MARRYING JESUS: BRIDES AND THE BRIDEGROOM IN MEDIEVAL WOMEN'S RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

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Abstract

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Phrases such as "bride of Christ" and passages which describe Christ as a "Bridegroom," a "Spouse," and a "Lover" appear in a wide range of Christian texts composed in both Latin and vernacular languages. The phrase has become almost a generic descriptor for religious women—especially mystics—yet the function of the relationship between Christ and his beloved is never a constant. I explore the language and imagery that surrounds Christ's many brides by examining a selection of medieval works that portray Christ as a desirable spouse for Christian women. Relationships between Christ and pious women did not consist exclusively of a spiritual re-enactment of courtship and marriage in vision or ritual. Mystics enacted marriage to Jesus in visions, while nuns' vows and profession ceremonies are described as a marriage to Christ, a chaste union to be consummated in heaven, traditionally modeled upon secular marriage ceremonies. However, the title "Bride of Christ" was not uniformly applied by and to medieval women, and some nuns and mystics never gained a bridal association. Most importantly, married and lay women could become brides of Christ, even if they were not mystics.

As the number of Christ's brides increased in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, women who claimed this special relationship were less likely to be automatically recognized as holy. Consequently, the phrase "bride of Christ" became politically charged, and by the fifteenth century, it was used in innovative but cautious ways, especially in writing by and for women's religious communities. My investigation of Christ and his brides between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries highlights the brides' gradual disassociation from sanctity. Though twelfth- and thirteenth-century

women religious became brides of Christ for their chastity and mystical experiences, I argue that the number and nature of brides of Christ in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries contributed to growing doubts about women's religious writing and creativity, resulting in the introduction of a new model for female sanctity that de-emphasized mystical experience and the bridal relationship in favor of virtuous actions.

In memory of Mariana Issa Geha
1910-2005

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Two days before I was scheduled to defend my PhD exams, my paternal grandmother, Mariana Issa Geha, died. She was not quite 95. Though I barely spoke Arabic, and she barely spoke English, she has been one of the most influential women in my life. Married as a teenager, raised during war and famine, mother of six and grandmother of eighteen, she was a brilliant and difficult woman who commanded and dominated our family. To me, her life's accomplishments exemplify female authority and agency in the face of poverty, constant childbirth, lack of formal education, war, and living in a

patriarchal society. Unlike so many other women in her village, tayta Mariana owned land, could read and write, lead the women's church group, and helped put her sons through college. I only wish she had lived a little longer. She was, to me, even more remarkable than the women about whom I have chosen to research and write. Although I believe she would have preferred I bear her many great-grandchildren, I know how much education meant to her, and that she would have been very proud to have another doctor in the family. With tears and love, I dedicate this dissertation in memory of Mariana Issa Geha.

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PREFACE

Almost ten years ago as an impressionable freshman, I was startled to read about physical love and marriage between Jesus and Margery Kempe, and refused to believe that in the medieval church, women's (and men's) religious experiences were sometimes signified through a metaphorical marriage to Jesus. Sometime in the fall of 1997, almost by happenstance, I found myself in Sara Beckwith's classroom, struggling through the Middle English *The Book of Margery Kempe* and falling in love with Margery's eccentricities. I clearly remember my amazement, amusement, and confusion. On the day we were discussing Margery's mystical marriage, I recall raising my hand to ask whether this was "normal," as I was too young, foolish, and arrogant to believe my professor's assurances that, to medieval Christians, extreme religious experiences were sometimes expressed through sexual or marriage metaphors. Over the past ten years, I have been humbled, and I have learned a great deal, but I have also continued to doubt that simple explanation for Margery's marriage to the Godhead in Rome. The next semester, in a class with my good friend and mentor, Mel Peters, I read the *Song of Songs* for the first time in my life. Years later, in graduate school, I began seriously studying medieval mysticism, and my old questions returned rapidly. What was going on when medieval authors wrote about marrying Jesus? Was it really just a simple metaphor for mystical experience? What else might it mean? Didn't medieval Christians think it odd that so many people had claimed to marry a dead man? At the same time, I was reading prescriptive literature for virgins, and found this same imagery—exhortations to guard chastity, so that young women could experience Christ's embraces as brides. At first, encouraging chastity by promising divine embraces made no sense to me. What follows is the result of ten years of trying to make sense of Margery's marriage to Jesus, and to the broader medieval phenomenon of marrying Jesus

that I have observed. Ten years is a very short period of time, and I have only begun to find a satisfactory explanation for why medieval men and women wrote about marriage to Jesus.

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Marrying Jesus

My beloved is mine and I am his *Song* 2:16

Apollo loves. And desires to marry Daphne upon whom he has gazed. [Apollo amat. Et optat conjugia visae Daphnes] Ovid, Metamorphoses 1:9

daz ist
dîn schepfaere,
dîn erloesaere,
dîn minnaere.
[This (the Bridegroom) is your creator, your redeemer, your paramour]
St. Trudperter Hohelied lines 145:24-27

Jhesus est amor meus, [Jesus is my love]
Book of Margery Kempe, lines *1810-1*

Ardent love between mortal men and women, between humans and pagan deities, or between humans and the Christian trinity certainly does not have to be expressed physically, much less commemorated with marriage. Yet Apollo first *saw* the virginal Daphne, then loved her, longed to possess her body, and wished to marry her. Daphne's virginal beauty incited a deity's uncontrollable passion. Apollo, desperate to possess the body he desired, chased Daphne until she miraculously transformed into a beautiful tree. In Ovid's version of this myth, mortal beauty inspires divine love and creates the potential for a marriage, though there is never any physical contact between Daphne and Apollo. In contrast, the two lovers of the *Song of Songs* share a carnal love, and the refrain "my sister, my bride" emphasizes the immediacy of their wedding. Though this pair of lovers is anonymous, both Jewish and Christian exegetes have long suggested that the infatuated male voice of the *Song of Songs* belongs to God as much as to Solomon. The lovers' boasting reveals much about the bride—the tone of

her skin, the shape of her figure, the lands she has traveled, the country she left behind— but this "Shulamite woman" has no fixed exegetical identity. Bernard of Clairvaux asks, "tell us, I beg you, by whom, about whom, and to whom it is said: 'let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth.'"[1]

Who was this sun-blackened beauty who knew God's body so intimately, this woman exegetes suggested God saw and loved? Though patristic and medieval exegetes would most commonly answer "the Church!" or "the Virgin Mary!" or "the individual's soul!" there were alternate possibilities.[2] Christians often characterized her as "the bride of Christ," or sometimes, "the bride of God," but many different types of women married Jesus, both in *Song* exegesis, and in a broader range of medieval religious literature. For instance, an illustrated twelfth-century commentary on the *Song of Songs* by Honorius Augustodunensis suggested that there were, in fact, *four,* brides of Christ, corresponding to the four biblical epochs, and that Jesus would wed the Anti-Christ.[3] Franciscans would recognize Lady Poverty as Christ's, as well as Francis's, bride.[4] Though these exegetical interpretations identified biblical figures and abstract concepts like "church" or "wisdom" as Christ's brides, the language of the *Song of Songs* was also employed by several highly influential patristic authors to encourage and praise women vowed to virginity. These exhortations may be the first surviving examples of living Christian women becoming brides of Christ. Jerome refers to the virgin Eustochium as "my Lord's bride" (letter XXII p. 2), while Ambrose of Milan recognizes consecrated virgins as Christ's brides in Book 2 ch 6 of his *On Virginity*. By the fourth century CE, exhortations to virginity and guides to female comportment regularly

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[1] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* (Spencer, Mass.,: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 3.

[2] These three Brides of Christ are mentioned in the St. Trudperter Hoheleid, and have numerous patristic antecedents. Friedrich Ohly and Nicola Kleine, *Das St. Trudperter Hohelied: eine Lehre der liebenden Gotteserkenntnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1998), 788.

[3] Anne E. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 58-64.

[4] In her discussion of the *Sacrum commercium,* Barbara Newman outlines how Francis's marriage to Lady Poverty borrows from the imagery of the *Song of Songs*. In one of a sequence of transformations, Lady Poverty becomes Christ's bride. Newman comments that "The tenderness and familiarity of the language should not mask its deep irony, for Christ's traditional bride was the very Church that Francis was trying to Reform..." However, as Francis was the alter-Christus, it seems quite logical that Christ would wed Francis's bride as well. Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 8.

drew from the erotic language of the *Song of Songs,* and the ceremony for consecrating virgins closely modeled contemporary marriage rites.[5] Though the bride of the *Song* ate rich food, relaxed in pastures and vineyards, adorned her body with jewels and rich fabrics, roamed the city streets, and called her lover into her bedchamber, she became a role model for pious, chaste, austere, and enclosed women. In this genre of patristic literature, virgins wed to Christ were primarily metaphoric abstractions meant to praise and entice young women to embrace asceticism. Whether in hagiography or treatises and letters addressed to historical virgins, bridal status was one of many ways to encourage a young woman to behave decorously. Even Jerome's letter to Eustochium, which explicitly encouraged a historical woman to please her divine Bridegroom, did not explicitly deal with Eustochium's transformation into a bride of Christ or incorporate all of the many details of courtship found in the *Song of Songs*. Instead, Eustochium's bridal title emphasizes religious and behavioral obligations and, presumably, offers similar guidance to any other virgins who might subsequently encounter the letter.

How did the sensual creature of the *Song of Songs* transform into a sanctifying metaphor for female spirituality? This patristic literature for virgins became the main source of medieval formational literature for religious women, and Ambrose and Jerome were especially influential.[6] Male confessors and spiritual counselors continued to describe, cajole, and praise sanctified virgins as Brides of Christ. However, the sanctified bodies of veiled virgins and pure Christians' bridal souls ceased to be abstractions in the mid-twelfth century, soon after Bernard of Clairvaux popularized the understanding that the bride was an individual's soul. By the late twelfth century, women (and men) were no longer passive recipients of bridal status, but instead actively proclaimed themselves (or were recognized to be) individual and living brides of Christ. These brides of Christ wore wedding rings, bridal gowns, and bridal veils, either in their souls or on their bodies. They spoke to the Godhead as if he were their lover

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[5] René Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1945), 188.

[6] Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," *Traditio* 45 (1989/1990): 126. This article would later be re-published in Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to womanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 19-45.

and visited with the Bridegroom in vineyards, palaces, wine cellars, and bedchambers, just as the bride in the *Song of Songs* had. Many of these medieval brides even married Christ, whether through a monastic initiation ceremony, or through a spiritual donning of bridal gown, crown, and wedding ring. By the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, every day sinners could, through religious conversion, marry Jesus and become the bride of Christ. Between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries, increasing numbers of women and men became brides of Christ, stepping into the role of the Shulamite woman and becoming living participants in a metaphoric enactment of Christ's transformative love.

Who could become the woman demanding to be kissed by God, the beauty Christ saw, loved, and wed? The *St Trudperter Hohelied,* a twelfth-century interpretive poetic commentary on the *Song of Songs,* recognizes a bridal collective of young virgins and older women gathered together in a convent. Each could claim the Creator and Redeemer as her beloved Bridegroom, and help each other attract and retain divine caresses. These consecrated religious women were not very different from the virgins and widows Jerome and Ambrose addressed, though their bridal status is explicitly described as a love-relationship between God and humans, modeled upon the *Song of Songs* .Yet Margery Kempe, the married mother of fourteen who rejected consecrated enclosure, also became a bride of Christ. Jesus himself commanded her to commission a ring to mark this union, and to have engraved upon it "Jesus is my love." Margery recognized this as a wedding ring.

Margery Kempe was not the only married bride of Christ, nor was she the first. In the later Middle Ages, the bride of Christ was no longer "just" the Church, the Virgin Mary, the Christian Soul, or the consecrated virgin, and bridal relationships were no longer exclusively sexless tales of longing, pursuit, and purifying transformation through divine marriage. In some respects, the late medieval bride of Christ began to more closely resemble her biblical model. Some of these brides of Christ, like Margery Kempe and Katharina Tucher, drank wine, took lovers, traveled in the world, wore rich clothing, or even fell afoul of the law. Yet others, like Daphne fleeing Apollo, resisted divine love. In one collection of late

medieval bridal texts, Christ the Bridegroom became less tender, and like Apollo, tried to enforce his will upon his beloved's body—though through physical chastisement rather than rape.

Though men and women of increasingly varied backgrounds became brides of Christ in the later Middle Ages, those originally associated with the metaphor—vowed religious women—did not uniformly self-identify as brides of Christ, or find bridal language and imagery relevant for their own communal literature. The women writers of the *Devotio Moderna* in particular seem to have been reluctant to call themselves and their sisters brides of Christ. Soon after the 1140s, when Bernard of Clairvaux wrote his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and the two anonymous bridal treatises for women, the *Speculum Virginum,* and the *St Trudperter Hohelied,* were composed, medieval women's mystical experiences offered the first recorded evidence of historical women becoming brides of Christ. Many of these mystical writings profess to be the words and experiences of the women themselves, and thus preserve potential voices of brides of Christ. These high medieval love mystics were primarily associated with the convents and beguinages of Germany and the Low Countries, and thus still conformed to the bridal model of a chaste and pious Christian woman whose beautiful soul attracts the eye of the divine Bridegroom. Though Beatrijs of Nazareth, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Gertrude of Helfta, and Hadewijch of Antwerp were all virginal mystics committed to a lifelong religious vocation, brides of Christ from the subsequent centuries would not always conform to standard definitions of female virtue. By the 1470s, two trends were becoming increasingly clear in Germany and the Low Countries: 1) bridal mystics were less likely to be professional religious women, and 2) professional religious women were less likely to identify themselves as brides of Christ. These two trends demonstrate how women were employing the bridal title in their own self-fashioning and suggest that expectations and standards for becoming a living bride of Christ had changed significantly since Jerome penned his letters to Eustochium. I want to draw attention to some of these alternate medieval understandings of "bride of Christ," and begin to answer the questions of how certain medieval Christians came to marry Jesus through a close reading of bridal texts dating between the 1140s and the early 1500s.

To the modern layperson, "bride of Christ" might first evoke memories of Dan Brown's 2003 *Da Vinci Code* and the now-notorious claim that Jesus married Mary Magdalene. Whether or not the historical Jesus died a bachelor, he seems to have accumulated a very large number of wives—both male and female—during the Middle Ages. This dissertation is not about Mary Magdalene, or any other woman the historical Jesus might have married. Instead, it investigates some of the medieval women who became brides of Christ, as well as literature by, for, and about historical brides of Christ. To medievalists and historians of Christianity, a dissertation about the bride of Christ may seem unnecessary, or worse, impracticably ambitious. However, the simplest explanation of this phenomenon—that marriage between Christ and medieval Christian men and women was a metaphor for their spiritual experiences and accomplishments—is insufficient. If marrying Jesus was only a metaphor, then why are accounts of these experiences so detailed, and so common? Likewise, the hypothesis that bridal status was used to commend pious women does not fully account for women who, like Margery Kempe, failed to meet the behavioral criteria for "good" Christian women by losing their chastity, or refusing to be chaste, humble, and obedient. Such bridal claims would not have been preserved and transmitted if "bride of Christ" were exclusively a cultural metaphor for "good Christian woman." Though the great mystic saints like Bernard of Clairvaux, Teresa of Avila, Catherine of Siena, and Bridget of Sweden were brides of Christ, Christians largely forgotten by history also earned—and assumed—this title. It is to these lesser known brides of Christ that my investigation turns.

Like other historians of medieval women and medieval Christianity, I accept that the phrase "bride of Christ" most commonly meant the Church, the Virgin Mary, a nun, or a virtuous Christian soul. However, in light of surviving evidence about *other* sorts of brides of Christ, I shall question the following corollary assumptions about brides of Christ: 1) that women generally were passive recipients of bridal titles and did not actively accept or reject the title "bride of Christ"; 2) that bridal imagery was chosen to appeal to female audiences and that women readers and writers did not respond positively to the language of crowns, veils, wreaths, and rings; 3) brides of Christ were almost exclusively virgins; 4)

the bridal relationship between women and Christ was meant to provide a male authority figure for otherwise "unbound" women; 5) erotic imagery in bridal mysticism is a metaphor for the indescribable experience of the soul's interaction with God. Of these commonly made assumptions, only the last is difficult to conclusively resolve from the writings of lesser known brides of Christ. Based on German and Dutch bridal literature, it seems impossible that women were only passive conduits for bridal imagery. The writings of numerous "love" mystics, notably Hadewijch, Mechthild, Gertrude, and Beatrijs, entirely disprove that line of reasoning. Additionally, the women writers of the *Devotio Moderna* seem to have actively and openly rejected or avoided both the bridal title and bridal imagery in certain circumstances, providing corroborating evidence that women were not always passive recipients of bridal status. As for prerequisite virginity, it is true that the most famous brides of Christ were almost certainly virgins. Jerome, Ambrose, Chrysostom, and others used bridal language exclusively in their exhortations to chastity *for virgins,* never in cautions against remarriage and exhortations to chastity intended for widows. However, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, several married and widowed women became brides of Christ, and many of them were even recognized as saints—including Bridget of Sweden, Elizabeth of Hungary, Dorothea von Montau, Marie d'Oignes, Helena of Skövde, and Catherine of Genoa. When a married woman became a bride of Christ, the bridal relationship sometimes *challenged* the established role of male patriarch by putting husband and divine Bridegroom into competition for a woman's soul and body. Likewise, making Christ a single woman's husband could only provide the security of a male "head" if the woman took religious vows, entered a religious order, and subsequently obeyed her superiors unfailingly. Hadewijch's exile from her community, as well as accusations that Margery Kempe was a Lollard, suggest that for beguines and laywomen, becoming a bride of Christ did not in any way make women "safe" in the eyes of the Church. Although marrying Jesus sometimes signified saint-like holiness, it also freed women from temporal vows of obedience to husband and church. As medieval women's religious literature reveals, becoming a bride of Christ might be neither a stamp of Church approval nor proof of spiritual perfection.

