia, 1995), 19-45.
visionary life; Christina's *vita* is thus an early example of a biography which owes its existence to an intimate friendship between the female subject and the author. ¹⁴ Monastic life also provided the context within which twelfth-century mystics such as the Benedictine nuns Hildegard of Bingen and Elizabeth of Schönau were able to create the relationships with monks that enabled their visionary world, and to a lesser extent, the stories of their lives, to be recorded. ¹⁵

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¹⁴ *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. and trans. C. H. Talbot (Oxford, 1959; reprint, 1987). The friendships and alliances Christina made in the course of her search for the religious life seem to have been quite typical of the close ties that were formed between men and women in religious life during the twelfth century, and which have been re-emphasised in recent scholarship. For Constance Berman's reappraisal of the earlier opinion that the early Cistercians had been hostile to women's communities, and her discussion of the close relationship between male and female religious houses, see, "Cistercian Nuns and the Development of the Order: The Abbey at Saint-Antoine-des-Champs Outside Paris," in *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq*, ed. E. Rozanne Elder, Cistercian Studies Series 160 (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987), 121-56, and her "Men's Houses, Women's Houses: The Relationship Between the Sexes in Twelfth-Century Monasticism," in *The Medieval Monastery*, ed. Andrew MacLeish, Medieval Studies at Minnesota 2 (St Cloud, Minn., 1988), 43-52. Sharon K. Elkins argues that the cooperation which is evident in relationships between women seeking the religious life and male religious during the twelfth century declined at the end of that century (*Holy Women of Twelfth-Century England* [Chapel Hill, 1988]). Such a decline is not seen till considerably later amongst the Cistercians in Belgium at least (Roger De Ganck, "The Integration of Nuns in the Cistercian Order Particularly in Belgium," *Cîteaux* [1984], 235-47).

¹⁵ Hildegard seems to have written her visions, and other works, in a Latin of simple syntax, limited vocabulary and "barbarous" style which her devoted secretaries, notably the monks
However, while monasticism continued to provide an institutional context for spiritual relationships between men and women into the thirteenth century and beyond, from the end of the twelfth century its role would be increasingly overshadowed by new forms of religious association. For in addition to the ties which developed between men and women in the monastic world during the twelfth century, relationships between men and women mystics were also encouraged by the newly practical interest in priestly pastoral care which developed in the later twelfth century and prompted the extension of pastoral care, previously limited to the monastic world, to lay women and women in semi-religious life. In the first half of the thirteenth century the new, and rapidly expanding, mendicant orders took up the care of souls as their own special mission; the friars' presence in the cities, and their dedication to deepening the religious experience of the people through the twin tools of preaching and the hearing of confession, changed forever the kinds of religious experience, and contact with the literate


clergy, which were available to religious women. The new recognition given to sacramental confession to a priest as a fundamental element in the life of all Christians by the Lateran council of 1215 gave women, especially lay women, an institutional framework for the formation of a close relationship with a priest; it also encouraged reflection on one's own life and served as a valuable medium by means of which the innermost experiences of a mystic might become known.

Finally, the growth of mystical religion went hand in hand with new developments in "spiritual direction," where a director offered regular advice and encouragement to his charge, in a process which might begin in the relationship between confessor and confessant, or develop quite outside that role. Each confessor, in leading his confessants through their confession, and in determining the appropriate penances, necessarily had a measure of

17 For the Dominican's' pastoral activities in the Low Countries, see Stephanus Axters, "Dominikaansche zielzorg in de Nederlanden der dertiende eeuw," Ons Geestelijke Erf 13 (1939), 149-84 and Walter Simons, Stad en apostolaat de vestiging van de bedelorden in het graafschap Vlaanderen, ca. 1225-ca. 1350, Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van Belgie, Klasse der Letteren; jaarg. 49, nr 121 (Brussels, 1987), 168-231. For an important discussion of the (male) negotiation of power in the relationships between friars and holy women, see John Coakley, "Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth-Century Franciscans and Dominicans," Church History 60 (1991), 445-460. Coakley's strength is also his weakness, as power is the only dimension of the relationship he considers.

18 Gustave Bardy, "Direction Spirituelle en Occident - Jusqu'au 11e siècle," and François Vandenbroucke, "Direction Spirituelle en Occident - Au Moyen Age," both in Dictionnaire de Spiritualité 3 (1957), cols. 1061-83 and 1083-89 respectively.
responsibility for the spiritual direction of his subjects. Both mysticism and the practice of spiritual direction required a model of "progress" in the spiritual life: a mystical life usually included various temptations and reversals on the way to increased contact with God. The growth of the concept and practice of spiritual direction created an important structure for sustained relationships between men and holy women, and was also to have an influence on biographical narratives produced about women mystics. The dialectical process of direction provided a narrative structure for the interaction between author and subject in a mystical vita, so that the vita charted the progress the subject made in spiritual graces in response to the guidance of her director. The new interest in providing material for the spiritual direction of others also began to shape biography: a detailed account of the spiritual exercises undertaken by the saint as she approached perfection allowed mystical biography to serve as a concrete guide to progress in the inner life.

In the sections that follow, I will examine the new kinds of relationships between author, text and subject which I see as characteristic of mystical biography in six of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, namely, the lives of Marie d'Oignies, Lutgard of Aywières, Margaret of Ypres, Ida of Louvain, Alice of Schaerbeek and Beatrice of Nazareth. I have aimed to

19 The new importance that confession and the relationship between confessor and female religious had attained is particularly clear in the thirteenth-century treatise for recluses, the Ancrene Wisse.

20 Of the six vitae I will not discuss here, the vitae of Juliana of Cornillon, Ida of Nivelles and Juette of Huy are all mystical biographies which clearly depend on the subject's own reporting of her inner life to others. The Life of Juliana depends in part on the records made of her life in French by her friend, the recluse, Eve of Liège. The vitae of Christina Mirabilis, Ida of Leeuw and Elizabeth of Spalbeek, on the other hand, are noticeably deficient in witnesses to the inner lives of these saints. In a paradoxical way, however, these last three vitae demonstrate the strength of the mystical model of religion: although the authors of these vitae have little access to the inner world of these saints, they are nevertheless convinced on the basis of the saints'
recreate something of the milieu in which each *vita* was written, by examining what we know of the relationship between subject and author, paying close attention to what the texts say about the process by which they were composed, gleaning as much as possible about the sources used in the making of each *vita*, and listening especially hard for the contribution which the subject herself made to the her biography and the context in which she was heard and recorded. In particular, I have tried to be aware of some of the new configurations of people, life-stories and texts, the new opportunities for women, as well as the tensions and difficulties that arose from the thirteenth-century fascination with the inner life of the mystical saint.

II

The *Life* of Marie d'Oignies, written by Jacques de Vitry in 1215, is well known as a precious early record of the enthusiasm for the semi-religious life which arose among women exterior actions - the bizarre penitential activities of Christina Mirabilis, the one-woman passion play performed by Elizabeth of Spalbeek, and the uncontrollable (narcoleptic?), and apparently contentless, ecstasies experienced by Ida of Leeuw - that they must be blessed with an extraordinary mystical life.

in the Low Countries from the late twelfth century. The Life of Marie is, however, also a pioneering document in the history of mystical biography: it was one of the earliest medieval biographies which concentrated their attention on the inner experiences and graces of a subject who had privileged access to the celestial world. Moreover, the Vita Mariae exemplifies the new relationships between author, subject and vita which are characteristic of mystical biography: the vita's accounts of Marie's mystical life are clearly based on her own reports to her biographer, Jacques de Vitry, while the complex ties which bound Jacques and Marie form an essential part of the narrative of the vita. What we find in the Vita Mariae is evidence of a close, reciprocal relationship between Marie, a lay woman devoted to the religious life and Jacques, the author of the vita, her close friend, confessor and co-inhabitant of the religious community to which Marie was attached; it was this relationship which the biographer drew upon to describe his own experience of Marie's virtues, and the changes she brought to his own spiritual life and practice of the priestly life, and which provided the close access to Marie's conversation which allowed the vita to focus on Marie's accounts of her mystical graces.

The Life of Marie d'Oignies, as the brief account of the careers of Marie and Jacques which follows will demonstrate, owed its existence to the meeting of two powerful religious visions. One was the search for an impassioned religious existence for the laity, exemplified

by the career of Marie d'Oignies; the other, which motivated Jacques de Vitry, was the attempt to recreate a priesthood modelled on the work of the apostles; the Life owes its power to the unusual circumstances in which Jacques and Marie were able to live in close contact, and to the layers of rich meaning which they were able to create for their relationship.

Marie d'Oignies was a laywoman, born in the town of Nivelles in 1177 to a family of the commercial middle class. As a young woman, Marie seems to have vehemently rejected her parents, and the mercantile values which she believed had done irreparable damage to their souls, and sought to free herself from their milieu as soon as she was able. Not long after her parents had "maliciously" forced her to marry at the age of fourteen in 1191, she persuaded her husband to agree to a chaste marriage, and to join her in her quest for the religious life. Marie and her husband "gave up everything to the poor" and together entered a leper community in Willambrouk, just outside Nivelles, where they lived a common

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23 For Marie's well-off, "mediocris" family, see Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 11, p. 550. Marie's attitude towards her mother, at least, was somewhat ambivalent: Marie hoped that her mother might have redeemed herself because of her almsgiving, and prayed tearfully for her soul, but her deceased mother appeared to Marie to inform her that she had been damned to hell for acquiescing to living off usury and unjust commerce, a fate which Marie herself had worked so hard to avoid (Thomas of Cantimpré, Vita Mariae, Supplementum, ed. Arnold Rayssius, in Acta Sanctorum, June vol. 5 [June 23] (Paris, 1867), chap. 2, par. 12, p. 576). Marie's revulsion at the materialism of her early life in Nivelles was demonstrated by her later desire to cut the skin off her feet to cleanse them after she had been forced to walk through the streets of Nivelles (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 67, p. 562). Her relationships with two of her brothers were more successful: she convinced them both to "leave everything" and join the Cistercians (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 64, p. 562).

24 For the history of chaste marriage, see now Dyan Elliot, Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock (Princeton, 1993).
religious life, but without taking monastic vows. Marie began her religious life in earnest at Willambrouk, under the direction of her first "spiritual father" Giles of Nivelles, who was the community's chaplain and also her husband's brother. After at least twelve years at Willambrouk, Marie sought a quieter existence, and in 1203 at the age of twenty-six at the earliest, but probably some years later, she joined a group of lay sisters attached to a small community of Augustinian canons at Oignies, south of Nivelles. The "sisters of the brothers

25 For the story of Marie's marriage, and the decision to join the community at Willambrouk, see Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 1, pars. 12-14, p. 550. Marie's husband, who is sympathetically treated in this episode, then fades from Marie's life, resurfacing only briefly to sanction her entry to the community of Oignies (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 93, p. 568).

26 Giles's relationship with Marie may have been a precursor to her later relationship with Jacques; certainly Marie understood the "great consolation" Giles' presence had given to the recluse Hadewijch, who was enclosed at Willambrouk, and sought to prepare Hadewijch for her loss when Giles left the community (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 80, p. 565). On Giles of Nivelles, see Greven, Die Anfänge, 84-86.

27 For Mary's move to Oignies, see Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 93, p. 568, and also History of the Venerable Church of Blessed Nicholas of Oignies and the Handmaid of Christ Marie d'Oignies, trans. Hugh Feiss (Saskatoon, 1987), par. 6, p. 40. Mary's care of the recluse Hadewijch for a period of "twelve years" provides the minimum length of her stay at Willambrouk (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 80, p. 565). For the history of the community at Oignies, see E. W. McDonnell, The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene (New York, 1954; reprint, 1969), 8-19. See also the works of Charles Dereine on the history of the Augustinian canons in the Low Countries, "Les prédicateurs 'apostoliques' dans les diocèses de Thérouanne, Tournai, Cambrai-Arras durant les années 1075-1125," Analecta Praemonstratensia 69 (1983), 171-189 and "Vie commune,
of Oignies" lived a loosely-organised semi-religious life, a form of life Marie had pioneered at Willambrouk. She died at Oignies in July, 1213, at the age of thirty-six. Marie d'Oignies emerges from the Vita Mariae as an especially talented creator of religious life: at Willambrouk, and later at Oignies, working outside any formal regular structure, she shaped a life of evangelical poverty, manual labour and zeal for souls, as well as an ordered devotional life of her own making. She had a particularly imaginative genius for creating new forms of personal, affective devotions, and for bringing out all the possibilities for powerfully emotional religious drama which high medieval religion held. Marie's sense of drama was heightened by her vivid feeling for the give and take of God's justice, and she would often see her life, and the lives of others, in terms of a quite concrete idea of merit earned or lost. She was also very conscious of the ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil in the world, to which she gave concrete, and often visual, form in the activities of demons and angels; her clear perception of the otherwise invisible world also gave energy to her zeal to save the souls of others from evil. Many of these features of Marie's religious life are evident in the relationship Marie forged with her biographer, Jacques de Vitry.

Jacques de Vitry was born in the village of Vitry in the diocese of Rheims, to a relatively humble family. Although the evidence of his date of birth is controverted, he was

28 For example, Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 50, p. 558. The group of women Marie joined at Oignies are described as "beguines" by Thomas of Cantimpré (Vita Mariae, Supplementum, chap. 4, par. 25, p. 580). See also Greven, Die Anfänge, 98-99 and McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 59-62.
29 Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 109, p. 572.
probably not substantially older or younger than Marie.\textsuperscript{31} Jacques studied theology in Paris, possibly under Peter the Chanter, the influential exponent of practical, pastoral theology, who might certainly have inspired Jacques' interest in popular pastoral care.\textsuperscript{32} Jacques seems to

\textsuperscript{31} There has been considerable debate over Jacques' date of birth; for a discussion which attempts to reconcile the problems, see Monica Sandor, "The Popular Preaching of Jacques de Vitry" (Ph. D., University of Toronto, 1993), 27-30. The anonymous History of the Venerable Church of Blessed Nicholas, written after Jacques' death in 1240, when elaborating on the significance of 1187, the year in which the community was founded, reports that Jacques de Vitry was a student in Paris in 1187; however, this date seems rather unreliable, considering that in the next sentence the author of the History also places St Francis' preaching career (inaccurately) in the same year (par. 1, p. 37). If, however, we do follow the traditional dating, based on the 1187 date, Jacques would have been born in around 1170, making him a student of theology at the rather young age of seventeen, and a man of seventy at his death in 1240, and would have been about seven years older than Marie. Since, however, a birth date of c. 1170 would mean that he was already thirty-three in 1203, the earliest year in which he could have possibly come to Oignies, where we know he arrived still unordained, and probably still a student, I suspect that his age was considerably closer to Marie's, if indeed, he was not her junior. See below for a discussion of the date of Jacques's entry at Oignies.

\textsuperscript{32} John W. Baldwin, Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1970), 1: 36-39. The priests John of Lier and John of Nivelles, who were both students of Peter the Chanter, and admired by Jacques de Vitry, were closely associated with the beguine movement in Liège. John of Nivelles became a canon regular at Oignies after the death of Marie (McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 40-45; Greven, Die Anfänge, 86-88). Jacques also has praise for another of Peter's students, the popular preacher, Fulk of Neuilly (for whose career, see Milton R. Gutsch, "A Twelfth Century Preacher - Fulk of Neuilly," in The Crusades and Other Historical Essays: Presented
have visited the community at Oignies while still unordained, and still involved in the study of theology. According to Thomas of Cantimpré, Jacques left Paris, came to Oignies in search of Marie, of whose sanctity he had heard in Paris, and was then persuaded to join the community by Marie herself.33 Be that as it may, Jacques did become a canon regular at Oignies, and sometime thereafter, at the urging of Marie and the brothers of Oignies, returned to Paris to be ordained.34 Jacques' entry at Oignies took place sometime between 1203, the earliest possible date for Marie's entry at Oignies, and 1211, which is the date of a charter concerning the nearby Cistercian nunnery of Aywières on which are found his signature and a record of his priestly status.35 On Jacques' return to Oignies after his ordination, he began the pastoral duties of the priesthood in earnest, developing, with Marie's help, his skill as a preacher, and hearing confessions, most notably, the confession of Marie herself.

Oignies was not to prove to be a permanent home for Jacques: even before Marie's death in 1213, he had begun to receive the Papal commissions to preach the Albigensian crusade that would take him away from Oignies.36 Despite her fears, however, Jacques was

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33 Thomas of Cantimpré tells us Jacques was drawn to Oignies from Paris "relictis Theologicis studiis," because he had heard of Marie's fame, and it was she who urged him to stay (Vita Mariae, Supplementum, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 573); cf. Greven's defence of Thomas' account of Marie's wide reputation (Die Anfänge, 103, n. 1). The History of the Venerable Church of Blessed Nicholas says it is the fame of the community of Oignies which attracts him from Paris, and describes Jacques as already a "doctor in sacred theology" when he came to live at Oignies (par. 7, pp. 40-41).

34 Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 86, p. 566.

35 Greven, Die Anfänge, 96-97; McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 22.

36 Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 96, p. 569; cf. McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, p. 21, n. 8.
able to be present during Marie's final illness and death. After spending much of 1214 and 1215 on preaching missions, Jacques left Oignies to take up the bishopric of Acre to which he had been appointed at the end of 1215. In 1229, he was made cardinal-bishop of Tusculum, and he remained in Rome till his death in 1240. The life-long links which he retained with Oignies, the diocese of Liège, and the memory of Marie d'Oignies were, however, exemplified in his decision to be buried at Oignies. Even after her death, Marie was still a concrete presence for Jacques: not only did she continue to appear to him in visions, but for many years he kept her finger in a silver case, which he always kept hanging from his neck.

The Vita Mariae bears witness to the remarkably intimate relationship Jacques and Marie were able to develop under the quite unusual circumstances at Oignies, where they had spent at least three years, and quite possibly more, in the same community, and during which time their relationship had been cemented by Jacques' role as Marie's confessor. Jacques emphasised this intimacy by writing his biography as fundamentally an account of his own.

37 McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 21, 37-39.
39 For Marie's appearances to Jacques, see Vita Mariae, Supplementum, chap. 4, pars. 20-22, p. 579. For Marie's finger, see Vita Mariae, Supplementum, chap. 3, par. 16, p. 578 and chap. 4, par. 20, p. 579; Thomas also mentions Jacques' possession of Marie's finger in his [Vita] De S. Lutgarde virgine, ed. J. Pinius, in Acta Sanctorum, June vol. 3 [June 16], (Paris, 1867), Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 19, p. 209.
40 The earliest possible date for the entry of Marie at Oignies is 1203; at the very longest, Jacques might have spent ten years with Marie, though this seems unlikely. The close associations between men and women at Oignies was not to last, as by 1250 the beguinage which grew from the loose community of women Marie had joined, now a source of disquiet to the canons regular, was moved to another part of Oignies (McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 59-61).
personal experience of Marie; he very rarely mentions anyone, with the exception of Marie herself, as a source for the material he uses for the *vita*, and there is little in the life which he might not have seen and heard himself, or heard directly from Marie over the course of their time together.41 This supports his own claim that he will therefore relate, what "I have seen and come to know, and for a large part learnt from experience."42 Particularly striking is the absence of other members of the Oignies community as informants, an absence which corresponds to Jacques' decision not to link the *vita* directly to the canons regular by dedicating it to the brothers, or to their prior, Giles of Oignies. Since the *vita* was finished by the end of 1215, less than two years after Marie's death in the middle of 1213, Jacques would, in fact, have been able to rely on the sharpness of his own memory, even when absent from Oignies on his preaching missions.43 He may have had some notes to help him: although Jacques tells us he did not acquiesce to the urging of Bishop Fulk of Toulouse that, as her "familiaris," he write Marie's life while she was still alive or at least commit her virtues to

41 Cf. Greven, *Die Anfänge*, 55, 62. Stories of Marie told by witnesses as close at hand as the prior of Oignies, Andrew, a laybrother of Oignies and a merchant of Nivelles, are included by Thomas of Cantimpré in his supplement to the *Life* of Marie. A small number of stories might have been reported to Jacques by others, such as the healing of members of the Oignies community, and the words Marie spoke to her servant on her deathbed, but Jacques might have also seen and heard these events himself; no source is explicitly given as such. Not all of those who knew Marie were able to serve as witnesses for her inner life: during her last illness, when the prior of Oignies and Marie's servant remained with her, they could not understand or remember many of the heavenly secrets she was talking about (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 99, p. 569).

42 "[Q]uae vidimus et novimus, et ex magna parte per experientiam didicimus" (*Vita Mariae*, Prologue, par. 11, p. 549).

43 The *vita* was written before Jacques was called to the bishopric of Acre (Greven, *Die Anfänge*, p. 54, n. 3).
memory, the day-by-day account of Marie's last illness strongly suggests that Jacques took notes of Marie's words and gestures during that final period of her life. Jacques' close extended access to Marie meant that he was freer to create his own personal "Marie," largely without reference to anyone else's picture of her, except of course, her own.

Jacques defended the kind of intimacy he had developed with Marie by explaining the new closeness to God that "experience" of Marie's life and conversation, even the sight of her face, could bring. Bishop Fulk of Toulouse, to whom Jacques dedicated the *Vita Mariae*, and who had been drawn to Liège by Marie's fame, was himself able to experience mystical graces as a result of his contact with Marie: during his first encounter of Marie, he felt the sweetness of honey in his mouth for an entire day after speaking with her, and when he returned to see her during her last illness, he was illuminated with inward light when he celebrated mass in her presence. For the benefit of those who doubted the value of friendship of the sort he had with Marie, Jacques recounted how Guido, an ex-cantor of the church of Cambrai, who had close ties with the community of Oignies, brought a friend of his to new religious awareness through Marie. When Guido made a detour in order to visit Marie, his companion was impatient, as he "did not perhaps yet know through experience how much the visiting and intimacy of good people is profitable to pious minds," and waited outside for the cantor. The companion only approaches Marie in order to hurry the cantor into leaving, but she

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44 *Vita Mariae*, Prologue, par. 9, p. 549.
45 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 41, p. 556; *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 104, p. 571.
46 "Qui nondum forte per experientiam cognoverat, quantum piis mentibus visitatio bonorum familiaritasque conferat" (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 39, p. 556). That Jacques was convinced of the value of sharing the problems of the spiritual life is clear from his account of a seriously depressed Cistercian nun who fell into despair because "she did not open the wound of her heart to anyone, so she could receive medication" ("nullique vulnus cordis sui, ut medicamentum recipiend, aperiens," *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 31, p. 554).
nevertheless works a transformation in him, and he is dissolved in tears, and can scarcely be brought to leave Marie's presence. His confession of Marie to his delighted friend will stand as a statement of the theme of the entire Vita Mariae, "Now, however, I have perceived, through experience, the power of God in this holy woman."47

Jacques' own life, too, had been transformed by his relationship with Marie. He alone, however, of all those she brought into closer contact with God, is presented as capturing the affection of Marie herself. No one else in the vita, including Christ himself, elicits from Marie the kind of emotion she has for "her preacher," and she is consistently presented as taking the initiative in deepening the ties which link her to Jacques.48

Jacques' special status and responsibilities as a priest and preacher have a central role in his relationship with Marie: through Jacques, Marie participates in a role she cannot herself

47 "[N]unc autem in hac sancta muliere virtutem Dei per experientiam percepii" (Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 39, p. 556). Some further examples: a priest who corrected Marie's crying, and was then visited with an uncontrollable flood of tears himself, also learnt "per experientiam" what he had failed to learn through compassion (Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 1. par. 17, p. 551); a Cistercian abbot knew to bring a despairing monk to Marie as he had sometimes felt her spiritual power "per experientiam" (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 63, p. 561).

48 Although Christ is a visual and emotional presence for Marie, who appears to her at various ages according to the church festival being celebrated, cradles her head in his lap, and comes to her "often" on her death bed, he is not an important protagonist in the vita, and only speaks to Marie on one occasion, to explain a vision (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 103, p. 570; Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 10, par. 90, p. 567 and Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 27, p. 553). He does not act as Marie's adviser, or personally encourage her in her religious life, a role he takes up in the vitae of several of the mulieres religiosae. Besides Christ and Jacques, Marie is also reported as "greatly loving" John of Dinant, a priest who was known for his work on behalf of religious women (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 53, p. 559).
aspire to, while Jacques relies on her inspired guidance of his priestly career.\textsuperscript{49} Their relationship is a very early example of what would become an established pattern for holy women and their male mentors in the next centuries, in which a holy woman's direct access to God would be felt to complement and support the authority and duties of the priest.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{49} Michel Lauwers ("Expérience bégine") has argued that the \textit{Vita Mariae} carefully presents Marie as a supporter of the priesthood, and as a devout confessant and communicant. Yet the full story of the \textit{vita} is more ambiguous, for as many times as Marie is undoubtedly depicted as submissive in her relationships with the clergy, she is also shown in roles which threaten the clergy, or shown to be guarded in her approval of the clergy. It could hardly be otherwise for a saint who claimed privileged access to God. A few examples will have to suffice here: Marie takes a role usually restricted to priests when she is given the duty of imposing a penance on a devil whom she is exorcising, though her careful consultation with two advisers before she proceeds is also emphasised (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 32, p. 554); she is very often pictured as knowing the sins of others (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 61, p. 561); Marie receives counsel from angels, and from St Andrew, bypassing the role of the confessor (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 35, p. 555; Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 103, p. 579); Marie corrects a priest who upbraids her for crying in church (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 17, p. 551). Marie's zeal for souls also gives her a priestly role (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 56, p. 560). Lauwers is right in observing that the role of the priest is emphasised in Marie's vision of the host in the form of a boy in the hands of the priest presiding at the Mass; but it must be added that the spotlight can be damning: the boy withdraws if the priest receives unworthily (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 72, p. 563).

\textsuperscript{50} See John Coakley, "Gender and the Authority of Friars" and the finely nuanced analysis of Jodi Bilinkoff, "Confessors, Penitents, and the Construction of Identities in Early Modern Avila," in \textit{Culture and Identity in Early Modern Europe (1500-1800): Essays in Honor of
first of the reciprocal ties which bind Jacques and Marie coincide with the beginning of Jacques' career as a priest at his ordination in Paris. Marie, unable to be physically present, nevertheless establishes her special claims to Jacques' priesthood by her spiritual presence at the ceremony, which she could later describe in detail, and by the prophecies she sent by letter to Jacques at Paris. Jacques records one of these prophecies, whose confident and proprietary tone illustrates Marie's relationship with him: "A new tree had just now flowered whose first fruits the Lord has destined for me," words which Jacques understood were fulfilled when he returned to Oignies to celebrate his first mass in her presence.51

Marie's claims on Jacques' role as a preacher were framed in exceptionally powerful terms: Jacques tells us that Marie, through earnest prayer had secured "that the Lord might compensate her through some other person for the merit and office of preaching, which she was not able to actually exercise in her own right, and that the Lord would give to her as a great gift a single preacher."52 Jacques of course was that preacher, and once Marie had been given her "gift," the Lord gave Jacques' preaching special attention because of the merits of Marie: she would labour dutifully in prayer and in repetitions of the Hail Mary while Jacques was preaching, commending "her preacher" to the Lord.53 Even when Jacques had gathered a

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51 "Arbor nova iam floruit, cujus primos fructus mihi Dominus destinavit" (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 86, p. 566). Jacques may himself be the unnamed priest who, wanting to repay Marie for her prayers, offers a Mass for her (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 85. p. 566).

52 "[U]t meritum et officium praedicationis quod in se actualiter exercere non poterat, in aliqua alia persona Dominus ei recompensaret, et quod sibi Dominus pro magno munere unum Praedicatorem daret" (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 69, p. 562).

53 "After [Marie's] prayers had been granted, although it was through him that the Lord sent out the words of his sermons as through an instrument, it was through the prayers of the holy
reputation for preaching. Marie could understand his own dissatisfaction with his efforts, and offered him counsel in the form of a vision.\textsuperscript{54} Maries prayers, prophecies and visions all served in the creation of a new kind of divinely-ordained relationship, and new kinds of reciprocal functions which would operate within that relationship.

Jacques described Marie as particularly conscious of the bonds which tied her to him as her death approached. Knowing her final illness was at hand, she ensured Jacques would have physical reminders of her by bequeathing him her lace girdle and linen kerchief, and other things he describes as "dearer to me than gold or silver."\textsuperscript{55} With her characteristic creativity, and interest in concrete negotiations of merit with God, Marie had thought out a process, based on a biblical model, which would connect Jacques and herself after her death. At his death, she argued, St Stephen had been given St Paul by the Lord as a gift, and at St Paul's own death, Stephen was able to offer his gift back to the Lord, as fruit which had multiplied. In the same way, after her death Marie hoped to offer back her gift, Jacques, to the Lord with interest, and for this reason she entreated God to keep him from temptation and sin.\textsuperscript{56} Finally, Jacques recognises something of Marie's continued power after her death, when he insists that Marie did not leave her special friends without her counsel; and he himself continued to honour the role he had been assigned as "her preacher" in the composition of her biography.\textsuperscript{57}

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\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 79, pp. 564-65.

\textsuperscript{55} "[A]uro et argento mihi cariora" (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 96, p. 569).

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 101, p. 570. Marie understood that St Andrew would stand as her witness before God when she came to enter heaven (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 97, p. 569).

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 69, pp. 562-63; Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 109, p. 572.
The relationship Jacques had with Marie gave him exceptional access to Marie's inner experience, which Jacques clearly understood as the source of her spiritual power. Her dedicated asceticism, which he describes in the first book of the *Vita Mariae*, was only preparation for her mystical life, to which he devoted the entire second book of the *vita*. Although the thematic approach he chose to describe Marie's mystical graces (organised into categories which correspond to the "gifts of the Holy Spirit") worked against any convincing attempt to describe Marie's spiritual life as progressive, Jacques nevertheless reports that in the course of her life Marie turned increasingly away from this world. Since her body and soul were progressively purified, she was able to ascend into the heavens, and when "she had walked through all the places of paradise with her mind rejoicing," she at last found him whom "her soul ardently desired."!

Jacques relied almost entirely on Marie's own reports, both for his knowledge of Marie's inner world, her visions, the revelations she received, her favoured knowledge of the heavenly world and her experiences of the divine, which are central to the *Vita Mariae*, and for information on Marie's private religious practices and her past life. Yet Jacques does not tell us a great deal about the process by which he learnt of Marie's interior experience. Marie's

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58 Jacques reports that Marie leaves manual labour behind to linger with the Lord (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 38, p. 555).

59 The "gifts of the Holy Spirit" were one kind of organising principle around which writers and preachers of the late twelfth and first half of the thirteenth century organised their work. See Jacques Berlioz, "La memoire du prédicateur: Recherches sur la memorisation des récits exemplaires (XIIIe-XVe siècle)," in *Temps, mémoires, traditions au Moyen Age: Actes du XIIIe Congrès de la Société des historiens médiévistes de l'enseignement supérieur publique. Aix-en-Provence, 4-5 juin 1982*, (Marseille, 1983), 159-183.

60 "[C]um per omnes gradus ascendisset, cum omnia paradisi loca animo laetanti perambulasset, cum omnia pertransisset, inveniebat tandem quem ardenter eius anima desiderabat (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 81, p. 565).
confession to Jacques, however, clearly was the source for some of Jacques' material. He had, for example, privileged knowledge of the assiduity of Marie's confession, which, he relates, often consisted of minor sins dredged up from her youth.\textsuperscript{61} Not only the piety of Marie's practice of confession, but also the actual content of her confession also served as material for the life: Jacques tells us that through Marie's confession he learnt of the self-mutilation which she had performed on her own body, scars from which remained on her body after death.\textsuperscript{62} On several further occasions, Jacques tells us of questions he posed to Marie about her life and activities, and gives her answers to them. This question-and-answer format may indicate that the act of confession formed the original context for these dialogues, especially the questions which relate to contentious aspects of Marie's behaviour, such as her crying, and her odd programme of fasting.\textsuperscript{63}

Much of Marie's private visionary experience, and her secret devotions, might well have been discovered in confession; yet much was also surely revealed to Jacques in

\begin{itemize}
    \item \textsuperscript{61} \textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 19, p. 551; Bk. 1, chap. 2, para. 20, p. 551.
    \item \textsuperscript{62} \textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 552.
    \item \textsuperscript{63} Marie is asked by Jacques for further details of a vision she receives while he is celebrating the Mass (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 10, par. 91, p. 567); Jacques asks about the effect of her tears (Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 18, p. 551); he asks if she felt vainglory from her revelations (Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 49, p. 558), her pain during her last illness, (Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 74, p. 563), and her unusual patterns of fasting (Bk. 2, chap. 7, para. 66, p. 562).
    
    Jacques describes himself as being reticent to offer Marie the kind of guidance normally expected from a confessor, as she was guided by the Holy Spirit in a way that escaped human reason, so that she "judged everything but was judged by no one" (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 7, para. 66, p. 562). On the one occasion he dared to question her about her devotional activities, she explained her own rationale for them so devoutly that Jacques explains he fell silent and "did not open my mouth against her any longer" (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 7, para. 66, p. 563).
conversation. Jacques is, however, eager to dispel any notion that Marie was profligate in her revelation of her spiritual graces. The fear of "vainglory" from revealing one's own privileged inner life was a recurrent concern for the biographers of the *mulieres religiosae*, and seems to express a certain unease at the new quasi-autobiographical role being taken on by women, and the abuses which might flow from it. Marie, however, was immune to the temptations of vainglory. Often she would flee outside when she felt unable to contain her joy in God, to hide what was happening to her. Despite her strong inclination to remain silent about her inner life, Jacques tells us that charity convinced Marie to reveal information that pertained to the spiritual health of those around her "to a few friends". Sometimes, divine power took the issue out of her hands: Marie, we are told, would explain "the Book of Life" while she was in ecstasy, and afterwards suffer embarrassment at the loquaciousness over which she had had no control. It was particularly during these times, when Marie's words seemed to most directly reflect her internal communion with God, that Jacques tells us that Marie would progress from being a disciple to a master. Ecstatic conversation was one solution to the need to recognise the saintliness of Marie's extraordinary inner life, while easing the anxieties over her own role in reporting on the graces she had been granted.

Yet despite these anxieties and hesitations, in his *Life* of Marie d'Oignies Jacques de Vitry succeeded in shaping a powerful, and innovative biography, a picture of the heady inner life of his remarkable friend, while at the same time leaving an equally potent record of the relationship which had created a context in which Marie's life-story could be told, and his work was rewarded with a considerable popularity. But for a clearer understanding of the

64 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 47, p. 558.
65 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 48, p. 558. Similarly, Marie has to be reluctantly torn away from ecstasy, to talk to visitors, yet she does this for the sake of charity (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 65, p. 562).
66 The *Vita Mariae* was the most popular of all the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*. The Latin text of the *vita* survives in at least twenty-six manuscripts, and is known to have been included
force of the model for relationships between priests and religious women that Jacques
presented in the *Vita Mariae*, and of the rewards to be gained from seeking out the private
experience of women, we can do no better than turn to the life and work of Thomas of
Cantimpré.

III

Amongst the crowd who listened to Jacques Vitry preach the Albigensian crusade in
the Low Countries in 1215 was the fifteen-year-old son of a Brabantine knight, Thomas of
Cantimpré, who was studying at the cathedral town of Cambrai.67 Thomas tells us that

in three more manuscripts which are now lost; Middle English and French translations of the
*vita* also survive in one manuscript each.

67 Except when other sources are given for the chronology of Thomas' life, I follow A.
Deboutte, "Thomas van Cantimpré, als Auditor van Albertus Magnus," *Ons Geestelijke Erf* 58
(1984), 192-209, at 196-97. For Thomas' education at Cambrai, see A. Deboutte, "Thomas
van Cantimpré: Zijn Opleiding te Kamerijk," *Ons Geestelijke Erf* 56 (1982), 283-99. See also,
Robert Godding, "Vie apostolique et société urbaine à l'aube du XIIIe siècle: une oeuvre

Thomas' birthplace is given by Deboutte as Bellingen, a short distance south-west of
Brussels. It was an area in which the French- and Flemish-speaking populations of the Low
Countries met, a fact which no doubt encouraged a high degree of bilingualism in its people.
This would account for the ease with which Thomas seems to have moved in both French and
Flemish circles: though he studied and settled for many years in French-speaking Cambrai, he
later moved to the Flemish-language Dominican house at Louvain. While Mary d'Oignies was
a French-speaker, the subjects of all three of his complete biographies of women, Lutgard of
Aywières, Christina Mirabilis and Margaret of Ypres, were Flemish-speaking. A clue to his
preferred tongue may perhaps be found in Thomas' *Book of the Bees*, in which he only once
Jacques' preaching made him a hero to the youth, "so that I was happy just at the sound of your name," and that he retained "a special love" for Jacques thereafter. In 1216, a year after Jacques had finished his vita of Marie d'Oignies and had departed for Acre, Thomas left off his studies and joined a small community of canons regular at Cantimpré, just outside Cambrai, which had been founded by John of Cantimpré in 1177. The house at Cantimpré had been founded in a similar fashion, and with similar ideals, to the community of Oignies; it may have been the example of Jacques de Vitry which interested Thomas in the life of the canons regular. In 1223, after about six years at Cantimpré, Thomas was ordained as a priest. Sometime in the years after he became a priest, between 1223 and 1228, Thomas began his career as a biographer, working on a Life of John of Cantimpré.

It was after his entry at Cantimpré that Thomas would have read the only biography which his hero, Jacques de Vitry, wrote, and the only written work which emerged from Jacques' time in the Low Countries, his Life of Marie d'Oignies. Thomas surely had his own copy made of the work, as he cites it throughout his life. Jacques' account of Marie, and his relationship with her, had a profound effect on Thomas. At the very least, the vita gave him a framework within which to see ideals which he already held dear. In the Vita Mariae, Thomas found a model of priesthood which included a deep respect for the female holy woman, a figure who might offer a priest his most direct and passionate experiences of the religious life, and his most intimate and nurturing human relationship. He also found a relationship which had mutual benefits and responsibilities, and which included the duty of using one's priestly learning to record the life of one's friend for posterity. In varying degrees, the Vita Mariae uses the vernacular to quote a phrase in French (Bonum universale de apibus, ed. Georgius Colvenerus [Douai, 1627], Book 2, chap. 57, par. 85).

68 Vita Mariae, Supplementum, chap. 4, par. 27, pp. 580-81.

69 Godding, "Vie apostolique," 693, 703-05.

served as a model for all Thomas' biographical studies of women. Indeed, his first excursion into the field of female biography was a continuation of the *Vita Mariae*, the *Supplement*, written in 1231 at the request of Giles, the prior of Oignies.71

In the *Supplement*, Thomas narrates the relationship between Jacques and Marie as a kind of romance in which the hero, Jacques, abandoning his "country, relatives and the mother of all arts," sets off on a noble quest for a far-off woman of whose perfection he had heard tell, and through her love is able to realise his true self, a brilliant "preacher to the people."

Marie's role is romantic, too, as she urges Jacques to stay in his new found world and, on his return from Paris after being ordained, walks after him, kneeling to kiss his footprints.73 Even after Marie's death, according to Thomas, Jacques would continue to see her as a touchstone for intense Christian experience, an attitude exemplified in his offer of his biography of Marie (and indeed her finger) to the cardinal-bishop of Ostia, Ugolino of Segni, as a cure for his spiritual despair.74

But now, Thomas relates with equal passion, Jacques' sixteen-year absence from active pastoral duties, and especially his neglect of the holy people of "Lorraine" have

71 For the dedication, see *Vita Mariae, Supplementum*, Prologue, par. 1, p. 572.
72 *Vita Mariae, Supplementum*, chap. 1, par. 2, p. 573.
73 Ibid.
74 *Vita Mariae, Supplementum*, chap. 3, pars. 15-17, pp. 577-78. From about 1217 till his death in 1241, Ugolino, as Papal legate in Tuscany and Lombardy and later as Pope Gregory IX, was active as a patron and organiser for the female penitential movement in central and northern Italy, which shared many similarities with the semi-religious life sought by Marie d'Oignies. He would surely have been a particularly receptive reader of her *vita*. See Mario Sensi, "Anchoresses and Penitents in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Umbria," in *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago and London, 1996), 56-83, esp. 58-62.
threatened his relationship with Marie, and the identity she had helped him discover.\textsuperscript{75} For Thomas, Jacques' relationship with Marie symbolised the worthiness and value of the active life of pastoral care for which as cardinal, Thomas had heard, he has no time.\textsuperscript{76} In the \textit{Supplementum}, Marie serves as Thomas' mouthpiece for his eloquent plea to Jacques to return to Liège and his true vocation, and he evokes Jacques' attachment to Marie's memory, and the unfailing accuracy of her spiritual direction, to reinforce his message.\textsuperscript{77} Having accepted Jacques the popular preacher and pastor, and Jacques the friend, protector and biographer of holy women, as a model for his own life, Thomas was indignant that his hero could apparently no longer see the value in those very roles.

At the age of about thirty-two, a year after finishing the \textit{Supplementum}, Thomas left the community at Cantimpré and joined the Dominican order in Louvain in 1232, soon after the house there had been founded.\textsuperscript{78} In the year he became a Dominican, Thomas wrote his first complete biography of a holy woman, the \textit{Life} of Christina Mirabilis, a laywoman of St Truiden, for which he had probably gathered material from witnesses in St Truiden two years

\textsuperscript{75} Thomas preferred to refer to the local area by the political designation, "Lotharingia" or Lorraine, that is, the southern Low Countries east of the County of Flanders, all of which territory owed allegiance to the German Emperor, rather than as the "diocese of Liège," as Jacques de Vitry did, because Thomas, while at Cantimpré, actually lived in neighbouring diocese, that of Cambrai (\textit{Vita Mariae, Supplementum}, chap. 2, par. 11, p. 576; cf. \textit{Vita Mariae}, Prologue, par. 2, p. 547).

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Vita Mariae, Supplementum}, chap. 4, pars. 24-26, pp. 579-80.

\textsuperscript{77} Esp. \textit{Vita Mariae, Supplementum}, chap. 4, pars. 21-23, p. 579.

\textsuperscript{78} The Dominican house at Louvain was founded in about 1230, from Rheims (Walter Simons, \textit{Stad en apostolaat}, 108-09). Cf. John B. Freed, \textit{The Friars and German Society in the Thirteenth Century} (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), 213. His decision to leave the canons regular for the Dominicans is a nice illustration of the way in which the canons' place at the vanguard of apostolic priesthood gave way to the mendicant orders.
earlier. Thomas spent the years 1237-1240 in further study at Paris. On his return to the Low Countries, Thomas met fellow-Dominican Zeger of Lille, from whom he obtained information on his next subject, Margaret of Ypres, which he worked into a biography during the years 1240-1244. Thomas' most ambitious biographical work, however, was his long biography of the Cistercian nun Lutgard of Aywières, which Thomas composed between the year of Lutgard's death, 1246, and 1248. Sometime after 1248, probably in the years 1250-1251, Thomas studied under the Dominican Albert the Great in Cologne. Between 1256 and 1262, he composed his great compendium, the Bonum universale de apibus, which contains many precious stories of the lives of religious women in the diocese of Liège, including excerpts from his own earlier biographical works. Thomas' death occurred before the year 1266.

Of all Thomas' biographies of the mulieres religiosae it is his Life of Lutgard of Aywières, the woman who came closest to being Thomas' "Marie," which affords the most acute comparisons with Jacques de Vitry's Vita Mariae. Like the Life of Marie, the Vita...
Lutgardis offers an arresting portrait of an energetic and self-confident mystic which is based on Lutgard's own accounts of her inner life. And for Lutgard, alone of the women of whom he had written biographies, Thomas was able to emphasise his own role, as Lutgard's friend, spiritual son and confidant, in receiving Lutgard's experience from her own mouth, just as Jacques had done in the Vita Mariae. Yet, as we shall see, while throughout the vita, Thomas clearly and consistently valued Lutgard's own reports of her inner experience, unlike Jacques he was forced to share his role as privileged recipient of Lutgard's revelations with others.

Lutgard of Aywières was born in the ancient Roman town of Tongeren, in the Flemish-speaking north of the prince-bishopric of Liège, in 1182 or 1183.\textsuperscript{83} She was the

printed by the Acta Sanctorum, and a much shorter text, known as the Vita Antiqua, or "Primitive Life" which seems to be a first draft which was later expanded into the Acta Sanctorum text (Guido Hendrix, "Primitive Versions of Thomas of Cantimpré's Vita Lutgardis," Citeaux: Commentarii Cistercienses 29 [1978], 153-206). The Vita Antiqua contains no narratives which were not later included in the longer text, so does not represent a separate tradition for the life of Lutgard. The process by which the Acta Sanctorum text emerged from the Vita Antiqua would be further complicated if one accepted Hendrix's conjecture of two "intermediate" Latin texts, which served as the basis for early translations of the Life of Lutgard into old French and Dutch (Guido Hendrix, "Het amsterdamse Leven van Lutgart als vertaling en een onvermoede getuige in de tekstevolutie van de Vita Lutgardis,"


For detailed commentary on the text of the Vita Lutgardis, see the notes to Margot King's translation of the Life (Thomas of Cantimpré, \textit{The Life of Lutgard of Aywières} [Toronto, 1987; reprint, 1989]); and in the Introduction to and sectional commentaries on Life of Lutgard, in \textit{Lives of Ida of Nivelles, Lutgard and Alice the Leper}, ed. Martinus Cawley (Guadalupe, Ore., 1987), 1-88. I am especially indebted to the inspiration provided by Cawley's source criticism.

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 191; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 208.
daughter of a noble woman, who encouraged her daughter to enter the monastic life, and a middle-class father, who had hoped to arrange his daughter's marriage. However, after the money invested for Lutgard's dowry was lost, she entered the Benedictine community of St Catherine's in the nearby town of St Truiden at about the age of twelve. Lutgard made her profession as a nun at St Catherine's, and was elected prioress of the community. In 1206 at the age of twenty-four, after she had been at St. Catherine for about twelve years, she transferred to the Cistercian community of Aywières on the advice of Christina Mirabilis, and also of the priest, John of Lier, who had also been a friend of Marie's. Lutgard had wanted to move to a Cistercian monastery but had been uncertain about Aywières, since it was a French-speaking community. This was, however, to be a blessing in disguise, as Lutgard's persistent failure to master the most elementary French saved her from being asked to serve as abbess in any number of the newly founded monasteries in French-speaking Brabant and Liège, and she remained at Aywières for the rest of her life. Lutgard lost the sight of both eyes in about 1235, eleven years before her death, at the age of 62 or 63, in 1246.

84 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 191.
85 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 194.
86 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 195; Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 196.
87 Ibid. She had herself preferred the Flemish-speaking community of Herkenrode. Aywières had been founded in 1202 at "Awirs" between Huy and Liège, but moved twice before coming, perhaps between 1214 and 1217, to its permanent home at Couture-Saint-Germain, in French-speaking Brabant. Originally a Benedictine community, Aywières affiliated itself to the Cistercian order in around 1206, and was formally incorporated by papal bull in 1209 (Simone Roisin, "Sainte Lutgarde d'Aywières dans son ordre et son temps," Collectanea Ordinis Cisterciensium Reformatorum 8 [1946], 161-72, esp. 163-64). Cf. Joseph Marie Canivez, L'Ordre de Cîteaux en Belgique des origines (1132) au XXme siècle (Forges-lès-Chimay, Belgium, 1926), 172-86.
88 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 196; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 204.
If Thomas of Cantimpré cherished the model of Marie d'Oignies and Jacques de Vitry's relationship, it seems that Lutgard too had felt its attraction. Lutgard and Marie had known each other, and Lutgard seems to have drawn closer to Jacques in the years after Marie's death, just prior to his departure for Acre. Indeed, Lutgard seems to have wanted to take over Marie's role as the special protector of Jacques' vocation as a preacher. When Jacques formed a "too human" attachment with a "certain religious woman," who was ill and for whose consolation he had been neglecting his preaching, Lutgard made dire threats to the Lord God so that he would agree to release Jacques from this temptation. Lutgard's prayers, and her own claim to Jacques, prevailed and he suddenly understood the danger to which he had subjected himself.\(^89\) And just as Marie had prayed while Jacques preached, the first of the three seven-year fasts which Lutgard undertook during her life, which was specifically designed to moderate the anger of Lord at the continued existence of the Albigensian heresy, was surely seen by Lutgard as a counterpart to Jacques' preaching of the Albigensian crusade.\(^90\)

Lutgard's concern for Jacques was reciprocated in the care he took to ensure for her sympathetic spiritual companionship and guidance as his own departure from Liège approached. It was Jacques who asked Sybil de Gages, Lutgard's well-educated fellow-nun and faithful nurse, exegete, confidante, and in all likelihood, chronicler, to counsel the illiterate Lutgard "in all things."\(^91\) The persistence of the ties between Jacques and Lutgard is demonstrated by the survival of two letters Jacques sent from Acre to Lutgard and the community of Aywières, in which he addresses her as "his most spiritual friend."\(^92\) Marie's

\(^89\) *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 3, pp. 196-97. Thomas specifically refers to Jacques "receiving" the grace of preaching from Marie in this passage.

\(^90\) *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 2, p. 196.

\(^91\) *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 12, p. 207; cf. Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 6, p. 205.

presence, too, was still influential from beyond the grave, when she asked Lutgard to help her pray for the soul of the recently deceased prior of Oignies, Baldwin of Barbençon. And just as Marie felt herself to be responsible for keeping Jacques from sin while he lived, so Lutgard felt responsible for Jacques' sins after his death; she was, however, thwarted in this vocation when Jacques appeared to her after he had already spent his allotted "three nights and two days" in Purgatory, so that he would not grieve her.

In the *Vita Lutgardis*, Thomas presents his relationship with Lutgard in terms which are clearly shaped by the model of male-female relationships presented in the *Vita Mariae*: yet the *vita* also reveals that during his sixteen-year friendship with Lutgard, Thomas was not entirely able to replicate the intimacy Jacques had known with Marie. Age and spiritual reputation surely played a part here: Lutgard was about forty-eight when the thirty-year-old Thomas, a priest, but not yet a Dominican, first came to see her. Thomas, already fascinated with religious women, was just beginning on his career as a biographer of women: he had begun his research into the life of Christina Mirabilis, and would finish the *Supplement* to the *Life* of Marie in the following year. Lutgard, on the other hand, had long been a respected figure in the religious life of the diocese of Liège, with an established circle of supporters and

93 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 205-06.

94 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 205. Apart from her ties to Jacques de Vitry, the *Vita Lutgardis* also bears witness to Lutgard's spiritual friendships with three other prominent men: she liberates from Purgatory the soul of Simon, abbot of Foigny, who had loved her dearly (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 197); John of Lier, who had made an agreement with her that whoever died soonest would appear to the other, kept his promise when he predeceased Lutgard (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 197-98); and lastly, she and the saintly Cistercian monk, Simon of Aulne, jointly received a revelation as to how to help a possessed nun, and they both prayed for her together (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 10, p. 198). All these men belonged to an older generation than did Thomas.

95 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 38, pp. 202-03.
friends. Marie d'Oignies had already been sufficiently impressed with what she had seen or heard of the young Lutgard, who was around thirty in 1213, the year of Marie's death, to prophesy that Lutgard would be efficacious in her prayers for sinners, and especially the souls in Purgatory. Moreover, as a nun secure in her community, Lutgard was hardly in the same institutional need of priestly patronage that Marie's sometimes precarious semi-religious life would have encouraged her to welcome. There is little evidence that Lutgard strove to create ties which bound her to Thomas with the same passion Marie had had for her relationship with Jacques. Thomas, too, could never have had the same kind of daily experience of Lutgard as Jacques had had with Marie, as his conversation with her was confined to periodic, though clearly much valued, visits to Aywières, where he spoke to Lutgard through a window.

96 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 198; cf. *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 205-06.

97 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 19, p. 208. Marie's freedom of movement makes a stark contrast to the confinement of Lutgard's life in the cloister, and of course, her movements would have been even further restricted by the blindness of her last eleven years. Marie leaves Oignies at will to go on yearly pilgrimages to Heignes (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 28, p. 553), to visit her friends in Willambrouk (via Nivelles) (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 67, p. 562), and to visit parish churches of towns in the vicinity of Oignies (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 10, par. 89, p. 567; Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 71, p. 563). By contrast, Lutgard makes only one trip outside the convent, to visit the recluse of Borgloon, Jutta (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 194). I suspect, however, that this story was not actually about Lutgard at all. Rather it looks like material left over from the *Life* of Christina Mirabilis, who also visited the same recluse (cf. Cawley, *Life of Lutgard*, 16, who wonders if the story is about an unknown beguine).

Marie is also able to have closer physical contact with her friends: she clutches and kisses the feet and hands of preachers and priests, and gives her friends a small embrace (*Vita
Thomas' first meeting with Lutgard, and certainly his account of it, are surely influenced by the kind of succour Thomas read of Marie offering Jacques. Thomas had sought Lutgard out "as if a mother" at a point of crisis in his priestly career, similar to Jacques de Vitry's crisis in his development as a preacher in which Marie intervened. Thomas' duties as a confessor had increased considerably in the wake of his recent appointment as the bishop's vicar, and he admitted to Lutgard that he found himself ill-equipped for his new responsibilities, and gravely tempted by the sins which were recounted to him. Lutgard prayed for him, and then urged him to return to his pastoral work, assuring him that his temptations would be lifted, and that grace would be given to him to overcome any shortcomings in his learning. The help Lutgard offers is a rather pale shadow of the strength of Marie's claims over Jacques' priesthood, but like Jacques, Thomas had now found divine

*Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 68, p. 562; Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 551), and her hand is grasped by a priest (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 75, p. 564). There is nothing similar in the personal conduct of Lutgard. Even the ghost of John of Lier, who appeared to Lutgard in the walkway of the cloister, was ushered by her to the "locutorium," so they might speak "following the [customs of the] Order," since she thought he was still alive ("Vivere ergo illum credens, manu inuit, ut locutorium introiret: ubi scilicet loqui secundum ordinem posset." *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 197). Cf. Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 40, p. 203, where a woman comes to speak to Lutgard in the "locutorium," who then moves to a "remote place" when she sees how troubled the woman is; after speaking to Lutgard, she returned to the "locutorium."

98 And like Jacques, too, Thomas confessed to embarrassment in recounting his difficulties, but decides he must not be silent over the virtues of Lutgard (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 38, pp. 202-03). In this passage, Thomas makes his one and only reference to Lutgard as a "handmaiden;" this could indicate another link to the *Vita Mariae*, as it is the word which is consistently used by Jacques of Marie. Cf. King, *The Life of Lutgard of Aywières*, p. 140, n. 199.
support, offered through a holy woman, for the burdens of his clerical duties, and the emotional support of a human friendship. 99 When Lutgard predicts her own death, Thomas tells us he is "the most unhappy of all" since he does not relish living as an orphan, without her "patronage," after her death. 100

Thomas' resolve, made years before her death, to have Lutgard's hand after her death for his own personal relic, demonstrates his determination to claim a special relationship with her, and of course to match the finger of Marie Jacques carried with him. When he made his claim to the abbess of Aywières, however, she voiced her community's competing claims to control of Lutgard's body. When the news got back to her of Thomas' plan for her hand, even Lutgard was not entirely convinced of Thomas' claim to it, and instead of the pathetic scene in which Marie bequeathed her most precious belongings to Jacques, we have a rather comic one: a teasing Lutgard pretends to be taking Thomas to task with some seriousness for wanting to own so much of her, but then smilingly acknowledging something of his claim over her, she tells him that one little finger will be enough for him. Perhaps after all she too remembered the finger of Marie which Jacques treasured. After her death, even when Thomas found that the finger he had set his sights on had indeed been cut from her corpse, he can only convince the abbess, who was "strongly opposed" to his request for the finger, to hand over his precious relic after he has agreed to write Lutgard's biography for the community. 101 It was a nicely concrete recognition of the intimacy with a saint that her biographer could claim.

If Thomas' relationship with Lutgard had to find its place in her life besides a number of other established friendships, and her allegiance to her own community, it also had to find a

99 Thomas is not alone in receiving help: Jordan of Saxony declared to Lutgard after his death that she was "mother and nurse of the whole order of preachers" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 3, p. 205); Lutgard also aided a monk of Affligem, who is worn down by dealing with a difficult parish (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, ch. 2, par. 33, p. 202).

100 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 16, pp. 207-08.

101 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 19, pp. 208-09.
place besides the most important emotional bond which the life describes: Lutgard's passionate and personal lifelong dialogue with Christ. Whereas Marie's Christ appeared to her as a silent symbol, a lamb, or as the Christ child, or a rather distant celestial figure, Lutgard's Christ was a vigorous young man who has a strong, individual presence in the vita. He is Lutgard's constant companion and interlocutor, whose presence she can summon almost at will. It is Christ who first initiated Lutgard into the spiritual life, and away from the lure of worldly love, by drawing aside his clothing to reveal his wound, for her to suck.102 Once he had revealed himself in this way to Lutgard, Christ was an increasingly close and concrete presence. She raged at him, accepted his guidance, bargained and argued with him, listened to his constant prophetic quotations from the Scriptures, and was given solace by him. If Jacques de Vitry tells us that Marie did not need human guidance because she was led by the spirit, Thomas shows us how Christ provided that guidance to Lutgard; perhaps the experience of close relationships with "spiritual friends" had begun to alter the kinds of relationships one could have with Christ. But it was not only in her communication with Christ that Lutgard felt confidence, she also had firm confidence in her own ability to act as his co-worker in suffering, to repay him for his passion, or to rescue others from their sins.103

The importance given to Lutgard's inner experience, exemplified in her relationship with Christ, her own expression of that experience, and to the privileged relationships in which Lutgard revealed her experience in the Vita Lutgardis is typical of the mystical vita. In his Prologue to the Vita Lutgardis, Thomas presents himself, who is writing the vita out of his

102 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 2, p. 192.
103 I am here attempting to set Lutgard's experience in its local context; a wider context would of course include the developments of monastic friendship and affective piety in the Cistercian tradition. For Simon Roisin's study of the connections between feminine mystical piety in the Low Countries and the Cistercians, see "L'efflorescence cistercienne et le courant féminin de piété aux XIIIe siècle," Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 39 (1943): 342-78.
"burning love" for Lutgard,¹⁰⁴ and of course Lutgard, as especially privileged sources for his biography:

If however enquiries are made as to how I am to convince readers concerning those things which I have written, I say briefly that Christ may stand as witness and judge to the fact that many of these things I received from the mouth of pious Lutgard, as a most intimate friend; and in these things I do not believe that anyone would be so rash as to contradict her testimony.¹⁰⁵

Lutgard’s conversation, uneducated though it was, was able to bring Thomas extraordinary solace,

because, although in common speech she seemed, and was, in a way uncultivated and very simple, nevertheless I have never found in the secrets of spiritual conversation such sincere, such ardent, such decisive words according to the spirit of truth coming from the mouth of anyone; so much so that I very often considered myself absolutely uncultivated and dim-witted in understanding her words. Remembering still the time and place, I declare that I was so stupefied by the subtlety of her words that if that sweet and ineffable wonder had held me any longer, it would have rendered me either senseless or utterly extinguished.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ *Vita Lutgardis*, Prologue, p. 189.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ "[Q]uod licet ipsa in communibus verbis, rudis quodammodo et simplicissima videretur et esset; tamen numquam ab ore alicuius ita sincera, ita ardentissima, ita secundum veritatis spiritum decisa verba, in spiritualis collationis secretis inveni; in tantum, ut rudem me prorsus et hebetem ad intellectum verborum eius saepissime reputarem. Loci adhuc et temporis memor, tantum me aliquando in verborum eius subtilitate stupuisse profiteor; ut si diu me illa dulcis et ineffabilis admiratio tenuisset, aut amentem me utique, aut extinctum penitus reddidisset" (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 15, p. 194).
In another rather poignant account of the process by which Lutgard's admirers sought out her inner experience, Thomas relates how an unnamed "close male spiritual friend" asks Lutgard a question filled with curiosity and longing: what does the face of Christ which she sees in contemplation look like? In answer, Lutgard, now sightless in both eyes, describes the "indescribable" flash of splendour in which she glimpses the beauty of Christ's glorified state.\(^{107}\) It is Lutgard's description, her words, which her friend is longing to hear, and which are duly recorded. Thomas tells us that Lutgard's description of the glorified Christ fits in with others he has heard or read about, though he regrets his own inexperience of such a divine light; no wonder priests such as he were keen to hear of the experience of women such as Lutgard.\(^{108}\)

Despite the value Thomas places on material which he has personally heard from Lutgard, and the care he takes to identify what he as been told by her, Thomas has clearly had to rely heavily on material about Lutgard supplied by others. Unlike Jacques, whose Marie was very much his own Marie, Thomas offers us a portrait of Lutgard painted from a number of different angles, reflecting the relationships a variety of individuals and communities had with her. In each case, however, it was the access his source had to the inner life of Lutgard which determines their suitability as witnesses of her life.

Thomas had clearly been keen to hear Lutgard narrate to him her own life and its mystical graces on his visits to her: he tells us that he heard two episodes from Lutgard's early years at St. Catherine, from Lutgard herself before her death, along with "very many other things" which he had compelled her to reveal by means of "sacred oath."\(^{109}\) Lutgard's denial to Thomas of feelings of vainglory, so similar to Marie's denial of the same sin when

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107 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 206.
108 Ibid.
109 "Haec mihi sicut et alia plurima ipsamet ante mortem, sacramento a me constricta, narravit" (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 192).
questioned by Jacques de Vitry, may have been elicited by similar questioning. Some of Lutgard's autobiographical stories were revealed to Thomas as a form of spiritual direction, as for example, when she reinforces her advice to Thomas to make a bow in honour of the Virgin while reciting the line from the Te Deum which mentions Mary, by telling him "as if her beloved son" of a vision she had had of the Virgin rejoicing while the words were being said. Thomas' fear of a mysterious "secret traitor of Christ" was the occasion of consolation from Lutgard in the form of her prophecy that the traitor, against whose wiles she was fasting, would not be allowed to overcome the church. In all, Thomas mentions in six places in the vita that he is repeating a story about Lutgard's past life, or about her inner experiences, which he heard from Lutgard herself; in another four places he recounts stories from his own personal observations of Lutgard.

In addition to his own relationship with Lutgard, her friendship with another Dominican, the Papal penitentiary Friar Bernard, emerges from the vita as a significant source of narratives from and about Lutgard on which Thomas was able to draw. A dramatic account of Lutgard's adolescent conversion to the religious life, in which she rejected two persistent suitors for her true spouse, Christ, who appears to her to press his claims, are credited to

110 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 18, p. 200.
112 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 197.
113 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 192; Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 192; Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 18, p. 200; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 205; Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 32, p. 202; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 42, p. 203.
114 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 15, p. 194; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 38, pp. 202-03; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 42, p. 203; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 206.
Bernard. Thomas confirms these stories, and perhaps expresses something of his chagrin at having to share the limelight with his confrère, by telling us Lutgard had also confided these same stories about her past to him:

Indeed she entirely revealed all the secrets of her heart to brother Bernard, a brother of the Order of the Friars Preachers and Penitentiary of the Lord Pope, not of course as she did to me, because he was worthier than I am and had a spirit better fitted to receive them. I believe, however, that she told me this not less entirely, even if I am less worthy....

Bernard is credited as a source, or is the main protagonist in material which he can be presumed to have supplied, in a further seven places in the vita, and in each of these he recounts a face-to-face encounter he had with Lutgard. It may be that Bernard had had more frequent opportunities to visit Lutgard than had Thomas; he certainly seems to have been collecting biographical material on Lutgard, which he must have allowed Thomas to incorporate into his life. It should be noted that despite the accounts of Lutgard provided

115 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, pars. 2-8, pp. 191-92. Bernard served as a penitentiary to Popes Honorius III and Gregory IX, which meant that he heard cases reserved to Papal jurisdiction. He later also served as a mediator in a conflict between Franciscans and secular priests (Axters, "Dominikaansche zielzorg," p. 181).
116 "Fratri quidem Bernardo, Fratri Ordinis Praedicatorum. et Poenitentiario Domini Papae, non utique sicut mihi, quia digniori et magis ad capiendum idoneo spiritu, cuncta cordis sui secreta totaliter revelavit. Credo tamen quod non minus totaliter et si minus digno mihi hoc dixit...." (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 192).
117 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 16, p. 199; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 40, p. 203; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 204; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 205; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 205; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 205-06; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 206.
118 Bernard has even been suggested as a possible candidate for the authorship of the Vita Antiqua (The Life of Lutgard of Aywières, trans. Margot H. King [Toronto, 1987; reprint,
by male religious such as Thomas and Bernard, confession is never mentioned as a context in which Lutgard revealed her inner life; in fact, Lutgard is nowhere described as confessing to a priest, or even being particularly concerned about her sins.119

Both Thomas and friar Bernard were at best visitors to the community of Aywières, and reliant on the dialogues which they had with Lutgard during such visits; they were not present when Lutgard was in ecstasy, nor did they themselves experience Lutgard's mystical powers in the context of her daily life in the convent.120 However, besides himself and

1989], 114-15, n. 49), though there is no firm evidence for this. Three of the stories attributed to Bernard are not found in the Vita Antiqua (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 16, p. 199; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 205, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 206); perhaps Thomas decided to use more of what he had obtained from Bernard in his final version. Bernard's name is only given once in the Vita Antiqua (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 205); otherwise he appears as "frater."

119 Although Thomas does say a funeral mass for two dead nuns after the death of Lutgard (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 14, p. 207), it does not seem that he or Bernard usually served Aywières as confessors or celebrants. Roisin presents the competing claims of the Cistercian abbeys of Villers and Aulne to the spiritual direction of Aywières in her "Saint Lutgarde de Aywières," 164. Alard, a chaplain at Aywières for many years, is only mentioned in the miracles after Lutgard's death, when she heals his sore thumb (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 24, p. 209).

120 It should be said that Thomas does not give sources for all his narratives of Lutgard's mystical experiences. Some of the most powerful sequences of visionary material are presented without any indication of their provenance, for example, the series which includes the powerful accounts of Lutgard exchanging hearts with Christ, and of the illumination of her soul she experiences as John the Evangelist, in the form of an eagle, places his beak in her mouth (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, pars. 12-13, p. 193; Bk. 1, chap. 2, pars. 14-15, pp. 193. 94.). Cf. the role of the Evangelist, as eagle in visions of the thirteenth-century
Bernard, Thomas can offer another witness to the life of Lutgard, Sybil de Gages, the lettered nun whom Jacques de Vitry had asked to act as Lutgard's guide. The picture we have of Sybil and Lutgard's relationship is a fine example of the encouragement the mystical vita gave to the recording of the friendships in which mystics could reveal their secrets. Thomas tells us that Sybil was "closer and dearer" to Lutgard than any other person.\textsuperscript{121} On her own account, Sybil had "served" Lutgard, looking after her, for example, when she was ill, ever since she had entered the order, at least thirty-one years earlier.\textsuperscript{122} On one occasion, Sybil felt herself resentful of her role of nurse, in particular, but then remembered Christ's affirmation of his own role as servant, and turned back to her task willingly.\textsuperscript{123}

But Sybil's most important role, and one of which she was clearly proud, was the "clerical" one of providing Lutgard with learned help in understanding the visions and revelations she received, which she would immediately reveal to Sybil. Sybil's knowledge of the scriptures was particularly important for Lutgard, as God was given to quoting the Bible to her in Latin, and she would immediately consult Sybil for help. On one occasion, for example, Sybil consulted a gloss for a verse from the Psalter which the Lord had interpreted in a vision for Lutgard, and found that the gloss accorded exactly with the comments of the Lord.\textsuperscript{124}

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\textsuperscript{121} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 12, p. 207; Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 33, p. 202.

\textsuperscript{122} Jacques' departure for Acre in 1215 sets the latest date for Sybil's entry at Aywières.

\textsuperscript{123} Sybil's recollection that her mother had never served anyone as she had served Lutgard suggests an elevated social background, but we know nothing of her family (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 30, p. 201).

Sybil is directly credited with five stories about Lutgard, and she can be identified as the "lettered nun" who helps Lutgard understand her revelations, in three further stories. She is also the author of a Latin epitaph for Lutgard which Thomas included in the vita. Sybil emerges particularly strongly as the most important witness of Lutgard's death. Bernard did not supply any stories for this part of Lutgard's life, and Thomas tells us that he regretted very much not being able to be present at Lutgard's death. Sybil's account of Lutgard's final illness begins with a flashback to a prophecy of her death Lutgard made to Sybil five years before it happened. We are then told of the Easter-tide visions of Christ and the Virgin Mary through which Lutgard was informed of her approaching death, and which she then relayed to Sybil. The specification of the date of the vision suggests that at least skeletal notes might have been taken by Sybil during Lutgard's last illness. The story of Lutgard's vision of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist assuring her that her "consummation" was close at hand, which came to her fifteen days before her death, can probably also be attributed to Sybil. On the Thursday before she died, Sybil entered Lutgard's room, and was asked by Lutgard to "sit here next to my heart," where she listened to Lutgard describe her vision of the whole cloister being filled with heavenly hosts of angels and the blessed.

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125 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 30, p. 201; Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 33, p. 202; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 6, p. 205; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 12, p. 207; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 207; Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 20, p. 209. Sybil would have been one of the unnamed "lettered nuns" who helped Lutgard decipher a passage from Isaiah (Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 200); again it may have been she who was the nun who explained the meaning of the Lord's quotation from the first Book of Kings (Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 198).
126 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 19, pp. 208-09.
127 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 6, p. 205.
128 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 12, p. 207.
129 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 13, p. 207.
including many sisters who had already passed to heaven. 130 These were to be her last words, as she seems to have fallen into a coma, and died on the following Saturday. In the six-line verse epitaph which Sybil wrote for her friend, she develops the two themes of her last vision, her desire for heaven, and her strong sense of connection with her community at Aywières: having hungered and thirsted after heavenly things, Sybil writes, Lutgard is now in the presence of the brilliant face of her spouse; but she also lives on in the memory of the sisters as "a mirror of life, the flower of the cloister, the gem of the sisters." 131 The value Thomas placed on Lutgard's mystical experience had also given new significance to Sybil's friendship with her, and to her account of her friend's life.

In addition to the narratives credited to Thomas, Bernard and Sybil, the vita also includes a large and internally cohesive grouping of stories which consists entirely of material concerning Lutgard's life within her own community at Aywières. 132 The stories in this section are the community of Aywières' memories of Lutgard's prophetic and visionary powers, and her efficacious prayer at work amongst them. Lutgard, for instance, helps a nun who is receiving demonic revelations; 133 she asks the community to join her in prayer for her own blood sister, who appeared to her in a vision; 134 she receives a vision of a demon fleeing the soul of a dying nun, who complains about the prayers of the community hindering his fight for the nun; 135 and reassures a nun who sees a flame rising out of her (Lutgard's) mouth. 136 Here we see a mystic whose revelations and other spiritual graces have a firm

130 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 207.
131 "Haec speculum vitae, flos claustri, gemma sororum" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 20, p. 209).
133 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 10, p. 198.
134 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 13, p. 198.
135 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 15, p. 199.
136 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 18, pp. 199-200.
institutional context. It is in this grouping that we find the stories about the "nuns who knew letters" (in one case Sybil is specified by name), who are asked to help her understand texts from Samuel, Kings and Isaiah which were divinely revealed to her. The memory of the community extended at least thirty-four years into the past, the date given for a miraculous bleeding granted to Lutgard which was witnessed by the nuns Margaret and Lutgard Limmos. Although it may be that Thomas has himself recorded these stories as he heard them from the nuns of Aywières, the strong feeling for community that emerges from this group of narratives, and the fact that Thomas does not claim to have the stories first-hand, suggest that they have come to him in written form. The frequent appearance of the "nun" or "nuns" who "knew letters," and interpreted scripture for Lutgard, must point to a role for Sybil in the creation of the work. This collection of stories from the nuns of Aywières indeed may have been made at the suggestion of their abbess, as her way of ensuring her house figured in the work she had commissioned.

Thomas also includes four stories which demonstrate Lutgard's relationship with monks from the Benedictine monastery of Affligem, north-east of Brussels, about thirty kilometres from Aywières, and which perhaps represent the monks' response to a request from Thomas for material. Though their house did not belong to Lutgard's own Cistercian order, she loved these monks "because of their [strict] religious observance;" she would also presumably have found it easier to speak to the monks of this Flemish-speaking community than with the French-speaking monks of Aulne or Villers. Three of these stories recount

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137 There were, however, nuns who did not support Lutgard, especially on the issue of Lutgard's privileged weekly reception of the eucharist (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 14, pp. 198-99). The nuns who opposed Lutgard either died quickly or converted to her side. Cf. Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 39, p. 203.

138 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 198; Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 200.

139 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 21, p. 200.

140 "[P]ropter religionis observantiam" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 207).
visits by monks or laybrothers of Affligem to Lutgard, and the supernatural help or illumination she procured for her visitors, including the fortuitous visit to the dying Lutgard by the abbot of the community, who had not known she was sick.\textsuperscript{141} The fourth of the Affligem stories narrates the conversion of the father of a nun of Aywières, who then enters Affligem.\textsuperscript{142} Here again we see that it is ties of friendship to which we owe these accounts of Lutgard's revelations of her extraordinary inner life.

When Thomas of Cantimpré set to work on his biography of Lutgard of Aywières, twenty years or so had passed since he had first been inspired by Jacques de Vitry's \textit{Life} of Marie d'Oignies, and yet, the biography he wrote of Lutgard was certain evidence that the \textit{Life} of Marie had retained its power for Thomas as a model for his own life and work. As Jacques had done in his biography, Thomas presented his own relationship with Lutgard, his own privileged role as her confidante, the intimate guidance and assistance she had offered him in his priestly and spiritual life, and his claim to her relics, as fully as he could. Above all, he had learnt from the \textit{Life} of Marie to value the revelations which Lutgard made to him of her inner life, and, indeed, seems to have "interviewed" her about her past life during his visits to her. Thomas, however, was never able to develop a relationship with cloistered Lutgard which could provide him with the access to Lutgard's conversation and mystical life Jacques had enjoyed to Marie's, and turned to others to complete his portrait of her. From his search for the testimony of others whose relationships with Lutgard had allowed them to hear her accounts of her visions, her prophetic knowledge, and the favoured relationship with Christ she enjoyed, Thomas was able to build up a rich picture of the friendship, both within her cloister and without, Lutgard was able to maintain. It is only a little ironic that Thomas' zeal in seeking out the inner life of Lutgard should have entailed him describing one friend of hers.

\textsuperscript{141} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 27, p. 201; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 33, p. 202; Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 16, pp. 207-08.
\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 24, p. 201.
Sybil de Gages, whose role as Lutgard's exegete and confidante threatened to overshadow his own.

IV

Thomas of Cantimpré's second complete biography took as its subject the laywoman, Margaret of Ypres, a woman he himself did not meet before her death in 1237.143 She had not been long dead, however, when her spiritual father, the Dominican Zeger of Lille, told Thomas of Margaret's saintly life during his brief stay in Ypres on his return from Paris in 1240. Thomas was inspired by the account of his confrère, and before he left Ypres he had secured from Zeger two small sheets of parchment on which he had written notes on the life of Margaret;144 he had certainly finished the resulting Vita Margaretae by 1244.145 The Life of Margaret of Ypres depends even more heavily on the relationship between a holy woman and her male confidant than do the Vita Mariae and the Vita Lutgardis. Zeger, Thomas claims in his opening paragraph, is the source for "all these stories about her," an assertion which tallies well with the material we find in the vita.146 He was thus the source of the relatively few stories which are related about Margaret of the time before she met Zeger at the age of


144 Vita Margaretae, Prologue, p. 106.

145 The terminus ad quem for the vita is determined by Thomas' request to Zeger to greet friar Jacques de Halle, who was referred to as dead in a document dated 20 November, 1244 (Vita Margaretae, Prologue, p. 107; Meersseman, "Les Frères Prêcheurs," 70).

146 "[F]rater ordinis predicatorium Sigerus nomine, a quo omnia gesta eius suscepimus" (Vita Margaretae, chap. 1, p. 107). Thomas' request to Zeger, in his Prologue, to greet Margaret's mother, her sisters, and Margaret's aunt and uncle, suggests that he may have met them while in Ypres; and yet he does not give them credit as sources.
eighteen, which he presumably learnt from her, and of the account of the remaining four years of Margaret’s short life, which ended in 1237, when she was just twenty-one.147 But not only is Margaret’s “spiritual father” the source of nearly all the information about Margaret included in the vita, and certainly all the information which the biographer possesses about his subject, the Vita Margaretae also presents Margaret’s religious life as one which is structured around, and largely limited to, the relationship of adviser and spiritual daughter, which is certainly not true of the Lives of Marie and Lutgard. The balance of spiritual authority in Margaret’s relationship with her mentor, Zeger, also differed from that evident in the relationships of Jacques and Marie, and Thomas and Lutgard: while Jacques and Thomas recognised their inability to offer their subjects any spiritual guidance, Zeger constantly advised his holy, but needy, spiritual daughter.148 Despite these differences, however, when it came to recounting the life of Margaret of Ypres, Zeger, like Jacques and Thomas, drew predominantly on his subject’s own account of her inner life, to which his relationship with her had given him special access.

Margaret’s spiritual father, Zeger of Lille, belonged to the Dominican house at Lille, whose foundation in 1225 by a group of Dominicans heading north from Paris made it the oldest Dominican house in the country of Flanders.149 As a highly urbanised population, Flanders came to support an unusually large number of mendicant foundations, among which the Dominicans were themselves unusually well represented.150 By 1324, in thanks partly to the patronage they received from the daughters and heiresses of Baldwin IX of Flanders, Joanna of Constantinople (countess, 1202-1244) and her sister Margaret of Constantinople

147 Vita Margaretae, chap. 50, p. 128.
148 For a discussion of Zeger’s relationship with Margaret, see John Coakley, ”Friars as Confidants of Holy Women,” 225-28.
149 Walter Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 108-109; see also, Meersseman, ”Les Frères Prêcheurs,” 70-73.
150 Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 76-82.
(countess, 1244-1280), the Dominicans had six houses in the county, compared with the seven houses of the usually much more numerous Franciscans.151

The Dominicans were not to have a house in the prosperous industrial town of Ypres till 1268-69, when a group of friars from Lille made the new foundation; prior to that, the Dominicans at Lille sent some of their number to minister to the people of Ypres, which was situated about 24 km to the north-west.152 In the Vita Margaretae, we see these early Dominicans in Ypres staying, probably throughout Advent and Lent, in the houses of their bourgeois supporters. They are active in pastoral care, using parish churches to preach and hear confessions, and preaching in the villages which neighboured Ypres.153 Private spiritual direction, such as Margaret enjoyed, was part of that pastoral care. Zeger of Lille, who had come from a Dominican house in England to work in Flanders, was a senior figure amongst the Dominicans at work in Ypres, who, as well as acting as "spiritual father" to Margaret, was in close contact with both Joanna of Constantinople, then countess of Flanders, and her sister Margaret.154 He may be the "Zeger" of the Dominican convent of Lille who died in 1250. or

151 Ibid., 110-17. Joanna and Margaret were also early supporters of beguine foundations in Flanders, which were often put under the direction of Dominicans (McDonnell, Beguines and Beghards, 205-17). See also, David Nicholas, Medieval Flanders (Harlow, Essex, 1992). 151-57.

152 Meersseman, "Les Frères Prêcheurs," 73. According to Simons, it was not Lille's size which had favoured its settlement over Ypres, as the cities had comparable populations (Simons gives a population estimate of c. 26,000 for Lille in the first decades of the fourteenth century, while Ypres had 28,000-30,000 during the same period), but political opposition in Ypres impeded an earlier foundation in that town (Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 93, 109-110).


154 Zeger is summoned away from Margaret of Ypres' sickbed by Joanna (Vita Margaretae, chap. 14, p. 113); he later brings a lady, whom Meersseman identifies with Margaret of Constantinople, to see Margaret (chap. 29, pp. 120-21; Meersseman, "Les Frères Prêcheurs,"
he may be that Dominican "Zeger of Lille" who preached a series of sermons at the university of Paris between 1261 and 1264. 155

Margaret of Ypres was the daughter of a bourgeois family, which had strong extended family connections in Ypres. Her father is not mentioned in the vita, and seems to have died while she was a young girl, a circumstance which probably contributed to the vehemence of her attachment to Zeger. Margaret was placed in a convent for her education at the age of four, where she presumably learnt to sing the Psalter, and took up ascetic practices such as fasting while still a child. 156 The age of eighteen was a turning point for her emotional and spiritual development. Margaret's uncle, a "most religious" man with whom she and presumably the rest of the family had lived from childhood, died. In the same year, Margaret fell in love with a young man, and her family spoke of her marriage to him. 157 It was at eighteen, too, that Margaret meet Zeger, and from this point, their stories are inseparable. Zeger caught a glimpse of Margaret amongst a crowd waiting to make their confessions, and "saw her, since Christ revealed it to him, whom he had never seen before, as suitable for receiving the future grace of God, as a vessel of election;" he did not then hesitate in calling her "from the world." 158 Margaret's conversion to the "religious state" was instant. Just as Thecla was converted to the religion of chastity and of Paul, so Margaret's conversion is in part to the love of Zeger, and

78). After Margaret of Ypres' death, Zeger refused to give her treasured headdress to Margaret, identified in this instance as the sister of the count of Flanders (chap. 54, p. 129). In addition to her contact with Zeger, Margaret of Constantinople received spiritual direction from two other Dominicans from the house at Lille, Michael of Neuvireil and Hellinus of Komen (Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 234).

155 Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 198.

156 Vita Margaretae, chap. 1, p. 107 (the convent education); chap. 8, p. 110 (Margaret in church with a Psalter); chap. 3, p. 108 (her austerities).

157 Vita Margaretae, chap. 5, pp. 108-09.

158 Vita Margaretae, chap. 6, p. 109.
dependence on his guidance in the spiritual life. And like Thecla, too, Margaret returned to her
mother, and tried to explain her new attachment to her. The conversation she has just had with
Zeger, she told her mother, was the most valuable she had ever had, and she later venerated
the place where it had taken place.\textsuperscript{159} It is characteristic of the enormous importance of the
role of Zeger in the \textit{Vita Margaretae} that it is Zeger who is introduced as the spiritual force who
draws Margaret away from the earthly love of her suitor, whereas, in Thomas' \textit{Vita Lutgardis},
Lutgard is drawn away from earthly love by the intervention of Christ.

Zeger acted as Margaret's "spiritual father," the term consistently used by Thomas to
describe the Dominican, from her conversion to her death. Under Zeger's guidance, Margaret
lived a structured daily life of religion in the midst of the secular world, while still living under
her mother's roof. She made a private vow of chastity before Christ, and although she does
not seem to have had any formal institutional affiliations, she was in close contact with the
Dominicans in Ypres, and a regular attender at Dominican sermons and services. Like her
fellow laywomen Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Margaret developed a quasi-
monastic daily routine of contemplation and prayer, which included the observation of the
canonical hours, and a daily quota of "four hundred Our Fathers, and as many Hail Marys and
... the same number of genuflections ... and fifty items from the Psalter [= the Psalter of the
Blessed Virgin Mary, that is, another fifty Hail Marys]."\textsuperscript{160}

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 21, p. 117; chap. 19, pp. 115-16. Meersseman believes that the
order of life Margaret adopted, at least partly at the request of Zeger, amounted to an adoption
of the primitive rule of the brothers and sisters of Penitence, the Dominican third order, whose
earliest forms require of their members a similar prayer life, including the recitation of the
canonical hours. Meersseman also explains that the fifty items from the Psalter which Margaret
recited were not psalms, which would have been quite an accomplishment, but a series of Hail
Marys, arranged, like the Psalter into three groups of fifty, which made up the "Psalter of the
Margaret's intense relationship with Zeger emerges from the *Vita Margaretae* as the core of her religious experience, and certainly his role in the creation of her religious identity, and as her guide and confidant in the spiritual life, provided the narrative structure for the work. Of course, since Zeger was the source of all our information on Margaret, it stands to reason that it is his relationship with her that forms the core of the *vita*, and indeed, Zeger appears as a protagonist in twenty-five of the fifty-seven chapters in the *vita*. But Margaret herself seems to have emphasised and enlarged the role a spiritual director might have been expected to play, involving him in every aspect of her religious life. Margaret's greatest fear was that the enormity of her love for Zeger "whom she loved more than anyone or anything" might be displeasing to God, and so she turned to God for guidance: "And because the mutual love and frequent conversation of a man with a woman seems suspect to our superiors, I ask you through your most excellent humility, that you mercifully show me, your handmaiden, if in loving and conversing with your servant I incur any loss of your love, and I promise, if I find it to be adverse to your love, I will never speak to him hereafter." ¹⁶¹ No such sacrifice was necessary, however, as the Lord made one of his few direct interventions in Margaret's life by replying to her "in the spirit" that her faith in Zeger was in accord with his will.

The emphasis laid in Margaret's prayer concerning Zeger on the central role which her "conversation" with him played in their relationship, which she offered to give up by not speaking to him ever again, is certainly reflected in the ample evidence offered in the *Vita Virgin Mary* ("Les Frères Prêcheurs," 73-76). For the Psalter of Mary, see also Axters, "Dominikaansche zielzorg," 154.

¹⁶¹ "At quia mutua dilectio et frequens collucucio viri cum femina maioribus nostris suspecta videtur, rogo te per excellentissimam humilitatem tuam, ut michi ancille tue clementer ostendas, si in dilectione et collocucione servi tui damnum aliquid tui amoris incurram, et ego spondeo, si tue caritati adversum invenero, numquam ei postea loquar" (*Vita Margaretae*, chap. 25, p. 119). Meersseman suggests that the "maiores" were Margaret's parish priest, and Zeger's prior at Lille ("Les Frères Prêcheurs," 73).
Margaretae of Zeger learning of Margaret's inner life through her own reporting of it. Zeger's role as "spiritual father" to Margaret was most probably an extension of his role as her confessor, though curiously, he is not explicitly named as her confessor, and Margaret is not described confessing to him or anyone else. Margaret certainly had ample opportunity, however, to speak to Zeger outside confession, as she seems to have sought him out at will

162 There is some indirect evidence that Zeger acted as Margaret's confessor: Margaret meets Zeger when he is hearing the confessions of a group of people to whom he has just preached, of which presumably she was one (chap. 6, p. 109), and in approaching communion she feels scruples which become acute in the absence of Zeger, who usually had consoled her in this situation (chap. 28, p. 120). Margaret, concerned about her sins, twice received divine assurance of her state of grace (chap. 28, p. 120; chap. 11, p. 111). Margaret had also clearly placed herself under obedience to him, and followed his directions for the ordering of her daily life (chap. 13, pp. 112-13; chap. 18, p. 115; chap. 20, pp. 116-17; chap. 22, p. 117; chap. 28, p. 120). It could be that Zeger was conscious of the responsibility not to reveal the content of a confession without the permission of the penitent, and so was reticent about his role as Margaret's confessor. Thomas of Cantimpré was not usually fastidious about the seal of confession, a fact which caused his seventeenth-century editor some grief (see Alexander Murray, "Confession as a Historical Source in the Thirteenth Century," in The Writing of History in the Middle Ages: Essays Presented to Richard William Southern, eds. R. H. C. Davis and J. H. Wallice-Hadrill [Oxford, 1982], 275-322). Jacques de Vitry included material he had learnt from Marie's confession in his Vita Mariae in 1215, the year in which the Fourth Lateran Council reaffirmed the importance of the secrecy of the confession, so perhaps was not yet sensitive to the issue. For the development of the seal of confession, see Henry Charles Lea, A History of Auricular Confession and Indulgences in the Latin Church, 3 vols. (Philadelphia, 1896), 2: 412-31.
for her solace or guidance; and he, on his part, visited Margaret at home when she was ill. 163 She would often "thirst" for the words of her spiritual father, and come to find him in the church the Dominicans used. However, since she had a nice understanding of the etiquette of spiritual direction, she would not attempt to speak to him when someone else was waiting, or ask others to speak to him for her; nor would she keep Zeger at her sickbed when he was summoned away by important dignitaries. 164 Margaret was not always able to be so restrained, though: when she sought out her "teacher" Zeger, "wailing and weeping," frantic that she had not been able to say her canonical hours, which he had directed her to do, because she was rapt in ecstasy, Zeger is cross at the worry her distressed face has caused him as well as relieved that no greater misfortune has befallen her. 165 Margaret's emotional distress at not being able to have immediate access to Zeger is a recurrent theme in the vita: on one occasion, needing instruction and solace in Zeger's absence, she visited a "certain man of religion in the town" who treated her unkindly, but she thereafter received as recompense consolation from Christ himself, who fed her his Body. 166 Margaret's need for Zeger's "spiritual consolation" during another of his absences, this time in England, was satisfied by a miraculous ability to turn her eyes toward England and see him plainly. 167

When Margaret was able to speak to Zeger, the revelations and visions she received from God undoubtedly provided subject matter for their conversations. Margaret's first visionary experience, for example, which occurred soon after her conversion, seems to have come to her during a sermon, and Margaret, puzzled by her first "direct" experience of God, went to her spiritual father for advice. We are then given the account of her vision which Margaret gave to her spiritual adviser, a very direct recognition of Margaret's contribution to

163 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 29, p. 120; chap. 14, p. 113.

164 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 14, p. 113.

165 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 20, pp. 116-17.

166 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 24, pp. 118-19.

167 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 34, pp. 122-23.
her *vita*, and the mediating role played by Zeger, as the audience is placed in the position of the listening spiritual director. Zeger's role as the hearer of Margaret's revelations is also emphasised by Thomas of Cantimpré in his introduction to the largest grouping of mystical stories in the *vita*, where he praises Margaret for only revealing her revelations to her spiritual father: Thomas expresses here a now familiar anxiety about the difficulties which self-reporting of one's mystical gifts might bring, but he clearly considered a spiritual father as an appropriate audience for the narration of mystical experience. Margaret's mystical experiences include visions of the Virgin Mary, and of St Catherine; an ecstasy in which Christ showed her her heart in the likeness of a chapel; a vision of the crucified Christ on Good Friday; frequent ecstatic visions of heaven, in which she was escorted to Christ by the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, and walked pleasantly about with the Lord; and, during her last illness, a vision of Christ offering her a drop from a vessel filled with many golden crowns.

As well as hearing of Margaret's inner life from her own reporting, Zeger was also able to write of his own involvement in the manifestations of Margaret's supernatural gifts: she reveals God's judgement on "a certain important lady" who visits her in the presence of

168 Thomas complains that "many religious women in our times, who have the pernicious habit of hens, start to cluck as soon as they have produced an egg" and praises Margaret for not being like them (*Vita Margaretae*, chap. 27, pp. 119-20). Margaret is also circumspect about the revelations she receives about the state of others souls, which she reveals only to Zeger (chap. 36, p. 123).

169 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 27, pp. 119-20; chap. 31, p. 121.


171 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 28, p. 120.

172 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 35, p. 123.


Zeger, she receives special visionary ability to see him during his stay in England, and she is given special grace whenever Zeger celebrates the eucharist. Moreover, Zeger might serve as the very source or conduit of Margaret's inner experience, for when she was in need of his instruction or consolation, "at one time her spiritual father seemed to be there, present as if through the spirit, and then she was filled with a certain interior knowledge, which sufficed for a time."  

In addition to the access Zeger had to Margaret's inner world, his role as her spiritual father also involved him in aiding Margaret to resolve the conflicts between her religious vocation and her romantic and family life, and the stories of these episodes in the relationship between Margaret and Zeger have also entered the vita. Zeger, for instance, helped Margaret understand that she should avoid any contact with her former suitor, however innocent. He also took on the delicate task of mediating between Margaret and her mother and sister, who seem to have realised that speaking to Zeger was the best way of influencing Margaret, and on two occasions complained to him of the unusual and anti-social behaviour which Margaret now saw as part of her religious calling. In one case, Zeger intervened to mitigate the praiseworthy silence Margaret imposed on herself at home by ordering her to speak to her mother and sisters every day for the amount of time it would take to recite seven psalms.

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175 Vita Margaretae, chap. 29, pp. 120-21. Meersseman identifies the lady as Margaret, the sister of countess Joanna, who possessed land around Ypres ("Les Frères Prêcheurs," 78).  
176 Vita Margaretae, chap. 30, p. 121; chap. 34, pp. 122-23.  
177 "[E]i quandoque pater suus spiritualis quasi per spiritum presens videbatur adesse, et tunc quadam cognicione interius replebatur, que illi ad tempus sufficiebat" (Vita Margaretae, chap. 24, p. 118).  
178 Vita Margaretae, chap. 10, pp. 110-11.  
179 Vita Margaretae, chap. 13, p. 112. It comes as no surprise that though she hated talking with her family, she "would sit at [Zeger's] suspended words and would incorporate his speech into her soul, just as the body takes in food while it lives" (ibid.).
and in the other, by allowing Margaret to explain the true spiritual worth of her odd-seeming behaviour to her family through him.\textsuperscript{180}

Only in Zeger's description of Margaret's last illness does he yield to others' experience of Margaret and their account of her words; only in his short collection of miracles Margaret performed after her death does he picture some of the ties Margaret had to spiritual friends other than himself. Zeger and his fellow Dominicans visited Margaret regularly during her last illness;\textsuperscript{181} but she received her last communion at the hands of a parish priest, presumably in the absence of any of the Dominicans.\textsuperscript{182} As is the case in many female saints' \textit{Lives}, however, it is the voices of the women who are close to the saint that are most clearly heard at her deathbed, and Margaret's mother and her aunt, the mother's sister, figure prominently in the stories of Margaret's death. Each recalled the words with which Margaret predicted the course of her illness and welcomed the pain she felt.\textsuperscript{183} It was they who would have recorded Margaret's vision of the Lord on the evening of her death, telling her that she would enter heaven without any time in Purgatory, and her last prayers, including a fervent prayer of praise, which is recorded in full.\textsuperscript{184} Her last vision, recounted in answer to her mother's questioning, is of Jesus and the Virgin.\textsuperscript{185} If Margaret's last illness belonged to her family as well as her spiritual father, it is Margaret's spiritual friends who emerge in the stories

\textsuperscript{180} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 19, pp. 115-16.
\textsuperscript{181} Zeger visited Margaret at least twice during her final illness, bringing her communion, and other members of the Dominican order also sat with her (\textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 41, pp. 124-25; chap. 42, p. 125; chap. 45, p. 126).
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 47, p. 127. Cf. Meersseman, who does not think that the parish priest is reasserting his rights over Margaret ("Les Frères Prêcheurs," 73).
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 41, pp. 124-25; chap. 43, p. 125; chap. 46, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chaps. 48-49, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Vita Margaretae}, chap. 50, p. 128.
of her miracles after death. At the moment of her death, one of Margaret's spiritual friends saw Margaret being conducted to heaven on a silver ladder which stretched up from her house; further confirmation of her place in heaven came from two more visions of Margaret in heaven received by spiritual friends. Thus while her relationship with Zeger emerges as by far the dominant spiritual tie in her life, her vita also gives some evidence of additional emotional ties.

Although the *Vita Margaretae* focuses very directly on the relationship between the holy woman and her director, it is nevertheless clear that Zeger felt that his authority as Margaret's priestly spiritual director outweighed the authority Margaret's mystical experiences had given her. It is clearly Margaret who needs the advice and help of Zeger, and not she who offers guidance and support to her spiritual father in his priestly life, as did both Marie and Lutgard. Zeger did not, as John Coakley has put it, turn to Margaret for "access to God." Both Marie and Lutgard, however, had already been dedicated and innovative participants in the religious life for many years when they met their biographers. In contrast,

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186 No one is mentioned as a "spiritual friend" of Margaret's during her life, though she does sit with a "most religious lady," who shared a vision with Margaret (*Vita Margaretae*, chap. 32, p. 121).

187 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 51, p. 128.

188 *Vita Margaretae*, chaps. 55-56, pp. 129-130.