Rather than offering a sprawling and exhaustive examination of each and every bride of Christ who walked Europe between 1140 and 1500, I have chosen to focus primarily on lesser known German and Dutch women, many of whom did not meet behavioral expectations for Christian women, or conform to the traditional assumptions about medieval brides of Christ. Only one, Dorothea von Montau, would become a saint—and she would not be canonized until 1976. I shall try to determine how women transformed themselves and their sisters into brides of Christ, and how the role of bride of Christ itself changed and developed between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries by examining some of what these women read, wrote, and told others. In particular, I am concerned with finding an explanation for the apparent divergence between mysticism, virtuous living, sworn chastity, and bridal status in the fifteenth-century Low Countries. I shall propose that the increasing number of living brides of Christ in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (including beguines, mystics, heretics, and married women) made bridal identification potentially dangerous for the women of the *Devotio Moderna*, who could not afford to be mistaken for beguines, and were forbidden from writing or translating mystical texts. Despite their dependence on bridal literature—they read Hadewijch, Jan van Ruusbroec, and the *Speculum Virginum*—these chaste women were only rarely identified as brides of Christ. My sources have been carefully selected to support a chronological narrative that can account for this shift away from bridal imagery in the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna*.

I begin with one of the earliest and most influential medieval bridal treatises "by a man for a woman," the anonymous *Speculum Virginum*, which would be prescribed as a necessary "start-up" text for Devout women's communities. In chapter 2, I focus specifically on the *Speculum Virginum's* depiction of bridal transformation. The *Speculum Virginum's* afterlife as a devotional text by Bridget of Sweden and the women of the *Devotio Moderna* forms an important link between traditional brides of Christ, married brides of Christ, and the muted bridal tradition of the fifteenth-century Low Countries.

A second devotional text, the anonymous *Christus und die minnende Seele,* is the center of a second nexus of ideas about the relationship between idealized brides of Christ and the historical men and

women who married Jesus. In this adaptation of bridal imagery, the bride herself is a wanton and willfully sinful worldly woman who is forcibly transformed into a model of virtue by an especially harsh and brutal Christ-the-Bridegroom. Despite its seeming brutality, this treatise was read and copied in several German women's communities, and would also be meditated upon by another known married bride of Christ, the fifteenth-century widow and mystic, Katharina Tucher.

The connections among German Convents, married brides of Christ, and violent or sexualized bridal imagery in *Christus und die minnende Seele* forms another important part of the picture of how medieval women adopted and adapted to changing versions of the bride of Christ. This nexus also introduces a crucial late-medieval innovation of merging bridal imagery with passion devotion, resulting in the bride stepping into a crucifixion scene or otherwise conflating Christ-the-Bridegroom with Christ's suffering body. In the Sisterbooks from the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna,* imitating Christ's life and death becomes more important than marrying Jesus through mystical experiences or virtuous living, and though bridal imagery exists, passion devotion and passion mysticism seem to have been more appealing to these Devout women than marrying Jesus. The extant writings of the Devout mystic Alijt Bake are characteristic of this shifting emphasis. Though Bake was a prioress, a virgin, a consecrated nun, and a gifted mystic, her own mystical writing focuses on Christ's suffering and death, not bridal love. My study closes with the Sisterbooks of the *Devotio Moderna* and Alijt Bake's mystical works, all of which were intended for in-house use, composed by women who were intimately familiar with bridal literature of preceding centuries, and only rarely includes bridal references. Despite these characteristics, Alijt Bake and the women chronicled in the Devout Sisterbooks are often described as brides of Christ in secondary literature. In the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna,* women recorded, altered, and responded to previous centuries' brides of Christ. Comparing their written records, the treatises they read, and other written records of late medieval brides of Christ reveals how medieval women understood bridal relationships with Christ. Married brides of Christ and the women of the *Devotio Moderna* offer contrasting answers to who could (not) marry Jesus, whether a bridal relationship

was considered important enough to be made public, or should be kept private, and whether being a bride of Christ had become a metaphor or synonym for the good Christian woman.

The purpose of this study is as humble as the women it investigates: to broaden common scholarly understandings of the bride of Christ, and to begin the process of looking at how medieval women responded to this particular "imposed" ideal of femininity, thus changing the ideal itself. Scholarship on medieval religious literature has made great progress regarding gender issues and asceticism, but the nuptial language of the bride and Bridegroom is almost always employed without questioning or problematizing imagery or metaphor. Asking what it means and meant to be a bride of Christ, rather than accepting or applying that title within the context of a broader treatment of gender and sanctity will bring new insights into how relationships between Christ and Christian women were imagined and constructed during the medieval period. My goal is to show that there were many types of brides of Christ, and that the phrase should not be applied carelessly, or accepted without question by scholars of women's religious history.

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The *Song of Songs* and the Bride of Christ

Before taking up the cause of lesser known brides of Christ, it seems prudent to pause a moment and glance over the traditional and predominant meanings of "bride of Christ," as well as several key exegetical interpretations of the *Song of Songs* which helped define "bride of Christ" for medieval Christians. What makes the brides of Christ who appear in subsequent chapters unusual should become more apparent after establishing the parameters of the bridal tradition itself. As I have already mentioned, the identity of the bride of Christ is tangled up in patristic and medieval exegesis of the *Song of Songs,* though medieval conceptions of the bride of Christ were also influenced by women's religious movements and medieval mysticism, especially the love mysticism of Germany and the Low Countries. In the predominant bridal tradition, Christ the Bridegroom would be drawn to a particularly enticing soul, and then redeem and transform her with tender love. This transformation derived from exegetic understandings of the *Song of Songs*.

Origen's highly influential writings on the *Song of Songs* inherited a Jewish understanding that God had enacted a marriage with Israel. This interpretation connected passages in prophetic books depicting the Exile in terms of marital infidelity to marital psalms such as psalm 45 and the *Song of Songs*. By reading these more sexual passages of the bible as the story of God's love for and punishment of the adulterous Israel, the passion and violence of the *Song of Songs* became a lengthy allegoric account of Israel's covenant with God, her fall into idolatry, punitive exile, lamentation, humiliation, and penance, and eventual return to God's love. This allegoric interpretation thus proposed that the *Song of Songs* recounted a wedding between God and the nation he especially loved—that it was an *epithalamium* for a divine marriage. Origen adapted this reading of the *Song of Songs* by casting Christ, rather than the God of the Hebrew Bible, as Bridegroom. Origen also introduced and popularized the two most common allegorical identities for the bride: the Church and the Virgin Mary. By encouraging the using the *Song of Songs* for liturgies of the Virgin Mary, he reinforced the association of the bride with the Virgin, and with virgins in

general.[7] Though Origen's interpretations would be overshadowed by the taint of his heresy, he introduced allegorical interpretation to the Christian understanding of the *Song of Songs* and firmly established the identification of Christ with bridegroom, as well as bride with Church or Virgin.

Subsequent interpretations would return to Origen's readings. For instance, during the investiture conflict, the identification of Bride as church or *ecclesia* would be used by Bruno of Segni to encourage an "alliance or coordination with the church as Virgin-Bride" in support of the papacy.[8] Medieval exegetes would also revive the Hebrew Bible's prophetic marriage imagery, drawing connections between the bride of the Song and the punishment of sinful Israel. Rupert of Deutz incorporated the extremely violent marriage of God to Israel and Judah (Ezekiel 23) into his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, comparing Ooliba's seduction by images of Chaldean warriors to the Bride's infatuation with her Beloved's body bedecked with gold and jewels. Just as Oooliba felt attraction for the Chaldean warriors' colorful garments and chose them to be her real life lovers, the bride of the *Song of Songs* chooses her beloved based on his rich and seemly appearance:

> I say to you: even as that woman--not Hierusalem but Ooliba-- opened her eyes to see men depicted on a wall, to see the images of the Chaldeans expressed in painted colors, to see their belts, their crowns, and their bodily beauty, so now you—open your eyes, your interior eyes, to see this Beloved, to see his golden head, his brilliant eyes, his awe-inspiring cheeks, his radiant and glorious lips, his smooth and golden hands, his ivory stomach set with sapphires, his upright legs. And touch his throat, surpassingly sweet, in accordance with the words: 'taste and see how sweet the lord is '(Ps. 33)[9]

Rupert's exhortation and interpretation draws upon a marriage between God and Israel described by a prophet of the Hebrew Bible, but leaves out the horrific consequences that befell Oolibah. Instead, he encourages the reader to envision the Beloved through interior eyes, within the soul, focusing on his

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[7] Matter, *Voice of my Beloved*, 10-11.

[8] Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 15.

[9] Ibid., 69.

beauty and splendor so that the soul may become entranced by his adorned beauty, taking Christ the Beloved as a spiritual lover, just as Oolibah sought Chaldean embraces.

Although Rupert of Deutz refers to Oolibah to provide context for the Bridegroom's physical appearance, rather than to account for the watchmen's assault on the bride in *Song* 5:7, other medieval commentators would draw connections between the bride, sinfulness, and punishment. Jerome himself drew the connection between the bride's blackness and her sinfulness in his Letter to Eustochium (letter 23: paragraph 1). William of St. Thierry also interpreted the bride's black skin as a sign of her sinfulness. According to his rendering of the *sensus litteralis*, the bride's skin was black because she was Solomon's wife, the daughter of the Pharaoh of Egypt. Though Solomon initially adorned her, loved her, and kissed her, he soon "cast her forth from their mutual union and the favor of the kiss until, by riddance of her Egyptian blackness and rejection of the customs of a barbarous nation, she might become worthy of access to the royal bedchamber."[10] Reading the bride's blackness and destitution as sinfulness and punishment would be foundational for the influential medieval interpretation of the *Song of Songs* as an allegory for Christ's transformative love for mortal sinners.

This medieval interpretation presumed that all souls were feminine, whether they were associated with male or female bodies. Men had to first become women before becoming brides of Christ. As Anne Astell puts it, "the allegory of the Song had defined the place of audience identification as the Bride, not the Bridegroom. The central consciousness of the Song *ad litteram* moreover, is feminine, not masculine...The exegetes all encourage their auditors to identify their "bridal self" with the Bride, using the feminine *figura* as a way of evoking, expressing, and directing the emotional domain within themselves. The exegetes insist that the proper human response to the divine call issued through the inspired text is that of the *Sponsa*."[11] In this exegetic tradition, Christians reading the *Song of Songs* were to

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[10] Ibid., 30.

[11] Ibid., 10.

imagine themselves as brides—sinners who, despite their sins, are still beautiful in Christ's eyes, and thus still worthy of his love.

This last exegetic trend of inserting the reader into the *Song of Songs* would provide a crucial foundation for medieval identification of living and historical brides of Christ. Together, these exegetic traditions would culminate in the medieval acceptance—and expectation—that men and women could become brides of Christ during their lifetimes, winning divine love through either virtuous living or happenstance. Yet by stepping into the role of bride, and casting Christ as Bridegroom, medieval interpreters were actively placing themselves into an erotic and physical relationship with their God. This relationship was not a substitute for physical love, or the sexual fantasy of repressed monks. In a candid and insightful explanation of why Freudian analysis would be both anachronistic and insufficient to account for medieval approaches to the *Song of Songs,* Denys Turner writes:

> Had I thought that this anomaly could be comprehensively explained in the way most obvious to the twentieth-century mind, as the phenomenon of a psychopathology, I should not have found it curious. It might have been worth documenting, but it would not have been worth much effort explaining. But although freudian [sic] explanations are, in my view, often illuminating, they are unconvincing as a generalised account of the male celibate enthusiasm for the imagery of *eros* in the Middle Ages. Mediaeval monks do not seem all to have been repressed. Most seem to be happy. They *like* sexual imagery, and if a Freudian would require of repressed subjects that they are ignorant of the forces which they sublimate and that they misrecognise them in their sublimated forms, then the medieval monk, by and large, lacks an important symptom: he *knows* what he is doing, he *intentionally* denies to himself a genital outlet for his sexuality and *deliberately* transfers his sexual energies upon a spiritual object.[12]

Turner is right to insist that this was the intentional and gleeful choice of celibate men (and women) who directed their sexual energy towards a spiritual being, and who felt that erotic and sexual love was the best way to describe their own relationships with the divine. Medieval monks even felt this imagery was appropriate to employ for and about women—they incorporated erotic bridal sequences into

[12] Denys Turner, *Eros and Allegory: Medieval Exegesis of the Song of Songs* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 17-18.

prescriptive literature and recorded the sensual details of bridal encounters women related to them. This medieval embrace of the erotic relationship between bridal soul and divine Bridegroom culminated in the acceptance and propagation of the written experiences of men and women who became brides of Christ.

Why was this potentially erotic relationship such an appealing way to describe love for God? The passionate sequence of the *Song of Songs* never explicitly offered the hope of transformative redemption through Christ's love that was clearly stated in the Gospels. Nevertheless, men and women incorporated the *Song's* sensual nuptial imagery into their own spiritual pilgrimages. Explaining the use of Christ as Bridegroom in medieval literature, Hildegard Keller writes that it is "a relationship between God and humanity, a relationship imagined in sexual terms… a sort of divine love story and family history."[13] While Keller's explanation is appropriate to medieval biblical interpretations and the erotic language of medieval mysticism, marriage to Jesus was not always imagined as sexual, and did not always teach about God's love for humanity. Beginning in the twelfth century, prescriptive literature for medieval nuns and anchoresses recast the bride as the souls of real women, rather than as an allegorical representation of an idealized virgin or a Christian soul.[14] As more women became brides of Christ, the phrase extended beyond an imagined sexualized allegory. As a supplement to existing explanations for the bride and Bridegroom in medieval literature, I propose that Christ's brides can be placed into three primary categories: those who share chaste relationships with Christ through monastic vows or other symbolic rituals, those who experience erotic mystical union, and those referred to as brides in passing (often in a monastic context), without any allusion to a marriage ritual. Only in mystical union is the marriage imagined as sexualized, though each type of bridal relationship incorporates culturally dictated gender

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[13] Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 6-7.

[14] Some relevant literature on prescriptive literature for nuns and anchoresses includes: Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," in *From virile woman to womanChrist: studies in medieval religion and literature*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); Constance J. Mews, editor, *Listen, Daughter: the Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

roles to express dominant theological ideals. These bridal passages do not always—or even frequently—make claims about God's love for humanity (although some claim quite a lot about God's love for one particular human). These three categories sometimes overlap, and are by no means exhaustive, but they more accurately capture the varied types of relationships Christ pursued with his brides.

There are three key stages in the transition from bride of Christ as an exegetic concept to bride of Christ as a living Christian. The introduction of bridal language and imagery in patristic literature for consecrated virgins provided the first crucial connection between the *Song of Song's* "bride of Christ" and Christian women. This definition of "bride of Christ" as a pure Christian woman was reinforced through monastic initiation ceremonies and especially the ritual of the *consecratio virginum,* which borrowed directly from secular and pagan marriage ceremonies. In the Middle Ages, references to patristic texts and classical literature reiterated the association between bridal status and virginal Christian women. Additionally, the marriage imagery of the *consecratio virginum* was permanently incorporated into women's religious vows.[15] These initiation ceremonies derive from a second crucial patristic contribution to the identity of the medieval bride of Christ: introducing marriage as a metaphor for the soul's commitment to Christianity. In the late antique world, monastic vows, martyrdom, and baptism drew on biblical imagery and marriage practices to describe God as a spouse. In both the ancient Mediterranean and in medieval Europe, young brides would leave their parents' homes to become part of the husband's family, a separation that often proved painful.[16] Severing the Christian from his/her previous life through baptism or monastic initiation resonated closely with the language of pain and separation in biblical marriage psalms where the bride becomes more desirable because she has abandoned her family. The

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[15] Giles Constable, "The Ceremonies and Symbolism of Entering Religious Life and Taking the Monastic Habit from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century," in *Segni e riti nella chiesa altomedioevale occidentale* (Spoleto: 1987); Columba Hart, OSB, "*Consecratio Virginum*: Thirteenth-Century Witnesses," *The American Benedictine Review* 23, no. 2 (1972); Philipp Oppenheim, *Die Consecratio virginum als geistesgeschichtliches Problem, Eine Studie zu ihrem aufbau, ihrem Wert und ehrer Geschichte* (Rome: 1943); Anne Bangall Yardley, "The Marriage of Heaven and Earth: A Late Medieval Source of the Consecratio Virginum," *Current Musicology* (1990).