189 Compared to Lutgard, Marie or Ida of Nivelles, Margaret offers others less frequent help with their spiritual life. Though a certain man, who had heard of her holiness and decided to visit her, cannot understand Margaret's words, still her face and the words themselves are enough to bring him grace (*Vita Margaretae*, chap. 12, pp. 111-12); she is sought out by some religious women and asked to say something about Christ (chap. 23, pp. 117-18) and having been made aware of the spiritual condition of other people, she is able to give them appropriate advice or praise (chap. 36, p. 123).

190 Coakley, "Friars as Confidants," 227.
eighteen-year-old Margaret owed her conversion, and the organisation of her daily religious life, to her experienced spiritual father. And as far as can be judged from Zeger's account of her in the four years before she died at twenty-one, Margaret demonstrated little of the religious creativity or religious insight which is characteristic of Marie and Lutgard, and something of the emotional immaturity which would be consistent with her age.¹⁹¹

But if Margaret is not portrayed as offering Zeger himself direct help with his priestly duties, he did record the support she offered to other Dominicans: when an English friar confided his anxiety over an ill-prepared sermon he was to preach later that day to Margaret, a gold hand of blessing was seen above them both. The friar preached a fervent and greatly affecting sermon, and Margaret on her part had fallen into ecstasy by the end of it.¹⁹² The *Life* closes with a miracle which occurred after Margaret's death, in which a Dominican saw Margaret sitting in the hall in which he was about to preach, with an open book as if she were showing him what to say; she disappeared at the end of the sermon.¹⁹³

There is of course no question that Zeger considered Margaret to be especially holy, and her life worthy of remembrance: not only did he make records of her life himself, in the weeks after Margaret's death he gathered up Margaret's personal belongings so that they might

¹⁹¹ For this reason, it is difficult for me to agree with John Coakley's argument that Zeger's relationship with Margaret may by itself stand as evidence of an "early" phase in the history of relationships between male confidants and female holy women when the authority of female holiness did not represent a locus of holiness separate from priestly authority ("Friars as Confidants," 227, 245-46). Zeger may well have been very different with a woman of the spiritual maturity of Lutgard at forty-six.

¹⁹² *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 32, pp. 121-22. A further indication of Margaret's support for the preaching apostolate was her vision of an angel whispering the words of a sermon into the preacher's ears (chap. 32, p. 121).

¹⁹³ *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 57, p. 130.
be sealed as relics. He would not part with Margaret's headdress even for Margaret of Constantinople, the future countess of Flanders, who often requested it from him. And yet, even now Margaret was safely ensconced in heaven, his own authority over her had survived beyond the grave: immediately after Margaret's burial, he encouraged a woman who approached him about a cure for her diseased arm to address Margaret using his authority, "Go," he said, "and tell my daughter who has just died that she should obey me as she did when she was alive, and that she should ask the Lord to cure you." Which, of course, she did.

The *Vita Margaretae* stands at the beginning of a long line of biographies of urban lay holy women, which were composed by, or from the notes of, the Dominican friars who were their spiritual directors and confidants. Thomas of Cantimpré and Zeger of Lille, who were both working in the first generation of Dominican public ministry in the towns of Europe, probably understood the *Life* of Margaret of Ypres to be an example of the deep response their pastoral work could draw from the laity, which was encouraging to both lay people like Margaret, and to other Dominicans involved in the *cura animarum*. The *vita Margaretae* confirms the new importance that the process of spiritual direction of a woman by her spiritual father now had in providing not only the context in which her saintly inner life could be made public, but the psychological dynamic around which the biographical narrative was shaped.

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194 *Vita Margaretae*, chap. 54, p. 129.
197 Eight of the nineteen *vitae* written about women by medieval Dominicans fall into this category (Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women," 224, n. 4.)
Of all the vitae of the mulieres religiosae which owe their existence to the subject's relationship with a close male friend and confidant, the Life of Ida of Louvain offers the most compelling example of the new opportunities the growing tradition of mystical biography gave to women to tell the stories of their own inner lives, and of the process by which that autobiographical impulse might be realised. For the majority of the Vita Idae Lovaniensis, as we shall see, is unambiguously presented as a record of Ida's own oral narrative of her past life to her confessor, Hugh, whom she understood had been especially sent by God as someone to whom she could faithfully reveal the secrets of her heart. Ida seems to have understood well that self-revelation lay at the heart of mystical biography, a genre which by the time she was narrating her life included the Lives of Marie, Lutgard and Margaret, and perceiving herself to have had a life worth recording, she initiated the process in which Hugh set down her own account of the divine favours she had received. Ida's forerunners, Marie, Lutgard and Margaret, certainly told their confidants of their past experiences and inner lives, but they are not portrayed as knowingly relating their lives in order that a written record be made of them, and many of their stories were probably only written down after their deaths. Ida took the process of self-revelation on which the earlier lives depended an important step further towards autobiography by consciously relating her life to her confessor in order that her account should be written down as she spoke. In addition to the new role Ida forged for herself, the Vita Idae Lovaniensis also bears witness to the continuing development of the role of male spiritual friends and confessors as recorders of holy women's narratives: Ida of Louvain's confessor, Hugh, must have spent long hours dedicated to the task of recording Ida's reminiscences, a task which was considerably different from the traditional role of an

author, and yet one which he obviously felt, as Ida did, was an important part of his relationship with a female spiritual friend.

Ida of Louvain was born, at an unknown date, into the prosperous middle-class family of a wine-merchant in the town of Louvain in the Flemish-speaking part of the duchy of Brabant. 199 At the age of eighteen, Ida rejected the world, and especially the mercantile values of her family, to become an "apprentice" of Christ. 200 She began to live apart from the family in a small apartment adjoining her father's house, where she earnt her own keep by spinning, so as not to be reliant on her father's tainted money. 201 During this time as a lay woman, Ida frequented the church of the Dominicans in Louvain, and counted several of the friars there amongst her many spiritual friends; she also associated with the beguines and recluses of the town. 202 The established Dominican presence in Louvain we find in the Vita Idae Lovaniensis suggests that the mid-1230s is the earliest possible date for this period of Ida's life. 203

Ida's life in the world was marked by innumerable eucharistic miracles which flowed from her fervent eucharistic piety, and by the extraordinary visions she received. She had also

199 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 1 [1], par. 1, p. 158.
200 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 1 [2], par. 4, p. 159.
201 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 2 [5], par. 10, p. 161.
202 For Dominican friars, see Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 6 [16], par. 39, p. 169; Bk. 2, chap. 3 [8], par. 14, p. 174; Bk. 2, chap. 4 [10], pars. 16-19, pp. 175-76; for the Dominican church, see Bk. 1, chap. 5 [14], par. 31, p. 166; for beguines, see Bk. 1, chap. 5 [12], pars. 27-28, pp. 165-66; Bk. 1, chaps. 5-6 [14], pars. 31-35, pp. 166-67; Bk. 1, chap. 6 [16], par. 39, p. 169; for the beguine church, Bk. 2, chap. 2 [4], par. 6, p. 172; and for the recluse who was a friend of Ida's, see Bk. 2, chap. 2 [5], par. 7-8, pp. 172-73; Bk. 2, chap. 4 [10], pars. 19-20, p. 176.
203 As was mentioned above, the Dominican house at Louvain was founded in about 1230 (Simons, Stad en apostolaat, 108-09). See also, Simone Roisin, L'hagiographie cistercienne dans le diocèse de Liège au XIIIe siècle (Louvain and Brussels, 1947), 67-70.
a number of paramystical experiences, including the stigmata, an invisible but painful crown of thorns and a miraculously expanding body; and she was given the gifts of prophecy and healing.204 These gifts led to the growth of Ida's public reputation for sanctity and so, at an unknown date, she sought to forestall any consequent temptation to vainglory by joining the Cistercian monastery of Rosendaal, a community in north-western Brabant, founded in 1227.205 Sometime after becoming a nun, a Cistercian monk by the name of Hugh, who as "capellanus" to Rosendaal was one of the priests who heard confession and celebrated mass for the community, became Ida's confessor.206 During the time in which he acted as her confessor, which seems to cover at least a year, probably more, Hugh made extensive records of Ida's life. His description of Ida receiving communion in both kinds as a nun, a practice prohibited by the Cistercian General Chapter in 1261, suggests that at least part of her life as a nun fell before that date.207 We have very little information about Ida from the years after the death of her confessor, and no witnesses to her last illness and death.208

At some time after Ida's death, an unnamed writer took up Hugh's unfinished work and used it as a basis for the vita we have. He explains his role in the composition of the vita in this way:

204 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 5 [14], par. 31, pp. 166-67 (the growing body): Bk. 1, chap. 3 [6], pars. 13-16, pp. 162-63 (the stigmata); Bk. 1, chap. 3 [6], par. 15, pp. 162-63 (the mystical crown of thorns); Bk. 2, chap. 1 [2], par. 3, p. 171 (the gift of healing); Bk. 2, chap. 2 [5], par. 7, p. 172 (the gift of prophecy).
206 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 20, p. 187; for Hugh's name, see Bk. 3, chap. 5 [16], par. 30, p. 189.
207 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 1 [5], par. 9, p. 184.
208 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 5 [17], par. 31, p. 189.
Note therefore, reader, that I am not chiefly the author, but rather a collector, of this work, for I have gathered little or nothing of those things which I am about to write from the oral narratives of anyone at all, but have only, as was said, distributed what was united from certain sheets according to a clear determination of chapters.209

The contributions of this final redactor are usually easy to identify, and are quite limited, especially after the first few chapters of the vita. The date of his composition is unknown, although he was writing long enough after 1261 to feel the need to explain the former custom of receiving the chalice at communion he found described in his source. His distance in time from the events he is describing is also suggested by his almost complete failure to secure further information about Ida's life after the death of her confessor and the consequent cessation of written records of Ida's life.210 Even the year of her death seems to have been unknown to the final author, who can only give the day and month on which she is "thought

209 "Attende ergo, Lector, imprimis hujus operis me non auctorem esse, sed potius collectorem: parum enim aut nihil eorum quae scripturus sum ex cujuscumque verboi relatione percepi; sed solum, ut dictum est, ex quibusdam schedulis adunata sub Capitulorum certa distinctione distribui" (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Prologue, p. 158). For the distinctions scholastic authors made between scribe, compiler, commentator and author, see A. J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages [London, 1984], 94-100. Richard FitzRalph's explanation that "auctor" is often used to mean either someone who "asserts" a passage, or someone who is its "editor or compiler", or else someone who is both "assertor" or "editor or compiler" at the same time (the proper meaning for "auctor"), would have helped explain Ida's role in the production of her vita (Ibid., 100-03).

210 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 5 [16], par. 30, p. 189.
to have died." Yet he was writing at a time when he was still able to consult others about the credibility of Ida's confessor, and hear accounts of his life and virtues, which would suggest a date in the late thirteenth century.

The final redactor of Ida's Life gives very little indication of the circumstances which inspired the composition of the *Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, or how he acquired the notes on Ida's life. No earlier vita is mentioned as inspiration and no particular kind of reader is addressed. Though he does say that he is writing at the "entreaties of others," there is no dedication of any kind, and no mention of Ida's community, or of any male Cistercian community (where one might expect Hugh's papers to have ended up), or even of the Dominicans of Louvain, who might have encouraged the redactor in his task. In one sense, the seeming lack of interest in Ida after her death shown by Ida's own convent of Rosendaal is consistent with the private, rather than communal interest, which led to the recording of her life in the first instance, an interest which was not sustained by the community after the death of the individual who had encouraged it, her confessor.

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211 *Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 3, chap. 5 [16], par. 31, p. 189. The redactor seems not to have known the year in which Ida died, and wrote "MCC," an impossibly early date, with the hope of filling in the year more precisely in the future (Roisin, *L’hagiographie*, 68).

212 *Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Prologue, p. 158.

213 This limited interest is also evident in the manuscript tradition. There is only one extant manuscript of the *Vita Idae Lovaniensis*: Vienna, Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek Series nova. MS. 12706-07. This manuscript is a collection of saints' lives, known as the *Hagiologium Brabantinorum*, made in the years 1476-84 by Joannes Gielemans who was a member of the community of canons regular at Roodklooster in Brabant. The *Hagiologium Brabantinorum* also contains the *vitae* of these *mulieres religiosae*: Marie d'Oignies (also includes the Supplement to her vita), Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Leeuw, Lutgard of Aywières, Alice of Schaerbeek, Juliana of Comillon, Christina Mirabilis, and Beatrice of Nazareth. The *Vita Idae Lovaniensis* is also known to have existed in a codex copied in the years 1493-94 at
Long before she had become a nun, met Hugh. and begun to recount her life-story to him. Ida had had considerable experience of spiritual friendships in which men and women could share their spiritual experiences, and edify each other; they are the solace which she says has sustained her in her life in the world.214 Her friends may share her mystical graces: Ida and a Premonstratensian monk both experienced a divine illumination which served to cement their relationship. They understood each other in that moment "as if they had lived together their whole lives long and known one another with identical mutuality", and it was also revealed to them that their individual efforts to please God had earnt them an "equality of merit before the Supreme Judge."215

Ida was also active in using her spiritual benefits to help priests: on one occasion, she is asked by a Dominican to pray for him while he celebrates the Mass, and obtains for him an

the community of canons regular in Corsendonck (near Turnhout). This book was a four-part legendary of which only two volumes (1 and 4) are now extant as Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, 858-61 [Cat. no.3139]. Volume 4 contains the vita of Beatrice of Nazareth. Three volumes (1, 2 and 4) were still extant when the list of the Library of the canons regular of Corsendonck was made in 1633 and recorded in Antonius Sanderus, Bibliothecae Belgicae Manuscriptae, vol. 2 (1644, reprint, Farnborough, 1969), 58-63. The lost volume 2 is recorded as containing the vitae of Alice of Schaerbeek, Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Louvain and Ida of Leeuw. This book was used by the early Bollandists for their editions of the vitae of Alice of Schaerbeek and Ida of Louvain.

214 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 7 [12], par. 37, p. 181.
215 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 7 [18], par. 43, p. 170. Spiritual friendship was not without its miseries, however. When a Dominican friar frequently visited Ida's sickbed to bring her consolation "from his immense store of scriptural themes" only to be suspected by his junior confrère of impregnating Ida, she became emotionally and mentally distraught at understanding what she had been suspected of. It is a story Ida told in considerable detail (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 4 [10], pars. 16-21, pp. 175-77).
unaccustomed taste of devotion. Ida takes on a similar role when it is revealed to her in a vision of her own judgement, that instead of heading immediately for heaven, she must return to earth to pray for the salvation of a spiritual friend whose soul would have otherwise been endangered.

The important link between spiritual friendship and spiritual autobiography which is established in Ida's later relationship with her confessor Hugh is foreshadowed during this earlier period in Ida's life in an account of a Dominican friar who had been instrumental in converting a prominent and worldly noble through his preaching. The friar, who was "quite familiar and intimate" with Ida, wanted her to help him thank the Lord for this grace, so he wrote an account of the conversion as an event in his own spiritual life, and sent it to her. Ida was completely overcome with emotion when she realised what the text recounted, and her fervour was so intense that she collapsed completely before she could complete her prayers of thanksgiving.

But if spiritual friends feature prominently in Ida's account of her early life, it is also true that none of her many male spiritual friends or "priests of her intimate acquaintance" can be identified as recurrent characters, so that we cannot build a picture of any particular relationship beyond what is given in each episode. Ida's confessors from this period are not marked out for special consideration as friends or guides: during her time in the world, Ida had one or more confessors, to whom she owed obedience, but they are not named, nor are her relationships with them described in any detail.

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216 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 3 [9], par. 15, pp. 174-75.
217 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 5 [13], par. 26, p. 178.
218 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 3 [8], par. 14, p. 174.
219 Ida's obedience to her confessor in the frequency of her reception of communion is mentioned in passing (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 4 [10], par. 16, p. 175). On the other hand, she was able to piously avoid unwanted guidance to mitigate her penance, by not
Ida's contact with the male spiritual friends she had known in the world was to be much reduced after her entry at Rosendaal; indeed, one of her "most faithful and constant" male friends, when he heard from Ida of her plan to leave him "in body but not in soul" by becoming a nun, became so distressed that he was reduced to temporary insanity, only to be brought back to normality by Ida's insistent prayer. As a nun, she was presumably much less free to take the initiative in creating and maintaining friendships with men. Before her future confessor Hugh was appointed to Rosendaal, she seems to have felt herself to be deprived of the kind of intimate spiritual relationship she desired, and prayed that she might be granted a suitable confessor, presumably the only male religious whom she could depend on seeing regularly:

Indeed I had entreated him, I had prayed to him, before I merited to know you, with every urging of the heart of which I was capable, that he might deign to acquiesce to my desire, concerning his provision to me of a faithful confessor, to whom I might with confidence reveal all my sins, before the moment of death intervened and I was snatched from this world through the common debt to nature.

telling her confessor the full extent of her penitential mortification, and just giving a summary so that he would approve it (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 1, chap. 2 [5], par. 12, p. 162).

220 The visit paid to Ida by a Franciscan friar from Mechelen who had known her in her pre-convent days demonstrates that not all ties were broken (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 2 [6], pars. 11-14, pp. 184-85).

221 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 7 [12], pars. 37-38, p. 181.

222 "Ipsi quippe supplicaveram ipsum exoraveram, antequam tuae personae meruissem habere notitiam, omni cordis instantia qua valebam, ut desiderio meo dignaretur acquiescere, de fidei Confessore mihi providendo, cui fiducialiter omnia peccata mea detegerem, antequam interveniente mortis articulo per commune naturae debitum eriperer ex hoc mundo" (ibid.).
On the night of Hugh's first visit to Rosendaal, but before she had seen him, Ida was granted a passionate vision in which she was able to recognise Hugh as the Lord's answer to her prayer, by the looks of love she and he exchanged in the vision, "On looking at him, my heart began to burn inside with what was in truth an immense, though chaste, love; he also, looking at me in turn, burnt with no less a fervour of love within, so that both his face and appearance were inflamed by the fire of love."223

It seems clear that Ida's longing for a sympathetic confessor and spiritual friend was bound up with her desire to reveal, and presumably have recorded, her past and present spiritual graces.224 Hugh certainly seems to credit Ida with taking the initiative and with something of the moral responsibility for her revelations to him, when, while listening to Ida speak of her past experiences, he thought to ask her if the process of revealing her secrets encouraged vainglory in her.225 The question also suggests again some continuing unease about the process of self-revelation, which the initiative Ida took in that process probably made more acute. Ida explained that she was able to escape vainglory by only revealing her secrets in an appropriate context, that is, to a spiritual friend sent especially from God for the purpose, who had also heard all the sins she had committed.226

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223 "Ad cuius aspectum immenso quidem amore, casto tamen, aduri coepit cor meum intrinsecus: ille quoque me versis vicibus intuens, non minori fervore dilectionis adurebatur interius; ita quod ex incendio caritatis inflammaretur eius et facies et aspectus" (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 20, p. 187).

224 Presumably there were no fellow-nuns who were literate enough, or sympathetic enough for the task. She herself had had almost no schooling, and would have needed to rely on someone else's skills to put her experiences into writing (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 1 [2], par. 4, p. 183 and Bk. 3, chap. 5 [14], par. 26, p. 188).

225 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 19, pp. 186-87.

226 "Nulli tamen hominum ea possem enarrare beneficia, quae mihi divinitus sunt collata, nisi prius a me sub confessionis titulo revelata susciperet omnia quae patravi scelera,
maintained, was divinely ordained as a relationship in which she could appropriately express herself, as she explained to him: "And therefore heavenly pity deigns to join us in a single steadfastness of faith, in order that henceforth on account of your labour you may increase your abundant reward, and indeed that after that I may not lack someone to whom I may reveal with confidence all the secrets of my heart, with God providing for the salvation of us both in this way."227

A similar understanding of the privileged access of a confessor and spiritual friend to a mystic's inner world is used by the final redactor as a defence of the credibility of the *vita*:

I have a certain and impeccable witness to the truth, him, namely, who collected from the mouth of the holy woman the details concerning the holy woman which I am about to describe and commended them to memory in writing. He is known to have been the foremost of her spiritual friends, and the hearer of her confession, and both a confidant of her secrets and spiritual soulmate.228

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neigentiasque et peccata quae comisi. Propterea, mi Pater, hac tibi praecipue causa fiducialiter enarrare praevalui, quia tibi peccatorum omnium, a me negligentia vel industria commissorum, iniquitates et crimina, praetextu confessionis exposita, revelavi" (*Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 19, pp. 186-87). *Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 3, chap. 1 [3], par. 7, pp. 183-84 contains an example of a situation in which Ida first makes her confession, and then tells of one of her mystical experiences.

227 "[I]deoque superna miseratio dignatur nos in una fidei firmitate conjungere; quatenus hinc pro labore tuo copiosa tibi merces accresceret: inde vero mihi non deesset, cui fiducialiter omnia cordis mei secreta detegerem, utriusque salutem in hoc Domino providente" (*Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 20, p. 187).

228 "[I]m certum et indubitatum testem habeam veritatis, illum scilicet qui de sanctae feminae singula quae dicturus sum, ore collegit et scripta memoriae commendavit. Is siquidem
The magnitude of Ida's own autobiographical contribution to the *Vita Ida Lovaniensis* stands as an important witness to the extent to which self-revelation as a form of hagiography had gained acceptance. The first two of the three books of the *vita*, which account for over three-quarters of the total content, consist entirely of Ida's stories about her past life in the world, before she joined Rosendaal, and of course, before she knew Hugh. No other witnesses are credited for these stories, and the redactor constantly reminds us that we owe these stories to Ida, and her confessor who recorded them. These books offer a substantial (forty-five columns in the *Acta Sanctorum*), robust, and often emotionally charged account of Ida's struggles with her family, her friends and supporters, and, chiefly of her extraordinary mystical experiences, many of which are centred on the eucharist.

Even in the final and shortest book, the majority of the stories are Ida's accounts of her mystical experiences after she had become a nun. Even in the recording of those experiences of Ida's life which occurred after he had known her, which are in fact very few in number, much of the narrative describes Ida's inner experiences which the confessor comes to know through Ida's conversation and confession. Only four stories are contributed by Hugh himself, one in which Ida explained her own understanding of the process in which she
revealed her past to Hugh, and three more which all testify to the superiority of Ida's spiritual experience and authority to his own. Finally, there are a mere three stories which do not originate from either Ida or Hugh, in which Ida's fellow-nuns tell of the miraculous light which shines from Ida's eyes or face, or illuminates objects on which she gazes. The Life is then essentially Ida's account of her own experiences, and especially her own account of her past life.

spiritualium amicorum illius praecipuus extitisse dignoscitur, et confessionum ejus auditor, secretorum conscius pariter et symmista" (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Prologue, p. 158).

The confessor's role as an appropriate receiver of Ida's revelations is also emphasised by the redactor in his explanation of the lack of material available on Ida's life after Hugh's death: "Because at that time she was lacking a confidant of her secrets and soulmate to whom secretly, and at the same time with confidence, such things ought to have been told and as no one at all knew this, these things were commended neither to writing nor to memory"

("[Quae, quia tunc caruit fidei secretorum suorum conscio et symmista, cui secrete simul et fiducialiter haec talia fuerant intimanda, nullo penitus hoc sciente, nec scripto fuere nec memoriae commendata" Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 4 [11], par. 23, p. 188).

229 Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], pars. 19-20, pp. 186-87. Compare Thomas of Cantimpré's discussion of pastoral care, which he sees as involving hearing confession, preaching and giving "consilium spirituale" (Bonum universale de apibus, Book 2, chap. 42, par. 2).

230 In two of these three stories, Ida receives communion directly from God; in the first of the stories, she makes her mystical communion while dressed in the vestments of a priest. The third story sees Ida reject criticism of her behaviour by her confessor by recourse to her superior mystical knowledge (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 3, chap. 1 [3], pars. 5-7, pp. 183-84; Bk. 3, chap. 2 [6], pars. 11-13, pp. 184-85).

The *Vita Idae Lovaniensis* is also notable for the details it gives of the process by which Ida related her life. Throughout the *vita* the final redactor calls attention to Ida's narration of her life, especially her eucharistic miracles and extraordinary mystical experiences. After recounting a vision Ida has of Christ revealing his wounded side for her consolation, the redactor reassures us of the authoritative process by which he has learnt of such an intimate and extraordinary inner experience: "She herself was the witness, to whom it was granted to taste such things while still on pilgrimage in her human body, and both the writings and spoken testimony of her aforementioned confessor, undoubtedly a man who was very blessed in every way, mediated to us what was learnt."  

Ida herself is quoted as explaining that she related the indescribable benefits which God "has already conferred and still deigns to confer on me" as if "it were not on me but on some complete stranger that they were conferred;" this was a useful defence against pride in her gifts. Ida would also avoid vainglory by diminishing her own responsibility for perceiving visions. After the narration of a long vision Ida has of the Virgin and Christ child, we are told that she would dismiss this story and others like it by reminding her interlocutor of the altered mental states brought about by drink and insanity: "to the drunk or insane, she said, an event sometimes seems to happen in another way than it might actually happen."  

We even learn

232 "[I]psa teste, cui talia praegustare concessa sunt adhuc in humano peregrinanti corpore. nobisque comperta praefati sui Confessoris, utique viri per omnia beatissimi, scriptis pariter et vivae vocis testimonio mediante" (*Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 2, chap. 3 [7], par. 11, p. 174).  
233 "Beneficia, inquit, ineffabilia, quae mihi jam contulit et adhuc conferre dignatur ... quasi mihi collata non fuerint, sed aliter cuiilbet extraneo, vel a mea notitia penitus alieno" (*Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 3, chap. 3 [10], par. 19, p. 186).  
234 "Ebriis, inquit, et amentibus interdum res aliter videtur evenire quam eveniat" (*Vita Idae Lovaniensis*, Bk. 2, chap. 5 [11], par. 23, p. 177). "Drunkenness" was an established way of speaking of the ecstasies and languishings of the mystics; the imagery is taken from the Song of Songs.
of the limits of Ida's memory in her role as narrator, when, while recalling a complex vision, in which she sees her soul as a vast church in which a Mass is being celebrated by a High Priest, she cannot remember all the details of the vision:

Who indeed that High Priest was, we learn from her own testimony and from a disclosure made to her confessor a long time afterwards ... But which or what kind of office it was, she was unable to explain as it had already been lost in oblivion for a long time. Indeed she judged it absolutely impossible to commend to perpetual memory each individual benefit which she merited to receive from the hand of the Lord in her lifetime.235

The Life of Ida of Louvain is an invaluable testimony to the developing influence of biographical narratives of the mystical life on the ways in which women considered, and narrated, their own life stories. Ida's confidence that her description of the graces she had been granted was worthy of record during her own lifetime, and the initiative she seems to have taken in having them recorded, would have been almost unimaginable, even a century before. The influence of the genre of mystical biography may also be seen in the type of account of her mystical privileges Ida gave to her confessor which, as far as we can judge from the redaction we have, does not differ in kind from the earlier mystical biographies of the mulieres religiosae with which she may have been familiar. And finally, the Life of Ida of Louvain demonstrates that by the time Ida was narrating her life to her confessor, the recording of a holy woman's lifestory had become a sufficiently conventional part of the relationship she might have with a male spiritual friend, or especially perhaps her confessor, to allow a holy woman to call on

235 "Quis vero Pontifex is fuerit, ex eius testimonio suoque Confessori facta diu postea revelatione, comperimus .... [O]fficium vero quod vel quale fuerit, iam dudum oblivione sopitum, explicare non potuit: singula quippe beneficia, quae de manu Domini suo tempore recipere meruit, perpetuae commendare memoriae prorsus impossible iudicavit" (Vita Idae Lovaniensis, Bk. 2, chap. 7 [19], par. 34, p. 180).
that relationship to authorise her own autobiographical narrative, and to encourage her biographer in his task as recorder.

VI

The Lives of Alice of Schaerbeek and Beatrice of Nazareth, the final two vitae to be considered in this chapter, share with the four vitae which we have considered up to this point their focus on the inner lives of their subjects. The Lives of Alice and Beatrice differ, however, in that although we owe the final form of both vitae to male authors, the information these vitae include on their subjects did not depend on relationships which they formed with male spiritual friends or confessors. In both cases, the writing of women formed an intermediate stage between the subject and the final biography.

The Life of Alice of Schaerbeek was, I will argue, in large measure the author’s own meditations on the mystical life, but it is nevertheless based on a small core of stories recounting Alice’s inner life, which the evidence suggests were written down by her sister, Ida, probably during Alice’s lifetime. The author of the Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, on the other hand, drew his material from a substantial autobiographical work which Beatrice herself composed. Both these Lives, admittedly on two very different scales, are witness to a new appreciation on the part of women of the value of their own interior lives, and the lives of their companions.236 Both works, too, seem to depend on a day-to-day record of the spiritual life, which in the case of Beatrice, being the subject’s own record, approached the novel literary

236 Further evidence of the role of women recording the lives of their friends may probably be found in the Life of Juliana of Cornillon. Juliana’s anonymous biographer mentions in his prologue that he drew upon a French account of the life of Juliana written by a “very devout person” for his Latin Life, and the recluse, Eve of St Martin, a close friend of Juliana’s who figures in several stories included in the Life, has traditionally been identified as the author of that account. See [Vita] de B. Juliana virgine priorissa Montis-Cornelii, in Acta Sanctorum, ed. G. Henschen, April vol. 1 [April 5] (Paris, 1866), 442-475, at Prologue, p. 443.
form of the spiritual diary. And finally, both the Lives of Alice and Beatrice seem to have been designed to assist in the cultivation of the mystical life: the author of the Life of Alice included much reflective discussion of the inner life in his account of Alice, while the considerable amount of treatise-like material describing the inner spiritual "programmes" Beatrice devised in her quest for spiritual perfection seems to have been included in order to help others form their own programmes of inner self-improvement.

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What little is known about the exterior life of Alice of Schaerbeek can be stated briefly.237 She entered the Cistercian community of La Cambre, near Brussels, at the age of seven, and apparently was a devoted and talented student during her youth.238 The most significant external event in her life was her contraction of leprosy, which eventually meant that she had to be housed in her own cell, apart from the other nuns of her community. Her disease became increasingly debilitating and painful, causing her to lose the sight of both eyes.


238 Vita Aleydis, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 472. The age given may represent a conventional understanding of the end the first stage of childhood rather than a securely known fact. The abbey of La Cambre was founded in 1201, under the direction of the Cistercian abbey of Villers, by the duke of Brabant, Henry I, and his wife Mathilda. The initiative for the foundation came from a Benedictine nun of Brussels, Gisla, who presented herself at Villers to be clothed in the habit of the Cistercians, and after having achieved that aim, lobbied for a new foundation she could join (Canivez, L'Ordre de Citeaux, 151-52).
until finally, she could no longer leave the small house which had been built for her.\textsuperscript{239} The one firm date in her life is that of her death, which occurred in 1250.\textsuperscript{240}

Alice's \textit{vita} is concerned almost exclusively with her inner world, which her life as a sequestered leper would presumably have encouraged her to cultivate. Her special intimacy with Christ is given particular emphasis: she is a bride for Christ, who gives herself over to the "service of Love" and to "adorning her face for the bridal chamber of her spouse."\textsuperscript{241} Her leprosy, according to her biographer, was given to her by God so that she could be free to spend more time alone with him in contemplation.\textsuperscript{242} The \textit{vita} focuses on her private emotional experiences: her emotional distress at her increasing isolation from her community, the "sweetness" of the divine consolation she received, her conversations with Christ and the visions she was granted. Like her fellow mystics, Alice's special graces were interior ones, which were not evident to the outside observer, though the cause of them, her pitifully sick body, was.\textsuperscript{243} It is the process in which Alice's mystical experience was made public which we shall attempt to trace here.

The circumstances which led to the composition of the \textit{Life} of Alice of Schaerbeek are obscure. We can glean from the \textit{Life} nothing definite about the anonymous author, except that

\textsuperscript{239} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 9, 23, pp. 473-74 and 475; chap. 3, pars. 25, 27, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{240} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 32, p. 477.
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 472.
\textsuperscript{242} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 9, 10, pp. 473-74.
\textsuperscript{243} Alice is only once described as being insensible as a result of rapture, a description included in a very generalised account of mystical eucharistic piety (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 11, p. 474).
he was male, and little about his intended audience: we do not know how he came to know about Alice, and he does not discuss the sources he used for the vita. Although the vita may have been written as little as ten years after Alice's death, it seems that few remained who were able to give oral testimony about her life: the author mentions only one witness as being alive at the time of writing. Another witness, the younger sister of Alice's personal servant, who was a girl at the time of Alice's death, was presumably still alive to tell the story of Alice she is credited with, and it may be that this woman also provided information about Alice's religious life which she had heard from her sister. Two more

244 See Vita Aleydis, chap. 2, par. 11, p. 474, for the writer's use of masculine adjectives to describe himself.

245 The space given to Alice's development of monastic virtues, and the perfection of her comportment in the refectory, cloister, church, dormitory, at work and at the colloquium point to a monastic audience (Vita Aleydis, chap. 1, pars. 2-6, pp. 472-73).

246 For a brief but penetrating discussion of the sources for the life of Alice, see Martinus Cawley, "Introduction," to Saint Alice the Leper, in his Lives of Ida of Nivelles, Lutgard and Alice the Leper (Guadalupe, Oregon, 1987), (s.p.). Cawley makes the plausible, but unverifiable, suggestion that the author was a chaplain who came to La Cambre after Alice's death. It would nevertheless be odd for a priest who was attached to a women's house, and obedient to its abbess, not to mention her in a text such as this.

247 St Louis, who died in 1271, is still alive in the vita (Vita Aleydis, chap. 3, par. 27, p. 476); the fact that the reception of communion in both kinds, a practice discontinued in 1261 in the Cistercian order, receives no comment (chap. 2, par. 15. p. 474), suggests, though not conclusively, that the life was written before that date (cf. Cawley, "Introduction", s. p.).

248 Vita Aleydis, chap. 3, par. 34, p. 477.

249 Vita Aleydis, ibid. The grief suffered at Alice's death, and the appearance of a messenger to the house of the sister and mother in the village of La Cambre to tell of Alice's death,
women, an unnamed "lady" and a nun of the community, provided stories, but it is impossible
to know whether they gave their evidence directly to the author, or whether their stories were
related to others, and were handed on in either oral or written form.250

The difficulty the author presumably had in collecting testimony is reflected in the quite
limited number of individual details we are told about the world beyond Alice's inner
experience in the *vita*, and the tiny number of people who actually appear in the life. By way
of compensation, much of the material in the *vita* takes the form of meditations by the author
on the skeleton of information which seems to have survived about Alice. The writer of
Alice's *Life* was convinced that the suffering body of a saintly woman held special power and
holiness, especially for the dead in Purgatory. His *Life* of Alice is a touching picture of the
small sorrows and joys of its subject; the rather meagre material he has for Alice's life is
interwoven with tender accounts of Alice's frequent, consoling conversations with a gentle
and encouraging Christ, described in jubilant bridal imagery, and much reflection on Alice's
inner life, and especially, her relationship with Christ. It is material which suggests that
Alice's life could serve as the basis for direction in the spiritual life.

In addition to the discursive reflections of the author, it is also probable that we owe to
his imagination the stories in the *Life* of Alice which have no circumstantial detail at all, and
are not credited to any source, such as the descriptions of her sadness on the first day she lives
apart from her community, the sweet solace she receives four years later when she moves into
her final dwelling place, or the very generalised accounts of her ecstasy at communion; these

indicating the importance Alice held for the family. Alice's servant, who is not mentioned as a
source, may be already dead. A story in which the servant figures (she is frightened by a fiery
red glow in which Alice's house is enveloped), and which she may have told her younger
sister, is found at chap. 2, par. 18, p. 475.

250 The "lady" saw Alice's house and her body glittering with the fiery glow of God's glory
(*Vita Aleydis*, chap. 2, par. 14, p. 474); the nun was present at Ida's deathbed, and is the
source for Ida's last words (*Vita Aleydis*, chap. 3, par. 32, pp. 476-77).
stories probably represent the author's imaginative recreations of Alice's experience.\textsuperscript{251} It may be, too, that the details of the conversations which are attributed to Christ and Alice are authorial extrapolations.\textsuperscript{252} Yet, even then, there remains a core of quite individual miracles, visionary experiences and records of prayer answered, which seem to require a source who was very close to Alice, if they do not stem from Alice herself. These include stories of a candle in the hands of the nine-year-old Alice which was miraculously rekindled;\textsuperscript{253} of Alice's nighttime vision of a golden cross hung by a cord;\textsuperscript{254} of her visit to heaven on St Ursula's feast day;\textsuperscript{255} of her vision of the sky "opened up" with a great brightness like a sepulchre on the feast of Easter;\textsuperscript{256} and of a vision of the crucified Christ on Easter day.\textsuperscript{257}

It seems, however, unlikely that the author of Alice's \textit{Life} had at his disposal records that were made about Alice's inner life by a sympathetic, but anonymous, priest or cleric. Priests and other male religious are scarce even in Alice's admittedly thinly-populated social world: the \textit{vita} includes just a single mention of an Augustinian canon regular for whom she prayed at the request of his sister.\textsuperscript{258} Alice's desire to receive communion despite the difficulties her illness imposed is a key theme in the \textit{vita}, and yet the priests who said Mass for

\textsuperscript{251} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 9, 10, pp. 473-74. It is also possible that the simplicity of these two stories reflects the imprecise memories of an oral source. The nicely crafted accounts of Ida's eucharistic piety are less likely to have such an origin (chap. 2, pars. 11, 13, 15, p. 474, and chap. 3, par. 25, p. 476).

\textsuperscript{252} See \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 12, 15, 16, p. 474 and chap. 3, pars. 25, 30, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{253} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 473.

\textsuperscript{254} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 473.

\textsuperscript{255} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 16, p. 474.

\textsuperscript{256} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 18, p. 475.

\textsuperscript{257} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 30, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{258} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 29, p. 476.
the monastery are invisible.\textsuperscript{259} There is no mention of confession in the \textit{Life} at all, and certainly none of a confessor. When Alice is anointed with holy oil during her illness and on her deathbed, she is twice described as "having herself anointed," an expression which curiously elides any priestly presence.\textsuperscript{260} As in the \textit{Life} of Lutgard of Aywières, it is Christ who performs the role of spiritual adviser for Alice in her regular conversations and negotiations with him. It seems quite unlikely, given these absences, that the author relied upon stories which had come, in written or oral form, from a male spiritual friend of Alice's.

The \textit{vita} does, however, point to a more plausible source for the interior experiences of Alice, and that is Ida, a beloved blood sister of Alice and a fellow-nun at La Cambre. Ida is clearly the most important human in Alice's life, who serves as her helper and confidante. When Ida is deathly sick, Alice threatens Christ with retaliation, unless he restores Ida to health, as she could not bear to be "deprived of the single refuge of her life, of the special solace of her infirmity."\textsuperscript{261} It is surely her own ministering sister to whom Alice, the contemplative "Mary," pays tribute as her "Martha" in this story:

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{259} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 11, 13, 15, p. 474 and chap. 3, par. 25, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{260} "Oleo sancto fecit se inungi" (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 475); "Oleo sancto se fecerat inungi" (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 32, p. 476). The reticence about the community's priests is particularly striking in view of the fact that one of the priests who served the community as its chaplain during the time when Alice was at La Cambre, had himself achieved a reputation for sanctity. Boniface of Brussels, doctor in theology, had served as a canon of the chapter of St Gudule in Brussels, and, from 1231, as bishop of Lausanne. In 1239, he resigned his bishopric to retire to La Cambre, where he was chaplain till his death in 1260 (Canivez, \textit{L'Ordre de Cîteaux}, 153-55; and also his article "Boniface de Lausanne," \textit{Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques} vol. 9 (1937), cols. 955-956.
\textsuperscript{261} "[A] singulari hujus vitae refugio, a speciali infirmitatis suae solatio, se fore destitutam" (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 17, p. 474).
Once she [Alice] called her "Martha" to her and said to her: "Be strong and persevere in good, because I have prayed to the Lord for you, and he has heard me. For your seat has been prepared for all time, and you are recorded with the elect in the Book of the Living."\textsuperscript{262}

The close relationship between Alice and Ida gave Ida entrée to Alice’s inner experience, and the \textit{vita} portrays her as the confidante to whom Alice reveals, for her consolation, the benefits that souls in Purgatory will receive from her suffering.\textsuperscript{263} Moreover, Ida appears in a disproportionately large number of stories, for which either she or Alice herself must have been the source.\textsuperscript{264} And since Ida was dead by the time the author of the \textit{Life} of Alice was writing, it seems Ida should be credited with making a written record of the key, private moments in her sister's visionary life which formed the core around which the \textit{Life} was built. If Ida's education matched her sister's, it was well up to this task.\textsuperscript{265} Of special interest are the stories which make up the narrative of Alice's last illness, which are dated by their place in the liturgical calendar. These details suggests that some notations on Alice's last year of life

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{262} "Quadam vice vocavit martham suam ad se, et dixit illi: 'Esto robusta, et in bono persevera, quia Dominum oravi pro te, et ipse exaudivit me. Sedes enim tua a seculo et in seculum est parata, et in libro viventium cum electis es notata'" (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 28, p. 476).

\textsuperscript{263} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 26, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{264} Ida appears in four stories, whereas no other character except Christ appears more than once (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, pars. 17, 19, pp. 474 and 475, chap. 3, par. 26 and probably 28, p. 476).

\textsuperscript{265} Alice apparently gave herself over to "litteralibus studiis" with a maturity beyond her years (\textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 472); she is also described as being accustomed to "read or pray" to mark Vigils (chap. 3, par. 30, p. 476; cf. Cawley, \textit{Saint Alice}, p. 48, n. 2).
\end{flushleft}
might have been made in the form of calendar entries; it seems, was keeping a record, however brief, of the significant spiritual events of her sister's last year of life.266

We see, then, in the Life of Alice another very particular, albeit conjectural, scenario for the composition of a mystical vita: a record kept of Alice's inner visionary and mystical life by a close female spiritual friend, in the absence of even a mention of a confessor, an anonymous author who had not known Alice, but used the original record, some scanty oral material on Alice's Life provided by acquaintances, and his own imagination, to fill out the intensely private consolations and conversations with Christ he was sure Alice had enjoyed. The Life testifies at one and the same time to the new interest women were taking in recording the inner lives of their friends, and to the enthusiasm religious men had for creating (in this case more literally than in most) mystical biography of the visionary lives of women.

VII

The last of the vitae considered in this chapter, the vita of the Cistercian nun Beatrice of Nazareth stands as an impressive witness to the autobiographical imperative which lay at the

266 Alice is anointed near the feast of St Barnabas (June 11), but still has more than another year to live (chap. 2, par. 22, p. 475); on the next Septuagesima she attends church for the last time, and is thereafter unable to go outside (chap. 3, pars. 24-25, pp. 475-76); the week before Pentecost, she offers her left eye to King Louis of France (par. 27, p. 476); Good Friday brings a vision of Christ (par. 30, p. 476), and the hour and date of her death, before Prime, June 11th, 1250, is noted (par. 32, p. 477). On the records of Alice's last year, see Cawley, Saint Alice, 39. Alice's appearance is also carefully noted (par. 31, p. 476). It may be, too, that records of Alice's prayers for the people who are recorded as beneficiaries of Alice's prayers and her merit: namely, a nobleman; Count William of Holland; St Louis of France; an abbot of the Augustinian canons, together with another nobleman were kept in a kind of prayer diary (chap. 2, pars. 20, 23, p. 475, chap 3, pars. 27, 29, p. 476).
heart of mystical biography. For the Vita Beatricis blurs the border between biography and autobiography, since the anonymous writer of the vita acknowledges a written account Beatrice herself made of her spiritual progress as his source for the inner life of his subject. Beatrice's original autobiographical work, which is now lost, was a pioneering effort: it was one of only a small handful of autobiographies written in the thirteenth century of which we have any knowledge, and fewer still are known from the twelfth century. The autobiographical form in which Beatrice chose to write was also highly innovative: the regular, sometimes daily, first-person account of the spiritual life which clearly lies behind the material given in her vita may have been one of the first spiritual journals for which we have evidence in the West.

Beatrice was the daughter of a middle-class family from the town of Tienen, in the Flemish-speaking north-east of the Duchy of Brabant, and probably the youngest of her parents' six children, born in 1200. She received her first lessons from her mother, who understood that her "clever daughter" should apply herself to her studies, and by the age of five could recite the Psalter. On her mother's death, when she was seven, she was sent to

269 For the dates of Beatrice's life, see Roger De Ganck, "Introduction," to The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268, xiii-xix, and his "Chronological Data in the Lives of Ida of Nivelles and Beatrice of Nazareth," Ons Geestelijk Erf 57 (1983), 14-27. For Ida's birthplace and parents see Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 10-11.
270 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 19, pp. 22-25.
live with beguines in the nearby town of Zoutleeuw.271 While she was in Zoutleeuw, her father sent her to school to learn the "liberal arts," which she studied with great seriousness for at least a year.272 She became an oblate at the age of about ten at the Cistercian house of Bloemendaal, south-east of Louvain, and made her profession there at sixteen, in 1216.273 Shortly afterwards, in the years 1216-17, Beatrice was sent to visit the Cistercian house of La Ramée to learn to copy manuscripts, and while there met the more experienced mystic, Ida of Nivelles.274 Some time later, Beatrice moved to Maagdendaal, a newly created foundation made from La Ramée in western Brabant, and in 1236, Beatrice shifted again as one of a group of nuns founding the community of Nazareth, close to the northern Brabant town of Lier.275 Beatrice at first served as novice mistress at Nazareth, and was then elected prioress

271 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 20, pp. 24-27.
272 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 21, pp. 26-27.
273 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 9, pars. 45-48, pp. 52-57; De Ganck, "Introduction," xiv. For Maagdendaal and Bloemendaal (Florival) see Canivez, L'Ordre de Cîteaux, 203-09; 193-97.
274 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 10, par. 50, pp. 58-61. For the vita of Ida of Nivelles, see Vita Idae Nivellensis, in Quinque prudentes virgines..., ed. Chrysostomus Henriquez (Antwerp, 1630), 199-297; with additions printed as De Beata Ida Rameia Virgine, in Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum Bibliothecae Regiae Bruxellensis: Pars I. Codices Latini membranei. Tomus II (Brussels, 1889), 222-26. Both Henriquez' text and the additions have been reprinted as "The Life of Ida of Nivelles", in Lives of Ida of Nivelles, Lutgard and Alice the Leper, trans. Martinus Cawley (Lafayette, Ore., 1987), 1-106, where I have consulted them.
275 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 3, chap. 10, pars. 228-231, pp. 266-73. For Maagdendaal and Nazareth, see Canivez, L'Ordre de Cîteaux, 202-04, 236-39.
in 1237.276 In the last years of her life, she wrote the mystical treatise, the *Seven Manieren van Minne*, and she died in 1268.277

The *Vita Beatricis* which has come down to us was written not long after Beatrice's death in 1268, probably at the request of the abbess of Nazareth, to whom the work was addressed.278 The anonymous author of the *Life* describes himself as the "brother and fellow servant" of the nuns at Nazareth, and may have been a priest attached to the community, although he does not seem to have known Beatrice himself.279 The author is very clear in acknowledging the extent to which his *Life* depended on the autobiographical writings of Beatrice: "I am only the translator of this work, not the author, indeed of my own I have added or changed very little, but, as I received them in sheets, I have merely coloured the offered vernacular words with Latin eloquence."280 He does, however, admit to omitting material

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278 *Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 1, pp. 2-3. Beatrice's sister, Christina, succeeded her as abbess of Nazareth (*Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 3, chap. 15, par. 269, pp. 338-39), and may have been the abbess to whom the work is addressed.
280 "[M]e solum huius operis translatorem existere non auctorem; quippe qui de meo parum addidi vel mutaui, sed, prout in cedulis suscepi, oblata verba vulgaria latino <tantum> eloquio colorauit" (*Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 4, pp. 4-5). Cf. Bk. 3, chap. 15, par. 269, pp. 338-39; Bk. 3, chap. 10, par. 233, pp. 372-73. De Ganck argues that the original Dutch-language autobiography does not survive because the suspicion into which mystical writings in the vernacular fell by the turn of the fourteenth century made the destruction of the *Life* expedient (De Ganck, "Introduction," xxvii-xxxii).
from Beatrice's writings which he considered too difficult for a general audience or liable to result in misunderstanding, and, moreover, there are many places in which the author stands aside from his work and comments on what he has just described.  