[16] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 21-30.

characterization of marriage by John Chrysostom in his First Baptismal Instruction expresses both the difficulty of severing ties to the family and union of the soul with God. To preserve his eloquence and the poignancy of this passage, I have quoted in full:

> What human reckoning will be able to grasp the nature of what takes place in marriage when one considers that the young wife, who has been nourished with her mother's milk, and kept at home, and judged worthy of such careful upbringing, suddenly, in a single moment, when she comes to the hour of marriage, forgets her mother's labor pains and all her other care, forgets her family life, the bonds of love, and , in a word, forgets everything, and gives over her whole will to that man whom she never saw before that night?
>
> Her life is so completely changed that thereafter that man is everything to her; she holds him to be her father, her mother, her husband, and every relative one could mention. No longer does she remember those who took care of her for so many years. So intimate is the union of these two that thereafter they are not two but one."[17]

Chrysostom's words describe the sacrament of baptism as the union of the soul to Christ through marriage to emphasize the very real transformation this sacrament effects. He recognizes the human soul as female, and suggests that through baptism Christians break their worldly bonds and are united with God as if they were married. Though the bride is taken, forever, from her family, her home village, and the world of her childhood, this separation becomes a joyous and beautiful moment. Chrysostom was not the first to describe an individual Christian soul's union with Christ, but his almost lyrical depiction of the marriage itself is a haunting reminder of the sacrifices men and women would make to marry Jesus. Though speaking of the mystery of baptism, Chrysostom might just as easily have been describing entrance to monastic orders, mystical marriage, or the soul's final journey into God's embrace after death. For Chrysostom and other early Christians, imagining marriage to God was profoundly comforting and spiritual. In the Christian theological imagination, union between soul and Divinity became a mystically beautiful and intimate transformation.

Though numerous highly influential patristic treatises described the human soul as the bride of Christ, or praised female virgins as brides, there are few if any records of how individual Christians

[17] John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions*, trans. Paul W. Harkins (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1963), 18.

responded to this body of bridal literature in the first millennium of the Christian era. Patristic authors like Ambrose, Jerome, and Chrysostom used "bride of Christ" to commend virgins and commemorate spiritual transformations, but did not promote this imagery in other contexts. During this period, bridal status seems to have been associated primarily with sanctifying ceremonies, such as the consecration of virgins or baptism. For instance, when writing to encourage *widows* to guard their chastity, neither Ambrose nor Chrysostom include bridal language. While Jerome may implicitly recognize Eustochium's mother Paula as a bride of Christ (letter CVIII paragraph 27: "As soon as Paula heard the bridegroom..."), bridal language was reserved primarily for virgins, and consisted most often of inserting "bride" and "bridegroom" into lengthy discussions of other matters.

Medieval formational literature for women continued this trend, although bridal sequences became more elaborate, often encouraging the female reader to imagine entire passages of the *Song of Songs.*[18] However, in the mid twelfth-century two crucial changes occurred. First, the exegetic impulse to identify with the bride of the *Song of Songs* would be popularized by Bernard of Clairvaux's exegetical *Sermons on the Song of Songs,* consequently associating the bridal relationship with Christ with mystical transformations of the soul. Second, the words and experiences of the consecrated virgins of convents and anchorholds were recorded and transmitted in increasing detail and number in the twelfth and subsequent centuries. The twelfth century also saw a flourishing of bridal formational literature intended for female religious communities, including *The St. Trudperter Hohelied* and the *Speculum Virginum,* as well as Abelard's guidance for the women of the Paraclete.

Within the writings of Hildegard of Bingen and Heloise, we see the first traces of how women responded to bridal imagery. At Bingen, Helfta, the Paraclete, and other women's communities, both Latin and vernacular bridal literature was read, copied, and reworked. By the early thirteenth century, Bernard of Clairvaux's mystical innovation would be embraced enthusiastically by gifted women mystics

[18] See for instance Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century." Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, 224.

who not only described themselves as brides of Christ but detailed their souls' turbulent romances with their heavenly Bridegroom. Though some, like Beatrijs of Nazareth and Gertrude of Helfta, were virgins who had sworn monastic vows, other mystical brides of Christ belonged to a new class of holy woman, the unregulated beguine. Women like Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg openly proclaimed themselves brides of Christ, and, though they lived chastely, neither probably participated in the monastic marriage ritual. In Book II of the *Flowing Light of the Godhead,* God's voice praises Mechthild and calls her a "bride of the Holy Trinity." Many of her poems and contemplations describe her love and longing for her beloved Bridegroom.[19]

Unlike brides in prescriptive literature, Mechthild and other bridal mystics actually *became* the bride from the*Song of Songs*.. Some, like Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau, shared their bridal experiences with male confessors who then wrote down their accounts of kisses, crowns, rings, veils, and Christ's physical embraces. Others, like Katharina Tucher, kept diaries chronicling their own experiences as brides of Christ. Among the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna,* such diaries, as well as recollections of experiences shared with others in the community, then became sources for *Lives* of brides of Christ. For instance, Sister Stijne Zuetelincks told other women at Master Geert's House in Deventer how Jesus had built a paradisiacal garden in her soul, and when this experience was subsequently recorded in the community's Chronicle, bridal language and imagery was either added to or preserved in the narrative.

These qualities characterize the men and women I term living brides of Christ: each of these women was familiar with the formational literature for religious women. They had heard exhortations to preserve their chastity for the heavenly bridegroom, and descriptions of spiritual lovers embracing in a garden or a wine cellar. Virgins or not, these women identified with the bride in the *Song of Songs* and framed their own relationships with Christ within that familiar tale of love, loss, and blissful reconciliation. Moreover, they were all *recognized as* brides of Christ, if only by their confessors and

[19] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank J. Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 78.

immediate acquaintance. Some were sainted, others were regarded as heretics, but the majority lived and died in relative anonymity. The surviving records of men and women who experienced marriage to Jesus and then described these marriages to others preserves a dynamic history of how medieval Christians responded to and transformed models of sanctity. Accounts of these living brides of Christ also enrich and broaden standard glosses on "bride of Christ" by adding names, faces, and experiences to an ever-growing list of men, women, abstractions, and personifications who have married Jesus.

To summarize, the phrase "bride of Christ" originally referred to the Church or the Virgin Mary, but was also associated with vowed virgins, virgin martyrs, and initiation sacraments during the patristic period. This title continued to be associated with anchoresses and would be transferred to nuns with the development of cenobitic monasticism.[20] In the medieval period, women's vows of celibacy and obedience to the church continued to be understood and expressed as marriage to Christ, until the rise of the beguines and other lay religious movements in the thirteenth century encouraged the development of new types of bride of Christ. Beginning in the thirteenth century, women unbound by monastic vows nevertheless became brides through mystical experience, virtuous living, or religious conversion. Marriage to Christ metaphorically sealed monastic women into a life of chaste sanctity, but the appropriation of nuptial imagery by unwed laywomen and wives living outside the bounds of traditional marriage did not always confer the same level of sanctity onto women outside the cloistered world. By the late medieval period and especially the Reformation, the image of Christ and his many brides was so prevalent and multi-faceted that some significant effort took place to control its associations. One consequence was a crackdown on the prolific number of holy women and aspiring holy women who sought to follow the most famous brides of Christ by pursuing mystical experience, practicing apostolic living, or engaging in pilgrimage and preaching.[21] The evidence for this new distrust of brides of Christ is

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[20] For a discussion of the ceremonial veiling of virgins in the early church see Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie.*

abundant in the lives and writings of late medieval and early modern mystics, as well as such ecclesiastical milestones as the Council of Vienne (1310), which curtailed the freedoms of Beguines. Distrust and suspicion of Christ's brides in the late medieval period had three main consequences: 1) no longer were all brides of Christ recognized as genuine and holy, 2) fewer nuns and mystics were identified as brides of Christ, and 3) the few women who *did* gain acceptance as brides became known almost exclusively for their moments of mystical ecstasy in hagiography, popular culture, and modern scholarship.[22] The texts I examine in the subsequent chapters suggest that the appropriation of Christ as Bridegroom by persons more difficult to categorize as holy—common women, lay women, married women, widows—contributed to a growing tendency to dissociate holiness and sanctity from claims of being wooed by and wed to Christ.

To begin developing the varied aspects of bridal relationships described and experienced by medieval women, I examine a variety of generally unstudied texts that share one common feature: Christ as Bridegroom. The range of genres and centuries under consideration is deliberate and intentional. An accurate and coherent understanding of Christ's brides should extend beyond thirteenth-century

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[21] Evidence for widespread skepticism about the claims of aspiring holy women abounds. Bynum gives several colorful examples of this developing distrust of women's spiritual expressions, noting that Albert the Great described nuns' visions of suckling Jesus as "silly." Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 85-86. Amy Hollywood similarly cites Jean Gerson as criticizing women's religious teaching and writing in 1415: "[there is] hardly any other calamity more apt to harm or that is more incurable. If its only consequence were the immense loss of time, this would already be sufficient for the devil. But you must know that there is something else to it! The insatiable itch to see and to speak, not to mention... the itch to touch." Gerson and others demonstrate that in the fifteenth century "the basis for later denigrating distinctions between male and female styles of mysticism was clearly already in place." Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 7. The banning of Beguines at the Council of Vienne is another example of growing skepticism about the claims of women religious. Michel Mollat and Paul Tombeur, *Le concile de Vienne: concordance, index, listes de fréquence, tables comparatives* (Louvain-la-Neuve: CETEDOC, Université Catholique de Louvain, 1978). There seems to be reasonable grounds to suspect that claims of marrying Christ or having erotic visions became subject to similar suspicions during the fourteenth century. The Windesheim crackdown on women's mystical writing in 1455 reflects a similar concern. Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The 'Modern Devotion', the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, trans. David F. Johnson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004). Though none of these crackdowns focus explicitly on the bridal relationship, they all demonstrate an increasing effort to circumscribe women's piety.

[22] This latter point is especially clear in the cases of the aforementioned saints Catharine, Bridget, and Teresa. Each achieved major political and practical goals during her life. For instance Teresa's organizational efforts in the management and establishment of convents took up a greater part of her life and her writing than her mystical experiences, yet those who modeled themselves after her focused primarily on her contemplative texts, and the most famous image of her shall always be Bernini's statue.

mysticism's dependence on courtly romance and the imagery of the *Song of Songs*. Consequently, I turn to anonymous devotional texts that present idealized female behavior for emulation, late medieval convent chronicles, and virginal as well as married or widowed mystics, especially those whose sanctity was denied or rejected. I shall employ these genres of texts to tease out a more complete depiction of Christ and his many brides and challenge the traditional view that the living bride of Christ was primarily a nun or mystic. Rather than finding and isolating every instance of Christ's appearance in this role in medieval literature—an impossible task—I arrange my materials chronologically from the twelfth century's *Speculum Virginum* to the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna,* who recorded their histories in the mid-fifteenth century. These texts tell the story of how pious women first embraced and identified bridal imagery, then produced and elaborated upon bridal stereotypes. Though the history of the bride of Christ begins in the patristic period, I begin my study in the twelfth century for three reasons: 1) the enforcement of clerical celibacy in the late eleventh century set worldly marriage and sanctity into tense opposition 2) the rise of new monastic orders increased women's involvement in monastic houses and religious life in the eleventh and twelfth centuries and 3) Bernard of Clairvaux's influential *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, dated to around 1136, is credited with inspiring bridal mysticism.

As many largely unstudied brides of Christ wrote in Dutch or German I focus on texts from the German and Dutch speaking regions of the medieval world. The accounts preserved in these texts complicate and enrich the standard depiction of the medieval bride of Christ, but the relevant secondary literature on these women can be found in the introductions to editions and translations which are more concerned with paleographic, linguistic, and literary issues than with the questions of voice, agency, and authority that feminist historians ask and answer. Describing the state of scholarship on the material culture of medieval women religious, Jeffrey Hamburger writes that "in the United States, however, where the commitment to feminist art history has been strongest, interest in Germany and Germanic culture has been relatively weak, at least among medievalists, certainly lagging behind that in subjects

French, Italian, and English. As with modernism, so too with medieval art: the focus remains France."[23] Hamburger's description of the situation in art history is also an accurate summary of the study of medieval women's religious history: the majority of research has been concerned primarily with France and England, and much remains to be learned from Dutch and German textual and material witnesses.

[23] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books ; MIT Press, 1998), 14.

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Brides of Christ in Studies of Medieval Religious Women

Scholars of medieval women's religious history, and medieval German and Dutch women, regularly encounter and analyze passages containing bridal references. However, with the exception of Hildegard Keller, very few have paused to stop and consider the significance of medieval women's self-identification as brides of Christ. In *Holy Feast,* Caroline Bynum convincingly demonstrates that medieval women's religious experiences should no longer be "understood as creatures constrained and impelled by society's notions of the female as inferior."[24] Her careful research encourages separating women's experiences from the mind-body dualism of traditional asceticism and has inspired others to look for women's voices in medieval religious texts. Yet Bynum's brilliant analysis of the significance of food for medieval women leaves the phrase "Bride of Christ" unquestioned and unexamined—a necessary constant in light of the other variables she considered. Her discussion of Catherine of Siena's mystical marriage focuses on the themes of eating, blood, and suffering without examining the role of marriage itself in Catherine's visions. Bynum writes that: "In her hagiographers' accounts, Catherine was married with a ring of silver or gold and jewels… but Catherine herself, in letter after letter, says we do not marry Christ with gold or silver but with the ring of Christ's foreskin, given in the Circumcision and accompanied by pain and the shedding of blood," and adds insistently that Catherine's discussion of this vision and its meaning emphasize the edible aspects of the marriage. According to Bynum, "no one who has read Catherine's work can fail to realize that eating and blood were so prominent in her interpretation of religious experience as to give a unique note to her writing."[25] Though Bynum's observations are well supported, she does not question why Catherine and her hagiographers presented strikingly different visions and interpretations of these marriage scenes, or examine the possible roles such a relationship between woman and Divinity might have contributed to determining sanctity or

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[24] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women.*

[25] Ibid., 174-5.

legitimacy. This might have offered a useful supplement to her discussion of food imagery and eating practices in this passage. . Raymond of Capua seemingly approves of the marriage itself and even tries to make it seem more legitimate by replacing Catherine's ring of flesh with the biblically familiar jewels appropriate to a bride of Christ.[26] Like eating and blood, marriage to Christ was an important theme for both Catherine of Siena and her hagiographers, and had Bynum paused to consider that in both accounts *Christ gave Catherine a ring* to signify their special love, she might have discovered even more about Catherine's special devotion to blood and food, and her hagiographer's interventions.

Though in this passage Bynum acknowledges conflicts between male and female accounts of women's religious experiences, Amy Hollywood would critique Bynum's early interpretation of women's mysticism for only rarely distinguishing between a woman's experience and a male hagiographer's version of events. Hollywood's *Soul as Virgin Wife* shows the importance of reading erotic metaphors and traces connections between beguine mystics and Meister Eckhart. With sensitivity to gendered language and authorship Hollywood outlines the complicated network of male and female authors and readers that helped construct medieval bridal identities.[27] Later, in *Sensible Ecstasy,* Hollywood would expand on these themes while drawing connections between medieval mystics and the French postmodernists they inspired. Both of Hollywood's monographs explore the connections between human body, divine touch, and mystical experience, drawing heavily from bridal imagery to delight in the interplay between corporal woman and incarnate God, but she too leaves the significance of mystics' bridal relationships with the divine largely unquestioned. In *Sensible Ecstasy,* Hollywood argues that "medieval women not only find a feminine bodily morphology reflected in the suffering body and humanity of Christ... but also feminize[him]...for Mechthild, Hadewijch, Beatrice of Nazareth, and Marguerite Porete, Love, an endless

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[26] Anne Matter responds to this lapse in: Anne E. Matter, "Mystical Marriage," in *Women and Faith: Catholic Religious Life in Italy from Late Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 38-39.

[27] Amy M. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1995).

outpouring toward the other, occupies the site of the Name/No-of-the-Father," adding that "much of the power of their discourse, moreover, rests on their passionate belief in this Other/Love in who[m] they both see themselves reflected (as feminine) and forever find themselves lacking."[28] Through her invocation of postmodernist language, Hollywood interprets mystical love as Divinely-sourced transformation that simultaneously authorizes the mystic and remakes God. Though this insightful interpretation of medieval mystical literature deftly translates the bridal relationship into modern language, Hollywood does not first pause to explain why certain medieval women described transformations with the language of love and marriage. I suspect that she would not disagree, however, when I transpose Denys Turner's comments about monastic exegetes of the *Song of Songs* onto the writings of medieval women mystics. These women described Christ as their Bridegroom because they *wanted to,* and when they detailed their courtships and marriages, it was because they *liked* weaving sexual imagery into their accounts of spiritual experiences.

Hildegard Keller goes further than this, providing an elaborate and detailed account of how medieval men and women imagined erotic relationships with the divine. In *My Secret is Mine,* Hildegard Keller addresses the bridal relationship through an examination of eroticism in late medieval German religious literature.[29] Keller provides a crucial survey of erotic bridal relationships in secular and religious literature. Yet here careful focus on eroticism does address all aspects of marrying Jesus. Although Keller carefully situates the erotic language of medieval Christianity within a long and global tradition of symbolic and erotic religious unions, and her discussion of texts within the larger context of patristic and medieval biblical commentary, she is more concerned with interpreting eroticism than accounting for its appeal to medieval Christians. While her use of secular literature does draw the Bridegroom out of his habitual mystical role, Keller's focus on eroticism considers only erotic texts and analyzes only the sexual

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[28] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, 208.

[29] Keller, *My Secret is Mine.*

aspects of these texts. In Keller's work, Christ is almost exclusively priapic, and other types of bridal relationships are thus left unexamined.