With these provisos, internal evidence confirms that Beatrice's "book" in all probability provided all the narrative material her biographer used to describe her life from about the time of her profession at fifteen in 1215 until the time she became prioress of Nazareth in 1237, after which the author could not find any material "in her book or from others" "for the long time which followed." The only part of the Life which is actually acknowledged to be independent of Beatrice is, understandably, the very short and bald account of her death, which the author tells us he has not found in "the book of [Beatrice's] own life," but which he owes to the oral testimony of Beatrice's sister Christine, and of other "reliable witnesses." Beatrice's autobiographical "book," however, is not the only work of hers to which her biographer is indebted. He also inserted into his account of Beatrice's life his own reworking in Latin of a treatise written by Beatrice on the mystical life, the Seven Manieren van Minne, and which has survived in its original Middle Dutch. The vernacular treatise offered a general account of the progress of the soul through its experience of seven kinds of love; Beatrice's biographer transformed this text, which he does not explicitly acknowledge as Beatrice's own work,

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281 Vita Beatrixis, Bk. 3, chap. 17, par. 275, pp. 342-43.

282 Vita Beatrixis, Bk. 3, chap. 10, par. 233, pp. 272-73. The three private visions which are placed in the period of Beatrice's time as prioress may have been recorded by Beatrice separately from her book.

283 Vita Beatrixis, Bk. 3, chap. 15, par. 269, pp. 338-39. Christine may have also supplied the information with which the vita begins, which concerns Beatrice's childhood and parents.
into biography by presenting the soul described in the original text as that of Beatrice.\textsuperscript{284}

Beatrice's biographer emphasised the value of the mystic's own self-representation above all other forms of biographical knowledge by pointing to the autobiographical nature of his source as a guarantee of the veracity of his own work. Beatrice could surely not be accused of fabricating her inner life: "for she read and learnt everything in the book of experience.

\textsuperscript{284} The treatise is found in the \textit{Vita Beatricis} at Bk. 3, chap. 14, pars. 246-262, pp. 286-331. Comparisons between the biographer's version of the \textit{Seven Manieren van Minne}, and Beatrice's "own" vernacular text of the treatise, and indeed, between the outlook of the \textit{vita} as a whole, and the "authentic" vernacular treatise have led scholars to cast doubt on the accuracy of her biographer's transmission of Beatrice's autobiographical writings. See esp. Herman Vekeman, "Vita Beatricis en Seuen Manieren van Minne: een vergelijkende studie," \textit{Ons Geestelijk Erf} 46 (1972), 3-54; cf. Ritamary Bradley, "Love and Knowledge in \textit{Seven Manners of Loving}," in \textit{Hidden Springs: Cistercian Monastic Women}, vol. 1, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank, Medieval Religious Women 3.1 [\textit{=} Cistercian Studies Series 113A] (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1995), 361-76, and her "Beatrice of Nazareth (c. 1200-1268): A Search for Her True Spirituality," in \textit{Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio}, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett et al. (Cambridge, 1995), 57-74. In defence of Beatrice's biographer, it should be said that he admits, as he does nowhere else, that his treatment of Beatrice's love of God, that is, the \textit{Seven Manieren van Minne}, is but a poor summary of his "abundant material" in "far too few words;" he does not claim here to be a mere "translator;" one may not necessarily draw inferences from his treatment of her treatise, which he needed to transform into biography, about his treatment of her autobiographical writings (\textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 3, chap. 14, par. 262, pp. 324-25).

Moreover, while it would be unwise to think of the \textit{vita} as providing an unmediated entrée to Beatrice's thought, or especially to her language, I do not find incompatible differences between the spirituality of the \textit{vita} and the vernacular treatise which would necessitate the conclusion that the biographer seriously misrepresented his source.
which she wrote afterwards with her own hand in a style as veracious as it was faithful.”

The secret interiority of Beatrice’s experience, which only she could truly fathom, meant that the evidence she supplied about her spiritual life could not be surpassed. Moreover, Beatrice had written her autobiography in secret, so that her biographer was spared much of the anxiety which conscious publication of one’s gifts entailed. Beatrice’s inner life had been unknown to her fellow nuns as she had modestly only revealed her experiences in her autobiography:

She alone, by the liveliness of her own spirit, was able to penetrate the inner parts of her mind, and bring forth from it the secrets of her mysteries, concerning which, in the whole course of her life, she did not admit anyone as a witness or confidant, except the internal judge from whom no secret is hidden. “For who among people knows the things which are in a person, except the spirit of the person which is in that person?” ... Who finally as foreigner or stranger would have been able to intrude into that most secret chamber of her mind, or to uncover by making public the treasure of divine grace hidden in the field of her heart, when she is said even to have excluded from it her relatives in the spirit and blood, who lived with her in that monastery, as if they were outsiders.

285 "[Q]ue totum in experientie libro legit et didicit quod, eo veratiori quo fideliori stilo, suis postea manibus exarauit," Vita Beatricis, Prologue, par. 5, pp. 4-5.
286 "[Q]ue sola, proprii vivacitate spiritus, interiora mentis sue penetrare potuit, et ex ea misteriorum suorum archana producere, super quibus in toto vite sue progressu, preterquam internum arbitrum cui nullum latet secretum, testem et conscium non admissit. 'Quis enim novit hominum que sunt in homine, nisi spiritus hominis qui in ipso est?' ... Quis denique vel extraneus aut ignotus in illud secretissimum triclinium mentis sue potuisset irrumpere, vel absconditum in agro cordis sui thesaurum divine gratie, propalando detegere, cum et proprias spiritu carneaque germanas, quas in eodem monasterio consortes habuit, referatur ab eo velut
In the *Life* of Beatrice of Nazareth, alone of all the *vitae* which we have looked at, we find the biographer emphasising not the warmth of the mystic's friendship with her confidant and her conversations with him or her, but instead the silence she maintained about her inner world during her earthly life, as she penned her work in secrecy. It remained only to defend her decision, possibly expressed in her testament, to make her work public, which she did to assist "her neighbours in their need." 287

Despite her attempts (not always successful) to avoid the company of other nuns, and to conceal or disguise her ecstasies, Beatrice's mystical life could not have been as entirely private as the account above of her secrecy suggests. Her frequent ecstatic states were clearly prolonged and debilitating and often came upon her while she was amongst the other nuns, and yet, we do not have any descriptions of the external manifestation of Beatrice's ecstatic life apart from those provided by Beatrice herself. 288 Moreover, while Beatrice did discuss her inner experiences with "spiritual friends" from outside her own community, the author has not sought evidence of Beatrice's mystical graces from these friends. 289 Nor does her biographer extraneas exclusisse" (*Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 5, pp. 4-5). Cf. Beatrice's own claim that her experience of rapture, she thinks, could not be recounted in words, nor be understood by someone who has not experienced it (*Bk. 1*, chap. 11, par. 56, pp. 70-71).

287 *Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 6, pp. 6-7.

288 Beatrice did attempt to conceal or disguise her raptures and to avoid the company of other nuns, *Vita Beatricis*, *Bk. 1*, chap. 11, par. 58, pp. 72-73 and for some instances of Beatrice's debilitated state, see *Bk. 1*, chap. 16, par. 74, pp. 94-97; *Bk. 1*, chap. 17, par. 77, pp. 100-01; *Bk. 1*, chap. 18, par. 80, pp. 102-03. We are told that Ida of Nivelles could tell that something unusual had happened to Beatrice after her first visionary experience, because of her demeanour (*Bk. 1*, chap. 11, par. 57, pp. 70-73).

289 *Vita Beatricis*, *Bk. 1*, chap. 11, par. 57, pp. 70-73; chap. 14, par. 67, pp. 84-85 (Ida of Nivelles having predeceased Beatrice, could not of course have served as a witness of her spiritual life); *Bk. 3*, chap. 6, pars. 209-212, pp. 240-45.
mention a confessor who might have had access to her inner world; she is, in fact, never described as confessing to a priest. Beatrice's own testimony of her inner life, it seems, obviated the need for further accounts of it provided by others, and it is to that testimony that we now turn.

The mystical piety current in monastic and semi-religious circles during the thirteenth century in Belgium would have provided Beatrice with a framework for understanding, and valuing, her own inner life as a story. We know, for instance, that Beatrice learnt about the mystical life in person from her contemporary Ida of Nivelles. The letter we are told she wrote to Ida to ask for help in a period of spiritual difficulty may have provided an early impetus to the recording of her own experiences. The narrative possibilities presented by the model of the mystical life would have been surely reinforced for Beatrice by the appearance of a

290 Although Beatrice is acutely aware of her need to confess and do penance for her sins, she sees these activities as part of the internal scrutiny she performs to hasten her private progress in the spiritual life. When, for example, Beatrice saw her soul as a monastic community, she conducted a private "chapter of faults" every day, in which she accused herself of her faults, and then willingly undertook the punishments provided for her by God, acting in his capacity as "abbot" of her soul (Vita Beatricis, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 115, pp. 140-41). Confession (at the monastery's chapter of faults) is important to Beatrice as preparation for communion (Bk. 1, chap. 13, pars. 65-66, pp. 80-83; Bk. 1, chap. 14, par. 67, pp. 84-85), and as a daily spiritual exercise (Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 119, pp. 144-47; Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 126, pp. 154-55). The only clergy mentioned in the life, and that tangentially, are a sacristan and a priest at Mass (Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 18, par. 79, pp. 102-03), and a preacher (Bk. 2, chap. 17, par. 161, pp. 190-91).

291 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 10, pars. 50-53, pp. 58-67. Ida was born in 1199, and so was a year Beatrice's senior, but apparently much more advanced in her life (De Ganck, "Chronological Data", 14-16; 22-26). For Beatrice's letter to Ida, see Bk. 1, chap. 14, par. 67, pp. 84-85.
mystical biography of Ida of Nivelles, which was composed shortly after Ida's death in 1231. And of course, unlike Marie, Lutgard, Margaret and Ida, who could not write, Beatrice was capable of writing her own life. Beatrice's education, on which she and her parents had apparently placed great value, obviated the need for her to create a relationship with a literate person in which she could relate the experiences of her life. What kind of narrative, then, did Beatrice adopt for her own life?

It seems clear that for Beatrice, the true story of her life was her own interior experience of the graces she was granted. Her *vita*, which concentrates almost exclusively on her inner life from her own point of view, tells us almost nothing about the social world of the convent in which she lived. It is certainly very different in this respect from the populous world of Lutgard's convent. We may also, I think, accept the *vita*'s concentration on Beatrice's progress in the interior life as her own: Beatrice's life is presented as a progression

292 See Roisin, "L'hagiographie", 55.
293 The first seven chapters are devoted to Beatrice's "outer life"; from then on it is Beatrice's "inner life" which dominates. Early in Beatrice's regular life she performs works of outward piety: devotions to the Virgin and nighttime vigils (*Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 1, chap. 4, pars. 27-28, pp. 32-35), mortifications of the body (Bk. 1, chap. 5, pars. 30-33, pp. 36-41), and the modesty of her clothing and deportment (Bk. 1, chap. 7, par. 36-41, pp. 42-47).

The author of Beatrice's life is aware of the novelty of the focus on inner sanctity he is presenting, and seeks to defend the lack of "corporeal miracles" in Beatrice's life by asserting the superiority of her "spiritual miracles" (*Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 3, chap. 13, pars. 243-44, pp. 282-87). He also defended her by comparing her visionary life to that of St Paul, who was lifted up into the seventh heaven (Bk. 2, chap. 19, pars. 175-76, pp. 204-07).
in the reception of God's graces, which are manifested in ecstatic visionary experience, verbal assurances she receives of God's pleasure and love, and their physical and emotional counterpart, the sweet floods of bodily "consolation." As she grew more perfect, her experience of God and of the heavenly places grew increasingly intimate, and her understanding of God's ordering of creation became more complete. In the last book of the vita, we read of the successful expiation of all Beatrice's sins through an illness, which enabled her to move even closer to God. Thereafter, no further impediments to her progress towards God existed, except for that of her body, which she felt to be a "thin skin" separating her from him, and in ever more frequent periods of ecstatic inebriation she was increasingly assimilated to Christ.

The progress Beatrice makes towards God over the course of her life was achieved after careful preparation. After recounting Beatrice's childhood, and her apprenticeship in the mystical life in the first Book of the vita, the second Book focuses on the passionate mental and emotional efforts Beatrice made to ensure that her mystical graces would continue as she struggled to be increasingly receptive to God and to progress in self-knowledge: "For as we

294 Some of the most important visions Beatrice is granted are: a vision of the Trinity (Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 11, par. 55, pp. 68-69); a vision of Christ standing at the "right hand of the power of God" (Bk. 2, chap. 14, par. 149, pp. 178-79); a vision of Christ baring his heart (Bk. 2, chap. 18, par. 165, pp. 194-95); her entry into the choir of the seraphim as one of them (Bk. 2, chap. 19, pars. 172-74, pp. 202-05); the world as a wheel beneath her feet (Bk. 3, chap. 11, pars. 236-37, pp. 274-77).
295 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 1, chap. 11, par. 55, pp. 68-71.
297 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 3, chap. 1, pars. 183b-191, pp. 214-23.
299 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 3, chaps. 2-4, pars. 192-204, pp. 224-37.
learnt through her own disclosure, never, or rarely, did an hour pass, in the course of the following seven years, in which the docile disciple of Christ did not make progress in her own devotion to instruction.\textsuperscript{300} She constantly scrutinised the progress she had been making in the spiritual life and the state of her relationship with Christ, judged according to her emotional and psychological states, to which she was exquisitely sensitive.

The evidence of the \textit{Vita Beatricis} further suggests that Beatrice conceived her life as a series of time periods which were marked one from another by the kind of inner experience she was undergoing; a period could be characterised by the kind of spiritual programme she was pursuing, or the quality of her relationship with Christ during that time.\textsuperscript{301} In the first Book of the \textit{vita}, we are told that Beatrice spent five years attempting to bring the enormity of Christ's sacrifice and his suffering on the cross constantly to mind. One aspect of the programme she undertook to achieve this end was visual: she wore a large wooden cross inscribed with the passion of Christ, tied a piece of parchment on which a crucifix was painted to her arm and set a third picture of Christ before her desk. The images helped Beatrice to focus her thoughts on the passion of Christ, which she eventually could bring to mind at will.\textsuperscript{302} Beatrice's focus on the passion was followed by a year of great sweetness and divine consolation which in turn was followed by another period of a year in which she focused on praise of God, which she could find in everything.\textsuperscript{303} Such spiritual sweetness was by no means a constant experience for Beatrice: recurring periods of spiritual sloth or temptation,

\textsuperscript{300} "Nam ut, ipsa confitente, didicimus, numquam dies aliqua, numquam vel raro, per continue sequens septennium, hora preteriit, in qua docilis christi discipula doctrine studio non profecit" (\textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 14, par. 69, pp. 86-89).

\textsuperscript{301} Besides these intervals of time, a few fixed points figure as emotional milestones in Beatrice's life, such as her entrance into religious life and her profession as a nun (\textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 9, pars. 45-48, pp. 52-59; Bk. 1, chap. 17, pars. 76-78, pp. 96-101).

\textsuperscript{302} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chaps. 14-15, pars. 70-71, pp. 88-91.

\textsuperscript{303} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 16, par. 75, pp. 96-97.
when Beatrice felt Christ's consolations to have been withdrawn from her, are also charted. The stupor of the first of these periods, which lasted for six months, began to lift when a fellow nun encouraged Beatrice to take communion.\textsuperscript{304} The time intervals which mark out Beatrice's life are often given quite precisely, while visionary experiences are often marked by their dates in the liturgical calendar.\textsuperscript{305} On one occasion, we are told about two visions which Beatrice has on two consecutive days.\textsuperscript{306} The frequency and significance of defined time intervals in the \textit{vita}, and especially, of dated episodes in her life, indicate that Beatrice made dated, day-to-day accounts, and at least on one occasion, a daily record, of her spiritual life. The kind of psychological self-consciousness records of this kind represent is clear evidence of the changes mystical biography brought to women's perceptions of themselves.

A particularly striking feature of the \textit{Vita Beatricis} is Beatrice's extensive use of analogy, numbered sequences, and visual imagery, as devices for creating visual and structural frameworks for organising the inner life. In Book Two, for example, we learn of several different "projects", some carefully elaborated, on which Beatrice has embarked in her quest for perfection. These include a threefold spiritual exercise, in which she spent some time (a month for the first stage), making satisfaction for her sins, then praising God for his generosity (not forgetting to give thanks for our redemption at each of the hours of the office); in the third stage she concentrated on serving the Lord, and she was willing to undertake any hardship for her Lord.\textsuperscript{307} Another plan Beatrice put into practice was to carefully examine the

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\textsuperscript{304} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chaps. 12-13, pars. 61-66, pp. 76-83; for other periods in which consolation is withdrawn, see \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 130, pp. 158-59.
\textsuperscript{305} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 2, chap. 18, par. 167, pp. 196-97; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 183b, pp. 214-15; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 191, pp. 222-23; Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 192, pp. 224-25; Bk. 3, chap. 7, par. 213, pp. 246-47.
\textsuperscript{306} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 3, chap. 8, par. 219, pp. 254-55.
\textsuperscript{307} \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 2, chap. 4, pars. 91-98, pp. 116-25.
\end{flushright}
virtues she saw in her fellow nuns and imitate them.308 Four of the projects involved complex spiritual analogies. In one, she created two "cells" in her heart. In the lower cell she placed six different types of miseries the human race suffers; in the upper cell she stored the goodness God had bestowed on her, and she would use the cells as "source material" for her meditations, and battles against her own inconstancy and sloth. When this does not bring her to the self-knowledge she desired, she "assiduously thought up new devotions" more suited to her purpose.309 Her next project was even more elaborate: she erected five mirrors, one below, one above, one in front and one at each side for the "eyes of her heart" to peer into. She looked at the mirror above her, where she saw God the just judge examining her life; the mirror below, the earth, reminded her to be humble; the mirror at her side in which she saw her neighbours reminded her to be charitable to them, and in the mirror in front of her, in which she looked most often, she saw Christ nailed to the cross. The fifth mirror, in which she saw death, reminded her of the final judgement she would face. Other profitable "considerations" included seeing her soul as an ordered monastery, or as a garden to be cultivated.310 The Lord showed her a "new manner of living" which involved a series of prayers and meditations designed to enhance her experience of the hours of the office, and the Mass, and she practiced this way of life till she was "drawn to another."311

308 Vita Beatrix, Bk. 2, chap. 4, pars. 99-100, pp. 124-27.
309 Vita Beatrix, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 105, pp. 132-33.
310 Vita Beatrix, Bk. 2, chaps. 7-8, pp. 136-43 (Beatrice's soul as a monastery); Bk. 2, chap. 9, pars. 118-19, pp. 144-47 (her soul as a garden).
311 Vita Beatrix, Bk. 2, chap. 11, pars. 125-29, pp. 152-59; quotes from Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 125, pp. 152-53 and Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 129, pp. 158-59. The Vita Idae Nivelensis also contains a chapter detailing the "eight considerations" which Ida used as a guide to the spiritual life (Vita Idae Nivelensis, chap. 29, pars. 1-9, pp. 84-88). Very similar material is found in the letters of spiritual direction written by Hadewijch of Antwerp. See, in Hadewijch:
Beatrice's programmes concentrate on the control and manipulation of her private emotions and thought processes, her memory, intentions, affections and her time; her aim is not primarily to develop a controlled and ordered way of interacting with the social world.\textsuperscript{312} Emotions are to be scrutinised, channelled and directed, but they are by no means rejected: Beatrice's excesses of desire, her experiences of sweetness, are welcomed and celebrated.

The detail in which these programmes for spiritual progress are described, together with the inclusion of Beatrice's treatise on the ascent of the soul, mean that the \textit{vita} was not only a cross between spiritual biography and a spiritual journal, but also acted as a handbook for the guidance of those in pursuit of the mystical life. A fundamental assumption of the biography is that human spiritual life can and should be a life of progress, and that people may receive guidance and help in that process. The reception of mystical graces, as gratuitous outpourings of God's special grace cannot be imitated at will,\textsuperscript{313} yet one could prepare oneself to be a suitable receptacle for his favours. Beatrice, as we have seen, apparently bequeathed her autobiography for the help it would give to her "neighbours:" similarly, we are told that she wrote an account of her struggle with temptation "so that everyone, taught by her


\textsuperscript{312} A few examples of Beatrice's programme of self-improvement: she asks Christ for her senses and affections to be calmed (\textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 8, par. 43, p. 50); she strives to obtain knowledge of herself, to see into her "dark corners" (Bk. 1, chap. 14, par. 70, pp. 88-91); she wants to repudiate her will \textit{Vita Beatricis}, (Bk. 3, chap. 9, par. 226, pp. 263-65).

\textsuperscript{313} The \textit{vita} reflects this when it recounts Ida of Nivelles' pronouncement to Beatrice that the Lord "will choose you for his own most faithful spouse, and will imbue you with the fulness of his grace" (\textit{teque in sponsam sibi fidelissimam eliget, sueque plenitudine gratie te perfundet}, \textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 10, par. 51, pp. 62-63). Beatrice also learnt from God, that his graces are given freely, not in exchange for human effort to please God (\textit{Vita Beatricis}, Bk. 1, chap. 14, pars. 68, pp. 84-86).
experience, would beware of the cunning ambushes of the enemy."314 The author of the *vita* imagines that all of her life will be read by the nuns for whom he is writing, Beatrice's "companions on the journey," as an example to follow.315

The didactic intent which is at the heart of the *Life* of Beatrice is in accord with the value which Beatrice herself placed on spiritual direction. At Nazareth, she served as the novice mistress for the nuns who entered the order.316 She herself was eager to seek advice from those advanced in the spiritual life, and in particular learnt much from her contemporary Ida of Nivelles, with whom she formed a "spiritual alliance of love."317 Beatrice loved Ida as a mother, followed her as a leader, clung to her as a teacher. Ida instructed Beatrice on how to prepare her heart for God, Beatrice called on Ida to pray that she might receive mystical graces, and subsequently could not keep the secret of her first ecstatic experience from her friend.318 The detailed advice Ida sends to Beatrice in answer to her own letter describing her spiritual situation "greatly restores" Beatrice.319 Later in life, after the death of Ida, Beatrice, who had become accustomed to seek the "familiar counsel" of Henry, a resident of her hometown of Tienen and a man of "special holiness and discretion," was tortured by having to wait several months before she could see Henry, and ask his opinion of her plan to feign madness so that she might become an object of scorn. Henry's objections to Beatrice's plan

314 *Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 6, pp. 4-7; Bk. 1, chap. 12, par. 64, pp. 80-81.
315 *Vita Beatricis*, Prologue, par. 6, pp. 4-5.
317 "[S]piritualis ... dilectionis federa" (*Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 1, chap. 10, pars. 50-53, pp. 58-67; quote from Bk. 1, chap. 10, par. 50, pp. 60-61).
318 *Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 1, chap. 11, par. 57, pp. 70-73.
319 *Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 1, chap. 14, par. 67, pp. 84-85.
were presented carefully and sensitively, and she gave up her scheme. A further indication of the place of spiritual education in her life is seen in the frequency with which Christ, who does not have a strong presence as a speaking character in the *vita*, takes on the role of spiritual director when he does appear as Beatrice's interlocutor. Christ instructs Beatrice with gentle inspiration; he is her "guide and leader," her "shepherd" as well as her "father" who wants to adorn her with graces.

The *vita* of Beatrice of Nazareth has an important place in the history of female biography. The evidence the *Life* offers us of Beatrice's own autographical text allows us to see at work the kind of mental framework which mysticism gave to women of the thirteenth century for use in understanding their own inner lives as narratives of progress, and it shows us how mystical biography could easily provide a model for autobiographical accounts of psychological and spiritual processes. The value Beatrice's biographer, and her sister, Christine, placed on Beatrice's autobiographical narrative as a source for the less radical genre of mystical biography Christine had commissioned, demonstrates a contemporary understanding of the affinity of the two genres. And lastly, we see in the *Life* of Beatrice a biography which, in its presentation of complex and detailed models for the ordering of the spiritual life, seems to be designed to help others with the practical development of their own inner lives.

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320 *Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 3, chap. 6, pars. 209-212, pp. 240-45. In addition to the help from Ida and Henry, we also see Beatrice accepting counsel from an anonymous adviser as to how to achieve perfection; and the advice of a fellow nun to receive communion (Bk. 1, chap. 9, par. 46, pp. 54-55; Bk. 1, chap. 13, par. 65, pp. 82-83).

321 *Vita Beatricis*, Bk. 1, chap. 15, par. 74, pp. 94-97. God does of course figure most powerfully in the *Life* as a compelling, but rather impersonal, object of desire in the *Seven Manieren van Minne*. 
VIII

This chapter has focused on the profound changes in the genre of female biography which appeared in the thirteenth century in response to the extraordinary re-emergence in Europe of mysticism as an influential model of religious life, and it has dealt with some of the consequences of those changes for women's understanding of their own lives, and for their relationships with men. The new appreciation of mystical experience which developed in the twelfth century focused attention on the inner mystical graces of the mystic: her visions, her intimacy with God and his saints, and her privileged access to knowledge of human and celestial affairs normally denied to those in this world. Descriptions of these private, interior experiences were fundamental to mystical biography, so that an account of a mystic's life might conceivably concentrate on her inner experiences to the virtual exclusion of anything exterior to them: this is the case, as we have seen, for much of the *vitae* of Beatrice of Nazareth and Alice of Schaerbeek. Mystical biography need not be so exclusively divorced from the world outside the mystic's own consciousness, however. If, like Lutgard of Awyières, she drew on her privileged inner life, her knowledge of the future and the worlds beyond the grave, or called on her intimacy with God in order to intervene in the lives of others, a mystic extended the sphere of her activity into the social world. Yet even here, this kind of interaction with others depended on the mystic's own revelation of her inner life; her private experiences remained the key to her sanctity, and biographical recording of such interactions necessarily testified to the inner life revealed through them.

One of the most significant changes in female biography which flowed from the new interest in the inner life of the mystic was the importance placed on the self-reporting by the subject of her private, interior experiences. The focus in mystical biography on contemporary reports of the mystic's revelations stands in stark contrast to the great majority of female saints' lives of the preceding centuries, which were often written centuries after the death of their subjects, using few if any contemporary sources of information about them, and which focused on the saints' exterior virtues and powers as a wonder-workers. The revolutionary
new desire, indeed, necessity, to make use of the subject's own account of her interior experience is evident in all of the six early examples of mystical biography discussed in this chapter: although the quality and quantity of the author's access to and use of the subject's narrations varies considerably amongst the six vitae, each one of the writers of the vitae drew on accounts the women themselves had given of their own inner lives.

The Life of Alice of Schaerbeek, the vita at the greatest distance from its subject, was written by an author who had not known Alice, nor, it seems, anyone who had known her well; he filled much of the vita with his own meditations on the mystical life. Yet the author also seems to have made use, as the core of his vita, of visionary experiences which Alice had herself revealed to her sister, Ida, and which were recorded during Alice's life; it was quite possibly the records of these visions which inspired his composition of the vita in the first place. The vitae of Lutgard of Aywières, Margaret of Ypres and Marie d'Oignies all place the private, inner experience of their subjects at the centre of their narratives. They also provide much information about the contexts in which the authors, or their sources, had access to the inner worlds of their subjects. During the eleven years in which Thomas of Cantimpré knew Lutgard, he had asked her "under oath" to recount her past mystical experiences and had treasured any insight into her privileged spiritual world his conversations might reveal. Moreover, on recognising that his own access to Lutgard's inner life was too limited to provide information for an entire vita, he sought out others who had been in a position to hear Lutgard speak of her inner experiences: Thomas' confrère, brother Bernard, the monks of Affligem, the nuns of Aywières, and her closest friend, Sybil de Gages. Sybil in particular was a highly valued witness: not only had Lutgard frequently confided her revelations and visions to Sybil, but she had also asked for her help in interpreting them.

As Margaret of Ypres' spiritual father, constant confidant, and probably also confessor, Zeger of Lille had considerable opportunity to learn of her mystical graces, and Zeger drew largely on the content of their conversations about them to supply Thomas of Cantimpré with material for his biography of Margaret. Further sources for Margaret's
revelations of her inner life were her aunt and mother, who heard and reported the prayers, prophecies and the accounts of her visions which Margaret communicated in her last illness. Like Zeger, Jacques de Vitry drew largely on his own recent memories of his conversations with Marie d'Oignies (and possibly on some notes made during her last illness) for his biography of her. As Marie's confessor, close spiritual friend and a member of her community at Oignies, Jacques had had an unusually good opportunity to hear her accounts of her past life, and her visionary and other mystical experiences. The *vitae* of Lutgard of Aywières, Margaret of Ypres, and Thomas of Cantimpré are good examples of the close relationship between author or source and the self-reporting subject.

With the *Life* of Ida of Louvain, the contribution of the saint to her own life narrative which mystical biography encouraged, increased rather dramatically, and moves closer to autobiography or autohagiography. Ida, it seems, initiated the biographical process by welcoming her new confessor, Hugh, as a divinely-ordained hearer of her secrets. Instead of remembering the conversations of his subject after her death, as Jacques, Zeger and Thomas seem to have done, Hugh probably wrote down Ida's account of her past mystical graces, of which he had no previous knowledge, as she narrated it to him. This is clearly a process which is more self-consciously autobiographical than the ones Marie, Lutgard or Margaret were engaged in, though both Marie and Lutgard told their biographers stories of a past which was unknown to their interlocutors. Of course, Ida's role in the making of her *vita* does not make it autobiographical, as her oral stories were not only selectively incorporated into a structured composition by Hugh, but also re-edited and rearranged by the final redactor of the *Life*, but the genesis of the *vita* does bear extraordinary witness to the autobiographical impetus which mystical biography encouraged in women. This impetus is surely evident in Beatrice of Nazareth's decision to keep a journal of her spiritual life, one of the first such diaries in Europe of which we have knowledge. In the *vita* of Beatrice of Nazareth, the new interest in women's own accounts of their inner lives as a basis for biography reached its final phase, as the contribution of the subject to the Life was extended to its logical conclusion: the
author of Beatrice's *vita* shaped her own autobiographical journal and a treatise she had written on the mystical life, into a third-person account of her inner progress towards perfection. We have moved a long way from the early medieval saint's *Life*, and much closer to the tradition of spiritual autobiography which includes the narrations and writings of Angela of Foligno, Margery Kempe and Catherine of Bologna.

These changes in the genre of female biography under the influence of mystical religion also represented important changes outside the world of literature: they provided new models for women to use in understanding and valuing their inner lives, and a new context for women to express their own life experiences. A woman such as Beatrice of Nazareth, who was familiar with the traditions of mystical biography in her region, indeed, whose close friend, Ida of Nivelles, had been the subject of such a biography, now had a clear context in which she could understand her life as a narrative worthy of record.

If mystical biography changed the relationship between the subject and her *vita*, giving a far greater role to the saint's own account of her experiences, a second, equally far-reaching change was the new relationship the author had with his subject, and also with the narrative itself. The two changes are of course related: the high value placed on the self-revealing narratives of the mystic placed greater emphasis on the relationships in which the saint revealed her inner life, and so all the six *vitae* we have considered allow us to form pictures of the intimate relationships each saint enjoyed. In the thirteenth century, one of these friends was likely to be the male spiritual friend, director or confessor who wrote her *Life*.

An important consequence of the new intimacy between saint and author for the genre of female biography was the new role the male author took on as a character in the *vita*, whose interactions with the protagonist help form the narrative thrust of the *vita*. In the *Life* of Marie d'Oignies, Jacques' own relationship with Marie forms an important autobiographical subplot, as Marie's life transforms his own, and she creates new ties to bind their lives together, even after death. In his *Life* of Lutgard of Aywières, Thomas of Cantimpré follows the model set
up by Jacques, emphasising to the reader, not always convincingly, the strong ties of intimacy which link him to Lutgard.

The Cistercian monk, Hugh, who recorded the *Life* of Ida of Louvain, included only a very few autobiographical stories of his relationship with Ida, but these all emphasise to the reader the special quality of their relationship: Hugh recounts the passionate vision in which Ida recognises him as the spiritual friend whom she has been sent by God, and whose future intimacy is symbolised by an exchange of girdles; he also narrates his own dawning recognition of the superiority of Ida's claims to religious authority over his own.

*Zeger* of Lille features prominently in the *Life* of Margaret of Ypres, appearing in nearly half of the stories in Margaret's *vita*. But in this *vita*, we do not have the autobiographical confidences provided by Thomas and Jacques: indeed, although it is not Zeger who is transformed by Margaret, but Margaret who is converted to a new life of religion by Zeger, on whom she is thereafter spiritually dependent, nevertheless it is the relationship Margaret has with Zeger (her conversion, the guidance she asks from him, her obedience to him, the revelations of her spiritual life she makes to him, her anxiety when she is parted from him) that forms the core narrative structure for the *vita*.

In mystical biography, then, authors could now appear as characters in lives of their subjects, they could relate their own experience of their subject, and in so doing provide readers, usually, with a model for the kind of response they themselves should have to the life of the saint. Furthermore, the relationship an author had with his saint could also provide the basic plot for the *vita*, as it did for the *Life* of Margaret of Ypres.

Above all, the new relationships authors of mystical biography had with their subjects, and the work they composed, represented important changes in the kinds of relationships religious men and women were able to form with each other. The presentation of the relationships between Zeger and Margaret, Thomas and Lutgard, Jacques and Marie, and Hugh and Ida found in the *vita* all provided their readers with models of close relationships between men and women bound by ties of religion rather than family. And while there is no
doubt these relationships between men and women involved the negotiation of authority among partners unequally supplied with it, they also provided some of the most intimate human ties in their lives.

Finally, the *vita* of Alice of Schaerbeek and Beatrice of Nazareth are witnesses to a third new element in female biography which was encouraged by mystical religion, and that is a new emphasis on the provision of spiritual direction in the contemplative and mystical life as part of a mystical biography. Both these *vita* present detailed spiritual exercises, often material for meditation structured around a numbered sequence or an analogical model of some kind, which are designed to enable readers to work towards their own interior spiritual perfection.322 If mystical biography provided a context in which women could relate their own inner lives, it also provided them with precise and concrete models by which to shape their thoughts and emotions.

* * * * *

In this chapter, we have concentrated on the new importance given to the inner life of the female saint which was encouraged by mysticism. It is, however, something of a paradox that the interpretive strength of the mystical paradigm of religious life can also be seen in a new appreciation of the physical activities of female saints, which flowed from the recognition of such bodily states as ecstasy, levitation and the stigmata as manifestations of the mystic's privileged experience of the divine. The positive valuation of a mystic's body, as well as her privileged access to the worlds beyond, were both vital components of the extraordinary

practice of vicarious suffering, a prominent feature in the *vita* of the *mulieres religiosae*. 

which forms the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Spiritual Charity and Vicarious Suffering

in the Vitae of the Mulieres Religiosae

I

In the last chapter, I argued that the unprecedented value the vitae of the mulieres religiosae placed on the autobiographical narratives of their female subjects made them innovative texts in the history of female biography. In this chapter, we will consider the vitae as early witnesses of the practice of vicarious suffering, one of the most arresting forms of spiritual charity in the repertoire of late medieval religious women. As dedicated exponents of vicarious suffering, the mulieres religiosae acted on the supremely confident conviction that their own penance, in the form of physical or sometimes emotional suffering, would be of specific and objective spiritual benefit to others because they could bestow their own

1 Since I began research on this topic several years ago, two important works on the "spiritual charity" and purgatorial piety of late medieval women, which have included discussions of vicarious suffering, have appeared: Jo Ann McNamara's "The Need to Give: Suffering and Female Sanctity in the Middle Ages," in Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca and London, 1991), 199-221 and Barbara Newman's "On the Threshold of Death: Purgatory, Hell, and Religious Women," in From Virile Woman to WomanChrist (Philadelphia, 1995), 109-36. McNamara's work brilliantly conceptualised a wide range of activities performed by late medieval holy women as "spiritual charity" or "almsgiving;" the connections she sees between giving material and spiritual alms have also been extremely useful. I find myself less convinced by McNamara's argument that spiritual charity developed as a response to an increasing incapacity on the part of religious women to give material alms or active charity. As the footnotes to this chapter will demonstrate, the theological emphasis of Newman's work, has closer affinities to my own work, and the themes I have tackled have often intersected with her concerns.
meritorious suffering on their neighbours, especially, though not exclusively, those who were in purgatory. The first part of this chapter traces the history of vicarious suffering as one of Western Christianity's cultural "narratives" which was given new life and meaning in the thirteenth century; the second part considers the suffering the mulieres religiosae endured for others in the context of the broad range of spiritual alms they bestowed on their neighbours.2

II

The Letters of St Paul offered first-century Christians a revolutionary interpretation of the suffering, death and subsequent resurrection of Jesus: Christ's death, according to Paul's passionate exposition, created an infinitely great good, which could be shared with humankind and accepted by God as reparation, or in exchange, for the cost of human sins. Suddenly. Jesus' suffering and death, which all the Gospel writers, and St Peter himself, had only been able to see as a wicked betrayal over which the divine Messiah had proved himself by triumphing, attained new and profound significance as an extraordinary blessing for humankind.3 By explaining Christ's death as an exchange, Paul also provided a mechanism

2 My exploration of the history of vicarious suffering has been considerably influenced by Sherry B. Ortner's work on cultural "schemata." I am especially indebted to her beautifully argued case study of a traditional community which used established cultural "schemata" to produce and understand religious innovation (High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism [Princeton, N. J., 1989]).

3 John was later understood as presenting Christ as a "sacrifice" offered for others when he has John the Baptist speak of Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world;" but it is not Christ's death that John connects with this ability to cleanse, but the atoning "baptism in the spirit" which Jesus will offer (John 1:29-34). Jesus' identity as the Messiah, which was confirmed by his triumphant victory over death and by the gift of the Holy Spirit which he sent on his departure, and the traditional reformist call to baptism and repentance were the key elements of the Christian faith St Peter preached in Jerusalem (Acts
for an equally radical new understanding of human suffering, which Paul himself was the first Christian writer to exploit: he made an extrapolation from the model of Christ's beneficial suffering (and in so doing isolated Jesus' suffering from his death and resurrection) to present the suffering he himself had undergone in the course of his ministry and missionary work as having created blessings which not only could flow on to others, but would serve to "complete" Christ's own redemptive work. Paul was now able to write of his own tribulations as a source of joy and benefit to those joined in the Body of Christ, just as Christ's own sufferings had been: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I do my share on behalf of his body (which is the church) in filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (1 Cor 1:24).4

Paul's model of Christ's saving work as a redemptive exchange, which could also serve as the model for understanding human suffering as efficacious for others, supplied a powerful narrative to underpin the practice of vicarious suffering. The most important early inheritors of Christ's function as beneficent sufferer would of course be the Christian martyrs: the cult of the martyrs depended on the idea that the suffering and death of the martyrs would entitle them to provide blessings to others. This kind of exchange of meritorious suffering for others could also be effected during the life of the martyr-to-be: St Perpetua, as we saw in Chapter One, understood that her future martyrdom gave her and her fellow captives special "power," which she realised would enable her to redeem her dead brother, Dinocrates, from the suffering which he had been enduring since his death.5 The firm link Perpetua drew

2:14-40). Peter, and the Gospel-writers could give no theologically systematic reason why Christ should have had to die.

4 The "overflow" of benefit which Paul's suffering achieved for others is first found in Paul's earlier work, the Second Letter to the Corinthians (see esp. 1:3-7; 4:10).

between her own suffering and her privileged power to ameliorate the pain endured by the
dead, as well as her sheer optimism in her own ability to affect the spiritual status of others for
the better, strikingly foreshadowed the suffering the *mulieres religiosae* of the thirteenth
century took upon themselves for the sake of the dead in purgatory.

Despite the possibilities for considering human suffering as co-redemption which Paul
had seen in his own theory of Christ’s suffering and death, however, the theological
interpretation of the redemptive work of Christ which prevailed in the Western church till the
eleventh century militated against interpreting human suffering as redemptive in the way
Christ’s had been. For Augustine, Ambrose and the other Western church Fathers, and the
early medieval theologians after them, had taught the “devil’s rights” theory of the redemption:
after Adam had been disobedient to God at the devil’s instigation, they argued, God had
deserted humankind, and permitted the devil to act as the gaoler over all future humans, who
would be affected by original sin passed on by Adam. Humankind was then justly held in the
power of the devil, and justly punished by him, until he lost his claim over humankind by
having Christ slain, not realising he was the Son of God, utterly without sin, and undeserving
of death. By overstepping the rights he had been accorded by God, the devil forfeited all his
rights over all humankind, who thereafter could attain beatitude.6 This explanation of the
mechanism by which Christ saved humanity emphasised the actions Christ had performed for
the liberation of humankind, rather than in the place of humankind. Christ had acted as the

6 The above description is taken from Augustine’s discussion in *De Trinitate*, 13, 16-18. For a
general discussion of the “devil’s rights” theory, see Jean Rivière, *Le dogme de la rédemption
and His Biographer: A Study of Monastic Life and Thought, 1059-c.1130* (Cambridge,
1963), 77-121, esp. 93-97.
liberator and champion of, rather than as a substitute for, humanity; the role accorded to his suffering was minimised as his triumphant victory over the devil was given pride of place.\footnote{7}

In his role as the heroic deliverer of humankind from the demonic forces of evil, Christ could and did serve as a powerful model for the saint who sought to triumph over the devil and his minions for the liberation and assistance of others. It was not, however, until the "devil's rights" theory of redemption was challenged by Anselm of Canterbury and his followers, and a greater role could be given to the merits earned by the suffering of a newly "human" high-medieval Christ, that the model of Christ's suffering could again be available as a model for vicarious suffering. In the meantime, the practice of vicarious suffering developed during the early Middle Ages as a form of vicarious penance rather than as an act of co-redemption, and it is to that development we now turn.

III

During the fourth century, the physical sufferings of the early Christian martyrs and confessors were routinised and institutionalised in the self-deprivation practised by the monks of Egypt. By their suffering, however, the monks sought not only to win something of the glory attained by the martyrs, but also to engage in life-long, systematic penance for their sins.\footnote{7}

for which suffering was deemed the most effective medicine. The intense monastic concern for systematic penance, and the close-knit nature of monastic community, provided the milieu in which vicarious penance found expression.

Willingness to suffer for others has a small but heroic place in the earliest monastic writings: suffering is presented in the literature of Egyptian monasticism as one of the most precious forms of charity available to the monks, who were able to use their own pain to deepen their spiritual friendships with each other. The Sayings of the Holy Fathers records the story of a monk who pretended to commit the same sin as his brother monk, and afterwards did penance for his supposed sin; after a time God revealed to an older monk in the brothers' community that he would forgive the monk who had sinned for the sake of the love of the one who had not. \(^8\) "This is what is meant by the words, 'A man should lay down his soul for his friend,'" the story concludes. \(^9\) The story relies on a bold and simple logic of exchange which depended on faith that penance created objective, transferable merit, though the monks had to wait till God had acknowledged he would accept the exchange as valid. In a similar story, again told as an illustration of monastic charity, Abbâ Lôt took on half of the burden for an act of fornication committed by his fellow monk, and after a number of weeks in which both monks did penance, it was revealed to Abbâ Lôt that God had accepted the repentance of that brother. \(^10\) These expressions of heroic monastic penitential charity prompted one of the earliest justifications of the practice of suffering for others, which drew as Paul had done on the communion of Christians in the Body of Christ:

\(^8\) The Sayings of the Holy Fathers in The Paradise or Garden of the Holy Fathers, trans. Ernest A. Wallis Budge, 2 vols. (1907, reprint New York, 1972), 2: 89. This is the passage Aquinas quotes in support of his argument that one person can satisfy for another, Summa Theologiae, Suppl., q. 13, art. 2. resp.
\(^10\) Ibid., 2: 90.
It is right for a man to take up the burden for those who are akin (or near) to him, whatsoever it may be, and so to speak, to put his own soul in the place of that of his neighbour, and to become, if it were possible, a double man; and he must suffer, and weep, and mourn with him, and finally the matter must be accounted by him as if he himself had put on the actual body of his neighbour, and as if he had acquired his countenance and soul, and he must suffer for him as he would for himself. For thus it is written: - 'We are one body.'

The powerful emphasis on the interchangeability of human sin and virtue within a tight-knit community we find here will be characteristic of vicarious suffering.

The renewed vigour which Irish monasticism brought to the original monastic dedication to the life of penitence, and to physical suffering as potent medicine for the soul, is particularly evident in the penitentials, the highly influential manuals on sin and punishment which were first developed in the austere milieu of Irish monasticism. The penitentials, which were introduced to England and the Continent from the seventh century, brought precision and a measure of systematic objectivity to conceptions of sin and penance, and in so doing, provided a more fully articulated mechanism by which vicarious penance could be understood and valued. In these manuals, we see for the first time a system in which sin is carefully classified, and in which specific amounts of private penance are assigned to individual sins, as the means by which satisfaction for that sin may be achieved - more than once if necessary. In providing such a systematic understanding of penance, the penitentials

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11 Ibid., 2: 100.

played a crucial role in establishing the kind of objectified relationship with God in which later medieval theology of penance and later accounts of vicarious suffering were grounded. ¹³

The penitentials allowed that a specific amount of penance required for each sin could be exchanged for equivalent penance of a different kind or intensity. Penances then became moveable units which equalled other units, a notion which lay behind the development of handlists of "commutations," that is, shorter, harsher penances which could be carried out instead of longer, less arduous ones. Once particular penances had been freed from strict attachment to a particular sin, they gained something of the mobility and objective exchangeability of money, and it was only a small step for penances to be disassociated from the particular sinner to whom they had been given. Merit and penance could then, theoretically, become exchangeable: the supererogatory performance of another's penance is "merit," which a person is able to apply to the satisfaction of punishment due to the other. And indeed, the eighth-century treatise on commutations known as the De Arreis acknowledged the new possibilities for exchange which the logic of the commutations had introduced, when it made provision for nuns and clerics to endure penance for sins they had not committed, which were "performed for the purpose of increasing one's reward." ¹⁴ What is more, the De Arreis

¹³"[Le système irlandais de la pénitence privée] accentue dans les rapports avec Dieu le sentiment d'un dialogue efficace: ni contrat ni contrainte, ... mais une concession divine du pardon, à l'issue de sacrifices thérapeutiques et rédempteurs, accompagnés d'une demande et d'une conversion. ... Désormais, les esprits sont préparés à tous les développements disciplinaires qui traduiront le concept du rapport étroit entre le chrétien et Dieu, dispensateur de grâce en échange de sacrifices" (Gabriel Le Bras. "Les Pénitentiels irlandais," in Le miracle irlandais, ed. Henri Daniel-Rops [Paris, 1956], 188-89).

¹⁴De Arreis survives in two fourteenth-fifteenth century manuscripts but is thought to have been written in the eighth century: "The Old-Irish Table of Commutations," in The Irish Penitentials, ed. Ludwig Bieler, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 5 (Dublin, 1975), section 8, p. 279. On commutations, see Cyrille Vogel, "Compositions légales et commutations dans le
extended the principle of exchangeability into the afterworld by giving precise prescriptions of
the prayers and physical penance which a living person was required to execute in order to
deliver a soul from hell, and in so doing it provided an objective formula by which vicarious
penance for the departed might be carried out. While the Egyptian monks had held quite
imprecise notions of sin and its consequences, and depended on their ties with each other and
the specific intervention of God to affirm the efficacy of their vicarious penance, the De Arreis
provided a more objectified understanding of the process. The legal formulations used in the
penitentials, at least, seem to imply that God was under objective obligation (that is, obligation
which did not depend on the special circumstances of the penitent, or a special act of
dispensation on the part of God) to act upon the sufferings one person offered for the soul of

système de la pénitence tarifée," Revue de droit canonique 8 (1958), 289-318; 9 (1959), 341-
359 and Thomas P. Oakley, "Commutations and Redemptions of Penance in the Penitentials,"
Catholic Historical Review 18 (1932), 341-51; his "Alleviations of Penance in the Celtic
Penitentials," Speculum 12 (1937), 488-502; and his "Les commutations et les rédemptions
dans les pénitentiels du continent," Revue historique de droit français et étranger 18 (1939),
39-57.