Though Keller is unabashed and unapologetic about the erotic qualities of the texts she presents, she never forces sexual readings onto religious texts that are not expressly erotic. Keller's treatment of sensual and potentially scandalous material is commendable. Descriptions of encounters with the divine are frequently eroticized, both by medieval mystics and by medieval scholars explaining how marital language could allude to indescribable experiences of mystical ecstasy. When introducing the thirteenth-century Flemish mystic Hadewijch of Brabant into her argument, Carolyn Walker Bynum warns that "this meeting with God reads like a description of a sexual orgasm (and it is only our modern sensibility that makes the suggestion a shocking one)."[30] Though she is encouraging a historically aware reading of Hadewijch's sensual language, Bynum's aside suggests that Hadewijch intended to sound orgasmic, and that God's orgasm-inducing touch would not have shocked medieval readers.

Responding to disclaimers like Bynum's, Nancy Partner disparages the use of "mysticism" as a loosely defined and circuitous term taken directly from religious institutions and encourages scholars to see sex as sex, not metaphor for mysticism. Defining mystical experience as ineffable and metaphoric prevents scholarship from probing religious impositions and even mystical experiences according to Partner. [31] She criticizes modern scholarship's insistence on treating the writing of medieval religious women within the hagiographic and church-determined framework, comparing the work of feminist historians with the hagiographers they so often criticize by suggesting that "primness and piety are not essentially changed when the religious orthodoxy of the fifteenth century is reformulated into the feminist orthodoxy of the twentieth…" As Partner points out, such reformulations of women's spiritual writing are terribly problematic and can obscure or impose eroticism. In Partner's words, "the blunt

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[30] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, 156.

[31] Nancy F. Partner, "Did Mystics Have Sex?," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 301-302.

word 'sex' is absent, replaced by the politely distant 'erotic;' the act of intercourse is euphemized as 'marriage' or disembodied as 'union' and there are no orgasms at all."[32]

Partner is right to chastise scholars for handling eroticism cautiously, but her essay's insistence on the sexual and erotic nature of medieval women's writing typifies the trend in recent scholarship to treat the religious writing of medieval women as graphically sexual. Recent articles and books have gone so far as to compare the voyeuristic and exhibitionist descriptions of the soul's relationship to Christ to modern erotica.[33] When Caroline Bynum suggested that finding orgasms in Hadewijch's religious poetry was shocking only because of our modern sensibilities, she neglected to mention that in academia, as in popular culture, sex sells. The language of intimate intermingling that accompanies some bridal texts still ascribes genders to the two intertwined souls. Even when I invoke theoretical references to erotica and pornography in chapter 5, I am aware that these models are anachronistic, and only useful for translating medieval gender relationships into a modern language. Apparently modern scholars (myself included) are particularly drawn to what shocks them most—their discoveries of the sensual within the spiritual. Consequently, my own analysis of medieval bridal texts strives to find a cautious balance between accepting erotic language literally and reading it exclusively as a religious metaphor. I believe that women who described their bridal relationships sexually should be respected and listened to, but I also believe that women who avoided sensual language—or even bridal imagery—should be given full attention. This means taking women's writing seriously, and resisting the impulse to editorialize or censor. Thus when I present sensual passages, it is because that particular author has chosen to depict bride and Bridegroom as passionate lovers, not because I wish to create a sequence of kisses and caresses. Likewise, if the passages are asexual, I wish to assure you that I have not exercised censorship, though some other transcriber may have done so in the past.

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[32] Ibid., 301.

[33] Bart Vandenabeele, "Strelend wonden helen: over Hadewijch, erotiek en esthetiek," *Uil van Minerva (De): Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis en Wijsbegeerte* 13, no. 2 (1996-7): 92; Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, 42-44.

Though my own research is deeply indebted to publications on women in religion by Carolyn Walker Bynum and Amy Hollywood, as well as by Barbara Newman, Peter Dinzelbacher Hildegard Keller, Dyan Elliot, Anne Winston-Allen, and Jeffrey Hamburger, I must point out that one of the unexamined constants in each of these scholars' contributions remains the role of Christ as Bridegroom. [34] It is no longer sufficient to accept medieval texts' identifications of brides of Christ without pausing to question *who* introduced the term, or what it was meant to accomplish. Likewise, it is no longer appropriate to apply this term to religious women anachronistically, by categorizing mystics and women religious as brides of Christ when neither they nor their contemporaries thought that label to be appropriate. The burgeoning scholarship on women's religious literature and communities in medieval Europe has opened the way for my own examination of bridal language in medieval women's literature—because so many others have identified women's voices and experiences, and subsequently pursued feminist investigations of women in the medieval Church, I am now able to point out that the commonly-recognized idealization of feminine virtue, the "bride of Christ," is far more complex than has been supposed. Thus, to supplement our developing understanding of medieval concepts of the bride of Christ, I draw on their foundational publications for methodology, context, and deft analysis of fascinating primary sources.

During the last three decades, gender, mysticism, and authority have become increasingly entangled with medieval studies. Drawing upon one of the crucial observations of Grundmann's fundamental *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*—that twelfth- and thirteenth-century religious movements, both orthodox and heterodox, were predominately vernacular and driven by women's participation—new efforts to uncover and interpret the world of medieval women initially strove to find

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[34] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*; Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?: Shicksale auffalliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Fruhneuzeit* (Zurich: Artemis & winkler 1995); Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*; Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*; Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St. Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Berkeley: University California Press, 1987); Keller, *My Secret is Mine*; Shawn Madigan, *Mystics, visionaries, and prophets: a historical anthology of women's spiritual writings* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

the existence of a female voice and experience.[35] Questions of authority and agency, framed in Foucauldian terms, stem from these initial efforts to unearth women's religious experiences and identities during the medieval period. The most frequently voiced explanation for the connection between mysticism and women's writing and authority in the medieval period suggests that celibacy and ascetic practices, coupled with mystical experience and the support of churchmen, allowed women to preach and formulate their own theological messages. But it has more recently been suggested that women were forced to conform to the tropes of mystical experience, and that any surviving written records must have conformed with hagiographic expectations.[36] In this interpretation, women might intentionally fashion themselves as saints and mystics by modeling their own writing on previous generations' successful female religious figures. Alternately, women who successfully achieved Church recognition were sometimes posthumously refitted into existing hagiographic models, as in Jacques de Vitry's *Life* of Marie d'Oignies or the Sisterbooks from the *Devotio Moderna*.[37] Somewhere beneath these layers of hagiographic ideals and theologically imposed feminine virtues might be the genuine voices of medieval women authors—or so we hope—though attempts to isolate these female voices by pinpointing divergences from the official models for female sanctity can be highly problematic.

Rather than imagining I am working with authentic, unfiltered women's voices, I have chosen to treat each text as if the original author's gender is uncertain. The *Speculum Virginum* and *Christus und die minnende Seele* are both anonymous, but presumably written by men, just as men wrote the lives of Margery Kempe, Dorothea von Montau, Bridget of Sweden, and Marie d'Oignies. Even though men recorded their lives, women's voices guided narration. Similarly, though the Dutch and German

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[35] Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

[36] See for instance Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 1-24.

[37] Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, ed. Margot H. King and Hugh Feiss, 4th ed., Two lives of Marie D'Oignies (Toronto, Ont.: Peregrina Pub. Co., 1998).

Sisterbooks were written by women, men were looking on, and thus these sources offer, at best, guarded female voices. Though the Devout mystic Alijt Bake recorded her own autobiography, it was later transposed into the third person by the confessor at Galilea as part of his effort to preserve her writing following its condemnation, thus her mystical experiences must also be read as filtered through a male voice.[38] Only Katharina Tucher's vision-diary, which is an autograph, could conceivably represent an authentic female voice, yet Katharina may have been self-censoring to meet her confessor's approval.[39] Assuming masculinity is just as problematic. Even Seuse's *Exemplar* was co-authored with Elizabeth Stagel, and authorship, translation, and textual transmission in the pre-print era could easily have stripped both gender and authorial voice from every other text I work with. My approach to these texts borrows from Donna Haraway's work on gender and technology.[40] Because the bridal relationship usually imagines God as male and human as female, each of these texts preserves medieval ideas about women's behavior in love and marriage, no matter who wrote them. Are cyborgs humans with mechanical appendages, or non-human entities? Are medieval texts the redacted words of male and female authors, or are they multi-gendered or un-gendered composites? When a cyborg moves or speaks, is the machine or the human responsible? Likewise, when a bride of Christ wrote, was the bride, the scribe, or the amanuensis, responsible for the words? Throughout this project, I assume that medieval texts are composite works, hybrids or cyborgs that contain and reflect the thoughts and voices of both males and females, authors, scribes, readers, and annotators. Just as if I were browsing the internet, I always remain suspicious of an author's professed gender, though I also recognize self-claimed gender pronouns in my own discussion. Whether they claim they are women, or they claim they are men, the authors of the

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[38] Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 218-221. However, John Van Engen mentioned that an autograph of Bake's autobiography exists, and that he will be publishing a translation based upon the autograph for Paulist Press.

[39] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 178.

[40] Her *Cyborg Manifesto* is especially important. See: Donna Jeanne Haraway, *The Haraway Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7-46.

bridal texts I shall be investigating still transmit useful information about living medieval brides of Christ and reveal how medieval Christians imagined Christ came to love and marry mortal women.

Significant progress has been made since the publication of Grundmann's *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages* in 1935. The histories and experiences of pious medieval women are demonstrably extant and richly varied and the rediscovery of lay devotional practices, local and regional movements, and writing pertaining to the lives and visions of women who escaped the notice of mainstream hagiography has dramatically enriched our understanding of medieval women's spiritual experiences. No longer is the canon limited to the lives and writings of nuns and saints. Yet the title and descriptor "bride of Christ," which appears so often in both primary and secondary literature, remains largely unquestioned. The assumption remains that when referring to historical women, "bride of Christ" describes only sainted mystics and consecrated nuns. Even if the majority of living brides of Christ were saints, mystics, and virgins, the experiences of those who fell outside those parameters are worth considering, and contain an important chapter of the history of medieval religious women.

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Outline of Chapters

While a survey of medieval bridal literature might begin with Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs,* move on to the Victorines or the writing of Abelard and Heloise, then turn to Italian mendicant mystics such as Catherine of Siena before alighting in the sixteenth century with a rhapsodic reinterpretation of Teresa of Avila's transverberation, that approach would only reconfirm existing presuppositions about the bride of Christ as a mystic and a nun. I begin instead with an innovative twelfth-century formational treatise which taught women how to become brides of Christ, and men how to enable these transformations. The *Speculum Virginum* uses interactive dialogue between a young virgin named Theodora and her mentor and spiritual father, Peregrinus, to construct a bridal relationship based on cultivating virtue and preserving spiritual chastity. This particular treatise has special significance for my own analysis because Bridget of Sweden and many of the women of the Modern Devotion would read and translate it in the following centuries. Thus, beginning with the *Speculum Virginum* allows me to establish a common bridal identity, which would eventually inspire new bridal models, such as married brides of Christ. In chapter 2, *The Maiden in the Mirror,* I outline how Theodora's bridal transformation simultaneously stresses the importance of monastic enclosure and chastity and provides alternative paths to marrying Jesus, such as performing good works in the world while caring for husbands and children. The *Speculum Virginum's* non-mystical bride of Christ was intellectually curious and partially dependent on a male confessor to serve as intermediary between bride and Bridegroom. I shall argue that Theodora's chaste and extremely intellectual transformation from virgin to bride of Christ provided a model that could be followed outside the cloister, and that by encouraging transformation through study and good behavior, the author of the *Speculum Virginum* would enable lay women to become living brides of Christ.

The *Speculum Virginum* alludes to the possibility that married women could also win a bridal crown, and in my third chapter, *Taking Jesus as a Second Husband,* I explore what happens when Christ's bride of choice is married or widowed. When Christ becomes a second husband, the presentation of

marriage takes on a new layer of realism, with a shift in emphasis from preserving and celebrating virginity to lamenting its loss. I begin with a brief discussion of spiritual marriage, then move on to look at a variety of situations where married women became brides of Christ, either while their husbands lived or as widows. After addressing how women like Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies established a new model for female sanctity, I begin a close reading of two of the most detailed accounts of married women's marriages to Jesus. Because there is a paucity of sources by married or widowed women who speak of themselves as brides of Christ this chapter will focus primarily on Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau. Though Margery was an Englishwoman, she had personal connections to Germany, and her spiritual experiences were influenced by continental saints. Margery Kempe's attempts to follow established models for female sanctity, including spiritual marriage, and her seemingly conscious imitation of Bridget in several crucial moments in the *Book of Margery Kempe* prove a natural starting point to discover what happens when a married woman becomes a bride of Christ *during* her marriage, instead of her widowhood. I also discuss the fifteenth-century widow Katharina Tucher's unusual marriage to Jesus following a game of dice. While Dorothea von Montau became a saint, Margery Kempe and Katharina Tucher were almost entirely forgotten, and their experiences survive in single manuscripts. Drawing from these accounts of married and widowed brides of Christ, I argue that even though the phrase "bride of Christ" could be used to describe married lay women by the late fourteenth century, bridal relationships disrupted worldly marriages and could be perceived as dangerous or disruptive to society—not just for married and laywomen, but increasingly for consecrated virgins.

The introduction of married and lay brides of Christ in chapter three highlights how the idealized model of Christ's bride was rapidly destabilizing in the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In **c**hapters four and five I examine a treatise which attempts to reign in and redefine the role of bride and Bridegroom by using the ascetic language of the Rhineland mystics to teach submission to divine will—and implicitly, to Church authority and social expectations. As in the *Speculum Virginum,* an anonymous author uses the relationship between Christ and a fictive bride to teach readers how to win

the bridal crowns. However, the tone and content of *Christus und die Minnende Seele* is at times dramatically violent and erotic. In *Christus und die minnende Seele* the old model of the bride of Christ from the *Speculum Virginum*, which emphasized chaste union, is skewed towards an emphasis on total submission of will. In this version of the bridal relationship, Christ beats, tortures, starves, and imprisons his bride to teach her how best to love Him. When her spirit and soul are finally broken and her eyes gouged out so that she can only focus on His image in her soul, the bride enters a blissful celebration of love set in pleasant gardens and feast halls. By submitting entirely to Christ's love, she finally wins—and renounces—a bridal crown. Yet despite the introduction of violence, this treatise more closely follows the storyline of the *Song of Songs* than the *Speculum Virginum* did. In the first of these two chapters I examine the violent and dramatic series of events which accompanies the image sequence of *Christus und die minnende* probing its connection to the *Song of Songs* in order to find possible explanations for this new violent twist in the relationship between Christ and his bride. In the second chapter, I re-examine some of the most violent scenes in *Christus und die minnende Seele* through comparisons to other late medieval German texts from the same religious circle, primarily the Sisterbook from Töss and Henriech Seuse's *Exemplar*. I argue that much of the imagery in *Christus und die minnende Seele* reflects late medieval German mystical language, but that the treatise's emphasis on private meditation was potentially subversive. However, *Christus und die minnende Seele* preserves the late medieval devotional emphasis on Christ's passion by incorporating devotion to his suffering into bridal mysticism.

The relationship between imitating Christ's life and death and marrying Jesus would be just as important for the women's communities of the *Devotio Moderna*. In chapters six and seven, I look at a series of texts roughly contemporary with *Christus und die minnende Seele* which sharply delineate the threat of mysticism and show how the phrase "bride of Christ" became gradually dissociated from both monastic vows and mystical experience.

The *Sisterbooks* of the lay gatherings and convents of the Modern Devotion suggest Christ gathered his brides primarily in the moment of death. Because these books originated in the circle of the

Modern Devotion, they were written out of an awareness of earlier mystical and monastic literature. Geert Grote, the movement's founder, was influenced directly by several of the texts I shall be discussing, as were the authors of the later Sisterbooks of Diepenveen, Deventer, and Emmerich. These chronicles are a window into how women in the fifteenth century incorporated the ideal brides of hagiography and formational literature into their own devotion and self-presentation. In these Sisterbooks the phrase "bride of Christ" appears primarily when describing a dying Sister, though it was also used to praise virtuous behavior, or, rarely, to describe a mystical experience. Though the use of this phrase in an Italian, and especially a Venetian, monastic context has been adequately documented, these northern sources have a decidedly different tone and require further examination.[41] In the context of the *Devotio Moderna*, an emphasis on chastity, faith, and good works rather than mystical union reappears. This was the path to salvation which dominated the *Speculum Virginum* and the translation of that treatise into Middle Dutch by the Devout certainly reflects a common spiritual interest.[42] In the first of a pair of chapters on these women's communities, I explore how "bride of Christ" was used to signify good sisters, and discuss why this phrase was one of the least commonly employed tactics for marking virtue in the *Sisterbooks*.

Then, in the next chapter, I explore how mysticism, leadership, obedience, and bridal experiences were recorded by the Devout through a comparison of two Devout convent mothers, Salomé Sticken and Alijt Bake. Bake, who openly described herself as a mystic, met strong hierarchical

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[41] For instance in Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice: Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent* (London: Viking, 2002); Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Bartolomea Riccoboni and Daniel Ethan Bornstein, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Kate Lowe, "Secular Brides and Convent Brides: Wedding Ceremonies in Italy during the Renaissance and Counter-Reformation," in *Marriage in Italy, 1300-1650*, ed. Trevor Dean and K. J. P. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Silvia Evangelisti, "Wives, Widows, and Brides of Christ: Marriage and the Convent in the Historiography of Early Modern Italy," *The Historical Journal* 43, no. 1 (2000).

[42] Irene Berkenbusch, *Speculum virginum: mittelniederländischer Text: Edition, Untersuchungen zum Prolog und einleitende Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995); Urban Küsters, "The Second Blossoming of a Text: the *Spechel der Maechden* and the Modern Devotion," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

resistance and was eventually exiled from her convent at Galilea. Yet despite her monastic vows and mystical experiences, Bake shied away from bridal language. In contrast, Salomé Sticken's biographer describes her as a consummate bride of Christ, but downplays Sticken's mystical experiences. I use Bake's exile and the Windesheim condemnation of women's mystical writing to explore the debate between mystical practice and the path of obedience for the Devout. Both Thom Mertens and Wybren Scheepsma propose that Bake's teaching of mystical meditation to other nuns was recognized as a danger by the Windesheim congregation's leaders. They argue persuasively that literature for women of the *Devotio Moderna* emphasized salvation through good work, piety, and prayer and warned of the disappointment and unpredictability of the mystical path.[43] By encouraging the women in her charge to pursue mystical salvation, Bake undermined the basic devotional philosophy of the Devout and was rapidly disciplined. Based on Bake's experience and the semi-hagiographic *Life* of Salomé Sticken, I propose that, at least in the circle of the Dutch Modern Devotion, the title "bride of Christ" had become politically loaded and dissociated from mystical experience.

Most of the Devout brides of Christ were virtuous women, but not mystics. Unfortunately my presentation of these sources has been limited by sparse critical editions and recent scholarship.[44] Because these documents have only recently entered scholarly debate, they have been used primarily to uncover communal histories, and their language, metaphor, imagery, and recurrent themes remain uninvestigated. These chapters investigate a fascinating and largely untapped data-set which I believe yields new insight into the question of how religious women described becoming brides of Christ. These

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[43] Thomas Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," in *Grote lijnen: syntheses over Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. F. P. van Oostrom and W. van Anrooij, Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1995). Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 197-226.

[44] Two recent English works that have introduced these sources are: Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*. Two editions were published in the early twentieth century, but the women of the Modern Devotion remained generally unknown until the late 1990s. *Levensbechrijvingen van devote zusters te Deventer*, (Utrecht: W.J. Kühler, 1910); Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich* (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein e.V., 1998); , ed. D. A. Brinkerink, Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen: ('Handschrift D') (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1904); Dirk De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige Punten van onsen oelden Zusteren : naar het te Arnhem berustende Handschrift met Inleiding en Aanteekeningen uitgegeven* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1919); Wybren Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993).

sources show that lay women could become brides of Christ by simply resolving to dedicate their lives to Christ, and that, by the mid-fifteenth century, both mystics and brides of Christ had become common place.

In my concluding chapter, I consider the correlation between anonymity and increasing numbers of living brides of Christ in the later Middle Ages. I also reiterate my call for a more careful and cautious treatment of this phrase, suggesting that one further consequence of labeling of women as brides of Christ has been the effacing of individuality. Though many brides of Christ have been forgotten over the centuries, those who are remembered and written about often are lumped into a single simple category. In biography, scholarship, and even in their own writings, these brides of Christ become uniform. Their voices become the voice of the divine, their bodies are now His body, and any of their accomplishments become secondary to having "caught" an especially eligible bachelor. As a result, medieval brides of Christ blur together into one amorphous mass of eroticized religious experience. The entire purpose of my study of marrying Jesus is to separate out several distinct-but-connected versions of a medieval bridal experience from the tangle of limbs, lips, hearts, and whispered intimacies. By acknowledging, first of all, that "bride of Christ" was not always, or only, a reference to Church, Virgin Mary, or anonymous nun, and second, that "bride of Christ" was not always a title willingly or knowingly assumed, I offer a supplement to existing histories of medieval religious women in the Middle Ages. From their words and their lives, a story emerges of women who sought divine love as eagerly and methodically as others pursued mortal men. Yet the histories of living brides of Christ also contain evidence of how women managed their own images, and how they responded to unattainable ideals of feminine perfection. Neither the *Speculum Virginum* nor *Christus und die minnende Seele* is the medieval equivalent of Cosmo or Redbook, but both suggest that dieting and changing her behavior may make a woman attractive to her lover. Likewise, the lives of Dorothea von Montau, Margery Kempe, Bridget of Sweden, and the women of the *Devotio Moderna* came from religious sources, not supermarket tabloids, but these women's experiences were remarkable, spectacular, and offered models for "winning" Christ the Bridegroom's

love that went beyond the prescriptive norms found in formational literature. What I am suggesting, then, is that medieval brides of Christ both *were* prescriptive models for female comportment, and attest to how women *appropriated and adapted* these prescriptive models.

The maiden in the mirror: Christ's bride as a model woman[1]

We have a little sister,
and she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister,
on the day when she is spoken for?
If she is a wall,
we will build upon her a battlement of silver;
but if she is a door,
we will enclose her with boards of cedar.
I was a wall,
and my breasts were like towers;
then I was in his eyes
as one who brings peace.
Songs 8:8-10

The religious movements of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries provided new opportunities for women to pursue religious vocations.[2] This influx of adult women into convents, anchorholds,

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[1] The material in this chapter first appeared as my masters thesis, where I focused primarily on Theodora's spiritual transformation. Because this chapter focuses on how the *Speculum Virginum* provides a useful model for the use of a bride of Christ in a prescriptive context, several of the larger arguments, as well as a great deal of historical background and discussion of recent scholarship have been excised. The curious may always consult my MA thesis for a fuller bibliography and more detailed discussion of the literary themes and social context of the *Speculum Virginum.* Rabia Gregory, "The Maiden and her Mirror: Formation of Virginal Womanhood and the *Speculum Virginium*" (Thesis (M.A.), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2004). When citing and translating from the *Speculum Virginum,* I have sometimes consulted the German-Latin edition, and sometimes the Latin critical edition. When available, I have deferred to Barbara Newman's English translations, which were published in an appendix to Constance J. Mews, editor, *Listen, Daughter: the Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[2] Herbert Grundman's groundbreaking observations about women's religious movements during this period draw attention to both the orthodox and heterodox opportunities, but Grundmann 's early work does not explore the literature that these movements produced in detail. Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995). More recent scholarship focuses closely on the connections between mysticism, heresy, and the rise of women's religious opportunities in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For the German-language region see especially Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer, eds., *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystiche Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* (Köln: Böhlau, 1988); Ute Weinmann, *Frauenbewegungen: Ihre Beziehungen Zur Orthodoxie Und Häresie*, ed. Annette Kuhn and Valentine Rothe (Bamburg: Centaurus-Verlagsgesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung, Pfaffenweiler, 1991).

beguinages, and other religious institutions necessitated the composition of instructional literature intended to guide and to protect women religious and their caretakers. These new formational treatises, including Abelard's writings to Heloise, the *Ancerene Wisse, Holy Maidenhood,* the *St. Trudperter Hohelied* and the letters of Bernard of Clairvaux, share a deep concern with the preservation of chastity and make extensive use of bridal language.[3] These twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts, described as "formation literature for women" by Barbara Newman, were heavily dependent upon patristic treatises addressing the conduct of virgins.[4] Medieval spiritual advisors returned to arguments first expounded by Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nazianzus to such an extent that it is difficult to discern where they borrow from patristic sources and where they borrow from one another.[5]

Although medieval pro-virginity treatises dedicated to women's spiritual formation often took the form of letters, sermons, or rules, and strongly emphasized the language of the *Song of Songs* by addressing the female audience as brides of Christ in eroticized language, the *Speculum Virginum*, a twelfth-century dialogue concerned with the spiritual education of young nuns, diverges from the expectations of this genre.[6] The title "virgin of Christ" consistently replaces "bride of Christ," erotic imagery is absent, and instruction is given in the form of a fictive dialogue between the monk Peregrinus and his young female student, the virgin Theodora, rather than a monologue-style dictation. Peregrinus and Theodora's conversations extend far beyond the predictable concerns of comportment and chastity to include theological debates, classical mythology, history, music, and biblical exegesis. Perhaps because

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[3] Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991); Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to womanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000); Vera Morton, *Guidance for Women in Twelfth-Century Convents* (Rochester, NY: Boydell & Brewer, 2004).

[4] Barbara Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," in *From virile woman to womanChrist: studies in medieval religion and literature*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 19.

[5] Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works*, 22-3.

[6] For a discussion of the general characteristics of this genre see Ibid., introduction; Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 21-58; Newman, "Flaws in the Golden Bowl: Gender and Spiritual Formation in the Twelfth Century," 18-26.

of the innovative approach and material, the *Speculum Virginum* was widely disseminated and translated into several vernacular languages.[7] This text is important because it was explicitly designed to be an exemplary model for female emulation which would be used by later generations of women in their own spiritual development—including Bridget of Sweden and the women of the *Devotio Moderna*—and because, unlike patristic writing or other formational literature for women from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the *Speculum Virginum* presents a lively, animated, active, and intelligent (if fictive) female voice who is actively engaged in her own spiritual development. Theodora is a fully developed inquisitive *active* personality rather than a passive, obedient, humble or humiliated female. She is a soul but also a woman who represents the beginnings of an autonomous female voice in Christian literature destined for female audiences. As a model virtuous woman, Theodora teaches that intellectual curiosity and the willingness to question religious superiors are among the necessary qualities in a bride of Christ.

Composed under the influence of the Hirsau Reform movement, which placed unusual emphasis on incorporating women into monastic life and required that novices and oblates be of an age to give consent to the vows they took, the *Speculum Virginum's* approach to the education of women religious and the language of bridal mysticism is innovative and unorthodox. It is a treatise that features a monk and a nun as spiritual equals—though Peregrinus dominates discussion—engaged in extended conversation without any form of chaperone. Peregrinus takes the role of teacher, well versed in pagan classics, the bible, and innovative pedagogy, while Theodora represents a young woman, newly arrived in the cloister. Through close reading of this treatise, I shall argue that their dialogue is educational but also transformational: Peregrinus prepares Theodora for a spiritual marriage, and in the course of their lessons, through meditation and acceptance of cloistered life, Theodora evolves, developing from a *virgo Christi* [virgin of Christ] to *sponsa Christi* [bride of Christ]. The *Speculum Virginum* connects both to the

[7] While many religious formational works intended specifically for women began in the vernacular, the *Speculum Virginum* was originally composed in Latin. However, it was soon translated into vernacular languages including middle low Dutch, middle high German, and medieval Swedish. Twenty-six manuscripts preserve the vernacular translations, a number equal to the Latin witnesses, indicating that the treatise was as popular—if not more popular—in translation than in its original form. , ed. Jutta Seyfarth, 1st ed., Speculum Virginum, vol. V (Brepols: Turnholti, 1990), 56 ff.

mysticism of twelfth- and thirteenth-century German convents and the resurgence of prescriptive devotional literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries under the influence of the *Devotio Moderna.*[8] This text presents one of the first female responses to the idea of marrying Jesus as a religious goal achieved through cultivating Christian virtue. Even though Theodora is a creature of fiction, she is imagined as replying, responding, and reacting, which is a major step towards bringing a woman's voice into prescriptive bridal texts.

The *Speculum Virginum* incorporates standard bridal imagery, including crowns, flowers, gardens, and the gifted bridal gown, but leaves out others, such as the wine-cellar and the bridal chamber. However, Theodora's transformation into a bride of Christ introduces how medieval men and women understood and imagined the bride of Christ. A virgin who commits her life to religion earns God's special love by actively training in virtues—but lay and sexually active women could follow Theodora's path as well. In the first section of this chapter I shall briefly discuss relevant scholarship and the historical background for the *Speculum Virginum* before examining Theodora and Peregrinus' relationship and role as exemplars. In the third section of this chapter, I shall briefly explore how Theodora becomes a bride of Christ and, by doing so, teaches others how to follow in her footsteps, chasing after her as Theodora herself hopes to follow the examples left behind by virgin saints, martyrs, and women from the bible. I argue that Theodora's transformation provides a crucial template for developing and discussing women's bridal relationships with the divine during the Middle Ages.

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[8] For instance, see Constant J. Mews, "Virginity, Theology and Pedagogy in the *Speculum Virginum*," in *Listen Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001).and also the review of literature given by Jutta Seyfarth in her introductions to the Latin and German-Latin editions of the *Speculum Virginum. Speculum Virginum*, 8-16; , ed. Jutta Seyfarth, trans. Jutta Seyfarth, Speculum virginum = Jungfrauenspiegel (Freiburg im Breisgau ; New York: Herder, 2001), 9-13.

~2.1~

Mirroring the Virtues of Virginity: Student and Teacher, Author and Reader

Despite the popularity of the *Speculum Virginum* in the first five centuries after its composition, scholarly attention has settled on this dialogue only recently, following the publication of Jutta Seyfarth's critical edition and new research connecting the treatise to important female mystics. Thus, even the most basic questions of authorship, audience, provenance, and purpose remain contested. In the mid-twentieth century, Matthäus Bernards identified prevalent nuptial and floral metaphors in the *Speculum Virginum* as a commentary on the *Song of Songs* in his doctoral research into women's mysticism, although more recent comparative studies of such commentaries largely disprove this supposition.[9] Rather than a commentary on one or many biblical books, the *Speculum Virginum* portrays a dynamic student-teacher relationship and chronicles the spiritual development of Theodora to model male-female interactions in convents. This relationship is characterized by Jutta Seyfarth as a "dialogue between 'master' and 'disciple,' 'father' and 'daughter,'… [Who] have an absolutely equally chance of obtaining the same place in heaven, if they combine love and fear of God."[10] Though Seyfarth's characterization assumes that both Peregrinus and Theodora are striving to attain a heavenly position, only Theodora makes any progress towards that goal during the dialogue. Theodora will transform into a bride of Christ but Theodora's transformation is asexual, lacking the erotic language which often accompanies bridal literature.[11]

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[9] For Bernards' argument, see Matthäus Bernards, *Speculum Virginum; Geistigkeit und Seelenleben der Frau im Hochmittelalter* (Köln,: Böhlau, 1955), 55 ff. Urban Küsters has since disproved this hypothesis through close analysis of contemporary commentaries on the *Song of Songs*, particularly those intended for a female religious audience. Urban Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten: volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1985). For a more general discussion of medieval commentaries on the *Song of Songs* see Anne E. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

[10] Jutta Seyfarth, "The *Speculum Virginum*: The Testimony of the Manuscripts," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and The Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 44.

[11] Though Theodora transforms in the course of the *Speculum Virginum*, the text itself does not seem to be mystical. It was read by mystics, but does not espouse mystical theology or even describe a mystical transformation. Instead, Theodora follows a path of discipline and mild asceticism, earning her bridal crown by behaving as a good Christian woman.

On a fundamental level, the *Speculum Virginum* served the needs of the Hirsau monastic reform [12] Social constructs of girlhood and womanhood in twelfth-century Germanic thought directly influence both the language of this dialogue and the spiritual development of Theodora.[13] In the past sixty years, the *Speculum Virginum* has been identified as a monastic document composed for the specific education of women religious, with little consideration given as to what types of women—virgins or widows, anchoresses or nuns, beguines, novices, or laywomen—were intended to benefit from Theodora's experiences. A late nineteenth-century critical edition of Swedish manuscripts of the *Speculum Virginum* introduced this treatise to modern scholars, though the illustrations and music accompanying the treatise were of more interest than Theodora and Peregrinus' interchanges. By the mid twentieth century, a handful of German scholars incorporated the *Speculum Virginum* into studies of female religiosity and mystical practice, but it was not until Seyfarth's critical edition and the publication of Barbara Newman's 1990 essay on formational literature for women that the subject matter of the *Speculum Virginum* was introduced into English language feminist scholarship.

Barbara Newman's assessment that the *Speculum Virginum* belongs to the monastic genre of formational literature seems obvious and uncontestable.[14] She characterizes this treatise as an educational text composed with the intention of assisting in personal spiritual formation, an interpretation which serves as a starting point for recent English-language inquiries into the *Speculum Virginum's* purpose and

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[12] This movement incorporated women into the monastic experience and restrict child oblation, creating a demand for guides to ease the transition of young women into the cloister. The *Speculum Virginum* provided a guide to educate young novices and simultaneously to train their spiritual fathers. For a brief analysis of the Hirsau Reform's influence on the production of treatises dealing with the spiritual advice of women see Julie Hotchin, "Female Religious Life and the *Cura Monialium* in Hirsau Monasticism, 1080 to 1150," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

[13] A fuller version of this argument is available in my MA thesis. "Virgo Christi" is the preferred title for Theodora, while "Sponsa Christi" is used only a few times during the treatise, almost exclusively in the sections pertaining to the end of Theodora's instruction. I base my discussion of twelfth-century German terminology and its importance on James A. Schultz., *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

[14]Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 9.

function.[15] However, Newman's understanding of the treatise is based largely on Matthäus Bernards' early use of the *Speculum Virginum* to study medieval women's mysticism. Breaking with Bernards' reading, Seyfarth describes a dialogue exploring central tenets of monastic life that strives to guide Virgins of Christ down the path to the heavenly Bridegroom without a mystical transformation.[16] Like Seyfarth, Constant Mews, editor of the only English-language volume on the treatise—suggests that the *Speculum Virginum* is "a guide that concerned itself with the true meaning of the life of a woman who had dedicated herself to the religious life."[17] Each of these interpretations agrees that Theodora's transformation into a bride of Christ was meant to model ideal behavior for pious Christian women.

While Peregrinus teaches Theodora, neither his lesson plans nor his teaching objectives—to use modern pedagogical terms—are addressed in extant publications on the *Speculum Virginum*. Theodora models ideal female behavior and is rewarded with Christ's bridal crown, suggesting that the *Speculum's* author composed an all-in-one guide to marrying Jesus. In the cloister, novitiate vows followed by vows of consecration and spiritual education replaced marriage vows, symbolically allowing nuns to be virginal wives in an entirely celibate environment.[18] The twelfth-century treatise *Speculum Virginum* chronicles a transition from naïve girl to virtuous woman within a fictional cloister.