The De Arreis also provided for the sufferings of sickness to be used as penance: a
month of "grievous illness" may be exchanged for a year's strict penance after a person vows
to a person in religious orders to make amends for his or her sins (Ibid., section 16A, p. 280).
Section 18A, using the same rationale as 16A, describes the commutation of seven years' strict
penance to seven months' illness. The acceptance of sickness as meritorious penance was
natural to the mulieres religiosae of the thirteenth century.

15 Ibid., sections 1-4 and 14, pp. 278-9. The treatise notes in section 4 that "Each of the
foregoing commutations rescues a soul out of hell if intercession for it be permissible at all."
Later, souls in the afterworld for whom it would be permissible to intercede would be
designated as residents of purgatory.
another according to a knowable formula, so that one could confidently predict the results of one's efforts.

While the Egyptian monks did penance for living confrères, the writer of the *De Arreis* assumed that the most important role for vicarious penance was in the deliverance of souls from the punishments of hell. As the notion of purgatory, an intermediate state, and later place, of purification for the souls of the imperfect elect was gradually clarified, and a more systematic understanding of the posthumous consequences of sin developed, the concern of the living for the fate of the suffering dead, which was now much clearer to them, grew increasingly acute.\(^{16}\) When we catch our next glimpse of monastic vicarious penance, in the letters of the eleventh-century reformist monk, Peter Damian, the prominent role of the vicarious sufferer as "rescuer" of dead souls from their temporary place of suffering is beginning to take shape, as is the role of the "ghost" of the dead soul who returns to this world first to ask for help and later to report on the blessed condition he has attained with the help of his brethren.\(^{17}\) The witness of the ghosts from the world beyond confirmed the efficacy of the

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17 Some of the most influential ghost stories are found in Book Four of the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great. There are two main kinds of story. In one sort, the living become aware that ghosts return to earth in lowly social positions to do penance on earth for their sins. These ghosts ask for help in the form of prayers or masses, and when their purgation is completed, disappear (Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, ed. Adalbert de Vogüé and trans. Paul Antin, 3 vols. [Paris, 1978-80], 3: 150-155 [Bk 4, par. 42, 1-5]; 3: 184-89 [Bk 4, par. 57, 1-7]). In the other main kind the ghost simply appears to those who have been offering masses and prayers for him, to let them know he has now been purged of his sins (Ibid., 3: 188-95. [Bk
exchange which was being effected, a function that God himself undertook in the stories from the Desert Fathers.

According to the Camaldulensian monk from whom Peter Damian had heard the story, a penitent monk, who had been assigned a very austere and long penance, asked a devout and blameless confrère, with whom he was intimate, for assistance with his penance. But although the second brother willingly took on part of the penance of his sinful fellow monk, he died shortly thereafter, before he had had the chance to complete the penance he had taken on himself for his friend. The dead monk appeared to his penitent brother in his dreams, and told him of the excruciating punishment he was undergoing in the next world for his sake, and then begged for prayers to help him escape from his torments:

Whence I ask of you, and demand with as much supplication as I can that you keep vigil for yourself and liberate me; earnestly therefore beg also of the holy convent of this place, that they discharge the debts of my agreement neglected by me and thus rescue me from the punishments which are at hand, by means of prayers. The monk, awakened, told the brothers what he had seen, made known what he had heard, explained his requests and effectually obtained them. Moreover next, when the brothers had fulfilled the fixed quantity of his penance by diverse exercises of special representations, that brother again appeared to the aforementioned monk in another vision, and he displayed to him the joy of a very serene and cheerful face. Asked again how he was, he replied that through the prayers of the brothers, not only had he been rescued from the terrible

4, par. 57, 8-17]). In both cases, the ghosts' appearance was closely connected to their claims on the aid of the living, and story aimed to demonstrate that the living can and should aid the dead. It was the second form which would become standard: souls are purged in another world, and return to tell of their fate there. The most recent study of ghosts in the Middle Ages is Jean-Claude Schmitt, Les revenants: Les vivants et les morts dans la société médiévale. (Paris, 1994).
punishments, but he had also recently been translated to the lot of the elect by the miraculous exchange effected by the right hand of the One on high.\textsuperscript{18}

The first part of this story echoes the vicarious penance reported of the Egyptian monks fairly closely: a monk who is linked by bonds of friendship to another was able to take the actual punishment due to the sins of his friend onto himself as if they were his own punishments. In the monastic world of the eleventh century, however, the afterlife consequences of sin, and the obligations of penance, were more fully elaborated than they had been in the fourth century. and so the first act of vicarious penance which was left incomplete on the death of the blameless monk, is now mirrored by a second, in which the living monk joined with his community to exchange their own penance for the penance which the dead monk was bound to perform. The story depends for its impact on its almost exaggerated precision and the symmetry of the workings of penance: penance is now seen as fixed units in a closed system, which can be transferred from person to person, and in which the continuation of the earthly system of penitence into the afterworld is established. And yet, the system was not quite so mechanical that the exchange described by Peter Damian took place as a matter of course: it was still dependent on the miraculous intervention of God.

\textsuperscript{18} Unde, quaeso, te, et, qua valeo, supplicatione deposco ut vigiles pro te ac liberes me; valde itaque et sanctum hujus loci precare conventum, ut debita meae sponsionis a me neglecta persolvant, sicque me, quae praesto sunt, suppliciis eruant. Expergefactus ille, fratribus quod viderat retulit, quod audierat intimavit, preces exposuit, efficaciter impetravit. Porro autem, cum jam fratres praefixam illius poenitentiae quantitatem diversis argumentorum specialium exercitiis implevisserunt, praefato monacho frater ille visum rursus apparuit, eique festivitatem sereni satis et alacris vultus ostendit. Interrogatus iterum quid haberet, respondit, se per orationes fratum, non modo poenalibus incommodis erutum, sed etiam ad electorum sortem mirabili dexterae Excelsi immutatione nuper translatum (\textit{The Letters of Saint Peter Damian}, Patrologia Latina 144: col. 403).
By the twelfth century, monastic concern for the souls of departed brethren was intensified as the ghosts of dead monks began to return much more frequently to remind their brethren of their duties towards them, and thereafter share the triumph of their glory which their brothers' labour had helped achieve. Very often, the colour of the departed soul's body or clothing changed from dark (in its unexpurgated state) to light to signify that it had been purified of its sins.¹⁹ Monastic suffrages for the dead also encouraged a much more quotidian place for vicarious suffering. The twelfth-century author of the De rebus gestis in Majori Monasterio, written to encourage the monks of Marmoutier to be zealous in their suffrages for the dead, saw vicarious suffering as a routine part of the ideal monastic observance which he commended in this passage:

Whenever one of the brothers had recently died, his confessor was questioned in public regarding the penance imposed on him. And when it was heard, you would have seen the burden of the dead brother eagerly taken up with wondrous passion by the brothers. This one seized for himself psalms, this one masses, another fasts, and another disciplining with whips. Truly with a wondrous ardor

¹⁹ The idea that the colour of a soul indicated the state of its purgation can be found at least as early as Plutarch, in On the Delays of the Divine Vengeance, 564C - 565E. Plutarch reports on the travels of a man from Soli to the underworld. The souls there had varied appearances: some were bright and moonlike, some covered in scales, some bruised-looking, some mottled, or covered in black "tattoo-marks", some covered with scratches. Souls were also colour-coded according to the passions which their owners had indulged: some were brown from greed, some red from cruelty, some blue-grey from incontinence, some green from envy. These colours would fade, and the souls would grow more luminous in the course of their purgation. This precise colour coding was not used by medieval writers, who retained the bare bones of the narrative: the colour and darkness of a soul represented the sins committed by it on earth, and the colour was gradually washed away by the process of purgation.
of love that apostolic saying was fulfilled, "Bear one another's burdens and thus you will fulfil the law of Christ."  

IV

Guibert of Nogent's account, written in the early twelfth century, of the suffering his mother endured in order to ease the penance of her dead husband, has not only preserved a precious early example of the practice of vicarious penance for the dead outside of the male monastic milieu, but also provides a powerful illustration of the emotional ties with the dead which a detailed and concrete understanding of the nature and workings of purgatory could encourage. Guibert described his mother as obsessively anxious about her own sexuality, her own sins (which she confessed every day), and the sins of her late husband, Evrard, especially the adulterous sexual relations he had during the time the pair were unable to consummate their marriage. Her close ties with clerics and monks may have helped her widen her understanding of the afterlife to the point where she was able to forge her own solution to the complex mixture of shame, piety and guilt her husband's memory evoked in her.

Soon after his death, Guibert's mother had received visions of her late husband in torment, and had set herself the task of helping him with prayer, almsgiving and masses.


22 Praying for the souls of the dead, in the belief that their post-mortem condition could be altered for the better, was a practice that can be traced back to the first centuries of Christianity.
Prayer for the dead was soon supplemented with certain other pious activities. St Augustine endorsed the efficacy of prayers, masses and alms for the aid of the dead, and so gave the great weight of his authority to these practices (see, for example, Augustine, *Enchiridion*, chap. 29, pars. 109-10.)

The mechanism by which these actions and not others worked was not clearly defined till the thirteenth century, though the firm principle, formulated by Augustine, that only those dead people who deserved help could be helped, had been established. Prayers, masses and alms continued to be thought of as the most important ways of aiding the dead throughout the Middle Ages, with the occasional addition of fasting to the list. In his *Dialogues*, Gregory the Great affirmed the importance of prayer, almsgiving and above all masses, as the kind of service the living could offer the dead. See, Gregory the Great, *Dialogues*, 3: 150-155 [Bk 4, par. 42, 1-5] (prayer); 2: 207-09 [Bk 2, par. 23, 2-5] (alms); 3: 184-89 [Bk 4, par. 57, 1-7] (the mass). By the thirteenth century, the belief that the length and severity of the penance endured by those in purgatory could be alleviated by the actions of the living was firmly established.

The sacrifice of the Mass was almost always seen as the most efficacious activity on behalf of the dead. Caesarius of Heisterbach lets the soul of a dead person speak for him: "No prayers, no alms can be compared with mass for the saving of souls. In the mass Christ prays, whose body and blood are the alms" (*The Dialogue on Miracles*, trans. H. von E. Scott and C. C. Swinton Bland, 2 vols. [London, 1929] 2: 321).

None of the three established practices carried out for the sake of the dead involved direct suffering on their behalf, or participation in the penances of the dead, though of course, the sacrifice of the mass could be seen as a vicarious sacrifice. Of all the traditional activities in aid of the dead, only fasting involved physical hardship, and it seems never to have gained a very important place in purgatorial piety. Moreover, fasting was traditionally seen as a way of moving the heart of God, rather than a way of sharing in the suffering of others. However, the
But Guibert’s mother then took on a much more active role in seeking out the world of the dead: her soul left her body and made a journey to the underworld, where she was immediately threatened by blackened "souls" which emerged from a pit, until a voice commanded that she be left alone. Her courageous journey enabled her to learn that her husband was being tortured by the wailing of a small child who represented (or was?) an illegitimate child of his who had died unbaptised. Returned to her body, Guibert’s mother resolved that in addition to the traditional suffrages, a more precise and intimate exchange of suffering was required, and "setting like against like, she chose to take on the raising of a little child only a few months old that had lost its parents." The baby tortured its adoptive mother by its wailing and crying, but she bore this suffering willingly, and "since she knew that these troubles were to purge away those of her husband, which she had seen in her vision, she bore them gladly, because she rightly thought that by sharing his suffering herself she was lessening the pains of the other sufferer."

consistent affirmation of the efficacy of prayer, fasting and almsgiving for the dead offered a powerful example of activity by the living on behalf of the dead, by one person on behalf of another, and was of fundamental importance to the development of vicarious penance.

Moreover, in addition to the traditional three, authors not infrequently expressed, usually in vague terms, a belief that other pious, penitential activity must be of use to the dead. For example, Bonaventure lists these activities as beneficial for the dead: "Masses, fastings, alms, and other forms of prayer and penance for the purpose of facilitating and hastening the expiation of their sins," and although he only discusses prayers, masses, fasting and alms individually, he wanted to leave the door open for other pious activity (Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, ch. 3. pars. 1-2, in *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck [Paterson, N. J., 1960-70], 2: 285-86).

23 Ibid., 96.
24 Ibid.
Guibert's mother had seen the possibilities for emotional engagement with the denizens of a concrete and accessible afterworld, and this only served to extend the logical symmetries of monastic vicarious suffering: she envisaged a penitential system in which the dead not only suffer punishments which are in some way appropriate to the sins they have committed, but in which the living, by replicating on earth the punishment endured by penitent souls, could take their suffering on themselves. As a laywoman, Guibert's mother prayed not for the members of a religious community, but for her family. As Barbara Newman has pointed out, through their suffering, women like Guibert's mother, whose religious devotion had left them open to charges of dereliction of wifely duty, could render valuable service to their husbands and families.25

V

The monastic model of vicarious suffering as an extension of vicarious penance retained its importance throughout the Middle Ages; alongside this model, however, Anselm of Canterbury's revolutionary new understanding of Christ's death and suffering would again encourage Christians, as it had encouraged Paul, to see Jesus as a direct model for the vicarious suffering of humans for each other. Against the earlier devil's rights theory, Anselm argued that it was impossible that the devil had ever held any just rights over humans.26 His own theory asserted that humankind needed to make reparation to God for the loss of honour God had suffered when humankind had refused to grant to him the obedience which was his by right.27 If satisfaction was not offered for sin by the sinner, the preservation of the

27 Ibid., Bk. 1, chap. 11, pp. 69-71.
harmony of the creation made it necessary for God to exact punishment for that sin instead.28 And even though the amount of satisfaction owed by humankind was beyond their means to repay, the obligation remained.29 So it was that only Christ, since he was both human and divine was able to make the necessary satisfaction for humankind.30

Despite the fact that Anselm denied to humans the ability to perform actions which God was obliged to recognise as meritorious,31 his theory nevertheless provided an important model for vicarious penance. Anselm's ideas about the mechanisms of Christ's saving work emphasised the direct vicarious suffering of Christ far more than had the earlier theories: Christ's "reward" earnt by his obedience in death satisfied the penalty which humankind owed to God. Anselm also gave new emphasis to the supererogatory nature of Christ's suffering, since Christ was able to earn the reward he gave to others, because he suffered and died despite the fact that he did not deserve to be punished for sin. Anselm argued that in dying obediently on the cross, Christ had created an objective obligation on the part of God towards

28 Ibid., Bk. 1, chap. 15, pp. 72-74. Anselm's explanation of this point is a good example of his commitment to an objectively rational and just world order: "If divine wisdom did not make these [conditions] when wrong-doing threatened to disturb the right order of the world, there would be a certain deformation caused by the violation of beauty of the world-order in that very world which God ought to regulate, and God would seem to fail in his own planning" (73).

29 Ibid., Bk. 1, chap. 20, pp. 86-88; for the magnitude of the sin, Bk. 1, chap. 25, pp. 88-90.


31 Anselm stated that no one could justify another person, because he or she was a sinner him- or herself, and a sinner could not justify another sinner (Ibid., Bk. 1, chap. 24, p. 94). It would be a moot point for later theologians whether other humans could provide merit to satisfy original sin, which is what Anselm is talking about here.
him, and Christ gave to humankind this reward he was now owed to cover the cost of the satisfaction humanity owed to God.\textsuperscript{32}

Anselm's explanation of Christ's saving work provided an alternative model for altruistic human activity to the struggle against evil on which the devil's rights theory focused. Anselm's theory also placed a heavier emphasis on the suffering of Christ than had been the case in the devil's rights theory. Instead of the pivotal moments of the story lying in the moment of Christ's death, the moment when the devil finally overstepped the mark, and then in the resurrection and the harrowing of hell, there was now more interest focused on the suffering that Christ endured on the cross, as Christ's suffering was now seen as undeserved punishment which (according to a presumed standard of dreadfulness) earns a reward. If a person, following the example of Christ, who did not deserve to suffer, did in fact suffer, then God was obliged to give that person a reward, which he or she might pass on to someone else.

In addition to the direct model for redemptive suffering that Anselm's theory provided, his theory was also noteworthy for its assumption of a closed system of abstract universal justice which demanded predetermined responses to particular actions.\textsuperscript{33} This closed legal system would foreshadow the legally precise understanding of penance and merit developed by theologians in the thirteenth century.

Thomas Aquinas, and other thirteenth-century theologians, drew on Anselm's work, as well as Peter Lombard's restatement of the Anselmian notion of satisfaction under the new name of "merit," to further refine the theology of Christ's passion and death, and in so doing

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., Bk. 2, chap. 19, pp. 129-31.

\textsuperscript{33} The rule of law had also been a vital feature of the world order within which the devil's rights theory was played out, but the order and justice of Anselm's world was more precise and definite.
furthered the revolution begun by Anselm.³⁴ In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas taught that Christ, by suffering voluntarily for the sake of justice, merited eternal life, not only for himself, but for all humankind, and he was able to clarify how it was that Christ's merits could be transferred to others: this was because as head of the church, his merit could flow to the members of the church.³⁵ Aquinas argued that Christ's merit was accepted by God as superabundant satisfaction for the sins of humankind, and offered an explanation of why Christ's suffering and death were able to compensate for such a great penalty: it was because of the great love Christ has shown in suffering willingly and obediently, because of the great dignity of the life he surrendered up to death, and because of the magnitude of the suffering he endured.³⁶

³⁴ Peter Lombard (d. c. 1160) brought an important and influential new element into the mainstream of theology of redemption when he organised his fairly short discussion of the saving work of Christ in the *Sentences* around the concept of merit (Bk. 3, Distinctio 18, esp. chaps. 1-5). Thinking about the saving work of Christ had, in fact, been important to the development of the subject of merit itself: the concept of merit had a place in writings on Christ before it developed as a subject in its own right. Lombard's work was important to both developments, as the *Sentences* also includes the first systematic treatment of merit (see esp. Bk. 2, Distinctiones 16-17). Instead of concentrating on the satisfaction which Christ made on behalf of humankind, as had Anselm, Lombard emphasised the merit which Christ had earned for himself from the time of his birth, and especially the merit he had earned for humankind in his passion and death (Bk. 3, Distinctio 18, chap. 5, 1).

³⁵ Alongside his development of Anselmian ideas of the saving work of Christ, Aquinas still had a place, if a minor one, for the rights of the devil: Christ is our redeemer, because he delivers humankind from slavery to the devil, and so the satisfaction Christ offers to God may also be thought of as a ransom of sorts (*ST*, 3a., q. 48, a. 4).

³⁶ *ST*, 3a., q. 48, a. 1-2. For Christ's ability to earn merit for others, see also *ST*, 3a., q. 19, a. 3.
By the time of the writing of the *Summa Theologicae*, then, a theology of the saving work of Christ which had direct correspondences with the practice of vicarious suffering was fully articulated. Christ, in his role of saviour of humankind, could offer a clear model of someone whose suffering, because it was undeserved, and because the sufferer had no need for the rewards his suffering earned, created a positive and objective force in the world. The magnitude of this force, merit, was determined in proportion to the intentions of the sufferer, the nature of the sufferer, and according to the degree of suffering. And finally, Christ offered a model of someone whose merits could be applied to the satisfaction of the penalty which was due to the sins of others.37

Aquinas taught that not only Christ, but also humans could accrue merit: he argued that God had ordained that his relationships with humans should be ordered according to an objective, rational organisation of merit and punishment, so that God was obliged to recognise and reward the actions of humans in a predictable fashion.38 God had voluntarily bound himself to a system within which humans could be accorded actual merit for practising virtues and performing good works, as well as being liable to punishment for their sins.39 He wanted

37 In addition to the idea of Christ’s passion being efficacious through the merit it earned, and the satisfaction it made, Aquinas also affirmed the Biblical idea that Christ’s passion and death were also efficacious as a sacrifice, in as much as the great love which motivated Christ’s passion pleased God, and affected a reconciliation between God and humankind. This idea also offered a clear model for Christlike human behaviour on behalf of others (*ST*, 3a., q. 48, a. 3).

38 The theology of merit is fundamentally a high medieval creation: it was extremely sketchy at the beginning of the twelfth century, but was fully formed by the end of the thirteenth. See Jean Rivière, "Mérite," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 10 (Paris, 1928), cols. 662-710.

39 Aquinas points out that the system is arbitrarily ordained by God, as human good works cannot actually earn merit independently of God, or in sufficient quantities to outweigh human
humans to work within a system in which they were able to earn measurable merit, and to apply this merit to the lessening of the punishment due to them for their sins, and indeed, to the meriting of eternal life. The concept of merit could describe both the activity of Christ and humankind, and provided even stronger links between the saving work of Christ and the penitential activity of humans. And if the merit earned by Christ might be applied to others, it was also true that merit gained by one person could indeed also be transferred to others. The existence of merit as an objective, positive force, and the mutual obligations which existed between God and humans which were its theological corollary, were, as we shall see, important assumptions the mulieres religiosae made about their religious world.

The new focus in theology on Christ's suffering and death as meritorious was of course echoed by the novel attention given to the humanity of Christ, and especially his sufferings, in high medieval spirituality. Anselm of Canterbury was again a key figure in

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sin, or to compare with God's own goodness (ST 114. a. 1-2, esp. a. 1. resp.). The idea of God's ordination is Aquinas' great contribution to the theology of merit. See Joseph P. Wawrykow, "'Merit' in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas," Ph. D. thesis, Yale University, 1988: "Just as God has freely determined to create in a particular way, and just as God has freely decided to save certain people by drawing them into the life of God, so God has freely ordained to accept as worthy of eternal life the good which people do in the free movement to God" (p. 34). See also, Michael Argus, "Divine Self-Expression Through Human Merit According to Thomas Aquinas," Ph. D. Thesis, University of Toronto, 1990.

40 ST 114, a. 3.

41 The only exception to this was that only Christ could earn for another the first grace, the grace that first brought a sinful person to God, at least in terms of strict justice. God could however through his mercy choose to allow the merit of one person to be applied to the first grace of another (ST, q. 114, a. 6).

the new devotion to the human Christ, as were the Cistercians Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx, whose meditations on the life of Christ laid the basis for the passionate devotion to *imitatio Christi* exemplified by St Francis and his followers. As Caroline Bynum has shown, devotion to Christ's humanity was especially important to religious women, who identified themselves with Christ's frail humanity, and because of this identification looked with new confidence on their own bodies as sources of holiness.\(^{43}\) Many female saints felt the message of the crucified Christ was an invitation to suffer, a message he delivered in no uncertain terms to Elisabeth of Schönau: "And when to the whole world he had displayed the cross on which he had hung and the wounds of his passion dripping as if with fresh blood, he shouted with a loud and exceedingly dreadful voice, saying: 'Such things have I endured for you, but what have you suffered for me?'"\(^{44}\) The desire to imitate the virtues of Christ's earthly life provided a powerful encouragement to physical imitation of Christ's suffering, whether to prove one's devotion to Christ, to do penance for one's sins, or for the aid of others.

VI

We have already seen that the precociously precise understanding held by Guibert of Nogent's mother of the world beyond as a place of purgation for the sins committed in this world and as one whose inhabitants could be helped by those in this world played an important role in the vicarious suffering she undertook on behalf of her husband. In the late twelfth century, as Jacques Le Goff has shown, a newly systematic notion of purgatory as one


of the destinations for the souls of dead humans was developed, as purgatory was firmly integrated into a newly precise understanding of the nature and consequences of sin and penance.\textsuperscript{45} Clarification of the linearity of time in purgatory so that penance there could be meaningfully measured according to human notions of time, of the types of sins which would lead to a posthumous sojourn in purgatory or alternatively lasting perdition in hell, and of the role confession and earthly penance played in minimising one's purgation enabled purgatory. and the penitential system of which it was part, to attain the importance it would have in late medieval religion.

The new certainty with which purgatory could be imagined as a place, and understood as an extension of the penitential process begun on earth, provided many late medieval religious women with powerful new narratives around which to organise their religious activities and aspirations. As Barbara Newman has argued, religious women were especially prominent both as "midwives" at the birth of purgatory and as apostles to those suffering purgatorial penance: the visionary and hagiographical literature suggests that "purgatorial piety, while not the exclusive preserve of women, occupied a privileged place and took on a distinctive character in their religious lives."\textsuperscript{46} Purgatory loomed large in the devotional activity and visionary experience of many female saints in the late Middle Ages: it appeared as a world of opportunity, unmarked by terrestrial social distinctions, and uniquely open to the intervention of women achieved through their prayers and, also, their redemptive, vicarious suffering.

\textbf{VII}

The importance of the new social and religious roles which late medieval women created through their spiritual charity, the prayers, fasts and suffering they offered for others, and especially the dead in purgatory, has been well established by the recent work of Jo Ann

\textsuperscript{45} Le Goff, \textit{The Birth of Purgatory}, esp. chap. 7.

\textsuperscript{46} Newman, \textit{From Virile Woman}, 109-36, quote at 111.
McNamara and Barbara Newman. Among the thirteenth-century holy women who pioneered this new kind of spirituality, the *mulieres religiosae* of Liège have a special place. The *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae* are the earliest saints' lives in which purgatorial piety, and in particular, the practice of vicarious suffering, become dominant themes. And although not every one of the *vitae* portrays a saint zealous to share her virtues with others, the corpus as a whole is remarkable for its emphasis on achieving the salvation of others through the positive force of one's own virtue.

There is no simple explanation why the *mulieres religiosae* should have become innovators in this new area of spirituality. However, the strong influence in this region of Cistercian piety, with its traditional emphasis on monastic suffrages for the dead, must have played an important part; as did the influence of clerical mentors and biographers such as Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, each of whom is known to have had a keen interest in purgatory. The precocious interest in mystical religion which characterises the *vitae* was probably another factor: the privileged, mystical knowledge the *mulieres religiosae* had of the hidden sins of others, of the worlds beyond, and of the future status of souls was a crucial ingredient in their ministry to others. Much of their activity was initiated by divinely revealed knowledge of the need for intervention, and the eventual success of their labour was also confirmed in a similar way. Finally, it is possible that the importance of commerce in the highly urbanised Low Countries - the fathers of Ida of Louvain, Marie d'Oignies, Lutgard of Awyières and Juette of Huy were all employed in urban commerce or financial administration - meant that the commercial contract may have offered a pertinent model of a highly structured, standardised way of measuring obligation for the rationalised exchanges at the heart of much purgatorial piety and vicarious suffering.

The spiritual and social world of the *mulieres religiosae* of Liège was profoundly shaped by a vivid, and often urgent, realisation of the inevitability of God's judgement of souls, together with an unwavering confidence in the power their own virtues, and their compassion, had to affect the spiritual lives of others. For many of the *mulieres religiosae* the
possibilities for ministering to the spiritual needs of others by sharing in their pain or
temptation brought with them new kinds of relationships. Familial ties, spiritual friendships,
pastoral relationships, and the bonds of monastic community were all relationships which
could be created, commented upon, or manipulated by the bestowal of spiritual charity. Even
more than this, the redemptive labour the *mulieres religiosae* took up on behalf of others could
also bring new meaning and depth to their identification with Christ, as they boldly shared
with him the task of suffering, and interceding, for humankind.

In the remaining sections of this chapter, we will follow the developing interest in
spiritual charity and purgatorial piety, and, in particular, the emergence of the practice of
vicarious suffering in the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*. The discussion will concentrate on
the six *mulieres religiosae* whose biographies give prominence to their zeal for souls: Marie
d'Oignies, Juette of Huy, Ida of Nivelles, Christina Mirabilis, Lutgard of Aywières and Alice
of Schaerbeek. The spiritual ministry of each woman will be considered in the wider context
of the material charity she offered others, and also in the context of her understandings of the
afterworld, of the nature of God's justice, of the value of physical pain, of the possibilities for
participating in the religious experience of others, and of course, of her relationship with
Christ. I hope in this way to do justice to the richness and variety of images, role-models and
narratives of process which each of the *mulieres religiosae* shaped into a powerful social and
religious practice.

The task I have set myself in this chapter has confronted me once more with the
difficulty of distinguishing between the spirituality of the *mulieres religiosae* and that of their
biographers. It is a problem which can never be finally solved. I have, however, made broad,
and I hope, reasonable, distinctions between the biographies that are closest to their subjects,
and those, including the *vitae* of Christina Mirabilis and Alice of Schaerbeek, whose distance
from their subjects means that they can tell us more about the thoughts of their biographers,
and also occasionally, between commentary which is clearly authorial, and narratives which
seem to represent accounts of the saint's own experience.
VIII

In the idiosyncratic forms of spiritual charity developed by Marie d'Oignies (d. 1213), Juette of Huy (d. 1228) and Ida of Nivelles (d. 1231), whose biographies are three of the earliest vitae from our corpus, we can chart the beginnings of the zeal for souls which would be characteristic of many of the mulieres religiosae. The Life of Marie d'Oignies, as we shall see, was as much a pioneering work in the history of spiritual charity and purgatorial piety as it was in the history of mystical biography: Marie had begun to see the possibilities of offering herself for the salvation of others, including the possibilities and responsibilities which the new doctrine of purgatory opened up for the living. In the Life of Juette of Huy, whose subject was, in contrast to Marie, apparently ignorant of the existence of purgatory and the needs of the souls suffering there, we seem to have a precious glimpse of a theologically quite individual route to spiritual charity, framed before the practice of spiritual charity was transformed by the advent of purgatory. And then, in our third vita, the Life of Ida of Nivelles, an extraordinary document which has not yet received the attention it deserves, we are suddenly confronted with a fully articulated spirituality built around vicarious suffering for the living and the dead.

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The early date of the Life of Marie d'Oignies and the rich account it offers of so many aspects of Marie's religious imagination makes the evidence of the Vita Mariae particularly valuable as a source for the development of spiritual charity amongst the mulieres religiosae. Much of what characterises Marie's relationships with others - her determination to use her own merits and gifts to work for the salvation of others, her acceptance of the objectivity of merit, her confidence in the possibility of transferring merit from one person to another, her incorporation of voluntary suffering into the fabric of her relationships with others and her precocious concern for the souls in purgatory - would have strong resonances in the lives and
thoughts of later _mulieres religiosae_. And while we do not yet see the practice of vicarious suffering for the living or the dead in the _Vita Mariae_, many of the ideas and devotional activities from which this practice would emerge are already clearly outlined there.

Throughout her life, Marie d'Oignies ministered to those around her by offering the benefit of her prayers, of her privileged knowledge of divine secrets, of her suffering, and of her assistance in fighting against demons. At the heart of her spiritual charity was her zeal for souls, a fundamental element in the ideal of the apostolic life which Marie d'Oignies, and her mentor Jacques de Vitry, held dear.47 Marie deeply admired the missionary vocation of the preacher, whose words captured souls, and regretted her own inability to share in it, as her heroes, the apostles Paul, Andrew and Stephen, and her "own preacher," Jacques de Vitry, had been able to do.48 On her deathbed, Marie's fondest wish for the world was expressed in a jubilant prediction of the imminent arrival of a new wave of "labourers" who would be sent by the Holy Spirit throughout the church, like the missionary apostles, "for the profit of souls."49

The zeal for souls which characterised the apostolic preacher provided a model for Marie's efforts on behalf of others, while at the same time, Marie's spiritual charity enabled her to share in an active apostolate of her own. While still at the leper house at Willambrouk where she spent the early years of her religious life, Marie poured her spiritual energies into the pastoral work she provided for spiritual children such as the knight, Ywain.50 The

47 The high value Marie placed on poverty and manual labour were also important parts of this ideal. See Jacques de Vitry, _[Vita] de B. Maria Oigniacensi_, ed. D. Papenbroeck, in _Acta Sanctorum_, June vol. 5 [June 23] (Paris, 1867), 547-72, at Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 45, p. 557.
48 _Vita Mariae_, Bk. 2, chap. 11, pars. 100-01, pp. 569-70; Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 103, p. 570.
49 _Vita Mariae_, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 100, pp. 569-70.
50 _Vita Mariae_, Bk. 2, chap. 6, pars. 58-59, p. 560. Although Marie d'Oignies began her religious career in the leper community at Willambrouk, her biographer makes no link between
pastoral care she offered seems to have been popular: Marie's decision to leave Willambrouk for the community at Oignies was apparently prompted by her desire to escape the heavy demands made on her by those who sought out her help and guidance.51

After her withdrawal to Oignies, Marie's pastoral care focused more closely on her own circle of friends and on the community of religious at Oignies. Marie's spiritual charity helped cement her closest relationships: much of her attention was lavished on her "intimate friends," including, of course, her mentor and confessor, Jacques de Vitry. Cistercian nuns and monks, who formed part of a wider circle of Marie's spiritual friends, also regularly benefited from her help.52 And like priests, Marie had a special mission to any of her flock the active charity she might have performed for the sick and the spiritual charity which Marie began to dispense while still at Willambrouk. Jacques does briefly mention that Marie dedicated herself to "works of mercy" for the sick after she had come to live in the community of Augustinian canons at Oignies, but here again Jacques stresses the spiritual charity Marie provided: as well as assisting the sick, she had a special concern for the souls of the dying, and would often take her place at their bedsides, where she would transform her active charity into spiritual charity by throwing herself into a violent struggle for their salvation (Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 50, p. 558). Jacques de Vitry obviously considered Marie's spiritual charity to be of far greater interest than her active charity, though the extent to which Marie dedicated herself to the latter is unclear. Michel Lauwers argues that Jacques was keen to downplay the active charity of Marie's semi-religious life in order to make his biography more palatable to the church authorities as a model for other semi-religious ("Expérience béguinale et récit hagiographique," Journal des savants [1989], 61-103).

51 Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 11, par. 93, p. 568.

52 For Marie's efforts on behalf of her "intimate friends," see Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 47, p. 558; Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 77, p. 564, for the guidance and help she offers the women of her community at Oignies, see Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 50, p. 558; for the Cistercians who benefit from her merits, see Bk. 2, chap. 6, pars. 62-63, p. 561.
who were mortally ill: both at Willambrouk, and also later at Oignies, it was the souls of dying members of her own community, often people whose sins she knew all too well, for whom she pitted her own virtues against the powers of darkness.\textsuperscript{53}

Marie's zeal for the salvation of the souls she took into her care rested on her vivid consciousness of the unflinching and objective justice of God's interactions with humankind, an understanding which she shared with most of the mulieres religiosae. Marie was certain that God would punish sin, and equally confident that he would repay virtue with the merit or reward with which it was strictly commensurate; it may be that the thought patterns of the commercial world in which she had been raised in Nivelles, and which she despised so vehemently, were more difficult to escape than she had imagined. Marie's confidence in God's justice gave passionate impetus to her determination to fight for the souls of others, who would surely otherwise face deserved punishment. Her confidence also helped her to place objective value on her own virtue: God, for instance, would repay her in heaven for withdrawing from her marriage.\textsuperscript{54} Likewise, he had already during her lifetime repaid with inner spiritual delights the bodily pleasure she forwent through her fasting.\textsuperscript{55} Her firm belief that merit was finite and quantifiable even caused her to limit her sleep, as she knew that no merit could be earned during a time when free will was inactive; clearly she was her merchant father's daughter.\textsuperscript{56}

But more than this, Marie confidently believed that God's justice towards humans could be achieved through a transferral of merit from one person to another. The truth of this was confirmed for her when she demanded to be repaid for the merit she was unable to gain for herself through the office of preaching, and God responded by granting her the gift of "a\textsuperscript{53} Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 6, par. 52, p. 559 (at Willambrouk); Bk. 1, chap. 6, pars. 50-51, pp. 558-59 (Oignies).

\textsuperscript{54} Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 14, p. 550.

\textsuperscript{55} Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 24, p. 552.

\textsuperscript{56} Vita Mariae, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 33, p. 554."
preacher," the benefits of whose preaching she would share.57 So, too, could Marie's own merits be used to benefit others: it was because of her merits, God revealed to Marie, that he had been able to keep her friends from a "great pit of sin."58 Marie's friends undoubtedly shared her belief that her spiritual power could be transferred to them, and welcomed the ties to Marie these transfers created: Jacques de Vitry reports that those present at Marie's death felt that they had received consolation through her merits;59 while a vision of Marie, now in heaven, was granted to a Cistercian monk after her death, in which she offered drink to her friends, an action which suggested a similar transferral.60

If we look for Christological parallels in the *Vita Mariae* for transferrals of spiritual power, we find that it is the sacramental body of Christ, rather than the crucified Christ, which provided a direct model for the communicability of spiritual good. For Marie, Christ's body, and his merit, were shared in the communion for which she so longed; as she communicated, Christ's body simply "melted" into hers.61 A similar transferral took place during the reception of extreme unction: she understood through a revelation that Christ was transfusing himself through the entire body of the sick person.62 The possibility of transferring merit from one person to another which had captured Marie's imagination was, of course, a crucial part of the spiritual outlook which would encourage saints to share their merits, and especially their suffering, with others, and so it is important to recognise her familiarity with the concept. And yet, as we shall see, Marie seems not to have thought of her own spiritual charity as primarily a process in which she transferred her merits to others.

57 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 69, pp. 562-63.
58 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 61, p. 561.
60 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 109, p. 572.
61 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 25, p. 552; Bk. 2, chap. 10, par. 92, p. 568; Bk. 2, chap. 12, par. 105, p. 571 (the quote is from this last passage).
Marie's voluntary acceptance of pain, both emotional and physical, which she often took upon herself as part of her spiritual charity, was also an important precedent for the later *mulieres religiosae*. Marie took on an arduous daily round of prayer, which included striking herself three hundred times for the help of others, especially her friends, and those oppressed by demons. Moreover, in the weeping and groaning which accompanied her prayers, Marie experienced deep emotional, as well as a measure of bodily, suffering. She welcomed the suffering illness brought, and the opportunity it provided to share the sufferings of others: whenever one of her friends was enduring trouble or temptation, Marie would become ill with the same kind of sorrow they were enduring, while the wavering conversion of her spiritual son, the knight Ywain, made her sick with sadness and anxiety.

Marie's deep awareness of the sufferings of the crucified Christ would have served her as a model for her own voluntary acceptance of suffering: we are told that the memory of the passion caused Marie deep and repeated distress, many tears, and often caused her to fall into ecstasy. Marie's biographer makes an explicit link between the two when he speaks of Marie taking up Christ's cross when she afflicted her own body; indeed, while she suffered.

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63 Pain could also communicate meaning to Marie: when she was forced to walk through the streets of Nivelles, the wretchedness of the state of people there caused her to feel physical pain in her feet (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 67, p. 562).

64 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 29, p. 553.

65 Ibid. Although she could do nothing to help them, Marie wept, groaned and cried out like a woman in childbirth when a troop of demons caused a group of holy women to flee from their home in Manne (Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 56, p. 560).

66 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 40, p. 556. Marie apparently could not see a sick person without wanting their illness (*Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 8, par. 74, p. 563).

67 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 59, p. 560.

the memory of Christ made her pain "sweet to her." The place Marie forged for suffering in her relationships with others, and likewise the possibilities for connecting the suffering of Christ with her own suffering which we find in the *Vita Mariae* set precedents of enormous importance for the later *mulieres religiosae*. And yet, these elements are not yet formed into a theology which would understand Marie's suffering as creating objective merit she could transfer to others. Marie did not suffer in the place of others, as Christ had done, but instead she shared the suffering of others. Christ's passion seems to have suggested to her that her pain was in itself virtuous as an expression of compassion for others, or that it would move God more swiftly to answer her prayers, but not that she herself could help others by taking on their pain or punishment.

It was not the suffering Christ, then, but rather Jesus, the exorciser of demons, and Christ, the liberator of humankind from the thrall of the devil, who provided the dominant models for the spiritual assistance Marie rendered to others, and here Marie stands apart from the rest of the *mulieres religiosae*. Demons make frequent appearances in the *vita* as the jealous and malicious enemies of humankind, and Marie fought them with her prayer and fasting, in order to liberate souls from their power. For instance, by pouring out many prayers and fasting for forty days, Marie, "overflowing with the spirit of compassion," rescued a Cistercian nun from deep, suicidal despair brought on by the evil work of a demon, whose hold on the nun had not previously been weakened by the insistent prayers of her fellow sisters. Marie was then able to exorcise the demon, and sent him to hell. When any friend was troubled by temptation, she would not cease to pray for that needy person until she had snatched them from the hands of the demons. Likewise, through her prayers, she once forced a demon to cease sending a brother false revelations. 

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69 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 21, pp. 551-52; Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 23, p. 552.

70 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 3, pars. 31-32, pp. 553-54.

71 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 29, p. 553.

72 *Vita Mariae*, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 30, p. 553.
demons were also common, as Marie fought on the side of the angels against a crowd of devils for possession of a soul. The emphasis placed on demons in Marie's cosmology allowed her to act on behalf of souls without either needing to call on God, in his mercy, to act outside the demands of strict justice, or needing to satisfy his justice through her own objective merits, the choice faced by the later mulieres religiosae, in whose worlds far fewer demons lived. Fighting the inarguably evil forces of the devil left God's justice more or less intact.

The precocious interest Marie d'Oignies had in purgatory, and her compassion for the souls who suffered there would also be a feature of many of the mulieres religiosae. Jacques de Vitry, who was the author of some early exempla on purgatory, must surely have taught Marie of the purgatory he had learnt of as a student in Paris. For Marie and her contemporaries purgatory was obviously a relatively new concept, and she often seems to be grappling with its logical and emotional implications. For her lay disciples, however, Marie was an expert in a new field of knowledge: one of her spiritual sons, a merchant of Nivelles, recounted the teaching Marie had given him on purgatory, of which he apparently had been ignorant, in which she emphasised the hope, rather than fear, which purgatory should bring to the penitent sinner. For Marie herself, knowledge of purgatory also brought with it a heavy awareness of the countless souls suffering there who could benefit from the "ointment" of her prayers. Marie's anxiety about the responsibility this brought was expressed in frightening visions, in which innumerable hands would reach out towards her in supplication, and attempt to cling to her when she ran for help: these were the souls in purgatory who had been left

73 Vita Mariae, Bk. 2, chap. 6, pars. 50-52, pp. 558-59.

74 Le Goff, The Birth of Purgatory, 298-300.

uncomforted while Marie was in ecstatic communion with God alone.\textsuperscript{76} Marie's purgatory is rather sketchily described: Marie herself never enters purgatory nor do her visions give any clue to its geography. She is, however, shown enough in one vision to see the punishments which befell a fellow sister, and to learn of the sins for which they were imposed.\textsuperscript{77} Marie had also to learn of the limits of her ability to help the dead: in a rather chilling episode, Marie's own mother appeared to advise her that the prayers she had been offering for her soul were of no avail, as she had been damned to hell.\textsuperscript{78} Those in good standing with the Lord, on the other hand, such as the well-known patron of religious women, John of Dinant, the crusaders who died fighting the Albigensians, and Marie herself, would bypass purgatory completely.\textsuperscript{79}

Encouraged by the impetus of her desire to participate in an active apostolate, and drawing on the teaching on purgatory she no doubt received from her mentor Jacques de Vitry and the thought patterns of the commercial milieu in which she was raised, Marie d'Oignies had during her life shaped the religious imagery and narrative frameworks which were available to her to create a spirituality which allowed her to offer her spiritual achievements to others. Although she would have no followers amongst the mulieres religiosae in her vision of spiritual charity as a war waged on behalf of others against demons, her understanding of the objectivity and transferability of merit, the role she found for voluntary suffering in her

\textsuperscript{76}\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 27, p. 553. Similarly, Marie was assured by a demon himself that her rest was just as tormenting for him as her prayers (Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 32, p. 554).

\textsuperscript{77}\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 51, p. 559.

\textsuperscript{78}\textit{Vita Mariae, Supplementum}, chap. 2, par. 12, p. 576; Marie is also advised that her prayers for a man who died in a tournament were useless, as he was damned (\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 1, chap. 3, par. 27, p. 553).

\textsuperscript{79}\textit{Vita Mariae}, Bk. 2, chap. 6, par. 53, p. 559 (John of Dinant); Bk. 2, chap. 9, par. 82, p. 565 (the crusaders); Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 38, pp. 555-56 (Marie).
relationships with others, and her awareness of her responsibilities towards those in purgatory broke new ground which later *mulieres religiosae* would be eager to cultivate.

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Although Marie d'Oignies was to predecease her older contemporary, Juette of Huy (1158-1228) by fifteen years, she was still a small girl living in Nivelles when Juette, as a twenty-three year old mother of two surviving children, embarked on her long religious career by joining the leper community outside her home town of Huy. Read beside Jacques de Vitry's account of Marie d'Oignies, the spirituality of Hugh of Floreffe's *Vita Juettae* seems curiously old-fashioned, despite the novelty of the lay religious life which had been taken up by its subject. Juette, apparently, had no knowledge of purgatory, and the needs of the souls who suffered there. Nor was she at all attracted to personal, affective devotion to the human Christ, or more importantly, to the suffering Christ of the passion, in whom she might have found a model for redemptive activity on behalf of others. And yet, using her own blend of religious imagery and narratives of spiritual exchange, Juette succeeded in fashioning an active ministry in which she distributed her own spiritual wealth to those around her.

In Hugh of Floreffe's account, Juette's passionate ministry to those around her serves as one of the major themes of the *vita*, alongside Juette's conversion and life-long penance for the sins of her youth, her continuing relationships with her family, and the growing material and spiritual prosperity the leper community of Huy achieved under Juette's guidance. Juette's active charity began while she was still living in the world, when she would offer alms to the
poor and hospitality to pilgrims. Hugh makes explicit mention of the menial cleaning and nursing tasks she performed for the lepers after she entered the leper community at Huy.

After eleven years of active charity to the lepers, Juette chose to be enclosed as a recluse within the leper community, and thereafter concentrated her charitable efforts on helping "countless" others in their spiritual lives: "Who would be able to tell," her biographer enthused, "how many people, and what sorts of people, she called back from such a number of evils, or which ones, and how many she called to good things, how many she incited to the best things, how many she sent to their first attempts at the discipline of a rule at various monasteries, how many she sent back to abandoned attempts?"
Juette's efforts for others were, however, always restricted to this world: purgatory does not figure in the *vita*, and Juette does not see her apostolate extending to the dead.83 The complete absence of purgatory from the *Life* of Juette (which was written sometime between 1228 and 1239) may be explained by her age and the relative lack of external influences to which she was subject. Juette's spiritual world-view was probably formed before the rapid spread of knowledge about purgatory which seems to have occurred in the first decades of the thirteenth century. Since as a laywoman she lived outside the networks of communication which membership in an established religious order would have brought and apparently never had the close priestly guidance Marie d'Oignies enjoyed, there was less opportunity for the new understanding of the afterlife to form an important place in her mental world thereafter. Amongst the *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*, only the *Vita Juettæ* seems to bear witness to a "pre-purgatory" view of the afterlife.