The *Speculum Virginum* had popularity well beyond the walls of Hirsau cloisters. There are twenty-nine extant Latin manuscripts, over half of which date to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Some of these manuscripts are from as late as the fifteenth century, and originate in such remote

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[15]Ibid. Newman's work is the theoretical foundation for each of the essays in the *Listen Daughter* collection, essentially defining all recent English-language work on the *Speculum Virginum*.

[16] "Das SV erörtet in einem Lehrgesprachzwischen dem Presbyter Peregrinus und der als *virgo Christi* bezeichneten Theodora (Epist. 35) das zentrale Anliegen monastischen Lebens: Den *virgines Christi* soll der Weg zu innerer Vollkommenheit geweisen werden, damit sei als würdige *sponsae Christi* ihrem himmlischen Brütigam zu gefallen vermögen." *Speculum Virginum*, 16*.

[17] C. J. Mews, "Monastic Educational Culture Revisited: The Witness of Zwiefalten and the Hirsau Reform," in *Medieval Monastic Education*, ed. George Ferozco and Carolyn Muessig (London: Leicester University Press, 2000).

[18] In my MA thesis I developed a hypothesis that symbolic marriage became a necessary transformation into womanhood for young nuns, because of German cultural ideas about marriage.

locations as Spain, while two of the earliest manuscripts were possessed by the famed Cistercian abbey of Clairvaux.[19] In addition to the popularity of the Latin text of the *Speculum Virginum*, the text had a "rebirth" in vernacular literature.[20] As many as twenty-nine vernacular copies of the *Speculum Virginum* have been preserved, mainly Middle Low German, though there are also translations into Swedish and Middle High German. The majority of these vernacular texts are connected to the *Devotio Moderna*, where the *Speculum Virginum* was embraced, translated and recopied within the first years of the movement's foundation.[21]

Because the *Speculum Virginum* was written in a monastic movement especially concerned with women's care, it addresses some very realistic problems. In one episode, Theodora and Peregrinus discuss how to handle a lustful male confessor. Peregrinus begins with a lengthy series of biblical examples that give precedence for enclosure. After pointed questions from Theodora, Peregrinus finally admits that virtuous people can leave enclosure without being harmed, just as those inclined to sin will not be protected by a convent's walls. However, he adds that there is "a good for the good, evil for the evil, a good entrance for the evil people, and a bad one for the good people" and expands this as the idea of the north and south gates to the enclosure, which are allegorically the good and evil exits of the city of Jerusalem. According to Peregrinus, Paul enters through the south door into salvation and virtue, while Judas exits through the north door into damnation and perfidy. To summarize and review the lesson of enclosure, Peregrinus offers to tell Theodora about "the entrance and exit of a certain man who came from the north, so that you may know how to spare your modesty when you see and converse with the

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[19] *Speculum Virginum*, 65-68.

[20] Urban Küsters, "The Second Blossoming of a Text: the *Spechel der Maechden* and the Modern Devotion," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001). I shall briefly discuss the importance of the *Speculum Virginum* and its connection to the *Devotio Moderna* in chapters 6 & 7.

[21] For a detailed discussion of the role of the *Speculum Virginum* in the *Devotio Moderna* see: Ibid. Irene Berkenbusch, *Speculum virginum: mittelniederländischer Text: Edition, Untersuchungen zum Prolog und einleitende Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995).

male sex."[22] The story which follows addresses the question of what happens when, despite all her efforts, a virgin of Christ attracts the lustful desire of a man—even though she is enclosed, dead to the world, chaste and humble in every respect. The answer is that God provides protection for the virtuous and punishment for those who fall into sin.

To paraphrase where Peregrinus has chosen to grant his student fleshy details, there was a congregation of nuns at an un-named monastery. These nuns were served by brother priests in matters of education and sacrament. One of these clerics, "young and confused in the blindness of his mind, forgetting shame and especially the honor of his own order," was tormented by lustful desire for a nun in his care.[23] The monk in question is eventually driven to scale the walls of the cloister, and hides himself in the bedchamber of "the virgin he wickedly loved," lying there waiting "to carry out his pernicious plan at once if he were able."[24] Peregrinus does not divulge how long the monk hid in that virgin's bed, before "divine vengeance… checked his rash enterprise… he was 'handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh' [1 Cor. 5.5] Strangled by the very angel who had tempted him to filthy love, he expired at once."[25] This is an interesting twist, where the nun's virginity is guarded by the Devil's intervention, though perhaps at God's insistence—protecting one of his chosen before the monk can sin against her.

Returning to her chamber after Matins, the nun in question found the corpse, but rather than waking her sisters and breaking the vowed silence of the hour she "concealed for a while the extraordinary crime she had witnessed."[26] The next morning, the monk was buried outside hallowed ground, and the sisters strengthened their enclosure, barring any man from entering their private

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[22] *Jungfrauenspiegel*, 173-80.

[23] *Speculum Virginum: Selected Excerpts*, trans. Barbara Newman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 276.

[24] Ibid., 276-277.

[25] Ibid., 277.

[26] Ibid.

chamber areas. Despite this trauma, the nun prayed for the monk's soul, and eventually her prayers are said to have saved him. Of this tale, Theodora says "Frequent access of men to women, even those who are dead to the world, fans sparks into flame," and Peregrinus builds upon this, encouraging his student to stay within the cloister, remaining modest in dress and action, chaste in thought, and always wary of contact with men. The contrast between the power of the chaste nun and the utter folly and vulnerability of the lecherous monk chastises both Theodora and the intent reader. This particular vignette serves as a sort of negative image—a reverse of the ideal monk-nun relationship between Peregrinus and Theodora. While the young monk failed in his vocation, succumbing to lust out of the confusion of his mind, Peregrinus' age, wisdom, and experience fully qualify him to teach a young virgin. Perhaps the other side of this contrast is that Theodora is the opposite of the chaste nun in the story—without Peregrinus' guidance and education, she would not know how to cope if she found a monk in her bed one night.

In another sequence, Peregrinus interprets the biblical story of Susannah and the elders. As he reminds himself of Susannah's predicament, Peregrinus is struck by the unforgivable betrayal that takes place when a religious man lusts after a chaste woman. Though Peregrinus later would use Susannah as an example of the tragedies that may befall married women, here he condemns the vile nature of the weak and lustful men. He breaks off in his lesson, not to apologize for describing a sexual situation, but to warn Theodora: "This passage is a fearful one for Christ's virgins!... what evil or vice can ever be likened to so great an evil? What death can be compared to this death, when the master of Christ's virgins, the guardian of eternal vessels, the teacher of Zion's daughters and tutor of celestial brides, should forget the fear and love of God and be so blindly in the shadow of lust as to look with illicit love on his own daughter, when he ought rather to have died himself to preserve her chastity?" He then compares the illicit passions of treacherous madness that befall a "senior bridegroom of the Church, a vicar of Christ who is dissolved in the excess of youthful debauchery," to apocalyptic biblical passages

such as "the stars will fall from heaven" and "the sun will become like sackcloth."[27] Here, Theodora, like any student presented with an opportunity to derail lecture, asks for a further explanation of what lecherous vicars of Christ have to do with the end of the world. Peregrinus is happy to oblige her, glossing his scriptural citations to explain the dangers of lust. After this, in the original Latin version of the *Speculum Virginum*, Peregrinus begins a lengthy rant, addressed not to Theodora, whom he generally calls a "virgin of Christ," but instead to the "servants of God" and "curators of Heaven" who are tempted to deflower the virgins in their care. Commenting that "he loved those he fathered in Christ" Peregrinus laments "Woe is me! How many monasteries of virgins in our times do we see plagued by this evil…" Yet in the Dutch version of the *Speculum Virginum,* which was translated around 1400 for use in the women's convents and Sisterhouses of Modern Devotion, this lengthy rant is entirely missing. Instead, the translator simply cuts to the next logical point of transition several hundred lines down, which is a series of praises for the priestly office:

> Oh you friend and guardian of Our Lord's virgins, you are His mouth and His lips to teach them holiness. You are His nose that differentiates between right and wrong. You are His ear that hears His heavenly will. You are His tooth that breaks the food with which the soul becomes nourished. You are his hand which fights against the devil with righteousness and consecrates the body of Our Lord.[28]

Why would the Dutch translator excise these passages condemning lustful priests, and instead skip to a passage openly praising priests? None of the Latin manuscripts listed in the 1990 critical edition omit this passage, though in her translation of the treatise into modern German, Seyfarth notes that the section represents a lengthy digression from dialogue style and seems out of place.[29] Perhaps because the Dutch vernacular *Speculum Virginum* was intended for use by female religious, the translator thought that a

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[27] This passage is in book 5 and can be found in *Jungfrauenspiegel*, 396-405.

[28] O du vrient end behueder der maechden ons heren, du biste syn mont end syn lippen in die leeringe der salicheit. Dü biste syn nase, dat quade end dat guede te onderscheiden. Du biste syn oer, synen heymeliken willen te hoeren. Dü bistre syn tant, die spise mede te breken, daer de siele mede geuoet wort. Du biste syn hant, tegen den viant mede te vechten recht end wael te doen end den lichaem ons heren te consecreren. Berkenbusch, *Speculum virginum: mittelniederländischer Text: Edition, Untersuchungen zum Prolog und einleitende Interpretation*, 228-9.

[29] Conrad of Hirsau, *Speculum Virginum=Jungfrauenspiegel*, ed. Norbert Brox et al., trans. Jutta Seyfarth (Freiburg: Herder, 2001), 396.

passage directly chiding men entrusted with the care of nuns was not relevant. Yet this abridgement in the Dutch version of the *Speculum Virginum* reverses Peregrinus' meaning—"Because he loves them" now becomes a transition to the importance of priests, rather than a sharp reminder of how much worse the betrayal of a priest may be. In either case, this example highlights the presentation of discussions of sex in the *Speculum Virginum* : when addressing the male part of the audience, the warning is severe, the punishment for failure death and eternal damnation. When addressing the female portion of the audience, the greatest matter of importance is preserving chastity and enclosure, but if physical chastity is lost, spiritual chastity may still be salvaged. This may be the first time that bridal status is not directly associated with intact physical chastity.

The *Speculum Virginum* addresses the very unique situation of sexual tension between nuns and the priests who provided their spiritual needs by emphasizing that each virgin of Christ, male and female alike, must guard chastity. However, the author realized that there would always be situations where guarding chastity through good behavior was insufficient, and allowed that, if God failed to kill the lecherous attacker, a virtuously virginal soul would compensate for a deflowered body. By making lust an issue of self-control, the *Speculum Virginum* blames male religious for their own lapses and comforts virgins by recognizing that their own efforts at self-protection may not always be sufficient. Though the *Speculum Virginum* echoes centuries of abstinence-only arguments, the author takes a practical approach to the realities of convent life, accepting that no enclosure can be absolutely effective, but also that even dedicated virgins must be taught how to protect themselves and their own chastity, and comforted if their precautions fail. Yet throughout the treatise, Peregrinus and Theodora also teach that faith and an earnest desire to follow Jesus are all that is required—that a holy person can live in the world as sinlessly as in the cloister, that a virgin can be damned by her thoughts, and that a mother can be saved by her piety. Because the *Speculum Virginum* emphasizes free will and personal choice, the state of the body matters far less than the state—or potential state—of the soul. Peregrinus teaches Theodora to become a bride of Christ through virtuous behavior, study, and meditation. Though her physical chastity is also

important, the state of her soul and her mind will be the primary catalysts for Theodora's bridal transformation.

~2.2~

Emulating Exemplary Virgins: Theodora and Models of Virtue

In both the introductory *Epistula* and the main body of its text the *Speculum Virginum* addresses itself to virgins of Christ. The female protagonist, Theodora, is a model Virgin of Christ—though in the early chapters she has not necessarily become a perfect model. Idealized virginity, however, referred to more than a woman's age or her marital status.[30] Though *virginitas* described a physical state, the *Speculum Virginum* taught that spiritual virtue was more important than remaining physically intact. Mews concludes that the *Speculum Virginum's* "central concern is not to exhort women to maintain physical virginity but to keep them focused on the quest for moral perfection," a tendency demonstrated in the stories of Susannah and the Elders and the lecherous young monk discussed in the last section.[31] The *Speculum Virginum's* concern with the quest for moral perfection rather than the protection of chastity contrasts starkly with other twelfth-century formational treatises for women.

In the *Speculum Virginum,* the *virgo* becomes the property of the Bridegroom—Theodora becomes a Bride of Christ, making her body, life, and soul entirely His. The *virgo*, Theodora, is being prepared *for* marriage, for the spiritual Bridegroom, and her careful study of virtuous behavior, biblical passages, and medieval theology precipitate erecting the bridal bower. Her spiritual perfection is rewarded through consummation of Theodora's union with Christ. This metaphorical marriage parallels the dedication process of a girl being taken into a cloister. The *Speculum Virginum* is the work of a Hirsau reform monk writing when marital status rather than biological age defined the boundary between child and adult. [32] Peregrinus' lessons serve to prepare Theodora for her Bridegroom through didactic examples stressing

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[30] The problem of defining the medieval Latin notion of *virginitas* and its import within the genre of instructional literature for nuns, is to some small extent covered by Constant Mews in his introduction to the essay collection *Listen, Daughter: the* Speculum Virginum *and the formation of religious women in the middle ages.*Mews, *Listen Daughter.*

[31] Ibid.

[32] For a more detailed discussion of age and the transition from girl to woman see James A. Schultz, *The Knowledge of Childhood in the German Middle Ages, 1100-1350*, ed. Ruth Mazo Karras (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

the attributes and merits of virginity, an agenda clearly stated in the introductory *Epistula*. The persistent use of the phrase *"virgo christi"* in this treatise may reflect medieval German understandings of female social status, but it also reflected ideas about brides of Christ as the ultimate virtuous Christian women. Vowed virgins, young, beautiful, and newly removed to a convent, could not be called *"sponsae christi,"* or brides of Christ. Though of marriageable age, these women were not yet prepared for their spiritual betrothals, and thus remained virgins until they had learned enough virtue to win their Spouse's love.

While students of the *Speculum Virginum* were encouraged to model their own spiritual development upon that of Theodora, the figures of the dialogue and the scenarios themselves mirror the world of the twelfth-century Hirsau reform. The treatise's incorporation of images, music, dialogue, and a framing letter accommodates many different learning styles, but each medium emphasizes transformation through virtuous behavior. Through the majority of the text, Peregrinus and Theodora function as exemplary figures and I shall examine the idealized traits they embody, developing the dynamics of this student-teacher relationship through a study of several classroom scenes. One of the basic tenets of medieval monastic education was teaching through example. In the *Speculum Virginum* Theodora learns by emulating Peregrinus and the exemplary figures from scripture, hagiography, and contemporary literature that he presents during their lessons. Classroom scenes or private tutelage often focused on modeling and emulating exemplary behavior.[33] Theodora, Peregrinus, and the "classroom" they occupy serve as ideal examples for male-female comportment in a monastic community

The character and presentation of these two exemplary virgins and scholars reveals the qualities they embody—thus the qualities readers should develop in their own lives. Theodora's behavior demonstrates how to learn, while Peregrinus' lessons and lectures exhibit the proper way to teach a young female student. A selection of vignettes from Theodora's lessons defines the character of our young nun and her tutor, though, at least in Theodora's case, the character is not static. Her crucial textual role is to self-transform through education, contemplation, and reflection, becoming an example

[33] *Jungfrauenspiegel*, 28-29.

for self-formation. Though exemplary virgins are presented as ideal models for Theodora, her transformation into an exemplary bride of Christ is the *Speculum Virginum's* primary didactic example.

The *Speculum Virginum* opens with a dedicatory epistle, though the scenario it describes—loving uncle composing a treatise for his two consecrated nieces—is likely fictional.[34] Jutta Seyfarth suggests that, based on the manuscript tradition, this epistle was probably a later addition, as it *Epistula* mimics the ways of cloister education while remaining works of fiction constructed for a purely didactic purpose, and offers a model for understanding Peregrinus and Theodora's conversations.[35] Seyfarth's close paleographic study of the manuscript tradition suggests that the *Epistula* was a later addition to tan original eight-chapter version of the *Speculum Virginum*.[36] Although the *Epistula* cannot be accepted as a genuine description of *Speculum Virginum's* composition, it explicitly state that the treatise's intended audience was enclosed virgins, and also introduce the structure, objectives, and practical applications of the *Speculum Virginum*. The putatively fictional characters of author and intended recipients are the idealization of author and audience and link the protagonists of the *Speculum Virginum* to the world of the saints and the world of the cloister through levels of reflection. In this *Epistula,* the *Speculum Virginum* presents itself as authored by "C. least of Christ's poor," generally identified as Conrad of Hirsau, who preferred the title Peregrinus, as a comfort for the anonymous "holy virgins N. and N."[37] The letter outlines the content of the *Speculum Virginum's* chapters, gives directions for its use, and states the author's purpose in its composition. Though the presentation of these three pieces of information was

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[34] Leclercq identifies the epistula as one of the most commonly employed a genres of monastic literature during this period Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrah, 1st ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 125-8.

[35] See for instance *Speculum Virginum*, 26.

[36] Morgan Powell, "The Mirror and the Woman: Instruction for Religious Women and the Emergence of Vernacular Poetics 1120-1250" (Dissertation, Princeton University, 1997); Eleanor S. Greenhill, *Die Stellung der Handschrift British Museum Arundel 44 in der Überlieferung des Speculum Virginum [the role of the BM MS arundel 44 in the transmission of the Speculum Virginum]*, ed. Prof. Dr. M. Schmaus und Prof. Dr. W. Dettloff, 1st ed. (München: Max Hueber, 1966).

[37] See chapter 1 pp. for a detailed discussion of Conrad of Hirsau as author of the *Speculum Virginum*. *Speculum Virginum*, 1."Ultimus Christi pauperum C. Virginibus sacris N. et N"

probably the reason for the *Epistula's* presence in the final version of this treatise, the three fictional figures introduced reveal more than the author explicitly states. These three consecrated virgins, the unnamed C., N., and N. reveal more about their social status than will be explicitly stated about Theodora in several hundred pages of dialogue. Of these anonymous virgins, cast as original recipients of the *Speculum Virginum,* C. writes: "because every human being is drawn by a certain natural order to seek her beginning, that is, her Creator, she should be admonished by the guidance of nature itself to be attentive and to hold temporal things of little worth in comparison with eternal, but this advice especially suits those who are sealed by the sacraments of the church for the kingdom of heaven, and who have learned from the doctrines of sacred law to value the temporal less than the eternal."[38] These opening lines reveal the treatise's purpose and intended audience.

This basic impression of newly vowed nuns seeking guidance is further detailed in the remainder of the letter. First, the letter-writer states his belief that the spiritual quest for God is an innate human quality and desire. This quest is best achieved through discipline, and Conrad notes that such a quest is most suitable for those "sealed by the sacraments" to a spiritual life.[39] As Conrad stresses, this particular treatise is dedicated to consecrated virgins and intended to guide their meditative approach to the Creator through admonition and observation of nature. In other words, the *Speculum Virginum* advertises itself as a source of spiritual and practical education, providing a scientific approach to the preparation of religious dedicated for an encounter with their Creator.

From these first phrases the reader discovers that these anonymous virgins are dedicated religious engaged in contemplation and meditation. I shall call them nuns, though they might perhaps be recluses or otherwise consecrated virgins. These two nuns have only recently left their families for the

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[38] "Cum omnis homo naturali quodam ordine ducatur ad principium suum repetendum, id est creatorem suum, ipsius conventione naturae admoneatur attendere et respectu aeternorum temporalia quaeque non magni pendere, illis tamen hoc macime competit, quos ecclesiae sacramenta regnis caelestibus consignarunt, quos sacrae legis dogmata aeternis temporalia postponenda instituerunt. Ibid.

[39] The sacraments of monastic initiation and the effect of the sealing that comes with chrism and consecration are discussed in chapter 3.3

cloister, and may have only newly spoken their vows.[40] The anonymous virgins are portrayed as young, apparently beautiful, recently separated from their families in favor of a life in the cloister.[41] C admonishes these virgins to adjust to their new convent life, writing that "the presence of your relatives or friends [is not] a thing greatly to be desired" stressing that they should "not look back at the things you despised for his [Christ's] love."[42]

From the tone of the epistle and Theodora's later questions, it seems the *Speculum Virginum* is in part an offering to comfort dismayed young women newly arrived at a convent; education and contemplation are prescribed to ease the pangs of homesickness. In the *Epistula,* Conrad writes that "since love is never idle, I have sent you a little book as a kind token of mutual love. In it you may exercise your mind, grow in the grace of the eternal bridegroom, and grieve the less at my absence."[43] Thus according to the *Epistula,* the author's three aims in composing the *Speculum Virginum* were: (1) to provide mental exercise for virgins new to convent life, (2) to develop the grace and love of Christ, and (3) to ease the pain of recent separation from family and home. Accordingly, becoming a Bride of Christ required spiritual refinement and breaking a woman's bonds to the world. Through study a virgin first develops her mind. Flexing her spiritual muscles, the virgin grows graceful and her loving relationship with the eternal and spiritual bridegroom—Christ—progresses through courtship to consummation.[44] Finally, through fixation on love for Christ, all pain due to loss of worldly pleasures and the comfortable presence of family will be forgotten. Conrad expresses the heartfelt wish for such a transformation from

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[40] C. writes "I rejoice with you all the more sweetly, daughters vowed to Christ, because with a willing spirit you have preferred the eternal to the transient, as I now see that for the love of Christ you have trampled underfoot your homeland, your family, and–what is most difficult—the beauty of your blooming youth." "Quod vos, o filiae Christo devotae, prompto fecisse animo, id est caducis aeterna praeposuisse, tanto dulcius conguadeo, quo vos patriam, parentelam et, quod perdifficile est, ipsum floribundae decus adolescentiae pro Chrsti amore conculcasse iam video." ibid.

[41] Refer to Chapter 1, pp. for the typical demographics of medieval German convents.

[42] "Nec magnopere tamen vel cognatorum vel amicorum praesentiam quaerendam putetis… nolite respicere ad ea, quae pro eius amore contempsistis." ibid.

[43] "Verum quia amor numquam otiosus est, misi vobis libellum quoddam mutui amoris insigne, in quo mentem exerceatis, ad sponsi aeterni gratiam proficiatis minusque de absentia nostra doleatis." Ibid

[44] *Speculum Virginum*, 245. "… sponsus sponsae suae spirituali gratia copulatur…"

homesick virgin to beloved of Christ: "I continually beseech the divine mercy that your beginning may be crowned with a still happier ending."[45] This consummation or crowning represents the culmination of the virgins' spiritual education, symbolized by her receiving Christ's bridal crown.

If the two women of the *Epistula* are vowed religious, virgins, young, beautiful, of good family, and only recently removed to the cloister, what is their relation to the epistolary author? C. indicates that they are kindred, writing that "both kinship and the double obligation of charity demand that my affection alone watch over you, although age and time and distance divide us."[46] He must therefore be seen as an older relative, a monk in a distant monastery, who has served as a spiritual mentor to the two young women, perhaps even inspiring them to leave the secular world and enter the cloister. This man has already completed his spiritual education and followed to fruition the path he describes for his virginal students. He both anticipates the difficulties they are about to face, and regrets that he cannot walk the path with them, lamenting his own imperfections. C asks that, upon receiving his little book, these virgins of Christ pray for him and "make the Lamb that you follow propitious toward me by your prayers, so that he who is denied the grace of following the Lamb with you may not be denied that of imitating the Lamb's perfect followers in virtue."[47] Here the inference seems to be that C. cannot follow Christ as a virgin.[48] However, in the next sentence, Conrad draws attention to the other point of contrast between his state and that of his students: while they are pure and may walk a road he cannot follow, they are also unstudied and must take counsel from those who have experienced more.

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[45] "Ut igiitur introitus vester filiciori exitu consummetur, divinam semper exoro clementiam" ibid.

[46] "quia hoc linea consanquinitatis, hoc expetit officium geminae caritis, ut pro vobis vigilet vel solus in nobis affectus, quem discernit a vobis et aetas et tempus et locus." *Speculum Virginum*, 269.

[47] "Hoc igitur munusculum vos, o Christi virgines, postquam susceperitis "Agnum, quem sequimini," placate mihi precibus vestris, ut, cui gratia denegatur agnum vobiscum sequendi, non denegetur perfectas agni sequellas per virtutes imitandi."Ibid.

[48] The idea of following the lamb wherever he goes is returned to in chapter 3. In the *Epistula,* this seems to be a clear reference to the widespread belief that the virginal religious woman was in the best possible position to know Christ, while older, educated, but doubtless less pure religious men could never attain such a relationship. Theodora will later ask why married people cannot follow the lamb everywhere, but still may find themselves at the same destination.

C.'s greatest innovation is not the writing of formational literature for a kinswoman—Alcuin, Abelard, and others undertook the same task, and even made the same pleas for prayers and expressed the same despair at their own state of impurity—but the method of instruction.[49] The use of dialogue, imagery, and analogy to engage the mind in spiritual learning makes the *Speculum Virginum* unique in twelfth-century medieval women's literature. The presentation of the *Speculum Virginum's* author in this introductory epistle is carefully contrived to present an authorial figure that embodies the ideals of monk, teacher, and spiritual advisor. Rather than set out information piece by piece with argument and counter argument, the lessons are engaging, interactive, and entertaining. The tone of the introductory epistle supports a view of C.—the idealized author—as wise, caring, and sensitive to the spiritual and emotional state of his students. This sensitivity is evidenced through the use of metaphors such as mirrors, flowers, wreathes, and gardens, presumably meant to engage the reader. For instance, when explaining why this treatise is a "mirror," the author states specifically that this image was selected to suit a young female audience. Reminding the two nuns that "virgins hold mirrors before their eyes to see whether their beauty has increased or diminished. For the beholder's image is reflected in the mirror, and even though the gaze and its reflection are distinct, the beholder' s mind is informed about what it wishes to know," C indicates that this treatise should operate like a worldly mirror, but serve a different function. "The mirrors of the women are divine words set before the eyes of holy souls, in which they may see at all times how they either please the eternal bridegroom with the beauty of a holy conscience or displease him with the ugliness of sin."[50] By reading the *Speculum Virginum* a virgin will see herself in the part of Theodora. The transformed virtuous woman, however, will see how she is pleasing or displeasing to Christ her bridegroom by comparing her spiritual state to Theodora's. This switch from virgin to

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[49] For a discussion of the tropes of this genre and their gender implications, see Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 22 ff.

[50] "Specula virgines oculis suis applicant, ut ornatus sui vel augmentum vel detrimentum intelligant. Repraesentatur enim in speculo intuentis imago, et licet diversa sint aspectus et respectus imaginarius, utcumque tamen ad id, quod appetit, intuentis informaretur affectus… sunt enim specula mulierum eloquia divina visibus obiecta sanctarum animarum, in quibus semper considerant, quomodo sponso aeterno aut placeant decore sanctae conscientiae aut displiceant peccati foeditate." *Speculum Virginum*, Ep. .

woman, virgin to bride, demonstrates the complex reflections through which this treatise operates. The idealized students, our young and homesick nuns, the unnamed N.s of the epistle, are to see themselves in Theodora and recognize their teacher in the guise of Peregrinus. By scrutinizing their own faces in the reflection of the text, they will, like Theodora, "learn how to seek what is invisible," and become like the women of Moses' tabernacle, fully developed through their relationship with Christ.[51]

Theodora is both a reflection of young women new to religious life and an idealized model, an exemplar upon whose example virginal students should strive to model their own behavior. The relationship between Theodora and the *Speculum Virginum's* student readers requires that Theodora be a model pupil, quick to master lessons, perfect in her comportment, insightful with her questions. Theodora plays the role of student in the *Speculum Virginum,* speaking less often—and when speaking, usually questioning or concurring. Her silence might be read as submission, Theodora playing the silent passive woman. However, we must not construe from a simple tally of lines spoken that Theodora acts as a purely passive figure in this dialogue, a vessel being molded and filled with knowledge. Based on Theodora's few speaking lines, it is tempting to see Theodora as a complacent "yes-man," or conclude, as Janice Pinder does, that Theodora represents neither an active female voice, nor a strong female role model. [52] In interchanges with Peregrinus, Theodora may appear reticent, but she never takes a passive role. Rather, her shorter lines often spur Peregrinus on, acting as an important tool for moral summary and prod for the longwinded lecturer.

Though Paul forbade women to teaching men, teaching through virtuous behavior, or teaching other women, was still permissible. While Theodora is a student of Peregrinus, as a virgin exemplar she simultaneously instructs. Peregrinus speaks by far the most in their lessons, but it is through interaction

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[51] "titulus igitur efficaciam sequentis ostendit materiae, ut quodam genere similitudinis, quomodo invisiblia quarenda sunt, agnoscatis…In speculo, quod misi, vultus cordium vestrorum attendite" ibid.

[52] Janice M. Pinder, "The Cloister and the Garden: Gendered Images of Religious Life from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries," in *Listen, Daughter: The Speculum Virginum and the Formation of Religious Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Constant J. Mews, The New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

with Theodora, rather than in Peregrinus' lectures, that the *Speculum Virginum* does its real teaching. Despite—or perhaps, because—of her supporting role, Theodora is a remarkable figure, well spoken, well read, constantly displaying critical thought, active rather than passive. At times she points out flaws in her teacher's reasoning or provides a crucial nuance to his absolute arguments, while in other examples she exhibits great self-confidence. Though there are examples of Theodora acquiescing to Peregrinus, her outbursts and active participation in their lessons are striking. When Peregrinus is being unproblematic and concise, Theodora may be inclined to agree "as you wish," to a question.[53] When Peregrinus falls into tedium or error, however, Theodora is neither reticent nor complacent. In one interchange, Peregrinus and Theodora are discussing the Blessed Virgin Mary. Peregrinus proposes that Mary drank from the fountain of Christ's love as a virgin many years before giving birth to her blessed son. Theodora in some confusion asks, "How could she drink, when she had not yet seen or heard the one she bore in her womb?" Rather than addressing Theodora's understandable confusion, Peregrinus evades, asking, "Why then did she say she was pleasing on account of humility, if she had heard nothing about the virtue of humility?" attempting to use his skill and knowledge to avoid answering a tricky question. Here, Peregrinus exhibits both his superior knowledge of scripture, and perhaps a moment's impatience with his student. Theodora fumes: "You make me out to be a ridiculous barbarian, pretending in jest that I am totally ignorant of the power of the Holy Spirit!" [54] She draws on an arsenal of biblical verses demonstrating the relevance and scriptural foundations of her initial question. Theodora repeats Peregrinus' earlier lessons as if in flattery, saying "Have I not learned from your own teaching that the sacraments have a double meaning…" Peregrinus seems delighted with her outburst.[55] In this passage, Theodora's display of knowledge through a spirited rebuttal of Peregrinus' statements takes the spotlight for a few moments. If Theodora is our model virgin, several traits beyond the

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[53] "Ut vis" *Jungfrauenspiegel*, 292.

[54] *Speculum Virginum*, 280.

[55] *Jungfrauenspiegel*. P. 280

traditional chastity and humility must be added to the ideal bride of Christ—for Theodora is curious, well-schooled and willing to stand up for herself.

Interchanges between Peregrinus and Theodora serve as instructional examples that model the ideal relationship between male and female virgins dedicated to Christ. Their passion is for learning—not for one another. To emphasize the chaste boundaries between these two, even their portraits are separated on the page, the distance maintained by words speaking of the true value of virginity.[56] Theodora is shown holding a book, her hair covered, her eyes gazing across the page to Peregrinus, who is making the sign of a cross or perhaps raising a finger to emphasize his point. Theodora's lips are full and one might call her beautiful with high cheekbones and a straight nose. Peregrinus is bearded, an older figure engaged in teaching. Between their faces the scribe has coincidentally written Peregrinus' oft-repeated "Audi, filia!" and "ecce, filia!" Though separate on the page and guarded by a barrier of books and letter, Peregrinus and Theodora are physically connected by the written words which signify their conversations. Their dialogue is a personal one, probably taking place in the same room, as we do not see a window-grate in either picture or text.

Peregrinus and Theodora converse about exemplar virgins and spiritual and doctrinal matters for Theodora to reflect upon, but their relationship is perhaps the most significant example of all. It is perpetually chaste, always focused on spiritual betterment and education. Though Theodora and Peregrinus' interchanges are the most important models for virgins in the *Speculum Virginum*, the lessons

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[56] See the image captioned "Theodora and Peregrinus" in the appendix. Seyfarth stresses that the relationship between image and word is preserved in most extant manuscripts, so the separation and the separating text would have remained constant and intentional. Both an expert art historian and the absolute authority on the *Speculum Virginum* in its manuscript form, Jutta Seyfarth's comments on what she terms the "autorenbilder" allude to this relationship between image and text, social situation and fictional representations. Each of the twelve illuminations incorporated into the *Speculum Virginum* hold a didactic purpose, illustrating visually the main lesson-themes Peregrinus lectures on. However, the position of the authorial portraits diverges from the standard incorporation of images into this treatise. While the other images are direct illustrations of chapter content, and were placed in-between chapters to further stress this connection, the authorial portraits are incorporated into the body of the text and do not refer to any single passage or lesson. The position of this authorial portrait at the beginning of chapter 3 is taken as evidence of the proposed 8-book version of the *Speculum Virginum*, but little research has been dedicated to the portraits' educational purpose or function in the overall structure of the text.

Ibid., 28.

Peregrinus gives to Theodora are filled with examples of idealized virginity. By studying and emulating these other women, Theodora becomes a model of virtue. These virgins include Christ and his Virgin Mother, several martyred saints, women from apocryphal literature, classical history and mythology, and women from Theodora's own world. However, understanding Theodora's transformation is impossible without first knowing the style and structure of her lessons and exploring how that transformation is elicited. In this section, excerpts from Theodora's lessons are used to demonstrate the process of self-improvement through emulation of ideal types. Peregrinus' lesson of the four virgin martyrs, the parable of Susanna and the elders, the example of the virgin and the unicorn, the lesson learned from the pagan Amazons, and the portrayal of Mary, her raiment, and her purity, all emphasize the importance of perpetual chastity, modesty, and spiritual contemplation. Any Christian who possesses these qualities will attract the interest and desire of the Bridegroom. Each of these vignettes represents a tale popular in contemporary medieval culture, and Theodora is already familiar with much of the material presented, so that the interaction between Peregrinus and his student, the setting and interpretation of the lesson material, and the interpretation of analogies are more significant than the selections themselves.