Juette's understanding of Christ also sets her apart from most of the *mulieres religiosae*. For Juette, Christ is often a quite fearsome and distant figure, who appears to her frequently, and nearly exclusively, in his role as judge of souls. Juette sees herself judged by Christ in a vision, and even towards the end of her life of penance, only feels able to approach him in heaven when she is escorted by Mary Magdalen and the Virgin Mary. Juette seems to have had no interest in the human Christ, and even more strikingly, apparently gave no thought to the sufferings and pain of the crucified Christ. Juette's Christ, the Judge of humankind, could not, then, act as a model for Juette's service to others. Indeed, voluntary

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83 The *vita* contains no reference to any after-death state or place in which souls suffer temporary punishment. The leprosy which a repentant women contracts is described as "purgatorial penance" which will cleanse her from her sins (*Vita Juettæ*, chap. 28, par. 86, p. 161), but it is unclear whether the author is indicating that she is enduring penance she would have undergone in purgatory.
suffering, even for her own sins, seems to have played a very minor role in Juette's religious activity.84

And yet, for Juette, the tangible reality of the judgement each soul would have to face at the hands of Christ had served as the motivation for her own conversion from the world, and also spurred her to encourage and equally, admonish, those around her to turn from their sin.85 Juette's imagination returned again and again to the heavenly tribunal in which Christ passed a sentence of eternal bliss or damnation on a person at the moment of his or her death.86 It was

84 There is only one reference to Juette inflicting physical pain on her body, and that is in the prefatory material, rather than in one of the stories passed down about her (Vita Juettae. Praefatio in vitam, par. 3, p. 146).
85 See Vita Juettae, chap. 27, par. 83, p. 161 and chap. 15, par. 46, p. 154. It is not just Christ who demands strict justice: Mary too urges Christ, when judging a cleric, to take into account the wrongs he had done to her (chap. 32, par. 93, pp. 162-63).

The absence of the "second chance" of purgatory makes it important that the penance that Juette and her father and sons have to undertake before they die is described in some detail, and that their ascension to heaven after their deaths is confirmed (chap. 5, par. 13, p. 147 [Juette's son and father]; chap. 16, par. 48, pp. 154-55; chap. 43, par. 112, p. 166; chap. 56, par. 127, p. 168 [Juette's own purgation]). It may also be the reason why Juette's late husband was never apparently remembered in her prayers.

Although Juette does not have contact with the dead who are not in heaven, nor visit their habitations, she does spend time in heaven (chap. 23, par. 68, pp. 158-59).
86 Amongst the mulieres religiosae, the image of the tribunal was almost unique to Juette: it would be much more common for later mulieres religiosae to receive privileged information as to the post-judgement location or appearance of a soul, or of the purgatorial punishments they were enduring. The role of the status-vision in the saint's counselling work remains, however, the same in all cases: those discovered to be good are encouraged to be better, those who would face damnation if they died in their present state of sin are exhorted to repent.
prior knowledge of this after-death scene of judgment, to which Juette's visionary gifts gave her privileged access, which gave authority to her efforts to guide others to salvation.87 For Hugh of Floreffe, Juette's activities as mediator and guide were guaranteed by the frequent admittance she gained to heavenly secrets such as these; at the same time, Juette was keen to use her time in heaven to intercede on behalf of her friends.88

Despite the seeming lack of resonance Christ's passion and death held for Juette, and her apparent ignorance of a penitential system which included the possibility of doing penance after death in purgatory, Juette nevertheless imagined a spiritual realm in which God accepted that spiritual rewards and punishments could be exchanged, and was confident of the power of her own merit to help her neighbours. Moreover, Juette worked within the judicial model which informed her understanding of Christ's judgement of souls to find a role for an intercessor who worked on behalf of others. Juette herself had been the beneficiary of the Virgin Mary's zeal for her own sinful soul, which had taken the form of an exchange at the moment of judgement: in a vision of her own judgement, in which she is condemned by Christ to damnation for her sins, Juette saw herself rescued from her fate when the Virgin Mary stubbornly insisted that the Lord remit to her Juette's sins and the punishment for them, and dismiss them from Juette herself.89 Juette and her biographer unquestionably saw Juette herself as capable of the kind of exchange which Mary had wrought for her. In a dramatic episode which forms one of the centrepieces in the vita, Juette's merits are deemed sufficient to allow her son, who had been judged worthy of eternal damnation and whose soul was

87 Vita Juettae, Praefatio in vitam, par. 7, p. 146; Vita Juettae, chap. 32, pars. 91-94, pp. 162-63.
88 Vita Juettae, chap. 23, par. 70, p. 159 (intercession for friends); chap. 29, par. 87, p. 161 (knowledge of hidden thoughts and sins); chap. 41, par. 107, p. 165 (access to divine secrets).
89 Vita Juettae, chap. 15, par. 46, p. 154.
about to be taken from his body by demons, a three-year truce in order to repent and amend his life.\textsuperscript{90}

In yet another form of exchange, Juette offered for a spiritual daughter who had been deceived by a priest her lamentation, sighs, prayers and tears, by which she "gave herself as a burnt-offering to the Lord on behalf of her daughter."\textsuperscript{91} Juette not only offered her merits for others, but also, like Mary, took the burdens of others onto herself: she told a monk who was being tried by temptation that he should "allow [the devil's] sword to fall upon" her when he feels irresistible temptation, and furthermore proposed that the reward for any victory she achieved over the monk's temptation be regarded as his.\textsuperscript{92} Juette's spiritual charity, her prayers and merit are, as in this case, very often given, not for the most wretched sinners, but for those who have dedicated themselves to some form of religious life and yet find they have fallen away from their initial resolve. It is tempting to think that Juette's own struggles to establish her own religious life gave her special insight into the needs of these people.

The \textit{Life} of Juette of Huy is, then, a curious and instructive mix of the old and the new: although she spent most of her life enclosed in a cell, Juette of Huy developed an active apostolate to her neighbours. She undoubtedly understood God to be presiding over an objective system of justice and punishment, within which her merit would be accepted in some kind of exchange for the salvation of others. And yet despite her zeal for souls, Juette's world

\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 20, par. 57, pp. 156-57. The son is not in purgatory: the text explicitly states that the soul of Juette's son is destined to be burnt by eternal fires. Juette's merits are not given in exchange for his punishments in purgatory, but to give him time to repent and be judged worthy of heaven.

\textsuperscript{91} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 24, par. 77, p. 160.

\textsuperscript{92} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 30, par. 89, pp. 161-62. Juette's biographer, while he praises Juette for having such a great desire for the salvation of others that she is oblivious to her own, nevertheless adds his own opinion that the merit for Juette's activity on behalf on the monk would go to her as the one who actually suffered the temptation.
is entirely innocent of purgatory, and the possibilities for co-redemption which that realm of suffering souls offered. Juette instead fashioned a systematic approach to exchanging her merits for others using the activity of Mary, rather than Christ, as her model of compassionate service for sinners.

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The occasional, though much detested, journeys Marie d'Oignies made in the last years of her life through her hometown of Nivelles could just possibly have taken her across the path of Ida of Nivelles (1199-1231), a young teenager twenty-two years her junior, whose family background and religious aspirations were very similar to Marie's own. Ida, who, like Marie, was born into the commercial middle class of Nivelles, began her religious life at around the age of nine, when she left home to join a small informal community of religious women attached to the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Nivelles, to avoid the marriage being planned for her by her relatives. The form of semi-religious life followed by Ida amongst


94 For the social status of Ida's family, see *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 3 and chap. 4, par. 1, p. 14. The death of Ida's father precipitated her relatives' plans to marry Ida, which in turn led to her flight from her parental home. Ida may have spent some of her period
the women at Holy Sepulchre, who would later be known as beguines, had also attracted Marie, who had lived in similarly informal religious communities at Willambrouk and Oignies. Ida, who as a childless virgin with independent financial resources had more choices of religious career than most, did not remain in the semi-religious life, as Marie and Juette had done, as she reportedly saw that life as less conducive to her desire for absolute personal poverty and more frequent reception of the eucharist than the monastic life. At the age of sixteen, using endowments left to her by her parents as her dowry, Ida entered the Cistercian order, first at the Flemish-speaking community of Kerkom. She was transferred within a year to the new foundation of La Ramée where she remained till her death in 1231, at the age of thirty-two. The Vita Idae Nivellensis was written by an anonymous monk, at the request of his abbot, soon after Ida's death, and draws on accounts from Ida's large circle of spiritual friends and her fellow sisters at La Ramée.

at Holy Sepulchre with her mother, who at some stage also took up a form of religious life (chap. 1, par. 4, p. 6). When Ida's mother died three years after her father, Ida continued to live in the community at Holy Sepulchre, though she now came under the guardianship of a relative (Ibid.).

95 For a discussion of the religious community at Holy Sepulchre, see E. W. McDonnell, The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene (New York, 1954, reprint 1969), 62-63. McDonnell identifies the witness Ida's biographer consults for this period of Ida's life, named as the recluse Mary of Heylonbineth in the vita, as a recluse in the leper community of Willambrouk. Mary had then, as Ida herself had done, moved on from the community at Holy Sepulchre to a more formal kind of religious life.

96 Vita Idae Nivellensis, chap. 2, par. 2, p. 10.

97 Vita Idae Nivellensis, chap. 2, pars. 1-5, pp. 9-11 (Kerkom); chap. 3, par. 1, p. 12 (entry at La Ramée), chap. 34, par. 4, p. 102 (Ida's age at death).

98 Vita Idae Nivellensis, Prologue, par. 3, p. 2.
In the *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, the developing interest in sharing one's virtue in order to bring about the salvation of others which we find in the *Lives* of Marie d'Oignies and Juette of Huy appears, transformed, as a fully articulated, and extraordinarily powerful, spirituality of vicarious suffering. No longer one amongst a number of other activities, Ida of Nivelles' "compassion" for sinners, both the living and those in purgatory, dominates her biography to the virtual exclusion of other spiritual gifts and interests. In the sixteen years which separated Ida's biography from the *Life* of Marie, the new possibilities purgatory offered as an arena for spiritual activity on behalf of others, which Marie had just begun to explore (and which were unknown to Juette, whose *vita* was written at about the same time as Ida's), were greatly extended, as the geography and workings of purgatory became clearer. Moreover, Ida of Nivelles took a theologically bold step which Marie and Juette, despite the affinities of their thinking, had not: Ida took it for granted that her own physical suffering would be accepted by God in direct exchange for the penance of another, or in exchange for the temptations or despair of others; indeed, her suffering was the key form of spiritual charity she offered to those around her. Voluntary suffering had, it will be remembered, played very little role in Juette's *Life*, whereas Marie's suffering for, and with, others was never designed to take the place of their own pain.

The importance which vicarious suffering and purgatorial piety assumed in the spiritual life of Ida of Nivelles and those to whom she ministered seems to reflect the spirituality of a quite small subculture, precocious even within the diocese of Liège. In his 1232 *Life* of Christina Mirabilis, clearly aimed at the broader audience it did in fact find, Thomas of Cantimpré gave his readers careful explanations of purgatory and the theological and narrative framework within which vicarious suffering might function. In contrast, the author of the *Life* of Ida of Nivelles did not feel the need to explain or justify Ida's extraordinary, and novel,

99 Only Ida's devotion to the eucharist, and her related devotion to the Christ child can be counted as aspects of her spirituality which are not directly connected to her compassionate zeal for souls.
behaviour to the local audience of Ida's "special friends" to whom he directed his biography, and from whom his stories of Ida were gathered. The world in which Ida herself had acted had also been intensely local and personal: her zeal for souls was always directed at the people around her. Not for Ida were the grander universal missions for the souls of the dead undertaken by Christina Mirabilis and Alice of Schaerbeek, or the interest in well-known political and religious figures shown by Alice and Lutgard of Awyieres.

The *Vita Idae Nivellensis* paints a compelling picture of a saint whose religious vocation was intensely social. Ida had little anxiety for her own salvation, or her own need for confession and forgiveness, and apparently little conscious ambition to achieve ever greater progress in the mystical life. Instead, it is Ida's compassion and her powerful sense of community that are repeatedly emphasised by her biographer. These were already evident during her early years with the beguines when Ida cared for those of her companions who were sick or in need, and begged for food and clothing for them from relatives and strangers alike. Soon after her entry into the Cistercian order, Ida's attentions turned to the emotional needs of her fellow nuns: unable to talk to the Flemish-speaking nuns during her short time at Kerkom, sixteen-year old Ida nevertheless sought out nuns who seemed to her sad, and sat with them, encouraging them with her smiling face. Not long after, during the novitiate at La Ramée which she began at the age of eighteen, a visionary encounter with God helped Ida understand how the connections between her own visionary gifts, her privileged standing with God, and her intense desire to help others could allow her charity for others to be elevated to

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100 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, Prologue, par. 3, p. 2.

101 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 7. For an extended discussion of Ida's compassion, see chap. 30, pars. 1-6, pp. 88-90.

102 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 2, par. 5, p. 11. Before she left Kerkom, Ida had also developed a reputation outside the convent, amongst both religious and lay people, for the comfort her presence afforded (Ibid.).
the spiritual sphere. In this first experience of ecstasy, Ida was taken up into heaven into the presence of the Lord, and immediately seized the opportunity to request from him an assurance of the salvation of a certain beloved sister. Unsatisfied by God's first reply, Ida warmed to her new role of advocate, and successfully demanded of God, for the sake of her own merits, a more certain sign of the nun's salvation, which God decided would be a debilitating ecstasy. Before returning to her body, Ida was given further indication of the role visionary experience would play in her future work for others, when she was allowed to see the status before God of a number of her friends. This early experience provided the foundation for a lifelong interest in discerning the status of others, knowledge she would use to help them in their paths to salvation; few of Ida's mystical experiences are not in some way connected with the salvation of others.

Two great visionary tableaux which form a centrepiece for the *Vita Idae Nivellensis* give vivid visual expression to Ida's concern for the salvation of others. In the first, Ida is shown a great book shining in brightness, which she learns through a revelation is the Book of Life. Ida reads attentively, and rejoices in seeing the names of many known to her, and whose future salvation is then taken as assured. The Book also seems to record the names of those whose salvation is not yet certain, and Ida takes it upon herself to warn these people of their fates. In the second vision, the landscape of the world hereafter stretches out on a magnificent scale: heaven appeared to Ida as an impressively tall and beautiful castle, strongly fortified on a hilltop, towards which a small number of people toil slowly upwards on very

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103 For Ida's age on admission to the novitiate, see Roger De Ganck, "Chronological Data in the Lives of Ida of Nivelles and Beatrice of Nazareth," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 57 (1983), 14-27, at 17.

104 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 4, par. 1, p. 16.

105 For example, *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 10, par. 2, p. 30.

106 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 18, par. 1, p. 49.
narrow roads. Hell was at the bottom of a series of descending valleys, into whose depths Ida could not see. A great wide road led to the valleys, on which crowds of festive merry-makers hurried along, as if to a sophisticated banquet. As in the first vision, the grand universality of this second vision did not preclude local, pastoral significance which were so important to Ida: amongst those few ascending to the castle, and the throngs descending to hell, it was granted to her to identify people known to her, who were still living, and thus gauge their spiritual status.

Vicarious suffering, voluntarily accepted for the benefit of both the living and the dead, was the chief form of charity Ida offered to others. While there were ultimately only two permanent places of rest for a soul, as Ida's vision of heaven and hell affirmed, purgatory, the third, temporary place had an important place in the Ida's charity. Ida seems to have embarked on her first mission for a soul in purgatory when she was asked by a nun to offer prayers for her father, and on discerning by means of a vision that the father was suffering purgatorial punishments, Ida requested of God an illness which would alleviate his distress in purgatory. Her request granted, Ida suffered from a high fever for six weeks, and afterwards learnt through a vision that the soul of the nun's father had received her help. Ida's suffering for those in purgatory seems to have been a form of charity given predominantly for the lay relatives of her fellow nuns, people she had not known herself, and whose sins were obviously considered to be more serious than those of religious. In contrast, nuns from Ida's own community regularly reported back from purgatory, to explain the minor sins for

107 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 18, par. 2, pp. 50-52.

108 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 5, par. 1, p. 17.

109 *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 14, par. 1, pp. 40-42. Ida's own parents are amongst this group: Ida asked a recently deceased nun about the fate of her parents, and finds they will both be saved, after some time in purgatory (chap. 10, par. 2, p. 30).
which they have been punished, or the rewards they will receive in heaven, now their purgation is complete, but they do not receive Ida's help in bearing their penance.\textsuperscript{110}

Ida's charity for those she knew, most often those who had dedicated themselves to the religious life, was more likely to consist of her prayers, and her suffering, offered to help them with their temptations and sins during this world by taking them onto herself.\textsuperscript{111} Ida's understanding of vicarious penance for the dead must surely have helped her give form to the campaigns she waged for the sake of the living. The considerable range of assistance Ida could offer a soul suffering under temptation is particularly clear in Ida's dealings with a fellow nun suffering from a spirit of blasphemy. To bring the nun to spiritual health, she first vomits blood (very often Ida's first expression of compassion), keeps constantly at her side, covering her mouth with her hand to restrain her blasphemy, she prays and weeps for the nun, and still receives no consolation, until she bargains with the Lord to allow her to receive the temptation the nun feels into herself. Finally, after Ida has endured for three days the lewd and violent temptations to which the nun was prone, the nun is freed from the afflictions of the spirit of blasphemy. Ida's mission was then rounded out with an encouraging vision of the host, slightly bent, but clearly bearing the name of her patient, which she took as a guarantee of the nun's salvation.\textsuperscript{112} Spiritual charity of this sort was poured out for a whole local community of spiritual friends, mostly religious: nuns in her own community, monks, priests and beguines.\textsuperscript{113} When Ida's biographer tells us that her whole community rallied around Ida

\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 8, par. 1, pp. 23-25; chap. 10, pars. 1-2, pp. 29-30.
\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 6, par. 1, pp. 18-19; cf. chap. 13, par. 2, pp. 38-39.
\textsuperscript{112} \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 7, pars. 1-2, pp. 21-23.
\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 7, pars. 1-2, pp. 21-23; chap. 13, par. 2, pp. 38-39 (the nuns); chap. 15, par. 1, pp. 42-44; chap. 16, par. 1, pp. 44-45 (monks); chap. 6, par. 1, pp. 18-19 (priests) and chap. 12, pars. 1-2, pp. 35-36; chap. 17, par. 1, pp. 46-47 (beguines).
during a serious illness, and successfully begged the Lord to put off her death, the story rings true as an indication of the gratitude Ida's labours earned her.\footnote{Vita Idae Nivellensis, chap. 10, pars. 3-4, pp. 31-32. Half of the miracles, for instance, performed through prayers to Ida after her death, or through her relics, were for the benefit of the members of her community (chap. 35, pars. 1-5, pp. 103-05).}

But just as Marie had had to understand that there were limits to her own ability to act for the damned, so Ida came to learn that the free will of others marked the limits of her capacity, and her responsibility, to help others achieve their salvation. The vision in which this lesson was clothed is one of the most impressive and sophisticated vision narratives in the corpus of the \textit{mulieres religiosae}.\footnote{Marie d'Oignies learns that God's justice limits her ability to help others, when she learns that she cannot deliver souls in hell.} In response to her grief over a woman whom Ida could not move to consider the perilous state of her soul, Ida's spirit is taken into the world beyond, where she sees souls purging their sins through fire or through unbearable cold. Beyond purgatory was a terrible river, belching foul smells and smoke, from which the cries of lost souls could be heard. A bridge, as narrow as a sword's edge, led across the river to heaven, from where Christ beckoned to her, and before the bridge stood the woman Ida had unsuccessfully been trying to help. Ida then attempts to lead the woman across the bridge to heaven, while the Lord encourages her by gently reminding her of his sufferings for her salvation. When the woman adamantly refuses to cross, out of fright, the Lord becomes angry, and tells Ida to leave her be, and Ida crosses the bridge to Christ alone. Even then, Ida does not give up on her mission for others entirely, since before she returns to her body, she sees friends of her own, living and dead, in heaven, and asks to be reassured about the fate of each.\footnote{Vita Idae Nivellensis, chap. 9, pars. 1-5, pp. 26-28.}

\footnote{Quite apart from the help it gave Ida in wrestling with the difficult notion of free will, Ida's vision also stands as an illuminating example of the way in which the landscape and}
workings of the other world, which had come into closer focus during the thirteenth century. could be used as visual tools to "think with."

In the *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, Ida's confidence in her ability to experience pain and temptation with and for others forms part of a more generalised understanding of the communicability of religious experience. This is clearly seen in the numerous episodes in the *vita* which depict Ida taking some part in the religious experiences of others. In one group of stories, Ida's relationship with a female mystic, with whom Ida is "chained together in Christ's love," probably one of the sisters at La Ramée, is cemented by their common ecstatic experience of heaven, the Virgin Mary and the Trinity.\(^{117}\) Likewise, it is granted to Ida to be able to be present in spirit at the consecration of her dear friend and spiritual daughter, Beatrice of Nazareth.\(^{118}\) The majority of the stories, however, involve priests and male religious who are drawn to repentance, or to heightened religious experience, and usually, too, a greater understanding of Ida's compassion for souls, by means of a vision of Ida.\(^{119}\) One priest, for example, a friend of hers, was taken up into heaven in an ecstasy at the same time at which Ida's reception of the eucharist had caused her to be similarly snatched into heaven. Ida was asked by the Lord to give the priest "part of the glory which I have abundantly given to you." a blessing which was transferred in a "spiritual kiss" from Ida, after which the priest shared the grace granted to Ida.\(^{120}\)

\(^{117}\) *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 25, pars. 1-2, pp. 72-73.

\(^{118}\) *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 28, pars. 3-4, pp. 83-84.

\(^{119}\) See *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 23, pars. 1-3, pp. 66-67 (Ida is granted a vision of the Christ child through an abbot's prayers); chap. 24, pars. 1-3, pp. 68-70 (a priest celebrating communion has a vision of Ida crying); chap. 26, par. 1, pp. 75-77 (a priest, once again celebrating communion, sees Ida's face, and her compassion for others is revealed); chap. 27, par. 1, pp. 77-79 (a priest is drawn into heaven with Ida); chap. 27, par. 2, pp. 79-80 (Ida has a vision of a celebrating priest receiving divine consolations).

\(^{120}\) *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, chap. 27, par. 1, pp. 77-79.
It is striking that despite her own faith in the value of physical suffering, the crucified Christ plays only a very minor part in Ida's biography, and no part in her visionary world.\footnote{121} In her own dealings with Christ, he is usually rather passive, and she quite imperious, as she demands Christ see things her way; while in her visions, Ida saw Christ as a baby, or once, as a beautiful boy of twelve, but never as the crucified sufferer.\footnote{122} Ida's eucharistic piety did, however, allow Ida to see herself participating in Christ's body and his merits, an understanding exemplified in a striking vision in which Christ feeds Ida with white manna which flowed directly from his mouth to hers.\footnote{123} But it is only in her vision of the heavenly bridge that attention is given to Christ's role as suffering redeemer, as he attempts to encourage the woman to cross the bridge to him by reminding her of his saving passion. Here, too, we find Ida's own zeal for the souls of others, though not her suffering per se, becomes expressly co-redemptive, as she joins with Christ in labouring to save the woman's soul.

In \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, then, we find vicarious suffering, the endurance of pain or temptation for another, as the dominant theme in the spiritual life of a saint dedicated to the salvation of all those in the closely-knit religious world to which she belonged. Amongst her fellow nuns, and her circle of spiritual friends, Ida exercised her mission of compassionate suffering, which was part of a wider confidence in the possibilities of participating in the

\footnote{121} Christ's passion is briefly treated as part of the "Eight considerations" on which Ida meditated during her life (\textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 29, pars. 1-9, pp. 85-88).
\footnote{122} See, for example, Ida's demand that Christ increase her virtues in return for her not making a fuss about the commercial origins of the dowry which brought her into the Cistercian order (\textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 4, par. 1, pp. 14-15), or her refusal to be satisfied with God's answer for the status of one of her friends (chap. 4, par. 1, p. 16). For the visions of the Christ child and boy, see \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chaps. 19-23, pp. 53-67.
\footnote{123} \textit{Vita Idae Nivellensis}, chap. 22, par. 1, p. 63. After this vision, Ida was granted the ability to discern the state of others' souls.
religious experience of others, with an intimacy and tenderness unmatched in the corpus of the *mulieres religiosae*.

**IX**

Through the rich religious imaginations and the zealous concern for souls of women such as Marie d'Oignies, Juette of Huy and Ida of Nivelles, vicarious suffering for the living and the dead seems to have become a recognised form of charitable activity for the dead in the Low Countries by the 1230s, at least amongst the religious circles to which the *mulieres religiosae* belonged. Moreover, the positive interpretation of human pain which redemptive vicarious suffering could offer seems to have been quickly seized upon, so that it now functions, as Barbara Newman has suggested, as "a kind of theodicy [which] not only justifies the fact of physical pain, but transforms it into a blessing."124 Amongst the *mulieres religiosae*, as we shall see in the section which follows, new meaning, and value, could in this way be found in the disturbed behaviour of Christina Mirabilis, or in the debilitating leprosy of Alice of Schaerbeek, as their tortured bodies became the means of the liberation of many from their sins.125

But if suffering had become an accepted part of spiritual charity, by no means had it become the only way in which one could work for the salvation of others. The endurance of physical pain played virtually no part in Lutgard of Aywières' life-long commitment to the impressively large clientele who benefited from her help. Instead, as we shall see, it was her fasting, and above all the efficacy, or to put it more bluntly, the stubborn importunity, of her intercession which she offered up for others.

In the *Lives* of Alice of Schaerbeek and Lutgard of Aywières, chronologically the last of the *mulieres religiosae* in whose biographies spiritual charity is a dominant theme, we also find the most developed understandings of spiritual charity, be it suffering or intercession, as

125 Ibid., 119-22.
co-redemption. For both Alice and Lutgard, their labour for others was intimately bound up with their confident and ambitious desire to emulate, and also to offer some repayment for Christ's salvific compassion. The very wounds of Christ appeared fresh and bloody in their visions to call them both to share in his redemption of humanity.

* * * * *

Christina Mirabilis (1150-1224) was born in the town of St Truiden in the north of the diocese of Liège and lived a quiet, quasi-monastic life with her two sisters until one day her practice of "internal contemplation" caused her to sicken and die. Life returned to Christina's body, however, as Requiem Mass was being said at her funeral, and although her new, "resurrected" body immediately floated up to the rafters of the church, it was soon forced to return to the ground, and Christina was able to return home with her sisters. All the same, nothing was ever quite the way it had been for Christina, and from the descriptions of her subsequent behaviour it seems clear that Christina suffered from severe, recurrent episodes of mental illness. Itinerant indigence characterised her adult life: she would wander from town to town seemingly without a fixed home, often living in the trees for preference; she begged her food (or snatched it from others if that failed); and kept herself clothed by stitching her


127 Vita Christinae, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 651.
one, patched garment with bark thread.\textsuperscript{128} Moreover, she would subject her body to extreme suffering and physical danger, emerging apparently unscathed from icy streams, water mills, ovens and boiling cauldrons; or else she would torture herself on a rack, suspend herself from a gallows, roll herself into a hoop or ball, or enter the graves of the dead.\textsuperscript{129} It is not hard to believe that her behaviour was not always appreciated by those around her. Christina's sisters, embarrassed by her actions, which others attributed to devil possession, had her chained, confined in a dungeon, and physically restrained by a wooden yoke, although eventually she was able to convince them to set her free.\textsuperscript{130} The priests of her acquaintance were especially wary of Christina, and Thomas tell us she suffered "many injuries" from them; certainly she found none during her life who was willing to act as her mentor or patron.\textsuperscript{131} Her begging, too, was often ignored by the townspeople of St Truiden.\textsuperscript{132}

It is, however, equally true that Christina's physical austerities, her poverty and the forthrightness with which she apparently called others to salvation, struck others as signs of holiness. Chief amongst those who recognised her saintliness were the count of Loon, the only person in the \textit{vita} apart from Christina to whom Thomas gives any real individuality, a

\textsuperscript{128} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 2, par. 21, p. 654, chap. 1, par. 10, p. 652 (wandering); chap. 1. par. 9, p. 652 (tree-dwelling); chaps. 2-3, pars. 22-24, pp. 654-55 (begging); chap. 3, par. 25, p. 655 (clothes).

\textsuperscript{129} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 1, par. 12, p. 652 (icy waters); chap. 1, par. 11, p. 652 (ovens and cauldrons); chap. 1, par. 13, p. 652 (rack, gallows and graves of the dead); chap. 1, par. 16, p. 653, chap. 3, par. 35, p. 656 (balls and hoops). Thomas' description of Christina hanging herself "for one or two days" on a gallows, in the midst of the thieves who were also hanging there, is the only allusion Thomas makes to any possible connection between Christina's suffering and that of Christ.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 2, pars. 17-19, pp. 653-54; cf. chap. 1, par. 9, p. 652.

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 4, par. 40, p. 657.

\textsuperscript{132} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 3, par. 24, p. 654.
recluse of Borgloon, with whom Christina stayed for nine years and from whom Thomas of Cantimpré gathered information on Christine, and the nuns of the abbey of St Catherine in St Truiden, who offered Christina temporary accommodation during her life, welcomed her into their convent during her last illness, and buried her in their church.\footnote{Vita Christinae, chap. 4, pars. 41-45, pp. 657-58 (the count); chap. 4, par. 38, p. 657 (recluse); chap. 3, pars. 35-36, p. 656; chap. 5, pars. 51-54, p. 659 (the nuns). The recluse's cell may well have been attached to the chapel of the count's castle at Borgloon, the capital of the county of Loon.} Christina, as Thomas of Cantimpré was quick to point out, was also recognised by his own hero and role-model, Jacques de Vitry. Jacques claims to have seen Christina himself, and briefly described her return from death, and her extreme activities in the Prologue to the Life of Marie d'Oignies, written when Christina was in her early sixties.\footnote{Vita Mariae, Prologue, par. 8, pp. 548-49; the passage is excerpted in the Vita Christinae, Prologue, par. 1, p. 650.} Others, like the abbot of St Truiden, were willing to give favourable accounts of Christina to Thomas of Cantimpré when he came gathering stories for his biography, eight years after her death.\footnote{Vita Christinae, chap. 5, par. 47, p. 658; Prologue, par. 2, p. 650.}

When Thomas of Cantimpré came to write the Life of Christina Mirabilis in about 1232, the possibility of interpreting physical suffering as spiritual generosity towards the dead provided him with the key to understanding Christina's life.\footnote{The meanings Thomas suggests for Christina's extraordinary bodily states are not limited to vicarious penance: they are also seen as evidence of her mystical experiences, and as a kind of bodily sermon of repentance she preached to others. See Margot H. King, "The Sacramental Witness of Christina Mirabilis: The Mystic Growth of a Fool for Christ's Sake," in Peaceweavers, ed. Lillian Thomas Shank and John A. Nichols, Medieval Religious Women 2 [= Cistercian Studies Series 72] (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1987), 145-164, and Robert} Thomas, like Jacques de
Vitry, presented the defining event in Christina's life as the journey her soul made to the otherworld while she lay dead in her coffin at her funeral.\textsuperscript{137} Separated from her body, her soul was taken into purgatory, where God explained to her the purpose of the suffering she saw inflicted on the many souls there. Christina was then carried into paradise, where in a now familiar kind of negotiation with the Lord, she was given the choice of either remaining in heaven, or returning to earth with an impassible "resurrection" body, whose sufferings could deliver "all the souls on whom you have compassion in that place of purgatory," as well as converting the living to salvation by the example of her life, while at the same time, earning an even greater merit for herself.\textsuperscript{138} Christina, of course, chose to help the souls in purgatory, and so dedicated herself to suffering in their place. Thomas has Christina warn her friends on her return from heaven they were not to be troubled by her new life, however bizarre and inscrutable it may seem, for her activities in fact constituted an extremely purposeful campaign waged on behalf of the dead.\textsuperscript{139}

It is impossible to know whether Christina Mirabilis herself envisaged her out-of-body experience as the beginning of a mission to suffer on behalf of the dead in purgatory, as Thomas of Cantimpré would have it. It seems, however, quite unlikely that Christina's journey to the other world, which would have occurred in the early 1170s, could have been given such an interpretation at that relatively early date in the history of purgatorial piety; Thomas himself should instead probably be credited with interpreting Christina's life as an extraordinary example of vicarious suffering. Jacques de Vitry's 1215 description of Christina had placed a quite different interpretation on her return to life (he does not describe any


\textsuperscript{137} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 1, pars. 5-8, pp. 651-52.

\textsuperscript{138} For the characteristics of the resurrected body, which Christina's body possessed, see Sweetman, "Christine of St Trond," 66-107.

\textsuperscript{139} \textit{Vita Christinae}, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 652.
journey to the afterworld), and her subsequent acceptance of purgatorial pains. For Jacques, who does not mention the possibility of vicarious suffering in any of his own writings on purgatory, Christina had been allowed to return to earth not in order to suffer for the sins of others, but to do penance for her own sins on earth so as to avoid punishment in the afterlife. Jacques did report, however, that Christina's penance had merited for her the grace of being allowed to lead the souls of the dead to purgatory, or through purgatory to heaven, a curious detail which hints that Christina helped these souls make their journey through purgatory, and which may have given Thomas encouragement to elaborate his interpretation.

As it had been in the *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, the practice of vicarious suffering in the *Life* of Christina Mirabilis was again presented as the most important spiritual activity of its subject. Yet Christina's biography, written within a few years of the *Vita Idae Nivellensis*, is quite different from the intimate account of Ida's suffering for her neighbours which her biographer offers. The *Vita Christinae* is an almost mythic demonstration of the possibilities of purgatorial piety, intended for a more general audience. Thomas, in contrast to Ida of Nivelles' biographer, assumed no knowledge of purgatory, or purgatorial piety on the part of his readers. Indeed, when Christina is shown through purgatory, Thomas has her confess she thought it was hell; thereafter, however, her actions and her words helped explain to the living

140 "[E]t a Domino obtinuit, ut in hoc seculo vivens in corpore, purgatorium sustineret" (*Vita Mariae*, Prologue, par. 8, p. 549).

141 "[E]t tantam a Domino gratiam promeruit, et multoties rapta in spiritu, animas defunctorum usque in purgatorium, vel per purgatorium sine aliqua laesione usque ad suprema regna conduceret (*Vita Mariae*, Prologue, par. 8, p. 549). In his biography of Lutgard, Thomas tells us that she collected some souls to bring with her to heaven as she passed through purgatory, and it may be that Jacques had a similar idea in mind (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 21, p. 209).
the role purgatory played in the salvation of repentant sinners, and reinforced the need for penance during this life.\textsuperscript{142}

Thomas' account of Christina's mission for the dead spelt out the possibility of intervening in the lives of the dead through suffering with equal clarity. The forceful literalness of Thomas' account of Christina's vicarious suffering is striking: she goes to the other world to see those suffering in purgatory, she is dramatically given the chance to see her future suffering for others as a God-given mission, and she then literally takes on the earthly counterparts of the punishments most associated with purgatory: torture by fire, cold, and the instruments of criminal torture. Christina's suffering is nearly always offered up for the universal benefit of all those in purgatory, a far cry from the circle of friends Ida suffers for, but the \textit{vita} does lead the reader through a concrete example of vicarious purgatorial punishment taken on for a specific individual, namely, Christina's patron and spiritual son, the count of Loon. Here too the mechanisms of vicarious suffering are laid bare for the reader: Christina is present at the Count's death, and sees his body being carried to purgatory, where it undergoes bitter punishment. When he appears to her after his death, she accepts half of his punishment, and so sets herself to suffer various punishments, in strict relation with those that the Count is suffering - they suffer in mirror image, each taking on half of the penance. The possibilities for intervention for the dead are also made concrete in the grief and weeping Christina offered up in the very places where the Count had sinned, as she sought to undo the sin he had committed.\textsuperscript{143}

In the \textit{Life} of Christina Mirabilis, then, Thomas of Cantimpré popularised the concept of vicarious suffering for the dead by leading his audience through his fascinatingly larger-than-life heroine's own education in and very literal practice of, this novel religious activity. At the same time, Thomas was able to use the new narratives of vicarious suffering to draw

\textsuperscript{142} \textit{VitaChristinae}, chap. 3, pars. 27-28, p. 655.
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{VitaChristinae}, chap. 4, par. 45, p. 658.
together into a logical whole the elements of a life he and others believed to have been holy, and which otherwise risked considered as being under the control of a demon.

* * *

We next turn to Thomas of Cantimpré's last and most ambitious biography, his *Life of Lutgard of Aywières*, written sometime between Lutgard's death in 1246 and the year 1248. Of all the *mulieres religiosae*, none had such a confident and extensive spiritual apostolate as Lutgard of Aywières: her fellow sisters at Aywières, nuns and other religious women from nearby communities, laywomen, including her blood sister and the duchess of Brabant, lay brothers, monks, and assorted clerics, including Innocent III and Jordan of Saxony, were all numbered amongst the spiritual "clientele" whose needs she served. Lutgard's labour for others was worked into a powerful and distinctive spirituality in which she forged rich ties between her own work for others, and that which Christ undertook for sinners. It was, however, not through participation in Christ's vicarious suffering for sinners

144 The considerable differences between Thomas of Cantimpré's accounts of the spiritual charity of Christina Mirabilis and that of Lutgard confirm what we know from other evidence, that the *Vita Lutgardis* represented the thinking of its subject much more accurately than did the *Vita Christinae*. Different again is Thomas' *Life of Margaret of Ypres*, in which spiritual charity does not figure at all amongst Margaret's virtues and purgatory is barely mentioned, and then only to reveal to the reader that Margaret was assured that her purgation had been totally completed in the present life (G. G. Meersseman, "Les Frères Prêcheurs et le Mouvement Dévot en Flandre au XIIIe S.," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 18 [1949], 69-130, at chap. 48, p. 127).

that Lutgard sought to emulate her saviour, but rather, by moving God to action through her prayer and fasting, in the same way that Christ continually intercedes for sinners. Lutgard's focus on intercession for others, which drew back from the "objective" understanding of sin and punishment we have found in earlier vitae, brought quite a different flavour to Lutgard's understanding of human relationships with God, and the quality of his justice, as well as his mercy, towards sinners.

From the time of her first conversion, it was the open, bleeding wounds of Christ which functioned as the key symbol in Lutgard's life long identification with her saviour. Christ's wounds called Lutgard to her true bridegroom, to participation in his body and blood, and finally to share his urgent mission of intercession. Christ made his first appearance to the adolescent Lutgard, at a time when she was distracted by human love, as a virile young man who drew back his garment to reveal the wound at his side, and asked her to contemplate "what she should love." Lutgard immediately rejected all other love in favour of Christ's, and her progress as a follower of Christ began soon after, when at a moment of acute anguish, she learnt to turn the shame of an attempted abduction into an exultant imitation of Christ's own suffering. It would, however, not primarily be through suffering that Lutgard experienced bodily identification with Christ, but through the most intimate exchanges of flesh and blood: in the earliest of the ecstatic visions in which Lutgard mingles her body with Christ's, Lutgard insists on receiving Christ's heart for herself, but finally agrees to exchange her own heart for his: "So be it Lord, but nevertheless let it be done in this way, so that you will mingle the love of your heart with my heart and so that I may possess my heart in you, secure in all time in your fortress." In similarly sensual expressions of Lutgard's union

146 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 2, pp. 191-92.
147 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 192. Lutgard recounted this key moment in her young life to both her Dominican friends, Bernard and Thomas of Cantimpré himself.
148 "Cui illa: Ita sit Domine: sed tamen sic ut cordis tui amorem cordi meo contemperes et in te cor meum possideam; omni tempore tuo munimine jam securum" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1,
with Christ, Lutgard received comfort and consolation by sucking at the wound at Christ's side, an exchange of fluids which left the indelible mark of the divine on Lutgard's own bodily fluids by making her saliva sweet to the taste. And although she was never blessed with the stigmata, Lutgard's body nevertheless shared in the blood of his wounds: whenever she meditated on the passion, fresh blood would appear in spots on her skin and hair.

Christ's displayed wounds not only referred to the hours which Christ spent suffering on the cross for the salvation of humankind, or to the possibility of participating in Christ's body. They were also bloody, unhealed reminders of that past suffering which gave authority to the continuing intercession Christ offered up for humanity, the grave task in which Christ

149 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chaps. 1-2, pars. 13-14, pp. 193-94. There seems to have been little connection between Lutgard's passionate participation in Christ's physical body, and her understanding of the eucharist. Lutgard is eager to communicate every Sunday, but there is otherwise little mention of eucharistic piety (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 14, pp. 198-99).

150 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 23, pp. 200-01. Lutgard's imitation of Christ was also an imitation of his earthly life: Thomas tells us that Lutgard's imitation of Christ's poverty, manual labour, and afflictions was so close that veneration of Christ would equally be veneration of Lutgard (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 18, p. 194). Cf. Lutgard's healing of a deaf woman with her own spit, clearly in imitation of Christ's healing of the blind (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 200; cf. Mark 8:23; John 9:6).
firmedly demanded Lutgard to participate. Lutgard was still young when Christ first commissioned her to do penance for sinners, and from the beginning, her labour for others was linked to his wounds: roused by a voice demanding that she rise from her bed and begin her work of penance for others, Lutgard ran to the church, only to find its entrance blocked by the crucified Christ who embraced her and pressed her mouth against the wound at his side.\textsuperscript{151} Later in life, her vocation was once more made clear to her in a dramatic vision of the Man of Sorrows, who turned Lutgard's attention to his wounds: "Behold and contemplate, dearest, that my wounds are calling to you." When the trembling Lutgard asked what they might be saying, Christ replied that the wounds were calling her to her mission of toil and weeping which would mitigate the wrath of the Father against sinners.\textsuperscript{152}

Lutgard's two great activities on behalf of others were her intercessory prayer and her fasting, both disciplines practised to fulfil the "calling" of the wounds, to soften the righteous anger of God against humankind. The power of Lutgard's intercession for others was recognised early on in her life by Marie d'Oignies: "'Under heaven,' [Marie] said, 'the world has no more faithful intercessor, nor a more efficacious one in prayers for the liberation of souls from purgatory and for sinners than the lady Lutgard.'"\textsuperscript{153} Lutgard's prayers were

\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 1, chaps. 1-2, pars. 13-14, pp. 193-94.

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 6, p. 197. Lutgard's mission of prayer for others was renewed once more by Christ, a year before she died (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 11, p. 207).

\textsuperscript{153} "Sub coelo, ait, non habet mundus Domina Lutgarde fideliores, et magis efficaces in precibus pro liberandis animabus a Purgatorio, et pro peccatoribus exoratricem" (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 198). Marie kept Lutgard to her mission after her death by asking for prayers for Baldwin of Barbençon, the prior of Oignies (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 205-06). Lutgard's special role as mediator was also foreshadowed by St Catherine, who told a woman to seek Lutgard as her mediator, because of the wonderful place Lutgard would gain in heaven (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 192).
pressed into service on a number of fronts: they liberated nuns from the demons which oppressed them; they obtained grace and fortitude in the religious life for her fellow nuns; they snatched laymen, such as the knightly father of one of the nuns of Awyières, from the chains of the devil; they helped a Cistercian monk with his dissolute parish; and of course in her prayers she interceded with God for those in purgatory.

Lutgard never visited purgatory herself, but ghosts returning temporarily to earth from purgatory, or after having been recently released from there, often appeared to her. Lutgard's intercession for the souls of the dead was offered for individuals known to her, rather than for the mass of suffering souls, and like that of Ida of Nivelles, her purgatorial charity was reserved for lay people, or those religious known to have serious sins to purge. Lutgard interceded for four souls in purgatory, three of them clerics whose sins are mentioned, and the fourth a laywoman, Lutgard's own blood sister.158 Appearing somewhat more commonly than souls who need Lutgard's prayers are those souls who wished to renew posthumously their earthly ties with Lutgard. These souls declared their own state of blessedness, or confirmed the help they received from Lutgard, and include some of Lutgard's more exalted clientele, Jordan of Saxony, John of Lier, Jacques de Vitry, the nun Yolendis, formerly a

154 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 10, p. 198; Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 11, p. 198.
156 *Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 24, p. 201.
158 Lutgard prays for Baldwin of Barbençon, the prior of Oignies, who had become worldly in his later years (*Vita Lutgardis*, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 205); Simon, abbot of Foigny, who treated his flock too harshly (Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 197); Innocent III, the nature of whose serious sins was not revealed by Thomas (Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 7, p. 197); and Lutgard's blood sister (Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 13, p. 198).
prominent noblewoman, and the duchess of Brabant. Lutgard's compassion for the souls in purgatory extended into the afterlife itself, as the Lord revealed to a nun of Aywières: passing through purgatory on her way to heaven in a kind of harrowing of hell, Lutgard was able to carry a number of souls with her to paradise.

The second spiritual labour Lutgard undertook for others was her fasting: in particular, her life was marked out by three seven-year fasts through which she acted not just for individuals, but for the church, and for sinners, at large. She began her first fast after learning from the Virgin Mary of Christ's anger at being "crucified again" by the Albigensian heretics, and being urged by the Virgin to fast in order to appease Christ's anger. Here again, although Lutgard's fasting more nearly approaches suffering than do her prayers, it is never presented as objective merit which deserves to receive a certain kind of reward, but always as propitiation of God's righteous anger. This is made especially clear in the vision in which Christ asks Lutgard to begin a second fast for sinners everywhere. Christ once more appeared before Lutgard with fresh, open wounds, supplicating the Father for sinners, and then, turning to Lutgard, said:

159 John of Lier, a priest who had been active on behalf of the holy women of Liège, appeared to Lutgard to reveal the glory of his present state, and explain the significance of his red, white and blue clothing (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 8, pp. 197-98); likewise Jordan of Saxony, the Master General of the Dominicans, and Jacques de Vitry revealed they were now in heaven (Bk. 3, chap. 1, pars. 2-3, pp. 204-05; Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 5, p. 205). The nun Yolendis and the duchess of Brabant appeared to tell Lutgard of the mercy the Lord had shown because of her (Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 12, p. 198; Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 36, p. 202).

160 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 21, p. 209.

161 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 2, p. 196.

162 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 9, p. 198.
Do you not see how I am offering myself up totally for my sinners? So also I wish that you offer yourself up to me totally for my sinners and turn away the zeal enkindled against them in retaliatory punishment.\textsuperscript{163}

Lutgard was to share with Christ his role as intercessor; her fasting, like his wounds, would serve to appease God, and allay the punishment which humankind deserved, and thereafter she would be reminded of the mission she shared with Christ each time he was sacrificed in the Mass.\textsuperscript{164}

Instead of suffering for others, or transferring her merits to them, as those \textit{mulieres religiosae} who practised vicarious suffering had done, Lutgard's efforts for others, as we have seen, were directed at bending the Lord towards mercy for sinners by her intercession. The confidence in both the value of voluntary, physical suffering, and in the notion of the exchangeability or transferability of merits between one person and another on which the practice of vicarious suffering rested, play only a small little part in Lutgard's spirituality. Physical suffering for others played no role in Lutgard's spiritual charity nor penance she performed for her own sins.\textsuperscript{165} The "exchanges" of merit between people, and the direct participation in the spiritual lives of others, which we often see in the \textit{Lives} of the other \textit{mulieres religiosae} are rare in the \textit{Life} of Lutgard, although she certainly believed that a strict

\textsuperscript{163} "Videsne tu, quemadmodum me totum Patri pro meis peccatoribus offero? Sic etiam volo, ut te mihi totam pro meis peccatoribus offeras, et zelum contraillos in vindictam accensum avertas" (ibid.).

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid. The third fast Lutgard undertook was to appease God to the extent that he would avert the evil that an enemy of the church was about to cause (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 205).

\textsuperscript{165} Thomas does, however, note that her compassion for the sick and feeble seemed to make her suffer more than they (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 12, p. 193). Emotional suffering played a part in her intercessory labours, as Thomas' account of her tears suggests (Bk. 2, chap. 3, par. 41, p. 203).
justice of exchange operated within her own life, and that she received direct compensation and reward during this life for the self-deprivations and the afflictions she endured.\textsuperscript{166}

Strict justice, however, had little to do with Lutgard's understanding of how best to obtain help for others. Lutgard's success as an intercessor often seemed to depend on the urgent, even querulous, insistence with which she demanded that God heed her call, rather than the justice of her request. Unlike the \textit{mulieres religiosae} whose suffering for others is able to preserve God's justice by taking justly deserved punishment onto themselves, Lutgard must force the Lord to change his mind. It is the anger of Lutgard's God which has to be appeased, rather than his justice satisfied; and while in theory God might be made to appear more merciful for not adhering to the demands of strict justice, in the \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, he certainly comes off looking decidedly less merciful than Lutgard, who even accuses him directly of cruelty in order to make her case.\textsuperscript{167}

Confidence in God's just behaviour towards her, if not to those for whom she interceded, was Lutgard's trump card in negotiating with God for others. Lutgard knew that God would never allow her to suffer harm, or ever fail to accord to her the rewards which justice required she be given, and she used the knowledge in a kind of saintly blackmail. When God refused to free Jacques de Vitry from temptation, Lutgard declared to him: "Either separate me from yourself, or liberate that man for whose sake I am entreating you, even if he

\textsuperscript{166} Lutgard exchanges one gift given to her by God for another (\textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 12, p. 193); receives compensation for her self-deprivation and practice of virtue (Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 19, p. 194); earns merit the equivalent of Agnes because of her desire for martyrdom, and the loss of blood she suffers (Bk. 2, chap. 2, par. 21, p. 200); and finally, she is promised that her friends, whom she could not longer see, will be guarded by God, and that she herself will bypass purgatory after death in return for the affliction of her blindness (Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 1, p. 204).

\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Vita Lutgardis}, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 3, pp. 196-97.
is not willing." In a similar way, Lutgard bribed and threatened the Lord for the liberation of Simon, the late abbot of the Cistercian house of Foigny, asking the Lord that he transfer any solace due to her, to Simon, and warning God that she would not be consoled by him until he was freed from purgatory. Lutgard also poured out prayers for a certain layman who was a close friend of hers three times without effect, until she "wrestled" with the Lord in prayer, but still to no effect. Finally, a threat from Lutgard was necessary: "Either erase me from the Book of Life or dismiss this harm from him." The Lord then relented, granted Lutgard's request, and promised to pour out favours for all those who loved Lutgard. Lutgard's sure faith in her own status before the Lord enabled her to lay down her own salvation in her heroic efforts to move the Lord to mercy.

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The last of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae in which spiritual charity figures as a dominant theme is the Life of Alice of Schaerbeek, written perhaps ten years after Alice's death in 1250. Like the Vita Christinae, it was offered up by its author as a record of saintly triumph over pain, and again, reflects a willingness to consider the lives of those who suffered through illness as especially holy. We also find in this last of the vitae, the first appearance of a detailed and explicit assertion that the vicarious suffering of our saint shares in the saving

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168 "[A]ut separa me a te, aut hominem pro quo peto libera, etiam non volentem" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 3, p. 197). Christ also makes similarly imperious demands of Lutgard, for example, when he tells her he wishes her to transfer to Aywières, and warns he will desert her if she does not (Bk. 1, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 195).

169 Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 2, chap. 1, par. 4, p. 197.

170 "Aut dele me de libro vitae, aut dimittas illi noxam hanc" (Vita Lutgardis, Bk. 3, chap. 2, par. 15, p. 207).

work of the suffering Christ. While Christina and Ida certainly suffered for others, their actions were never directly tied to Christ's suffering, and Lutgard's co-redemptive labours did not include suffering. At last, in the *Vita Aleydis*, the two ideas come together.

It seems likely that the anonymous author of the *Vita Aleydis*, whose own extended meditations on the limited sources for the life of Alice available to him make up the bulk of the biography, was drawn to write her *Life* because of his reverence for her diseased suffering.172 Nevertheless, the conviction that the pain her leprosy inflicted on her enabled Alice to alleviate the suffering of the dead and liberate those in the world trapped in sin appears to be Alice's own, which she revealed to her sister to comfort her.173 The suffering which Alice endured was not something which Alice inflicted upon herself, as was the suffering of Christine or Ida, but it became in some sense voluntary when she received so much consolation from it that she determined she would not give her illness up even if she could.174

For the author of the *Vita Aleydis*, Alice's suffering and its consequences were intimately and cogently bound up with her relationship with Christ. It was Christ, not any force of evil, who was responsible for her debilitating and painful disease, which was given to her so that she would be able to linger at greater length in Christ's presence, and be drawn closer to him. Alice's increasing intimacy with her bridegroom, as she received constant solace and sweetness from him until at the last she was welcomed into his arms, is a powerful theme in the *vita*.175 Her physical intimacy with, and gradual assimilation to, Christ were also emphasised in her biographer's description of her eucharistic devotion: at communion, Alice felt her heart open like a door to receive Christ into the "garden of her heart," and then felt the opening closing up behind him.176

172 There is very little evidence, for example, of the audience for which the *vita* was intended.

173 *Vita Aleydis*, chap. 3 par. 26, p. 476.

174 *Vita Aleydis*, chap. 2 par. 10, p. 474.

175 *Vita Aleydis*, chap. 2, par. 9, pp. 473-74.

176 *Vita Aleydis*, chap. 2, par. 13, p. 474.
Moreover, in addition to the association made between Alice's suffering and her progress in the mystical life, Alice's endurance of the pain of her leprosy was directly related to the redemptive work of Christ's suffering. Like Christ, she welcomed her undeserved suffering as a way of liberating others from their sins through a transfer of her merits. A connection between her disease and Christ's suffering is made by her biographer in his explanation of a vision Alice received of a cross hanging from a gold cord. The cross, he argued, symbolised the passion, which Alice carried as a "bundle of myrrh" between her breasts, and the vision had been granted to Alice as a sign of the martyrdom which would be consummated in her through her suffering in heart and body. For Christ, her biographer explained, she was already a martyr.\textsuperscript{177} The ties between Christ's suffering and Alice's were even more explicitly confirmed in a Good Friday vision of Christ's passion which Alice receives. In it Christ addresses her from the cross, bloodied, and with his wounds in full view. He asks Alice to meditate on the outrages he suffered for the redemption of humankind, and she responds by preparing to labour even more ardently for humankind. The horror of Christ's wounded and bloody body was mirrored by the wretched state of Alice's own ruined body in the last months of her life: the skin of her upper body had become as rough as bark, while her legs were as raw as a skinned animal; she was unable to move any part of her body except her tongue.\textsuperscript{178} Her suffering was recognised as equivalent to that of a martyr, and again as parallel to Christ's own voluntary death, when she was welcomed into heaven by Christ as a Virgin and Martyr.\textsuperscript{179}

Alice's pain was offered to counteract the consequences of human sin: by her suffering she would assist the dead in purgatory with their penances, purge the living from their sins, and guard them from temptation.\textsuperscript{180} In her last year on earth, Alice was advised by God that

\textsuperscript{177} Vita Aleydis, chap. 1, par. 8, p. 473.

\textsuperscript{178} Vita Aleydis, chap. 3, par. 31, p. 476.

\textsuperscript{179} Vita Aleydis, chap. 3, par. 33, p. 477.

\textsuperscript{180} Vita Aleydis, chap. 2, par. 21, p. 475.
her pain would be greatly increased, for the mitigation of the punishment of the dead, and the cleansing of the souls of the living.\textsuperscript{181} During this time, Alice would descend to hell or purgatory three or four times a day to suffer the penances of the dead, though Alice's biographer gives no details of what she encountered there.\textsuperscript{182}

In addition to her great general mission for humankind, Alice also responded to special requests for her penance from those in purgatory. She assisted two noblemen, whose heavy punishment in purgatory suggests that they had many sins to atone for, and who appeared to Alice to request her help in the performance of their penance.\textsuperscript{183} It seems that Alice, like Christina Mirabilis, felt that noblemen needed help more urgently than most other people, for when Alice is asked about the fate of a recently deceased Augustinian abbot by his sister, it is revealed to Alice that he only has a small amount of light penance still to bear, and she does not herself do penance for him.\textsuperscript{184}

Alice clearly understood her suffering to be creating objective amounts of positive spiritual force which could act on her behalf in the world. Since she had not deserved to lose the sight of her right eye, and so had no need herself for the merit her loss would earn, she was confident she could direct the reward she had earned at will. Her choice fell on another aristocrat, the count of Holland, and the merit was offered to help him defend the church against its enemies.\textsuperscript{185} Likewise, when her right eye lost its sight, Alice gave the "fruit of her

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 22, p. 475.
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 25, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 20, p. 475; chap. 3, par. 29, p. 476.
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 3, par. 29, p. 476. Similarly, it was revealed to Alice that the name of her "Martha," who should probably be identified with her sister Ida, was written in the Book of Life (chap. 3, par. 28, p. 476).
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Vita Aleydis}, chap. 2, par. 23, p. 475.
penance" to the French King Louis, so that he might be successful in his crusading and. illuminated by divine light, make a good end to his life.186

Understanding the loss of her sight as an event which created superfluous merit gave Alice a way of thinking of her suffering as a positive force for good. By the second half of the thirteenth century it had become quite conventional, at least amongst some circles, to see the sufferings of a female saint in terms of a closed system of circulating merit, in which any merit superfluous to the saint's needs would be applied to others. This is nicely demonstrated by the Life of another of the mulieres religiosae, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, which was written by Philip. the abbot of Clairvaux, from notes he had taken on a visit he had made to her in 1267.187 Despite Elizabeth's apparent failure to admit to the good her arduous daily round of self-inflicted physical punishment achieved for others, Philip nevertheless revealed to the reader that he had it from a reliable, but secret, source that "the prayers and sufferings and supererogatory payments of the innocent virgin liberated many thousands of souls from the chains of sins and the punishments of purgatory."188 Vicarious penance for the living and the dead was clearly seen as a suitable end for the superfluous, free-floating merit which suffering such as Elizabeth's, and Alice's, had created.

186 Vita Aleydis, chap. 3, par. 27, p. 476.
188 Vita Elizabeth, par. 26, p. 377. Philip saw Elizabeth's physical activities as being signs of her interior graces, and having evangelical purpose as a book to the illiterate. Her pain, however, required a separate interpretation.
The passionate desire to help others achieve their salvation, which was characteristic of each of the six vitae discussed thus far, is much less in evidence in four of the chronologically latest of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, the Lives of Juliana of Cornillon, Ida of Louvain, Ida of Gorsleeuw and Beatrice of Nazareth. These lives focus much more exclusively on individual progress in the mystical life, have much less interest in spiritual charity in general, and very little indeed in an apostolate to the souls in purgatory. Put simply, these four later mulieres religiosae spent a much greater amount of their time in heaven with God, than in rescuing souls from purgatory. However, all four vitae nevertheless draw upon the imaginative and theological legacy created by the earlier mulieres religiosae and recorded in their biographies: a clearer understanding of a penitential system which included purgatory, and confidence in the possibility of bearing the sins of others, sharing their pain, or using one's own merit for the benefit of others, had become part of the tool-kit of ideas and imagery which were available to late medieval religious women and their biographers.

Juliana of Cornillon (1193-1258), for instance, was able to draw on narratives of vicarious suffering when she expressed her intimacy with others and gratitude to them through her sympathetic suffering of their pain. Julliana's experience of Christ was especially physical in nature, and focused on her capacity to share Christ's sufferings, which she always keep in her heart, causing her to experience severe heartache when she spoke or heard of Christ's passion. Julliana responded in a similar fashion to the difficulties brought about by

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190 For Juliana's desire to share Christ's pain, see especially, Vita Julianae, at Bk. 1, chap. 4, par. 18, pp. 448-49. Juliana also suffered pain when the Veronica veil of Eve of St Martin reminded her of Christ's passion (Bk. 1, chap. 5, para. 28, p. 452); her experience of the
her expulsion from her community at Mont Cornillon when she bound herself to those companions and supporters who remained loyal to her by sharing their experience of pain.\textsuperscript{191} Juliana's mercy to those who had persecuted her was similarly expressed in terms of vicarious suffering and an exchange of merit: she offered to be put to death without merit, if that might only save the souls of her persecutors.\textsuperscript{192}

The Cistercian nun Ida of Louvain (fl. mid-13th century) made dramatic use of the imagery of vicarious suffering to express the enormity of the consolation she had received from gazing at Christ's face: as she told her confessor, that consolation would have been sufficient to allow her to bear in her body during her brief lifetime the griefs and afflictions of all mortals throughout the ages past, present and future.\textsuperscript{193} And although purgatory and purgatorial punishment are entirely absent from the \textit{Life} of Ida of Louvain, Ida nevertheless followed the example of Christina Mirabilis' heroic sacrifice of present enjoyment of heaven for the benefit of others, when she chose to return to earth instead of taking up the honoured place in heaven which she had been offered by the Lord. Unlike Christina, however, Ida returned not for the sake of the souls of the dead, but to help an intimate friend, who would have otherwise fallen into mortal sin.\textsuperscript{194}

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\textsuperscript{191} See \textit{Vita Julianaee}, Bk. 1, chap. 5, pars. 26-27, pp. 451-52; Bk. 2, chap. 5, par. 26, p. 466; Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 42, p. 471. Juliana's friends also shared her suffering: when she had to flee one of the refuges she had found in exile, a friend was tortured with pain when she brought Juliana to mind (Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 43, p. 471).
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\textsuperscript{192} \textit{Vita Julianaee}, Bk. 2, chap. 7, par. 36, p. 469.
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\textsuperscript{194} \textit{Vita Idae Lovaniensis}, Bk. 2, chap. 5 [13], par. 26, p. 178.
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Ida of Gorsleeuw (d. c. 1260), a Cistercian nun at the Brabantine community of La Rameé, demonstrated her confidence in the possibilities of transferring her merit to others when she, "not covetous of heavenly goods," told a friend, who was bowed down with the burdens of his sin, that she would confer all of her rewards on him, and take on herself all his evil work, if he would henceforth follow the path of virtue.¹⁹⁵ Purgatorial suffering is given a significant role in the Vita Idae Lewensis, but it is not the suffering of others which is important, as Ida is no disciple of her saintly predecessor at La Ramée, Ida of Nivelles. Ida of Gorsleeuw cannot bear to have her entry into heaven delayed even one day by a sojourn in purgatory, so she asks that she might be purged of her sins during her time on earth. For a year and a half, Ida was laid open to the fiercest attacks of the devil, who would tempt her, and afflict her body with incessant blows. After this long battle had been won, however, Ida had earnt the right to ascend to heaven and enter the wine-cellar of the beloved.¹⁹⁶

And lastly, the Life of Beatrice of Nazareth (d. 1268) is almost exclusively concerned with Beatrice's relationship with God and gives very little indication of Beatrice's relations with


her fellow nuns, or the souls in purgatory. But even Beatrice was not entirely unaffected by the spiritual interests of her predecessors, and in the Life of Beatrice we find that the newly clear model of a soul's penitential progress through this world and the next, so important to the spiritual charity developed by the earlier mulieres religiosae, was incorporated into Beatrice's model of private spiritual progress. The completion of her own purgatorial penance on earth was now given special significance, as it had been by Ida of Gorsleeuw, as a crucial step in Beatrice's progress towards heaven. After having purged all her venial sin by means of a fever, Beatrice was no longer bound to this world, and was increasingly incorporated into heavenly life through her mystical experience and visions:

Here [in heaven] she deserved to be more festively honoured by him with heavenly joys, according to the greater purity of the mental understanding and

197 The probable origins of the Life of Beatrice of Nazareth as a spiritual journal, which account for its almost exclusive concern with the internal states of its subject, go some way towards explaining the total absence from it of interest in the souls in purgatory (or indeed any sign of zeal for souls on earth). Prayer for the souls in purgatory seems to have had no place in the mystical progress which Beatrice envisaged. This seems particularly surprising in light of the great concern Beatrice's spiritual mentor, Ida of Nivelles, had for souls in purgatory, and also in view of the purgatorial piety which is recorded as a feature of the spiritual life of her father. Beatrice's father had great compassion for the souls of the faithful departed, who "through God's mercy had to suffer the pains of purgatory." He recited the Psalter or repeated the fiftieth psalm, the penitential psalm, for an equivalent time, for the liberation of those souls. He also sought to alleviate their suffering through his "prayers and bodily discipline or through other bodily afflictions" (The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268, trans. Roger De Ganck [Kalamazoo, Mich., 1991], Bk. 1, chap. 1, par. 11, pp. 14-15).
affection with which she flew to the sweet chamber of her lover and beloved, with no more vexing hindrance of sin. 198

The clarity of the model of penitential advancement, together with the recognised methods for helping others with their purgatorial punishment by suffering on earth, had thus encouraged mystics like Beatrice to form a new model of spiritual progress: all those who had committed no mortal sins, and had purged themselves of all others were then justly entitled, like souls who have completed their purgation in purgatory, to be incorporated into the heavenly realm.

XI

This chapter has traced the history of vicarious suffering, a practice which, after its first beginnings in Pauline theology of suffering and later development in the penitential disciplines of Egyptian and Irish monasticism, remained more or less dormant within monastic culture, until the dramatic changes the twelfth century brought to the spiritual life of Europe provided the nourishment for new growth. The advent of purgatory, a more clearly articulated penitential system, the new devotion to the human, suffering Christ, and the development of Anselmian theology of Christ's saving work were all important influences on the new interpretations of vicarious suffering which would emerge in the thirteenth century, principally as a form of spiritual charity offered for others by saintly women.

The mulieres religiosae of Liège were amongst the earliest of the thirteenth century women who came to include vicarious suffering, for the living as well as for those in purgatory, amongst the spiritual labours they undertook for others. We have followed developments in spiritual charity through six of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, where we found that each saint forged, from the religious narratives available to her, quite individual understandings of the means by which she could bring others to salvation, and who it was she should help. Marie d'Oignies offered to her friends and neighbours chiefly help in the battle

198 Vita Beatricis, Bk. 3, chap. 3, par. 196, pp. 228-29. For Beatrice's fever, see Bk. 3, chap. 1, par. 190, pp. 220-23.
with demons. Ida of Nivelles and Alice of Schaerbeek performed vicarious suffering for sinners on earth and in purgatory, whereas the beneficiaries of Christina Mirabilis's vicarious suffering were only the dead. For Juette of Huy, it was her own merit which she offered in exchange for mercy for her biological and spiritual children, while Lutgard of Aywières, confident of her own merit, made intercession and fasted in order to wrestle from God mercy for her many clients on the local and international scenes.

Similarly, each of the *mulieres religiosae* looked to different models for their saving work: Marie's models were evangelical preachers and Christ the destroyer of demons; for Juette, it was Mary who was her model in the practice of vicarious penance; in the *Lives* of Ida and Christina, Christ was only barely hinted at as a model for their suffering. By contrast, in their *Lives* Lutgard and Alice's work for others was clearly presented as an imitation of Christ's labour for sinners. Only in the *Life* of Alice, do we see the full implications of the Anselmian revolution in Christology, as Christ and Alice alike are presented as offering up their suffering as supererogatory merit for the salvation of others. All of these choices made by the *mulieres religiosae* are then also choices about the kind of religious values they espoused, the kind of afterlife they envisaged, and, perhaps especially, the kind of God they worshipped.

The differences between the *mulieres religiosae*, however, should not overshadow the enormous spiritual self-confidence they shared: their understanding of the value of human good works in general, and their own individual spiritual power in particular, was breathtaking in its optimism. For the spiritual charity of the *mulieres religiosae* depended on their common conviction that they were so blameless in their own lives, and their own virtue so highly valued by God, that they firmly expected that they could vanquish demons, that their prayers must move God to action, that their suffering would earn supererogatory merit for others, or pay Christ back for the suffering that he endured in saving humankind. The high importance of the role of co-redeemer allowed to saintly women such as the *mulieres religiosae* was surely one, albeit small, way in which medieval culture attempted to mediate the
contradictions between a spiritual world which was theoretically without distinctions of
gender, and a social, political and ecclesiastical world in which such distinctions were ever
present. 199

199 The paradigm of vicarious suffering has not yet been lost from the modern world. In
1996, Alexandrina da Costa, a Portuguese holy woman who died in 1955, was beatified on
account of the heroic virtue in which she offered up, as a "victim soul," her agonising
paralysis for the salvation of souls, including the souls in purgatory. See Francis Johnston,

More recently still, a peculiarly modern, and astonishingly effective variation on the
theme was presented in Lars von Trier's 1996 film, _Breaking the Waves_, in which a young
woman is driven to offer her body for the sexual gratification of strangers, one of whom
eventually kills her, in a bargain she has made with God for the life and health of her critically-ill husband.
Chapter Four
Juette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228):
Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life

From the inception of Christian biography of women, as we have seen in chapter one, mothering and motherliness established themselves as recurrent themes in the lives of female saints which had no counterpart in the lives of male saints, where fathering merited little discussion. The emergence of the lay female saint in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, who was more likely than a monastic saint to have borne children before she turned to the religious life, encouraged a re-examination of the place of mothering in the life of a holy woman, and gave new impetus to the theme of holy motherhood in hagiography.¹ This chapter will follow these developments in the life of the *mulier religiosa*, Juette of Huy, a lay saint who struggled to reconcile her responsibilities to her religious life and her family.

* * *

Medieval motherhood was an intricate and ever-changing network of ideas and practices. Medieval people's experience and understanding of motherhood was naturally

influenced by the values of contemporary Christian culture, while at the same time mothering provided metaphors and narrative structures for experiencing and describing aspects of Christian practice. The present chapter seeks to investigate some aspects of the interaction between understandings of motherhood and the perfect Christian life by exploring the relationship between motherliness and sanctity in the life of Juette of Huy, a widow, recluse and mother of three children. Since institutions and ideas are both reproduced and changed by those who live within them, my essay will discuss, as far as possible, the ways in which Juette of Huy herself experienced, and by her own actions negotiated, the constraints and powers involved with motherhood.

Before turning to Juette's life, however, a brief

2 For an example of the use of maternal imagery, see Caroline Walker Bynum, Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages (Berkeley, 1982), 110-69.

3 Motherhood has been an issue of great importance and controversy in feminist writing of the twentieth century. Mothering has been seen variously as the source of the oppression of women, the source of the liberation of women, and finally the locus of the formation and continuation of the patriarchy. For example, Simone de Beauvoir, in The Second Sex, ed. and trans. H. M. Parshley (New York, 1953) and Shulamith Firestone, in The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution (New York, 1970), both presented reproduction and mothering as fundamental causes of women's oppression. Haunani-Kay Trask may be cited as representative of the cultural feminists who have found in mothering the source of women's beneficial and indeed potentially revolutionary contribution to society (Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory [Philadelphia, 1986]). Nancy Chodorow has argued for the social reproduction of mothering as greatly significant in the creation of our gendered society (The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender [Berkeley, 1978]).

The above writers tend to emphasise the universality of their understanding of motherhood, and so overlook the history of the institution. This paper is a contribution to the study of motherhood as an ever-changing historical institution, a project to which Adrienne
consideration of the ideological and historical context for Juette's life as a holy mother is appropriate. 4

A powerful ambivalence towards family obligations for those striving for the perfect Christian life is evident from the earliest period of Christianity. From the earthly mission of Christ onwards, ties to the family might be, and often were, powerful obstacles to be valiantly overcome on the path towards God. 5 The antagonism of monastic life to the family has often been noted, and the theme of parental opposition to a saintly career is an ancient and potent one. Family may very strongly symbolise the world that pulls the holy person away from his or her vocation.

Furthermore, late antique Christianity developed a particular emphasis on the holiness of virginity, especially in women. Virginity became an important and established element in society's understanding of female sanctity. 6 The problem of children in this context is clear:

Rich made a pioneering contribution in Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (New York, 1976).

4 For a valuable overview of the ideas which informed medieval motherhood, see Clarissa W. Aktinson, The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages (Ithaca, NY, 1991).

5 Three important gospel passages in which spiritual duties are placed above those owed to the family are Christ's promise that all who leave their families for his sake will receive a hundredfold reward and shall possess life everlasting (Matt. 19:29), Christ's warning that those who love their families more than him are not worthy of him (Matt. 10:37), and his affirmation of the ties of spiritual relationships over blood ties (Mark 3:31-35).

6 The importance of sexual purity in the attainment of a holy reputation and eventual saintly status for women is illustrated in the statistical analysis of Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700 (Chicago, 1982), 97-99. Marc Glasser's article, "Marriage in Medieval Hagiography," Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History n.s. 4 (1981), 3-34, confirms the importance of virginity as a saintly virtue, particularly in the early middle ages, while at the same time arguing for a
they were living reminders of the saint's failure to remain virginal, and were solid links to the earthy, mundane aspects of human existence. Only the Virgin Mary, whose cult was to grow in importance in the high middle ages, would be able to offer a model which combined the virtues of motherhood and virginity.7

These ancient and deep-rooted features of the Christian model of religious perfection ensured that there were few models of saintly motherhood, and a limited tradition from which to shape a narrative about a saintly mother. One group of holy mothers who nevertheless gained a lasting place in Christian tradition were the influential mothers of sons who became important Christian figures. St Helena, the mother of Constantine, and St Monica, the mother of St Augustine, are early examples of this group, which would later include St Aleth, the mother of St Bernard of Clairvaux, and St Joan of Aza, the mother of St Dominic.

relative increase in the acceptance of married women as saints in the later middle ages. For background to the high regard in which virginity was held, see Peter Brown, The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity (New York, 1988) and Jo Ann McNamara, "Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought," Feminist Studies 3-4 (1976), 145-58. John Bugge discusses the feminisation of the ideal of virginity in the middle ages in Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal (The Hague, 1975), 80-110.

7 See R. W. Southern, The Making of the Middle Ages (London, 1953), 238-40, for the transformation of the image of the Virgin from a queenly symbol of dominion to a realistic model of devoted, tender motherhood; Southern (ibid., 246-54) also notes the intimacy and availability of the figure of Mary in the Marian miracle story which developed from the late eleventh century. See also Penny Schine Gold, The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France (Chicago, 1985), 43-75, for the renewed interest in Mary seen in the iconography of the twelfth century, and for a general history of Mary during the same period, see Hilda Graef, Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion, 2 vols. (London, 1963), 1: 210-264.
During the early middle ages, most of the saintly mothers whose lives are recorded were aristocrats, like most of the female saints of their time. These women were able to command religious authority and gain recognition for their sanctity largely as a result of the powerful position of their families. Typically they were noble widows, such as St Monegund, St Ita, St Rictrud and St Waudru, who gave up their high place in society to enter religious life after their children had been raised, or royal mothers, such as St Clothild, St Ethelberga, and St Sexberga, whose support of the church and influence over their husbands and families made their personal piety of public significance. The vitae of these holy widows and queens did not always emphasise their role as mothers, but childbearing was understood

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to be an important duty of women of their rank.\textsuperscript{10}

The eleventh and twelfth centuries produced significantly fewer female saints than the previous five centuries, and this decrease was matched by a sharp drop in the numbers of mothers who attained a reputation for sanctity.\textsuperscript{11} During these centuries, when the church focused much attention on reforming and strengthening the clergy and the prelacy by an insistence on clerical celibacy and on ecclesiastical freedom from lay control, as well as on reforming monasticism, the religious models of the church and people were typically powerful reforming bishops and abbots. Women in general, and mothers in particular, had few opportunities to demonstrate their saintly dedication to the ideals of the Gregorian or monastic reform, and so achieve sainthood.\textsuperscript{12} However, in the long run, as the reforms of the church

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Patrick Corbet has emphasised the value placed on maternity in the \textit{vitae} of saintly Ottonian queens and aristocrats (\textit{Les saints ottoniens: sainteté royale et sainteté féminine autour de l’an Mil} (Sigmaringen, 1986), 200-03; 262-63.
\item[11] For the decline in female saints during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, see Weinstein and Bell, \textit{Saints and Society}, 220-21, and Schulenburg, "Sexism and the Celestial Gynaeceum."
\item[12] Of the eleventh- and twelfth-century women included in Weinstein and Bell's master list of saints, I have only been able to confirm that two women, St Aleth, the mother of St Bernard of Clairvaux, and St Joan of Aza, the mother of St Dominic, were mothers (Weinstein and Bell, \textit{Saints and Society}, 252-76).
\end{footnotes}
deepened in the twelfth century, and as the ramifications of the ideal of a holy and pastoral church unfolded, the increased expectations of the religious life of the clergy and laity alike were to be of great benefit to religious women.

Recent studies have described the increase in the opportunities which began to appear during the twelfth century for women who wished to choose a heightened form of religious life. More women were able to find, or create, a space for themselves in the new monastic or mendicant orders, as recluses, or in more loosely defined areas, such as beguine communities, semi-religious hospital communities, confraternities or heretical groups. A marked democratisation and laicisation of religious life made specialised religious roles and practices available to a broader section of society. At the same time, the greater emphasis in late medieval piety on such spiritual accomplishments as a humble life of poverty, service or suffering, or the presence of mystical gifts, gave women who were not virgins other areas within which to aspire to saintliness. These changes meant an increasing willingness to accept as saintly lives which at one stage included marriage and children, and indeed, the proportion of women saints, including women saints who had borne children, rose considerably in the thirteenth century. The women who appear to have most clearly

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(Boston, 1987), 131-51; cf. Weinstein and Bell, Saints and Society, 223-24).


15 Weinstein and Bell, Saints and Society, 220-25; Vauchez, La sainteté, 402-10, 427-48;
benefited from the religious opportunities of the late middle ages were lay women as a whole and lay and religious women from the urban middle classes in particular, and it is to these groups that many of holy mothers of the late middle ages belong.

The acceptability to society of a saintly mother is, of course, related to the value placed by that society on mothering as a role, and in turn to the value placed on the children who are to be mothered. This brings us to the elusive problem of the social norms and moral standards concerning parental duties which were endorsed by medieval society. What kinds of obligations did Christian parents have towards their children, and what sort of upbringing and education were parents who wished to be obedient to the church expected to give their children? What kinds of behaviour towards children would have been incompatible with a holy life? These issues are one aspect of the larger problem of the history of ideas about children, to which social historians have drawn our attention in recent years.16


16 These questions can only be answered by attention to medieval conceptions of parental duties in and of themselves. Much of the literature on attitudes towards children has been concerned with describing the progress towards modern ideas of childhood, and modern norms of the treatment of children. Some medievalists have argued that the evidence suggests an increasingly conscious interest in and concern with the socialisation of children from the twelfth century onwards. See, for example: David Herlihy, "Medieval Children," in *Essays on Medieval Civilization*, ed. Bede Karl Lackner and Kenneth Roy Philp (Austin, Tex., 1978). 109-41, *idem, Medieval Households* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) and Mary Martin McLaughlin, "Survivors and Surrogates: Children and Parents from the Ninth to the Thirteenth Centuries," in *The History of Childhood*, ed. Lloyd deMause (New York, 1974), 101-81. The above authors often link these changes to "progress" in the humane treatment of and affectionate concern for children.

In contrast, Stephen Wilson in "The Myth of Motherhood a Myth: The Historical View
Juette of Huy, the subject of this chapter, was born in 1158, in the town of Huy, situated in the bishopric of Liège, in what is now southern Belgium, and she died in 1228, at the age of sixty-nine. The *vita* which records Juette's life was written in the generation after

of European Child-Rearing," *Social History* 9 (1984), 181-98, has argued against what he sees as a "largely unsubstantiated orthodoxy among historians from widely different backgrounds, the 'indifference and neglect' thesis" (p. 184), and urges that norms and behaviour surrounding children and child-rearing practices be investigated in their social context and compared over time. Shulamith Shahar, in her *Childhood in the Middle Ages* (London, 1990), while arguing that changes have occurred in childrearing and issues relating to children, denies that it is possible to chart parental concern and affection as progressing towards the modern situation (see especially p. 3).

her death by Hugh of Floreffe, a canon at the Premonstratensian abbey of Floreffe, at the request of Hugh's superior, Abbot John of Huy. The Premonstratensians were an order of

On Juette's name, see Elisée Legros, "Pour sainte Juette," *Annales du cercle hutois des sciences et beaux-arts* 24 (1951), 13-21. As this bibliography suggests, there are many contexts within which to place Juette of Huy, all of which add to our understanding of her life. My aim in this essay is to explore what the life of Juette can tell us about mothering in the saintly life, rather than to suggest that my approach offers the key to understanding Juette herself, or that Juette's status as mother determined the shape of her religious life.


The *Vita Juettae* does not survive in any known medieval manuscript. A seventeenth-century manuscript containing the *vitae* of Juette of Huy, Lutgard of Aywières, Elizabeth of Spalbeek and Christina Mirabilis is still extant as Stadtbibliothek Trier MS. 1179. The first edition of the *Vita Juettae* is found in *Lilia Cistercii sive sacrarum virginum Cisterciensium origo, instituta et res gestae*, ed. Chrysostomus Henriquez, 2 vols. (Douai, 1633), 2: 6-83. The Bollandists published their edition in 1642 in the January volume of the *Acta Sanctorum*. Henriquez and the Bollandists used the same codex as a basis for their editions (*Acta Sanctorum*, Jan. vol. 2 [January 13], 145). That codex, now lost, had been lent to the editors by its owner, the Belgian savant Aubertus Miraeus, who recorded that it contained the *vitae* of Ida of Nivelles and Ida of Leeuw as well as that of Juette (Aubertus Miraeus, *Ordinis
Augustinian canons regular, which had had from its inception a strong commitment to the pastoral care of its neighbouring community. The abbey of Floreffe had firm links to the leper community of Huy, amongst whom Juette was to find her religious vocation, through the priests it supplied for two benefices there. Hugh of Floreffe, who was himself Juette's

*Praemonstratensis Chronicon* [Cologne, 1613], 171-72). The *Vita Juettae* was also included in a collection of saints' lives, no longer extant, listed as belonging to the library of the Benedictine abbey of St. Trond in 1638. The list records the "Vita Juttae inclusae Huyensis" in the same entry as a number of other thirteenth-century *vitae* from the Low Countries (S. Bormans, *Bulletin de la société des bibliophiles liégeois* 4 [1888-89], 38; Brussels, Bibliothèque des Bollandistes MS 98, f. 345v.). It should be noted that this manuscript history demonstrates the close relationship, at least in transmission, between the *Vita Juettae* and other *vitae* of the *mulieres religiosae*.

19 The interest of Premonstratensian abbots of the southern Low Countries in the pastoral care of religious women is demonstrated by the decision of the Chapter General of the Order, meeting in 1221, to delegate to John of Huy, abbot of Floreffe, and also to the abbots of the nearby Premonstratensian abbeys of Averbode and Tongerloo, the responsibility of incorporating an informal community of religious women into the Premonstratensian order (Barbier, *Histoire de Floreffe*, 1: 109-10). Presumably, these women were themselves attracted to the Premonstratensian order. Indeed, Carol Neel has argued that the active, charitable way of life followed by the lay sisters of Premonstratensian order in the twelfth century was a precursor to the life of the beguines in the thirteenth century ("The Origins of the Beguines," *Signs* 14 [1989] 321-41). See also, A. Erens, "Les soeurs dans l'Ordre de Prémontré," *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 5 (1929), 5-26, for an account of the Premonstratensian sisters based on the legislative sources of the Order.

20 In 1226, Margaret, a religious from the leper community, established by means of the alms of the faithful two benefices, the patronage of which was given to Floreffe by the bishop of
friend and sometime confessor, insists on the authoritativeness of his account of Juette's life.
and claims two impeccable sources: the Abbot for whom he was writing, who had been
Juette's last confessor, and Juette's female companion of many years, with whom she had
shared many aspects of her spiritual life.\(^{21}\)

While I am always aware of the impossibility of equating Juette's feeling and words
directly with those attributed to her by her biographer (though of course interesting in
themselves), I nevertheless feel that more can be gained from an attempt to discern Juette
behind the words of her biographer than from a position of absolute skepticism about the
possibility of recovering anything of Juette's own life. In the case of the \textit{Vita Juettae}, I have
found the analyses used in source criticism to be appropriate and useful. The sources of very
many of the stories in the \textit{Vita Juettae} are either indicated in the text, or can be reasonably
inferred from the context. Apart from the numerous passages in which the author's voice is
most clearly apparent, usually defending himself or Juette, the information in the \textit{vita} can be
divided into that which Hugh of Floreffe owed to his abbot, John of Huy, and that which he
heard from sources close to Juette's own circle of companions and sympathisers.

The abbot's information about Juette appears in the \textit{vita} still in the form of the
questions and answers of her last confession. It is possible that John of Huy already had in
mind the idea of Juette's \textit{vita}, which he commissioned, at the time of Juette's last confession.
and may have made a written record of her words. The abbot probed the more mystical,
theological aspects of Juette's religious life, asking her about her mystical knowledge of

\begin{footnote}
Liège, Hugh of Pierrepont, with the consent of the prior and the religious of the leper
community (Barbier, \textit{Histoire de Floreffe}, 1: 112). Margaret is probably the same woman
mentioned in the \textit{Vita Juettae} as leading a delegation to the Bishop of Liège concerning the
financial state of the leper community (chap. 55, par. 125, p. 168). A dispute between
Floreffe and the leper community concerning the benefices founded in 1226 was mediated
with the help of town officials in 1236 (Barbier, \textit{Histoire de Floreffe}, 2: 91).
\end{footnote}

\(^{21}\) \textit{Vita Juettae}, Prologus, par. 7, p. 146.
heaven, the Trinity, and Christ.\textsuperscript{22}

In contrast to the material provided by his abbot, Hugh also included much information which is shaped into discrete stories each of which has a firm narrative structure. Many of these stories, particularly ones which describe Juette's encounters with those who came to visit her, are probably traceable to the other main source mentioned by Hugh, the servant woman who shared Juette's cell. Almost all of the events of Juette's geographically very limited life could easily have been known to the servant.\textsuperscript{23} Other stories in the \textit{vita} may have come directly from their main protagonists, mostly spiritual friends, other members of the leper community or townspeople sympathetic to Juette.\textsuperscript{24}

These stories would have circulated within Juette's group of companions, and would finally have passed to Juette's biographer in oral form. They often represent every-day situations in which Juette or sometimes other protagonists are brought to a dramatic climax of emotional struggle. The chief causes of emotional distress and spiritual turmoil are sexual desire and avarice, and this gives the stories a somewhat novelistic tone. This is in contrast to the \textit{vita}e of the other \textit{mulieres religiosae} of the southern Low Countries, which seldom depict scenes with such a clear dramatic structure, tend not to feature scenes of temptation, and which

\textsuperscript{22} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 22, par. 67, p. 158; chap. 23, pars. 68-71, pp. 158-59.

\textsuperscript{23} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 21, par. 60, p. 157. Examples of the kind of story which the servant woman would have witnessed include those which give prominence to visitors to Juette's cell (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 30, pars. 88-89, pp. 161-62 and chap. 31-32, pars. 90-94, pp. 162-63).

\textsuperscript{24} Examples of such material include: the episode in \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 24, par. 79, p. 160, which is told of a woman still alive in the leper-community; the story related in \textit{Vita Juettae} chap. 35, pars. 97-98, p. 163, which is told of a young monk, a relative of Juette, who held her in great reverence and commended her to others and the story in \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 55, par. 125, p. 168, which is told of a woman who was prominent in the leper community after Juette's death. Hugh of Floreffe tells us he himself learned about the vision related in \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 34, par. 96, p. 163 when hearing Juette's confession.
are also much more reticent in their description of the emotional power of sexual and economic motives.

I would argue that in the case of the *Vita Juettae*, these distinctions between the different kinds of material in the *vita* allow us to make hesitant steps towards the life and feelings of Juette herself. To begin with, we can be reasonably confident of the main outlines of the public, external activities of Juette and her family, such as their entry into religious communities. These events would have been public knowledge, and may be given greater credence than, for example, the details of Juette's stated motives for her actions. But I would go further and argue that we can also attach some importance to the emotional content of the stories told by those in Juette's circle because it is reasonable to assume that their perceptions were close to Juette's own understanding of her life.

Before turning to the *vita*'s narrative of Juette's life as a mother, I would like to explore Juette's own experience of being mothered. Juette's mother is a shadowy figure in the *vita*, who seems to have died not long after Juette's marriage.\(^{25}\) However, we can gain some understanding of how Juette experienced and depended upon the motherliness of others by looking at her passionate relationship with the Virgin Mary. Juette was unusual amongst the *mulieres religiosae* for the intensity and intimacy of her devotion to the Virgin, as the spirituality of the other holy women was ardently Christocentric.\(^{26}\) Juette's interest in Mary

\(^{25}\) Juette's mother is mentioned at the time of Juette's marriage (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 147), but has died by the time of Juette's departure for the leper community (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 10, par. 34, p. 152). By contrast, considerable place is given to Juette's relationship with her father, and his search for an appropriate religious life.

\(^{26}\) See Martinus Cawley, "Our Lady and the Nuns and Monks of XIII-Century Belgium," *Word and Spirit* 10 (1988), 94-128. Cawley discusses the *vitae* of Christina Mirabilis, Alice of Schaerbeek, Beatrice of Nazareth, Ida of Nivelles, Ida of Leeuw, Lutgard of Aywières, and Marie d'Oignies. His observation of the preference for Christocentric piety amongst those women also holds true for Margaret of Ypres, Juliana of Cornillon, Elizabeth of Spalbeek and
may be related to her own identity as a mother: certainly, she was the only mother amongst the
mulieres reliogiosae, all of whom, except for the childless Marie d'Oignies, were virgins.
Mary's special maternal relationship with Juette was established in a dramatic vision in
which Juette saw herself condemned by Christ to harsh punishment for her sins.27
Juette desperately begged Mary to intervene on her behalf, and Mary responded by
prostrating herself in front of Christ and asking her son to remit Juette's sin to her.28
Christ, said to be unable to deny his mother, acceded to Mary's request, and then
presented Juette to Mary as her daughter: "Mother, behold your daughter. I commend
her to you as your own, as your special handmaid forever. Keep, protect and guide
her as your own."29

Mary fulfilled the role of protector given to her by Christ when she responded to
Juette's anguished entreaties and defended her against the amorous approaches of a young
man,30 and when she responded to Juette's plea for help with a difficult and deceitful cleric in
Ida of Louvain. None of these women shares the warmth of Juette's enthusiasm for the
Virgin.

27 Vita Juettae, chap. 15, pars. 44-47, p. 154. Juette's biographer opines that the sin for
which she deserved grave punishment was her desire for her husband's death (Vita Juettae,
chap. 15, par. 47, p. 154).

28 Compare the vision in which Margaret of Ypres was assured by the Virgin Mary that her
sins had been forgiven by Mary's Son. See Vita Margarete de Ypris, chap. 11, in G.
Meersseman, "Les Frères Prêcheurs et le Mouvement Dévot en Flandre au XIIIe S."

29 "Mater, inquiens, ecce filia tua: hanc tibi commendo, velut propriam, velut ancillam
perpetuo peculiarem, hancque ut tuarn custodi, protege, et guberna" (Vita Juettae, chap. 15,
par. 46, p. 154).

30 Vita Juettae, chap. 8, par. 24, pp. 149-50.
her community by causing him to be transferred to another area.\textsuperscript{31} And finally, at the end of Juette's life, Mary appeared as a guide for Juette's journey to heaven.\textsuperscript{32} For her part, Juette fulfilled the role of Mary's servant by acting in cooperation with Mary in seeking repentance from and, failing that, revenge against the perpetrators of offences against Mary.\textsuperscript{33}

Juette's experience of the motherliness of the Virgin Mary, the perfect mother, was one of protection and guidance. In Juette's experience, Mary was fearless in her efforts to secure the salvation of those who dedicated themselves to her, even if it meant sharing the burden of sin borne by them. Mary was also known to Juette as a mother who was able to influence her son, Christ, because of her relationship to him. All these qualities are pertinent to Juette's own relationship with her children. She too felt that her ties to her sons, even after she no longer lived with them, were strong and permanent, she too was confident of her ability to influence her sons, she too would exert herself to ensure their salvation.

The special closeness of the bond between mother and son is also stressed in the \textit{vita's} description of the relationship between Christ and Mary. Juette is described as being concerned that her devotion to, and dependence on, Mary might involve her in neglect of Christ. Her biographer then assures his readers that Christ and Mary are so closely associated that devotion to one is devotion to the other.\textsuperscript{34} In particular Hugh stresses the close connection of shared flesh which binds Christ to Mary:

\begin{quote}
For the mother cannot be honoured worthily or truly loved without the son, nor
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Vita Juettæ}, chap. 22, pars. 62-64, pp. 157-58.

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Vita Juettæ}, chap. 48-49, pars. 118-19, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{33} Two of these offences involved clerics fornicating in the collegial church of St Mary at Huy (\textit{Vita Juettæ}, chap. 26, pars. 81-82, pp. 160-61; chap. 27, pars. 83-84, p. 161; chap. 32, pars. 91-94, pp. 162-63).

\textsuperscript{34} A similar point about the interchangeability of devotion to Mary and Christ is made in the \textit{vita} of Margaret of Ypres, though in her case, it is Mary who is in danger of neglect (\textit{Vita Margarete}, in Meersseman, chap. 32, p. 121).
the son without the mother. Indeed they are one in feeling, one in purpose, one in flesh, one in spirit, one in grace, one in glory, according to their humanity, I say, one and the same, flesh and blood, mother and son, Christ and Mary.... The one and the same having been conceived, born and suffered, rising again from the dead, conveyed the flesh which he had received from Mary, above the stars to the right hand of God the Father, honouring every human and especially maternal nature.35

Again, this kind of understanding may have had strong resonances with Juette's understanding of her own role as mother, and the corporeal ties that bound her to her children. The passage also demonstrates Hugh's interest in using the example of the Virgin to present a positive picture of human motherhood. But although the Virgin Mary was a powerful model for Juette of a perfect mother whose saintliness was expressed without ambivalence in motherly concern and protection, Juette herself would find the Virgin's calm certainty about her role as a mother difficult to emulate.

We meet Juette in the first chapter of the vita as a thirteen-year-old daughter who was already rejecting the world by resisting her imminent marriage. Juette's parents had consulted with their friends and relatives about the marriage of their daughter, but Juette already knew of the heavy responsibilities of marriage and wished to avoid them. This aspect of Juette's reluctance to marry is stressed, rather than the more common desire to remain a virginal bride of Christ:

But the girl, prudently noticing what she had not yet learned by experience, that

35 "Non enim mater sine filio, nec filius sine matre honorari digne potest aut vere diligi. Unum quidem sunt in affectu, unum in effectu, unum in carne, unum in spiritu, unum in gratia, unum in gloria, secundum hominem dico unum et idem, caro et sanguis, mater et filius, Christus et Maria.... Ipse idemque conceptus, genitus, et passus, resurgens a mortuis, carnem quam de carne Mariae suscepit, super astra ad Patris Dei dexteram transvexit, honorans omnem humanam naturam et maxime maternam" (Vita Juettae, chap. 22, par. 65, p. 158).
the law of marriage, the disagreeable burdens of the womb, the dangers of birth, the education of children were a heavy yoke, and considering, besides all these things, the unsteady fortunes of men, the care of the family and household and especially the labor of daily responsibility, she refused every marriage and she urged by what means she could, now her father, now her mother, supplicating them, that they might allow her to remain without a husband.\textsuperscript{36}

Juette was not able to resist the combined insistence of her parents and the townspeople and was married.\textsuperscript{37} She could not, however, forget the liberty of her unmarried life, and growing to hate married life in practice as much as she had feared she would, she began to detest every coupling with her husband.\textsuperscript{38} Hugh of Floreffe's description of Juette's unhappiness and despair at this time in her life seems to point to considerable emotional disturbance. Juette focused her unhappiness on her dislike of sex, and her desire to be free of her husband, who did, in fact, die at that time: "From the violence of continual sorrow in her

\textsuperscript{36} "At puella prudenter animadvertens, quod nondum experimento didicerat, grave jugum legem esse matrimonii, fastidiosa onera ventris, pericula partus, educationes liberorum; et praeter haec omnia, casus virorum dubios, curam familiae reique familiaris, insuper et laborem quotidianae sollicitudinis attendens, renuebat omne conjugium: instabatque quibus modis poterat nunc patri, nunc matri supplicans, ut eam manere absque viro dimitterent" (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 147).

This passage is reminiscent of the anti-marriage rhetoric found in the letters of St. Jerome, as in, for example, his letter to Eustochium (Letter 22, \textit{Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae}, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum 54 (Vienna and Leipzig, 1910) Part 1, pp. 145-46). See also Letter 54, to Furia (\textit{Sancti Eusebii Hieronymi Epistulae}, Part 1, pp. 468-69).

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 2, par. 9, p. 147.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 2, par. 10, p. 147.
spirit she began to grow weary of her life and falling thus into a certain torpor of mind, she began to have so great a hatred for the payment of the conjugal debt, that, in order that she could be free from her husband, she seemed voluntarily to desire her husband's death, and truly so it was.\textsuperscript{39} Juette was later to experience great remorse over her desire for the death of her husband, which she only slowly came to understand as a sin of great magnitude.\textsuperscript{40} At the time of her husband's death, after five years of marriage, eighteen-year-old Juette had given birth to three boys, one of whom had died.\textsuperscript{41} Although the \textit{vita} does not mention Juette's children in connection with her depression, it is not difficult to imagine that the changes and hardships brought to her life by the birth of her children, especially since one of them seems to have died during the period of her marriage, contributed to Juette's dark feelings towards her...

\textsuperscript{39} "Ex vehementia siquidem moeroris continui, coepit animum ejus taedere vitae suae, et sic in quamdam mentis acediam deveniens, tanto solutionem conjugalis debiti odio habere coepit, quod ut libera fieri posset a viro, viri mortem ulterior videbatur optare, et vere sic erat" (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 3, par. 11, p. 147). The \textit{vita} of the seventh-century saint Waudru (or Wadetrude), which was written in the southern Low Countries in the thirteenth century (but which may have derived from an earlier source), provides an interesting parallel to the \textit{Vita Juettae} at this point. Waudru is a matron who also, like Juette, "began to have a great horror of the very coupling of the flesh ("coepit ipsam carnis copulam valde perhorrescere"), and she "prayed ... that she might be freed by God's will" ("ut nutu Dei silveretur ... exorabat") from her marriage. Waudru's crisis is a noticeably calmer one than Juette's, and is more calmly resolved: Waudru's husband is filled with divine inspiration and decides to enter a monastery, thus dissolving the marriage. Waudru's \textit{vita} is found in \textit{Acta Sanctorum}, April vol. 1 [Apr. 9], 828-33; see chap. 1, par. 4, p. 829 for the extracts quoted.

\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 15, pars. 46-47, p. 154.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 5, par. 13, p. 147.
husband and her nostalgia for her own childhood.\textsuperscript{42} 

If we look at the progression of Juette's religious and emotional life in a schematic way, we can point to a small number of clear turning-points and stages of development. The death of Juette's husband was one such point, and was the occasion for her first turning towards God. After becoming a widow, Juette gradually distanced herself from her solid social position in her community by refusing to remarry and by impoverishing herself through almsgiving. In the most dramatic moment of her life, she took up a liminal position by leaving her family and giving up her social status to live in the marginal world of a leper community on the periphery of her town. Thereafter, Juette was drawn back from the margins towards the centre, not by returning to her town, but by attracting society to herself in the leper community. This movement was marked by Juette's enclosure in the institutionalised marginality of the life of a recluse.

The first of Juette's movements towards her religious life was her refusal to remarry after the death of her husband. Juette's father wanted her to marry again in order to continue the family line and inheritance.\textsuperscript{43} Juette, however, is said to have been visited at this time by the Lord, who began his work of grace in her, and "she was suddenly changed into another

\textsuperscript{42} Compare Juette's situation with that of the women in Patricia Paskowicz's study of twentieth-century mothers who no longer lived with their children. Paskowicz' work suggests that these "absentee" mothers were more likely than other mothers to have experienced emotional and psychological illness, to have had unsatisfactory marriages, to have given birth to their children at short intervals, and to have had male children. As a group they were also characterised by a low degree of personal self-awareness and self-realisation during the time they lived with their children (\textit{Absentee Mothers} [Totowa, N. J., 1982], 125-37).

\textsuperscript{43} "Qui, ut posteritatis suae lineam protenderet, coepit pulsare animum filiae monitis quibus poterat, instans opportune, importune, ut nuptiis consentire, et per hoc amicorum suorum consiliis et voluntati acquiescere vellet" (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 6, par. 15, p. 148).
woman." Her steadfast refusal to marry induced her father to bring her before the bishop of Liège in the hope that he might convince her otherwise. However, Juette's wise speech to the bishop in which she related how she had vowed herself to widowhood, and wished to keep her vow, and so, not enter into any pact which would do injury to her prior agreement with Christ, persuaded the bishop, who then took Juette's side against her father. Juette's confrontation with authorities who wished to stand in the way of her desire for chastity, and her courageous speech defending her aspirations, link her to a long line of hagiographical heroines, who followed the example of the early virgin martyrs who spoke defiantly to their pagan judges and executors. The description of Juette's defence is notable for the details it gives of her emotional state during her ordeal: on arrival, she was confused and terrified by the multitude of officials and soldiers at the bishop's palace; while the bishop was persuading her gently and intimately to accept a second husband, she uttered a desperate prayer to God to help her keep her resolve; she confessed her agreement with Christ humbly and modestly.

44 "Subitoque mutata est in feminam alteram, et deposito vetere homine cum actibus suis, renovata est in agnitione ejus, qui creavit eam" (Vita Juettæ, chap. 4, par. 12, p. 147); see also, Vita Juettæ, Praefatio in vitam, par. 2, p. 146. On Juette's refusal to remarry, see Vita Juettæ, chap. 6, pars. 15-17, p. 148.

45 The bishop is said to have been well disposed towards Juette's father because of his position within the bishop's household as the collector of episcopal revenues, or "cellerarius" in the town of Huy. For further information on this office, see A. Joris, La ville de Huy au moyen âge: des origines à la fin du XIVe siècle (Paris, 1959), 421-22.

46 Vita Juettæ, chap. 6, par. 16, p. 148. Randulfus of Zähringen was bishop of Liège from 1167 or 1168 till his death in 1191 (Gallia christiana, 3: cols. 875-76; É. de Moreau, Histoire de l'Église en Belgique, 5 vols. [Brussels, 1945-1952], vol. 3, L'Église féodale 1122-1378, 677).

47 See, for example, Alison Goddard Elliott, "The Power of Discourse: Martyr's Passion and
After her successful confrontation with her father and her bishop, Juette also had to guard her chaste widowhood from attack from another direction, the solicitous and then amorous attentions of one of her husband's relatives. When it became clear to Juette that this man's concern for her had grown into passion, she spoke to him with great sympathy, but thereafter denied him her company. But one night, while they were both guests in the house of mutual friends, he tried to approach her bed and was only prevented by a visitation of the Virgin.48

In addition to her involvement in this detailed story of thwarted passion and temptation, Juette stands alone among the *mulieres religiosae* of the thirteenth-century Low Countries in being described as having done battle with sexual temptation in the form of erotic thoughts, which she fought by castigating her body.49 Sexual temptation is an important theme in the *vita*, which contains several stories in which Juette encourages others to continue in the celibacy to which they had committed themselves, warns them of coming sexual temptation, or admonishes them to repent of their present sexual sins.50

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48 *Vita Juettae*, chap. 8, pars. 20-24, pp. 149-50.

49 *Vita Juettae*, chap. 14, par. 43, pp. 153-54.

It seems clear that the rejection or patient endurance of marriage and the desire for chastity were, for Juette no less than for the large majority of lay female saints and those that wrote about them, important ways of constructing her struggle against the world. If we may see marriage and family as the heaviest of a woman's burdens in secular life, the responsibilities of domestic life are inseparable from, and symbolised by, the burden of the conjugal debt. The attitudes towards marriage, husbands, sex, and second marriage expressed in Juette's vita do nothing to weaken the power of the ideal of chastity for women. And yet it remains a fact that in presenting as saintly a woman who is not a virgin, and who is troubled by sexual temptation, Juette's biographer does present a sanctity which is not solely based on sexual purity.51 At the same time, we must remember that the initiative for these changes came from those women whose desire to live a heightened religious life thrust them into the limelight, whose confidence in poverty, humility, suffering, and charitable activity as routes to sanctity demanded attention, and eventually, new attitudes towards the content of female sanctity.

It is certainly true that Juette's biographer is very much concerned to counter the kind of criticisms which might be made of Juette, and indeed of him, for imagining her life fit to record. Hugh's prologue describes how his reluctance to write was overcome by his conviction of the worth of Juette's life, and later in the vita, he defends vigorously both himself and Juette against those that consider sanctity impossible in a local, contemporary figure.52 Hugh is careful to defend Juette's holiness when describing her temptations and

51 See Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Precious Balsam in a Fragile Glass': The Ideology of Virginity in the Later Middle Ages', Journal of Family History 8 (1983), 131-43, for a discussion of the decreasing importance given to physical virginity in the later middle ages as greater emphasis was placed on the "spiritual" content of virginity. See also Glasser, "Marriage in Medieval Hagiography," for a description of the newly positive models of marriage which are being used by hagiographers after the twelfth century.

52 Vita Juettae, Prologus, pars. 5-7, p. 146; chap. 41, pars. 107-09, p. 165.
lapses into sin, and takes pains to demonstrate the sufficiency and efficacy of her penance, and to present evidence of her heavenly forgiveness.53

Turning our attention again to Juette's early widowhood, we learn that Juette remained in the town of Huy as a widow for about five years "having responsibility for the house and for her sons, whom she certainly educated as studiously as she was able in all fear of the Lord."54 She raised her two surviving children until they had passed beyond the boundaries of "infantia",55 at which point she gave up one to the study of letters and the other, too young

53 For examples of Hugh's defence of Juette, see Vita Juettae, chap. 9, pars. 27-32, pp. 150-52 and chap. 18, pars. 50-51, p. 155; for an example of Juette's penance, see Vita Juettae, chap. 16, par. 48, p. 155. For episodes in which Juette receives assurance that her sins are forgiven, see Vita Juettae, chap. 15, pars. 44-47, p. 154; chap. 33, par. 95, p. 163 and chap. 43, par. 112, p. 166. Both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalen act as mediators between Juette and Christ: perhaps she felt that they, as role models for her own life as a saintly mother and a saintly former sinner, would be well able to understand her problems and anxieties.

54 "Sedit autem post obitum viri sui vidua in oppido annis circiter quinque, curam habens domus, et filiorum, quos utique educabat quanto studiosius poterat in omni timore Domini" (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 26, p. 150).

55 The term "infantia" is used twice in the Vita Juettae in reference to Juette's sons: here, to describe the point to which Juette raised her children (Vita Juettae, chap. 5, par. 13, p. 147), and later, when Juette's younger son is described as having been frivolous from the time of "infantia" (Vita Juettae, chap. 19, par. 53, p. 156). In the first case, the end of "infantia" seems to indicate the end of Juette's responsibility to her children, and in the second, the end of Juette's influence and control over her children. The use of the term in canon law describes not the young child who cannot yet speak, but the child of up to seven years (René Metz, "L'enfant dans le droit canonique médiéval: Orientations de recherche," in La femme et l'enfant dans le droit canonique médiéval (London, 1985), Essay I: 39-42; 46). This conception of "infantia" as the first stage of childhood, ending at about seven, was also held
to study, she kept at home with her.\textsuperscript{56} She was aided in her duties by at least one other woman, a servant who remained with Juette through her life.\textsuperscript{57}

During this time, three incidents occurred that highlight the impediments to Juette's spiritual progress arising from her condition as a mother. Firstly, we are told of Juette's great charity for the poor, to whom she gave whatever she could, even pieces torn from her household linen, despite the fact that in so doing she was taking from her own children. This did not escape the notice of her father, who was afraid that the children might be dispossessed by this charity, and "indeed he took the sons away from her for some time so that she would have less control of affairs and would not be able to sell their right of inheritance without his

by many other writers. See Shahar, \textit{Childhood in the Middle Ages}, 21-31. The author of the \textit{Vita Juettae} may have this upper limit in mind as a point after which a child moves beyond the realm of the mother.

Juette is also described as nurturing three of her spiritual friends and companions "ab infantia." See \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 21, par. 60, p. 157; chap. 24, par. 72, p. 159; chap. 30, par. 88, p. 161.

\textsuperscript{56} "Susceperat autem ex eo tresliberos, quorum unum in albis Deo reddidit; duosque reliquos enutrivit, donec infantiae limites praetergressos, unum litteralibus addixit studiiis, altero secum retento domi quia junior erat, nec studii laborem sufferre poterat aetas adhuc infirma" (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 5, par. 13, pp. 147-48). Abundus of Huy, a close contemporary of Juette's children, and from the same town, was also sent to school "when he had attained the limit of the years of infancy" ("cum infantilium metam annorum attigisset"), in the first instance to learn enough to help in his father's business. Abundus first attended a school next to the collegial church of St. Mary at Huy, and then, at his mother's insistence, was sent to a school next to Neufmoustier, the community of canons regular just outside Huy (\textit{Vita Abundi}, edited in A. M. Frenken, "De Vita van Abundus van Hoei," \textit{Cîteaux} 10 [1959], 11-33; Abundus' schooling is discussed in chap. 2, pp. 13-14). See below for further discussion of Abundus.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 33, par. 95, p. 163.
knowledge, for he seemed to look after them as his own children."58 The children were, however, returned to Juette after a short while, since she could not be without them for long, "because she loved them tenderly."59

Secondly, in another struggle resulting from the need to provide for her children, we

58 "...abstulit quidem ei filios aliquamdiu, ut rerum minus esset compos ipsa, nec vendere posset jus hereditatis ipsorum absque conscientia, qui quasi pueros mamburnire videbatur" (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 25, p. 150). In The Domestic Life of a Medieval City: Women, Children, and the Family in Fourteenth-Century Ghent (Lincoln, Neb., 1985). 109-29, David Nicholas considers the practice of appointing guardians for children who have suffered the loss of one parent amongst citizens of fourteenth-century Ghent. These guardians were normally nominated by the clan of the deceased parent, and were usually male. A mother could become a guardian only with the approval of her husband's clan. The guardian had the right to manage the child's property, its share of the dead parent's estate, and even to take it out of the custody of its mother if the circumstances demanded it.

This discussion is of interest for the role played by Juette's father in the life of her children. It seems that he is the most likely candidate for guardian of her children, either at her husband's death or when she leaves the world. If he was guardian at her husband's death, this would make it his duty to concern himself with the financial situation of his wards, and his right to take custody of the children. We do know that Juette's children received inheritance portions from their mother, because her younger son is given a sum over and above this amount by his mother so that he can leave the province (Vita Juettae, chap. 19, par. 56, p. 156), but when this inheritance was divided and when it became available to the sons is unclear. Nicholas' demonstration of the considerable influence of the dead husband's family in the cases he has investigated helps to explain the story of the relation of Juette's husband who became closely involved with her household affairs (see discussion following).

59 "Quos tamen ei in brevi post restituit, eo quod diutius sine eis mater esse nollet, quia tenerrimus eos diligebat," (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 25, p. 150).
are told that fearing "as much for her children as for herself, and wishing to take care for the future" Juette followed her father's advice and invested some money with local businessmen. This was apparently a common practice, and Juette was unaware that she was committing the sin of usury. She was distraught on discovering her wrong-doing, and her biographer takes care to explain why God allowed her to fall unknowingly into this sin.

60 "... metuens tam sibi, quam filiis cavere volens in posterum, de voluntate et consilio patris consensit in hoc, ut pecunia quae sibi proveniebat ex substantiola sua, publicis negotiatoribus accommodaretur...." (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 26, p. 150).

61 Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 26, p. 150. Compare Juette's actions with the practice discussed by David Nicholas in which fourteenth-century citizens of Ghent would invest money for a surviving child at interest after the death of one parent (Nicholas, Domestic Life of a Medieval City, 111; 130-32). Nicholas suggests that the argument which justified the avoidance of usury restrictions in this case was that "children were incapable of increasing the value of their property themselves and that as 'innocents' they were not responsible to God for the sins committed on their behalf" (p. 111). Juette, however, is described as having taken full responsibility for her own action after she had learned it was sinful.

62 Vita Juettae, chap. 9, pars. 26-30, pp. 150-51. This incident took place in about 1180, at the time when the clerical campaign against usury, which was so marked at the beginning of the thirteenth century, was being prepared. By the time Hugh of Floreffe was writing in the 1230s, the issues involved would have been more clearly defined. See John W. Baldwin, Masters, Princes, and Merchants: The Social Views of Peter the Chanter and his Circle, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1970), 1: 296-311. The career of Fulk of Neuilly who preached against usury in northern France and in the Low Countries from about 1195, gives us some indication of how the growing clerical sensitivity to the practice of usury was disseminated (Milton R. Gutsch, "A Twelfth Century Preacher - Fulk of Neuilly," in The Crusades and Other Historical Essays: Presented to Dana C. Munro by his Former Students, ed. Louis J. Paetow
These conflicts of economic priorities, together with the subtler interplay of conflicting emotions, are also found in the story of Juette's rejected suitor, mentioned earlier. The story gains new significance as an example of the conflict between the domestic and the religious life when we read that the young man, her husband's relative, developed his friendship with Juette through the children: "He, on the pretext of earlier familiarity, or pretending to care for the children and the widowed mother, used to visit her, and to speak with her as if to help her with her and her sons' family affairs; he used to show that he cared for them like a next-of-kin." He became so indispensible in domestic matters that he was like "her right hand", until his disguised lust for Juette became apparent and caused her to banish him from her company. This story further demonstrates how Juette's responsibility for her children could seem to be a liability for Juette since it made her vulnerable to this kind of temptation and danger.

In all three episodes, the implicit message is that children are part of the pressure of the world which forces those who strive for perfection into compromise. These stories elaborate the theme already prominent in the preface of the vita, that Juette was indeed saintly because she was able to escape the traps set for her by the devil in her life: temptations of the world or of the flesh, as found in the domestic sphere.

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63 *Vita Juettæ*, chap. 8, pars. 20-24, pp. 149-50.

64 "Hic praetextu familiaritatis pristinae, curam se habere simulans filiorum et matris viduae, frequentare eam solebat, et colloqui ei quasi pro utilitate rerum necessariarum ejus et filiorum, quos intime se diligere ostendebat quasi proximus" (*Vita Juettæ*, chap. 8, par. 20, p. 149).

65 "... quasi pro rebus domesticis multiplicitibusque caussis, in quibus exhibebat se velut manum dexteram ejus" (ibid.).

66 *Vita Juettæ*, Praefatio in vitam, par. 4, p. 146.
Juette's remorse at having sinned through her usurious business dealing on behalf of the children prompted her to give alms even more generously than before. She also opened her house to strangers and pilgrims, and fed the hungry: pious work that she could carry out in the world, and yet all the time she was unsatisfied with the extent of her spiritual commitment. Juette remained in the world for five years after her husband died, all the time wanting to be free, and knowing it was not possible to perfect herself unless she left the world. Unable to delay her spiritual growth any longer, she went to live with and to serve the leper community that was situated outside the town of Huy:

Therefore, when she had made arrangements for all her affairs and her house and her sons, and although all her friends and her father (for her mother had already departed from her righteous life a long time ago) were against it, she took herself to the above-mentioned place [the leper community]. As she did this, all the inhabitants of the whole town marvelled that a youthful woman, who seemed to be in a better position in life, wealth and age, according to the world, having spurned worldly glory, desired such great misery, even misery heavier than all miseries, namely to serve and to live with the lepers.

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67 Juette's biographer states that she wanted to reconcile herself to God, who had been offended by her usurious business transactions, by first restoring to God, in his presence amongst the poor, anything which she feared was not rightfully hers. Only then did she proceed to offer hospitality and distribute food (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 30, p. 151).

68 "... coepit concupiscere aliquem solitudinis locum, ubi reliquum vitae suae tempus redimeret...." (Vita Juettae, chap. 9, par. 32, pp. 151-52).

69 "Dispositis ergo rebus, domo, et filiis, invitit amicos omnibus et patre, quia mater jam dudum ejus religiosa vita discesserat, ad memoratum se locum transtulit admirantibus universis totius habitatoribus villae, mulierem juvenculam, quae in meliori statu consistere secundum seculum videbatur vitae, divitiarum, et aetatis, spreta mundana gloria, tantam appetere miseriam, et miseriam omnibus miseris graviorem, videlicet servire, et cohabitare
Juette's biographer emphasises the fact that Juette's decision was made before leper communities had been transformed, through the work of such people as Juette, into established religious communities; when Juette made her startling decision, no healthy person lived with the lepers. By her actions, Juette created a religious life and space for herself outside traditional monastic communities, and her life is a testimony to the growth in opportunities for institutional religious expression for laypeople, and especially women, during this period. Juette may have felt that entry into a monastic community, given her family situation, was impossible or unappealing. But she was also moving away from her family, as part of the established world which she pushed aside in seeking the liminality of the leper community, and indeed her separation from the social ties of the family would have contributed to her marginal status. It is rather poignant to think that Juette's journey to the periphery of society only took her as far as the edges of her own town. Perhaps she was not able or did not need to go further.

The fate of Juette's children on her departure for the leper community is unclear, and one may be sure that concern for them formed part of the objection of Juette's father to her plan. Juette was now twenty-three. If she had had her first child at the age of fourteen, he was now nine years old, and if her last was born when she was eighteen, he was now five. The leprosis" (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 10, par. 34, p. 152).

70 There was a great increase in the foundation of leper communities throughout France and the Low Countries during the second half of the twelfth century and the thirteenth century (Françoise Bériac, *Histoire des lépreux au moyen âge: une société d'exclus*, 151-179). These communities provided not only opportunities for almsgiving and charitable service to the laity, but also opportunities for semi-regular religious life. On the leper community of Huy, see Joris, *La ville de Huy*, 388-89.

71 Cochelin, in *Sainteté laïque*, points out the position of the leper-community ensured Juette's continued contact with the citizens of Huy (p. 398), and that in choosing the leper community, Juette chose a place outside ecclesiastical control, under lay authority (p. 400).
elder boy was probably already living away from home when his mother moved to the leper community. The passage quoted suggests that Juette left her children behind, perhaps with their grandfather.72 There is no suggestion that Juette kept her children with her, and no discussion of the arrangements made for their welfare.

The little explored issue of parental responsibility, or what may indeed be conceived of as child rights, is pertinent here. We are aware of the debts that medieval spouses, joined by a sacramental bond, owed their partners, particularly that they were unable to forsake them for the religious life without permission. The position of children, however, is less clear. Studies on the child in canon law have concentrated on the delineation of the parents' rights vis-à-vis their children. It is evident that parents had the duty of baptizing their children, and that children of the age of reason (variously defined) in the high and later middle ages had access to confirmation, the eucharist, confession, and extreme unction.73 The duty of parents to raise their own children, and the minimal duties that a parent had towards a child, beyond baptism, were not explicit convictions or concerns of the canonists.74

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72 Brenda M. Bolton in "Vitae Matrum" concludes that Juette "handed her young family over to her father and opened a hostel for pilgrims and guests" (p. 258 and n. 39), although there is no evidence for this in the text. She is followed in this by John Boswell, in The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance (New York, 1988), 285, n. 44, and by Atkinson, in The Oldest Profession, 165.

73 On the responsibilities spouses had to each other, see Elizabeth M. Makowski, "The Conjugal Debt and Medieval Canon Law," Journal of Medieval History 3 (1977), 101-02; for the duties a parent had towards a child in canon law, see Metz, "L'enfant dans le droit canonique," 59, 61-66.

74 John Boswell's study of the abandonment of children in the middle ages emphasises the general lack of moral or canonical censure of those parents who abandoned their children suggesting an underlying absence of the conviction that parents had a particular obligation to raise their natal children (The Kindness of Strangers, 331-35, 428-30). Thomas Aquinas
We are told that Juette served the leper community where she settled for about eleven years, eating and drinking with them, washing them and their bedclothes, and washing herself in the same bathwater which they used. Juette was entering into a new life as a mother, with its own very maternal tasks. She identified with those she helped to such an extent that she wished that she could become a leper herself.\textsuperscript{75} During this time a community of men and women gathered itself around her, whom she instructed with teaching and encouragement.\textsuperscript{76} Having sought out the margins of her own society, Juette now became the centre of a new community of her own.

The next step in Juette's religious life was her enclosure as a recluse.\textsuperscript{77} This new move to a stricter religious life is made by the biographer to parallel her earlier withdrawal from family life to service in the leper community. Hugh of Floreffe reintroduces Juette's family into his narrative in order both to emphasise her freedom from obligations to worldly focuses on the responsibility of parents to make adequate arrangements for the children they are leaving, rather than their duty to bring up their own children, when he objects to parents leaving their children for the religious life if they have not made provision for the children's upbringing (\textit{Summa Theologiae} 2-2.189.6 resp.; cf. 2-2.101.2.ad 2).

\textsuperscript{75} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 11, par. 36, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 11, par. 37, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{77} The difficulties faced by widows in their attempts to find a suitable form of religious life, and the opportunities that the role of the recluse could offer are discussed in Nicolas Huyghebaert, "Les femmes laïques dans la vie religieuse des XIe et XIIe siècles dans la province ecclésiastique de Reims," in \textit{I laici nella "societas christiana" dei secoli XI e XII}, Miscellanea del Centro di Studi Medioevali 5 (Milan, 1968), 346-89.

On the phenomenon of the urban recluse in the late middle ages, see Paulette L'Hermite-Leclercq, "Le reclus dans la ville au bas moyen âge," \textit{Journal des savants} (1988), 219-258. L'Hermite-Leclercq points out that recluses were commonly associated with leper communities ("Reclus," 229).
life, and to construct the sanctity of Juette's new life through contrast with her former life as a laywoman. The place of the family is re-asserted so that it may be denied once again.

The reappearance of Juette's family begins with her father. The biographer writes that God heard Juette's prayers and illumined the eyes of her father, so that he sought to amend his life. He entered a community of canons regular outside Huy, but finding the discipline too lax, and that he was given too much honour from the other brothers, he took counsel from his daughter, and having obtained permission from the superior of his monastery, he built a cell in the side of the little church in the leper community where his daughter lived. He was never enclosed in the cell, however, as he then remembered a pilgrimage vow he had made and journeyed to Santiago. On his return, he entered a Cistercian monastery, again following the advice of his daughter, and after a time died there.

Juette's biographer states that her father and the son who died in infancy were now no longer her responsibility. Nor, we are told, was her elder son, now aged about twenty, who had become a Cistercian at Orval in the diocese of Trier. The biographer

78 Juette's father entered Neufmoustier, a priory of canons regular of St Augustine, founded around 1101 (Gallia christiana, 3: col. 1002; de Moreau, Histoire de l'Église en Belgique, 3: 429-30).

79 Vita Juettæ, chap. 13, pars. 39-41, p. 153. The Cistercian monastery was Villers in the diocese of Liège, which was founded in 1146 and often visited by St. Bernard (de Moreau, Histoire de l'Église en Belgique, 3: 400-09). Juette had a strong attachment to the Cistercian order, which both her sons and father eventually joined. She herself wore their customary tunic next to her flesh for some years before her death (Vita Juettæ, Praefatio in vitam, par. 2, p. 146). For the pronounced female influence on the Cistercian order in the thirteenth century in Belgium, see Simone Roisin, "L'efflorescence cistercienne et le courant féminin de piété au XIIIe siècle," Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique 39 (1943), 342-78.

80 Vita Juettæ, chap. 14, par. 42, p. 153. Orval is in the archdiocese of Trier. It was a foundation of canons regular until the Count of Chiny asked Bernard of Clairvaux to send
continues: "the devoted woman, feeling as if she were freed from all the cares of the present life, decided to serve the Lord under a program of a still stricter vow, and leaving off the service of Martha gave herself entirely to the part of Mary, which is the best, and had herself enclosed in the little cell which had been built next to the church for her father." 81

The fact that there is no mention of her younger surviving son among those who are no longer a burden for Juette is ominous, and indeed, this prodigal son, now at least sixteen years old, turns up several chapters later, and his conversion, brought about through the prayers and tears of his mother, forms the most detailed and moving account of the mother-son relationship in the vita.

The biographer begins the story by stating that the devil, as he could not make any progress with Juette, sought to draw her from her prayers by working on her son. 82 The son, from the time of "infantia," had given himself up to a reprobate and frivolous life, and spent his time with youths of his own age, who were equally frivolous. 83 The prayers of his

some of his monks to replace them (de Moreau, Histoire de l'Église en Belgique, 3: 399-400). Juette's son, Henry de Satenay, was abbot of Orval from 1225 until his resignation in 1228 (Gallia christiana, 13: col. 628; Monasticon Belge, 5: 200).

81 "... quasi exoneratam se sentiens a cunctis vitae sollicitudinibus praesentis, sub districtoribus adhuc voti proposito mulier devota Domino servire disposuit: omissoque ministerio Marthae, in partem Mariae, quae optima est, totam se contulit atque in cellula, quam patri secus ecclesiam: construxerat.... se fecit includi" (Vita Juettae, chap. 14, par. 42, p. 153). The fact that Juette was enclosed by the abbot of Orval, her elder son's monastery, suggests her continued connection with that son. The enclosure took place in 1192, and the abbot who presided over it was Remy de Longuyon. He appears as abbot between 1192 and 1197 (Gallia christiana, 13: cols. 627-28; Monasticon Belge, 5: 196-97).

82 Vita Juettae, chap. 19, par. 53, p. 156.

83 Ibid. Some insight into the behaviour of this wayward son comes from the writings of Guibert of Nogent (Guibert de Nogent, Autobiographie, ed. and trans. Edmond-René
mother, however, saved him from greater harm.\textsuperscript{84} Juette came to hear about the deeds of her son, and was distraught: "the mother wished that he had died or that she had never borne him before such a life should be reported to her concerning him. Yet she pressed on in her prayers, made herself wet with tears, prostrated her body, humiliated her soul, beat her breast, plucked at her hair, was twisted inside and out, an innocent mother for a guilty son: proposing two things, she desired one of the two, either death for herself, or life for her son."\textsuperscript{85} The theme of Juette's horror at hearing bad reports of her son is quite marked: it is clear that those people who reported the son's actions to Juette felt that she bore some kind of responsibility for them, and that she also felt the burden of this.

Labande (Paris, 1981); English translation, \textit{Self and Society in Medieval France: The Memoirs of Abbot Guibert of Nogent (1064?-c.1125)}, ed. John F. Benton, trans. C.C. Swinton Bland, rev. by Benton [New York, 1970]), who had a similar experience of parental deprivation. Guibert, who was very attached to his mother, felt abandoned by her when she left to enter the religious life, though he (later) understood that this was for the good of her soul. Guibert also notes that his mother's decision was publicly criticised and her motherliness brought into question. After his mother's departure Guibert's newly-found liberty and perhaps his resentment against his mother and the church were expressed in rebellious behaviour, which included keeping company with other youths of similar disposition. Guibert's mother, like Juette, was grieved at the reports she heard of his behaviour and persuaded the abbot of Saint-Germer to accept Guibert into his community, so that he could be restored to the company of his former tutor (Autobiographie, 101-11; Self and Society, pp. 74-77).

\textsuperscript{84} \textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 19, par. 53, p. 156.

\textsuperscript{85} "... quern mater vellet ante mortuurn aut se numquam genuisse, quam vitam nuntiari sibi de eo hujusmodi. Instat tamen orationibus, rigatur lacrymis, affligit corpus, humiliat animam, tundit pectus, vellit caput, torquetur intus et extra pro filio obnoxio mater innoxia, duo offerens, unum optat e duobus, aut mortem sibi, aut filio vitam" (\textit{Vita Juettae}, chap. 19, par. 54, p. 156).
Juette then asked all the friends who came to console her to pray for her son devotedly, and asked him to come to her cell to see her. After she had rebuked him and cried over him, the son expressed remorse for his past life, but seems to have been mostly anxious to prevent the punishment that he feared would come upon him if his deeds affected the holiness of his mother's life. This sentiment is an interesting representation of the ambivalence a rebellious son felt, or was thought to have felt, towards the holy mother he both resented and revered. The son consoled his mother, and attributed his wicked life "partly to his youthfulness and partly to the partners of his crimes" and saying to her that she would henceforth only hear good reports of him, he "departed from her as an unhappy Cain from the face of the Lord."  

The son, however, returned to his old friends and ways, and hearing this from her friends, Juette was again greatly concerned: "tears came again to her cheeks, though the previous ones were not yet wiped away." At this stage, Juette called her son to her cell, and ordered him to leave the province if he could not reform his ways; his obedience to her in this was a sign of her authority over him.

The turning point in the son's life came while he was in Liège on the first leg of his journey into exile. He had a vision in which he saw himself judged to be fit only for hell, where his torturers attempted to drag his soul from his body by means of pitch-forks and flame-vomiting tongs. The son was only saved when his torturers were ordered to stop by a messenger who revealed that the son had received a truce of three years from God. This  

86 *Vita Juettae*, chap. 19, par. 55, p. 156.
87 "... causas malorum adscribit partim adolescentiae, partim sociis criminum, tamquam quis ipsum ulterius allicerent ad vitia... eo quod bona ei de se nuntiari posse non dubitaret in proximo: et sic in corde et corde cuncta locutus, egressus est a facie Domini infelix Cain" (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 19, par. 55, p. 156).
88 "... redeunt ad genas lacrymae, necdum prioribus plene detersis, rursus planctus, rursum clamores, rursum suspiria" (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 19, par. 56, p. 156).
89 *Vita Juettae*, chap. 19, par. 56, p. 156.
dispensation, which is granted on account of the merits of his mother, is an extraordinary expression of the ways in which blood ties were perceived to be intertwined with spiritual ones.90 The next day, he encountered a woman telling him to go to his mother. The young man "was changed into another man," his conversion echoing his mother's earlier experience, and immediately he returned to his mother's cell, and telling her all the these things, announced that he wished to do her will.91

Convinced now of her son's conversion, Juette, weeping, raised her eyes and hands to the heavens: "thanks be to you, good Father, since you have heard the voice of your hand-maiden and you have not wanted to disappoint me of the desire of my heart before I should die. Behold, now I shall die happy because the son of my womb has turned to you, my God, and will be left behind in your grace."92

90 *Vita Juettae*, chap. 20, par. 57, pp. 156-57.
92 "... gratias tibi, bone Pater, quoniam exaudisti vocem ancillae tuae, nec fraudare me voluisti a desiderio cordis mei antequam morerer. Ecce jam laeta moriar converso filio uteri mei ad te Deum meum, et superstite relictio eo in gratia tua" (*Vita Juettae*, chap. 20, par. 58, p. 157). The prayer echoes the first verses of the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-48), and the portrayal of Simeon and his Song (Luke 2:26, 29-32). Juette's tears and faithful prayers poured out for the sake of her unrepentant son echo the tears and prayers of Monica, Augustine's mother. Monica is western literature's clearest model of a mother steadfastly desiring and working towards her son's conversion. Juette's joy at her son's conversion may be compared to that of Monica, when she too was informed by her son of the conversion which she had long desired. A passage from the *Confessions* 9. 10. 26, in which Augustine remembers his mother's words is especially close in sentiment to the words of Juette. Monica does not understand why she is still alive, now that her hope in this world has been fulfilled: "Unum erat propter quod in hac vita aliquantum immorari cupiebam, ut te christianum catholicum viderem priusquam morerer. Cumulatius hoc mihi deus meus praestitit, ut te etiam contempta felicitate terrena
On Juette's advice, the son joined the Cistercian monastery of Trois-Fontaines, not, however, before returning to school to learn to read. He soon attained the rank of priest, and died in the monastery after a long and praiseworthy penance.93

The story of Juette's prodigal son illustrates the kinds of close ties that bound mothers to their children, which both made holy mothers responsible for the moral lives and ultimate destiny of their children, and made it possible for the sanctity of a mother to benefit her children. Similar stories, in which a holy mother is described as suffering for her wayward son, who is finally brought to salvation through her efforts, are told of the mother of Guibert of Nogent, of Birgitta of Sweden and Margery Kempe.94 Suffering was increasingly a

servum eius videam." ("The one reason why I wanted to stay longer in this life was my desire to see you a Catholic Christian before I die. My God has granted this in a way more than I had hoped. For I see you despising this world's success to become his servant" [Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991), p. 172]). See also Confessions, 5. 8. 15 and 3. 11. 19-20 (for Monica's tearful grief over her son's unrepentant state) and 8. 12. 30 (for her joy at Augustine's conversion). On the changing understanding of Monica in Christian thought, see Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Your Servant, My Mother': The Figure of Saint Monica in the Ideology of Christian Motherhood," in Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and Social Reality, ed. Clarissa W. Atkinson, Constance H. Buchanan and Margaret R. Miles (Boston, 1985), 139-72.

93 Vita Juettae, chap. 20, par. 59, p. 157. Trois-Fontaines is in the diocese of Chalons in the archdiocese of Rheims. Juette's younger son is noted as a person of holy life in a small number of Cistercian martyrologies of the seventeenth century. The son's relationship to this holy mother, his misspent youth, his conversion and entry into the monastery of Trois-Fontaines are recorded. All this information may have been derived from the Vita Juettae, yet the additional detail given of the younger son's name Eustache, is not found in the vita ("Praetemissi, et in alios dies rejecti," Acta Sanctorum, March vol. 2 [March 13], 253).

94 See Atkinson's sensitive discussion of the theme of holy mothers suffering for their
defining feature of sanctity, and helped make the role of motherhood, which could easily include vicarious suffering for a child, acceptable in a saint. As Clarissa Atkinson has written, "Instead of blocking access to the sacred, motherhood made it available through sorrow and suffering, permitting women to share the tears of Mary and the pains of Christ."

Further information about Juette's relationship with her adult sons as monks is found in the one near-contemporary reference to Juette outside her vita. The vita of Abundus of Huy (born c. 1189) records an incident in which Juette's ties to her sons are emphasised. When he was still a young layman, Abundus of Huy visited Juette, described as a recluse of great piety, in order "to converse about the good things of the Lord and about the salvation of his soul." Juette understood that Abundus wanted to join a Cistercian monastery, and gave him this advice:

"My son, if you desire to be a monk, behold I propose two monasteries to you, the first Trois-Fontaines, and the second Orval; choose one of the two and I promise you, in charity which is not false, that I will make your concern most certainly succeed with the abbot of Trois-Fontaines, especially since I am confident of the good-will of the abbot towards me, and my sons who became children in The Oldest Profession, 144-193.

95 We know that the practice of transferring one's merits, usually accrued through penitential suffering or illness, was current in Juette's area, as it is a notable feature of the vitae of the mulieres religiosae, especially those of Christina Mirabilis, Lutgard of Aywières, Alice of Schaerbeek and Ida of Nivelles.

96 Atkinson, The Oldest Profession, 192.

97 "... ut ei de bonis Domini et de salute anime sue colloqueretur" (Vita Abundi, chap. 4, p. 15). For Abundus of Huy (BHL 18c), see Roisin, Hagiographie cistercienne, 34-38, and Albert D'Haenens, "Abbondio di Villers-en-Brabant," Bibliotheca Sanctorum, 1: cols. 33-34. The Vita Abundi was written by a confrère of Abundus at the monastery of Villers, probably Gosuinus de Bossut, during Abundus' lifetime.
monks, one in the monastery of Trois-Fontaines, the other in the monastery of Orval, ought to offer you their help, along with me."98

This passage indicates how Juette's connections in the monastic world were formed through her sons. She is proud to recommend the abbeys of her sons, and feels confident that her relationships with the abbot of Trois-Fontaines and her two sons will assist Abundus with his desire to become a monk.

Juette's older surviving son was to be the only member of her family to survive her, and until her death she continued to express her concern for him. As she felt death to be approaching she sent for her son so as to be able to advise him: "And she also had her elder son, who as we have said was at that time the Abbot of Orval, ordered through a messenger to come to her, wishing to persuade him before her death to be willing to resign his administrative office, because the authority held by her son had for a long time been very troubling to her, although no one knew the cause of her disquiet."99 Juette's son was not able

98 "'Fili mi, inquit, si monachus esse desideras, ecce duo tibi propono monasteria, primum Trium Fontium, alterum Auree Vallis; elige unum e duobus ac ego promitto tibi in caritate non ficta, quia negotium tuum apud abbatem Trium Fontium faciam certissime prosperari, precipue cum de abbatis erga me presumam benevolentia et filii mei unus in monasterio Trium Fontium, alter in monasterio Auree Vallis monachi facti sua tibi mecum prestare debeant obsequia'" (Vita Abundi, chap. 4, p. 15). Abundus, however, already had his heart set on the Cistercian monastery of Villers, and so did not take her advice. Father Martinus Cawley has pointed out to me that Juette makes particular mention of the abbot of Trois-Fontaines, and mentions Trois-Fontaines before Orval, because Trois-Fontaines was monastically senior to Orval, as its founder. Presumably the abbot of Trois-Fontaines, who would have served as visitor to Orval, would have had considerable influence over who entered the novitiate at Orval.

99 "Filio quoque suo seniori, qui erat tunc temporis Abbas Aureae-vallis, ut praediximus, mandari per nuntium fecit ut ad se veniret, volens ipsum inducere ad hoc ante obitum suum ut administrationis suae resignare officium vellet, eo quod molesta ei dudum extitisset et gravis
to come in time to see his mother alive, or even to attend her funeral, though her burial was
delayed for three days or more in the hope that he might be able to come. 100 He arrived after
the funeral, and was hardly able to visit her grave before being recalled by his superior. But
heeding his mother's advice to resign from the office of abbot, he asked to be released from
his duties, and obtained permission. 101

In reading Juette's vita for evidence of her relationships with her children, it is
impossible to ignore the numerous places in which her motherly affections and concerns for
young people that are not her children are expressed. She had found new monastic families for
her own children, now she was finding a new "spiritual" family for herself.

The main group of Juette's spiritual daughters were the other women, some of whom
were still girls, who gathered around Juette in cells of their own. We are told that when Juette
foresaw her own death, she "began to be anxious and to be more solicitous concerning her
daughters, whom she had acquired as profit from Christ, each of whom she had, up to that
time, nurtured very gently in the instruction of the Lord." 102 One of these girls Juette had
adopted as her own: "There was indeed among the other virgins whom she educated in Christ,
a certain young virgin, whom she loved, instructed, and exhorted in a unique way, above all

admodum ipsius filii praelatio, cum tamen nullus sciret molestiae causam" (Vita Juettæ, chap.
47, par. 117, p. 167).

100 Vita Juettæ, chap. 56, par. 126, p. 168. This indicates some measure of the public
estimation of the devotion or at least duty felt by the son towards his mother.

101 Vita Juettæ, chap. 47, par. 117, p. 167. The superior was the abbot of Orval's mother
community. The evidence of the vita is supported by other sources: Juette's son last appears as
abbot of Orval in the year of her death, and appears again as a simple monk in 1230 (Gallia
christiana, 13: col. 628; Monasticon Belge, 5: 200).

102 "... coepit anxiari et esse magis sollicita de filiabus suis, quas Christo lucrifecerat,
quasque usque in tempus istud in disciplina Domini benignissime enutriert," Vita Juettæ,
chap. 45, par. 114, p. 166.
the rest, because she had adopted her as a special daughter from her years of infancy long ago." The girl, often referred to as "filia," is saved from sin by the prayers of Juette.

We have already seen that Juette was the person that the young Abundus of Huy came to see when he wanted advice about his vocation. It may be that Abundus had been a regular visitor to Juette's cell as a schoolboy. A story in the early thirteenth-century vita of Arnulf (d. 1228), a conversus who was Abundus's confrere at Villers, offers us some insight into the kind of relationship Juette and Abundus may have had: we are told of a schoolboy who visits a female recluse (his "magistra et mater") every day, and doesn't mind missing his lessons in order to learn of the "way of Life" in her "school." 

Young monks were also given motherly attention. Concerned about "a certain brother of the Premonstratensian Order, a young man who was commended specially to this saint as a spiritual son "from his infancy," she spoke to him and "as a wise materfamilias, with the wine of harsh correction she mixed the oil of benign consolation." Juette counsels "amicably and secretly" another young monk, who was a friend of hers because they were related, about his involvement with a young woman outside the monastery. Perhaps

103 "Fuit sane inter alias virgines, quas ipsa Christo educabat, virgo quaedam juvencula, quam praeceter unice diligebat, instruebat, et exhortabatur, eo quod in speciale filiam ab annis eam infantiae jam dudum adoptaverat" (Vita Juettae, chap. 24. par. 72, p. 159).
104 Gosuinus de Bossut, De B. Arnulfo Monacho, in Acta Sanctorum, June vol. 7 [Jun. 30] chap. 4, pars. 33-34, p. 572. This vita was probably written before 1236 (Roisin, Hagiographie cistercienne, 32-34).
105 "Frater quidam Ordinis Praemonstratensis adolescens, qui specialiter Sanctae huic ab infantia commendatus fuerat in filium spiritualem" (Vita Juettae, chap. 30, par. 88, p. 161).
106 "Quod ipsa intelligens, ut sapientissima materfamilias vino asperae correctionis oleum benignae consolationis admiscuit, dulcisbusque sermonum propositionibus juvenem ad virtutis amorem, et contemptum vitiorum instruebat" (Vita Juettae. chap. 30, par. 89, p. 162).
107 Vita Juettae, chap. 35, par. 98, p. 163.
Juette's friendships with these young people were seen as the "hundredfold" return of spiritual relationships promised by Jesus in return for his followers' withdrawal from worldly kinships; this is certainly suggested by Hugh's description of Juette as having acquired her spiritual daughters "as profit" from Christ. 108

In conclusion, it is clear that Juette's attitude towards the condition of motherhood and towards her children as revealed in the vita was highly ambivalent. Certainly, Juette's children are represented as contributors to the temptation of the world which she had to overcome in order to achieve progress in her spiritual life. The biographer creates a context from her conquests over the temptations of her worldly life as a wife, and then as a mother for the spiritual victories which lead Juette towards her life as a recluse. For the writer of the vita and presumably for its audience, refusing to conform to the normal behaviour of a mother and abandoning even quite young children for the religious life could be evidence of heroic virtue.

And yet the very fact that Juette's children could be the occasion of temptation for her was only possible if she had feelings of responsibility and affection towards them: there is no virtue in separating oneself from something that is not attractive. Motherliness, as the example of the Virgin in Juette's own life showed, need not be rejected quite as fully as wifeliness, and there is evidence of Juette's continuing affection and concern for her sons in the vita. This is particularly seen in Juette's anxiety over her younger son's soul, and her desire to see and advise her elder son before her death. The authority with which Juette advised and directed the lives of her children and father was considerable: the power inherent in Juette's dual role as mother and holy woman was to prove irresistible even to family members who were at first recalcitrant.

Even such maternal concern as is communicated in the vita is not, however, without its

108 Vita Juettæ, chap. 45, par. 114, p. 166 (passage is quoted above, p. 319). Cf. Matt. 19:29: "And every one that hath left house or brethren or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold and shall possess life everlasting" (Douay-Rheims translation).
own ambiguity. Juette's deepest expression of maternal love was in her desire to guide her children's souls to safety: that is, into the new spiritual families of monasteries.

Yet looking in another direction, Juette was able to retain aspects of her motherly role in her relations with her spiritual associates: motherhood in the world might have been far from a blessing, but as a recluse, Juette was able to exercise motherly concern and authority over the lives of her spiritual "children" to great effect. The practical condition of motherhood was a worldly burden for Juette, but spiritual motherhood held possibilities of blessedness.

Thus the life of Juette, as told by Hugh of Floreffe, gives us some insight into the phenomenon of the saintly mother, and allows us to explore the place of children and motherhood in the perfect Christian life. From a wider study of women such as Juette, a deeper understanding of the nature of late medieval lay sanctity and the attitudes and perceived obligations held towards children may be expected. In a broader perspective, the power of both Juette's rejection of the role of motherhood, and conversely the power available to her in the role of a mother may be seen as further indications of the deep ambiguity of motherhood in the lives of women.


______. "'Your Servant, My Mother': the Figure of Saint Monica in the Ideology of Christian Motherhood." In Immaculate and Powerful: The Female in Sacred Image and


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______. *Quinque prudentes virgines, sive B. Beatricis de Nazareth [auctore Guillelmo de Mechlinia, B. Aleydis de Scharenbecka, B. Idae de Nivelles, B. Idae de Lovauio, B. Idae de Leuvis, ordinis cisterciensis...Accedit catalogus...sanctarum et beatarum...ejusdem instituti. Auctore P.F. Chrysostomo Henriquez,...* Antwerp, 1630.


______. "'Noli me tangere': Marie Madeleine, Marie d'Oignies et les pénitentes de XIIIe siècle." *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome (Moyen Age)* 104 (1992): 209-68.


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