The image of a bridal wreath or virgin's wreath, the equivalent to a martyr's crown, is woven throughout the twelve chapters of the *Speculum Virginum*. The martyr's crown is synonymous with the bridal wreath and the victor's laurels, it is the crown for which C. prays in the introductory epistle, awarded at the conclusion of a virgin's transformation to signify her new relationship with Christ.[57] As a virgin martyr is reborn in heaven she is embraced by the Bridegroom, while the cloistered virgin, by weaving her own bridal wreath of virtues, makes her daily devotions a purifying passion. Peregrinus introduces the idea of the wreath in the context of the garden of Paradise, drawing heavily upon the imagery of the *Song of Songs*. "I shall converse with you, Theodora, about the flowers of paradise…" Peregrinus begins, "that is, the holiness of the virginal life and the consummation of chastity in Christ's

[57] For a discussion of the significance of the crown to the ceremony of the *consecratio virginum* see 3.3

members. As the subject or starting point of our dialogue, let us take that flower that said, 'I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys' [Cant. 2.1]"[58]

Peregrinus intertwines the image of the Church as the bride of Christ with a description of the garden of Paradise with its four rivers, an image fully illuminated in the accompanying illustration.[59] In this garden, "the white lily of chastity shines, the crocus of charity burns, the violet of humility grows… the rose of humility blushes, the spikenard breathes a fragrance of spiritual discipline… there thousands of virgins multiply the hues of ardent love at the sight of God."[60] The virgins are all flowers, just as the virtues of virginity are flowers, and "whenever the bridegroom strolls in this spiritual garden, like a flower more charming than the rest, and rambles among the flowers… he says 'I have gone down to the nut garden to see the fruits of the valleys.' [Cant. 6.10]."[61] While in the Garden, the Bridegroom tends to his flowers, and will pluck those that please him most, symbolizing the way that Theodora will be taken for the bridal bower when her soul has been cultivated to yield a perfect blossom. Already, their dialogue is situated in the mystical-erotic landscape of the *Song of Songs*, and the reader/student must expect that Theodora will eventually encounter her divine Bridegroom amongst the flowers. First though, Theodora must weave together a bridal crown out of allegorical flower, or as Peregrinus puts it: "Look! While browsing through the meadows of Scripture, we have at the same time gathered flowers to weave a crown for the virgin's head, until we are able to cover the rest of her body as well with mystical garments."[62] The mystical garments are the standard garb of the Bride of Christ as she prepares for her wedding, and the floral crown, a wreath of virtues, is both the martyr's crown and the crown which Christ gives his bride as they are joined.

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[58] *Speculum Virginum*, 271.

[59] The illumination depicting this garden is devoid of flowers however, depicting instead the "mysteries" of paradise. See Image 2.3

[60] *Speculum Virginum*, 272.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Ibid., 275.

Peregrinus mixes popular vernacular literature with biblical and hagiographic material to relate the highest ideals of virginity to more worldly examples, making it easier for Theodora to place herself on the other side of the mirror, and reflect in her the idealized virtues of Peregrinus' model virgins. Theodora herself asks for these more earthly examples on several occasions, not because she is not intelligent enough to grasp Peregrinus' mysteries as he unravels them, but because she is too humble to put herself on the same level as saints and biblical figures, asking Peregrinus "compare the creature to the Creator by analogy, since you cannot do so by equivalence."[63] Peregrinus responds with the example of the virgin and the unicorn, a tale with which Theodora is familiar, though the mystical significance has never been made clear to her. The story of the virgin and the unicorn, so popular in courtly literature, is here moralized in Peregrinus' retelling. He characterizes the wild unicorn as ferocious and strong, a beast who "engages in single combat with the elephant—not to mention beasts of lesser or equal strength—and sometimes vanquishes it by stabbing the elephant's belly with its horn… [though] the smaller beast could be defeated by the larger one in a moment, yet it attains the victory by its incomparably superior nature."[64] This wild beast can be tamed by the simple presence of "a girl of elegant beauty, attractively dressed" for "as soon as it has seen her, the untamed beast runs up immediately and grows gentle."[65] The import of this tale is not simply that virginity has great power, beauty and importance, but that Theodora should "draw a lesson from the literal meaning…[that] the brutality of the beast is diminished by the sight of a virgin, whereas the insanity of men is sometimes aroused to perverse love."[66] Again, Peregrinus has returned to the need of virgins to be cautious in the presence of men, to "fear the

[63] Ibid., 293.

[64] Ibid., 294.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid.

company of a dog or a wild animal less than of a rational creature."[67] Here Peregrinus reminds Theodora that virtuous behavior protects from lustful men.

Teaching by example and deed, teaching by analogy to reveal the invisible message, and teaching by incorporating the student's interests into a more esoteric lesson are all evidenced in these excerpts from the *Speculum Virginum*. While Theodora learns the importance of chastity, the virtue of modesty, the merit of prayer and patience, she is teaching the importance of curiosity and critical thinking, and above all, the zeal for learning to love God. Peregrinus teaches Theodora both through exhibiting piety and breadth of knowledge, and by criticizing misbehavior and praising virtue in the tales he tells. Through their lessons, she develops spiritually, becoming more attractive to the Bridegroom.

[67] Ibid.

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A Transformational Courtship: Theodora as *virgo* and *sponsa*

In the *Speculum Virginum*, Christ adorns Theodora and the Virgin Mary in mystical raiment, the clothing of Christ's Bride. Theodora and the martyred virgins picked bouquets of floral virtues, fashioning crowns and bridal wreaths. Though this is not a mystical text, Theodora undergoes a spiritual transformation expressed in bridall language and imagery. While the language of erotic love and marital imagery characterized the writings of medieval female mystics, a developing scholarly critique suggests that the language which describes female union with God actually reflects a male monastic imagination of this relationship. The male authorial voice, particularly noticeable as editor, hagiographer, recorder, or spiritual advisor, may be overlaying the language of the *Song of Songs* into genuine female religious experiences.[68] The *Speculum Virginum's* presentation of love language in a mystical context probably projects a male's imagined perfect woman onto Theodora. The subdued language of erotic mysticism in the *Speculum Virginum* is unusual when compared to eroticism in literature for religious women, especially literature from the German-language regions. In the *Speculum Virginum,* nuptial language serves an intentional textual purpose and highlights Theodora's spiritual development. As Theodora's lessons progress she becomes spiritually closer to Christ. The relationship between Virgin and Bridegroom develops concurrently with Theodora's education and formation. While the same pattern of spiritual progression exists in other medieval mystical texts, the relationship between bride and Bridegroom is often far more erotic.

I characterize the erotic language of the *Speculum Virginum* as dispassionate in comparison to other treatises employing bridal mysticism. Avoiding erotic language, the *Speculum Virginum* portrays a courtship between Theodora and Christ, with Peregrinus serving as intermediary. The three-way

[68] For development of this critique see especially Amy M. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1995), introduction. Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 5-9.

relationship between Peregrinus, Theodora, and Christ the Bridegroom fits neatly within the schematic of sexualization and typecasting Keller describes.[69] When Christ acts as the male lover of a female virgin's soul, confessors and spiritual advisors can take on supporting roles. Most often, the male religious figure of priest or monk becomes the propitiator of a mystical union. Keller writes: "what is interesting, then, is that the sexualization of the bride of Christ does not simply catapult men out of the context of the erotic relationship with God… in the pastoral care of women they are linked into the motif."[70] The spiritual advisor becomes the manipulator in these relationships, taking on a position of power by assuming the role of "the person who gives the bride away, woos the bride of Christ, prepares her for the wedding, and watches over her until her definitive union with the bridegroom."[71] Keller adds that this is most characteristic of texts like the *Speculum Virginum,* treatises "which serve for the spiritual instruction of women in the convent."[72]

Peregrinus plays the role of male agent or procurer by vouchsafing the chastity of the bride and negotiating the union between virgin and bridegroom. He first introduces her to Christ and arranges the betrothal, then guides their courtship with his lessons, and finally passes his pupil into the hands of her spouse in the final lines of Chapter 12. Peregrinus is the stereotypical spiritual father and advisor, taking up the role of agent and guardian of chastity in Theodora's love-relationship with the Bridegroom. While his lessons teach her the proper way to live as a Christian and vowed virgin, Peregrinus gives little explicit instruction on how to be a good wife to Christ. Peregrinus is more comfortable speaking of flowers and history than of marital relations, and his lessons gloss over the physical nature of love, even when alluding to the threat of rape-by-confessor.

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[69] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 35-6.

[70] Ibid., 36.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid.

Peregrinus introduces Theodora to her Bridegroom with flowers, and teaches her to attract divine attention through good behavior. Through a series of floral images, Peregrinus explains the relationship between the bridegroom and his virginal beloved. Here, the virgins are all flowers, and the bridegroom is attracted to them in an entirely non-sexual way.[73] "There thousands of virgins multiply the hues of ardent love in the sight of God… [and] the bridegroom strolls in the spiritual garden, like a flower more charming than the rest, and rambles among the flowers, enhancing each by his grace, receiving from them no increase of his own native glory."[74] The sweet scent of the virgin's flower will draw the bridegroom's attention, and this scent is a token of each virgin's own virtues—especially her chastity. While he perambulates, the field of virgins remains stationary, and any sexual contact between the lily and the field, even expressed in the language of pollen and bees, not human bodies, is unspoken. By showing Theodora the flowers and encouraging her to cultivate her own virtues, Peregrinus helps Theodora beautify her soul to attract the Bridegroom's eye.

In contrast to the euphemisms and metaphors of the *Speculum Virginum's* fields of flowers, near-contemporary commentary on the *Song of Songs*, the *St Trudperter Hohelied*, delights in erotic imagery as a community of women help groom each other for their Bridegroom.[75] In the epilogue, the anonymous and presumably male author describes the treatise as a mirror for the brides of the Almighty God: "This book should be used as a mirror by the Bride of the almighty God and she should diligently keep her gaze on it [the mirror], so that she can please her bridegroom who is always looking at her with loving

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[73] Compare this asexual selection to the fondling of virginal breasts in the *St Trudperter Hohelied*, see p. 12 for my analysis of that passage.

[74] *Speculum Virginum*, 1.16.

[75]The *St Trudperter Hoheleid* was written within fifteen years of the *Speculum Virginum*, most likely at the double-monastery of Admont. The text takes its name from the manuscript copy found at the Hirsau house of *St Trudpert* in Munstertal, and the treatise is closely associated with the Hirsau reform. From its self-description as a mirror for brides of God and its relationship to Hirsau, Urban Küsters suggests that the *St Trudperter Hohelied* was written with full knowledge of the *Speculum Virginum* Küsters, *Der verschlossene Garten: volkssprachliche Hohelied-Auslegung und monastische Lebensform im 12. Jahrhundert*, 60.

eyes."[76] Like the *Speculum Virginum,* the *St Trudperter Hohelied* was also written by a male spiritual advisor for a female audience, probably residents of the convent of Admont.[77] Again, the self-stated purpose of the text is to provide spiritual guidance and instruction for women religious, with the goal of making these women more attractive to their spiritual suitor. However, the *Hohelied* takes the form of a vernacular commentary on a single biblical book, and the advice and guidance offered is expressed in passionate language and erotic imagery. In answer to the question of who the Bride is, the *St Trudperter Hohelied* explains that she is the reader, the one whom God has chosen:

> Who is this maiden?
> It is the one who God has elected
> That the Son has enlightened
> And the Holy Ghost has adorned
>
> He led her through the desert, that is the desert of the world, that was for a long time situated in unfruitfulness. Also today she goes to the desert of weakness and
> The Banished and the enslaved go home
> And the humbled and the weeping are comforted.
> She calls the desperate to return directly,
> She makes the bound free,
> She gives support to the guilty sinners
> She gives joy to the sorrowing ones
> She suffers with those who feel the pain of their suffering
> She is guilty with the sinners,
> She is forgiveness for the penitent.[78]

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[76] Friedrich Ohly and Nicola Kleine, *Das St. Trudperter Hohelied: eine Lehre der liebenden Gotteserkenntnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1998), 307 145, 12-19. All quotations from this edition will be made from the modern German text. When a question of meaning arises, the Old Allemanic word or phrase will be provided. As this is a commentary, all direct biblical quotations are given in capitol letters, while the commentary itself is given in normal script, as was done by Ohly and Kleine.

[77] Ibid., 1226 ff.

[78] Wer ist diese Jungfrau?
Es ist die, die Gott erwählt hat
Die der Sohn erleuchtet hat und
Die der Heilige Geist geschmückt hat.

Er leitete sie durch die Wüste, das heißt die Wüste dieser Welt, die lange unfruchtbar gelegen war. Auch heute geht sie durch die Wüste der Kraftlosen und
Führt heim die Verbannten und die Versklavten
Und tröstet die Demütigen und die Weinenden.
Sie ruft die Verzweifelten zurück,
Sie macht die Gefangenen frie,
Sie steht den Schuldigen bei

Comparison of this Bride's attributes to what we know of Theodora's nature shows several differences in both character and the love-relationship. Though God would eventually select Theodora as a bride, he only became interested in her after Peregrinus taught her to become beautiful. Peregrinus, not the Holy Ghost arrayed Theodora, though the emphasis on selection and preparation is similar.[79] In the *St. Trudperter Hohelied* the male author of this treatise does not actively participate in the love relationship. After the bridal soul is adorned she gains Christ's salvific powers, ransoming the lost and offering forgiveness for the truly penitent. Though the fifteenth-century German mystic Katharina Tucher would receive redemptive powers after marrying Jesus, Theodora gains no such salvific powers after her own adornment—even though she is guiding others to salvation by modeling virtuous behavior so well. This position outside the events of courtship and marriage requires the male narrator to transfer the role of procurer to other participants in the dialogue. He gives direction to selected brides to help ease younger virgins into their own relationships with the Bridegroom rather than seeking to insert himself into that role of procurer and protector.[80]

In one instance, virgins reading the *St. Trudperter Hohelied* are instructed to sing: "So set to it, you virgins who have never been kissed with desire. Sing now, you beauties, who have never eagerly sung of the world. Your breasts will be embraced by God, since they were never yet touched by a man. Now

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Sie gibt Geliet den Trauernden,
Sie leidet mit den Schmerzleidenden,
Sie ist geduldig mit den Sündern,
Sie ist die Vergebung für die Reuigen

So geht sie mit ihrem elden Duft noch durch die Wüste dieser Welt. Dies ist die Hilfe die Gott seinen erwählten Seelen schenkte.Ibid., 103, 40, 15-29.

[79] In the final section of this chapter, the importance of selection, arraying, and spiritual preparation is connected to the ceremonies of the *Consecratio Virginum*.

[80] For instance, experienced nuns are instructed to teach maternal and marital duties to younger ones in a commentary on *Song of Songs* VII 12 In this passage, the author expresses two concerns: that the younger brides should be adequately schooled and instructed by their older sisters, and that all of the brides of Christ should not so totally lose themselves in desire for their lover that they neglect their own earthly duties. The divine Bridegroom is likened to a mortal man, more concerned for the well-being of his children than desirous of his wife. The breasts of the virgin lose their erotic interest when heavy with milk, sustenance for the Bridegroom's children. Ohly and Kleine, *Das St. Trudperter Hohelied: eine Lehre der liebenden Gotteserkenntnis*, 263.

sing, o dearest ones, because you have not yet been made hoarse by worldly songs." [81] Here, the embrace of God is a physical one and explicitly erotic. These virginal voices raised in songs express joy in their convent life and attract God's wandering eye. However, His attention is not expressed through a chaste blessing! Instead, God's ears and eyes, moved by the song of the virgins, lead his hands to fondle their breasts—"your breasts will be embraced by God." This image is one that may either conjure the sexual fondling of breasts or the chaste enfolding of arms around the chest in an embrace to an English speaker though the original text does not leave its meaning so ambiguous.[82] In the *St. Trudperter Hohelied,* a virginal chorus culminates in physical contact with the divine, while the *Epithalamium* that concludes the *Speculum Virginum* simply expresses joy at the upcoming union of Theodora and the Bridegroom.

The *St. Trudperter Hoheleid* describes bridal union as a physical contact and a deeply internalized emotional moment. In that moment the body is left behind, a cold empty shell, and the soul of the beloved grows hot with passion for her paramour:

> That is, when the flesh begins to cool
> and the spirit begins to warm.
> That is, when the loose love in you cools
> and the spirit begins to warm.
> That is, when the loose love in you cools
> and the love for eternal life grows hot in you,
> when the heat of wrath in you cools
> and the love for the next life burns in you,
> when the heat of wanton abandon in you cools
> and the love of God's spirit, your righteous love for him
> burns hotter than ever in you.

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[81] translation by H. Keller, Ibid., 145, 12-13 ; Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 145.The modern German reads: Nun tretet herzu, ihr Jungfrauen
ihr niemals mit Begier gekussten
nun singet. ihr schonssten,
die ihr nie mit Hingabe an die Welt gesungen ha
Eure Bruste mogen von Gott geliebkost werden,
da sie nie ein mann beruhrte.
Sun singet, ihr Liebsten,
da ihr von weltlichem Gesang nie heiser wurdet.

[82] The old allemannic reads "*brüste"* which is quite explicitly breasts rather than chest. Keller connects this passage to Mechthild von Magdeburg, who writes that Christ says of her "your breast and mine are one, not caressed by any man but you alone." Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 144-5. The modern German *brüste* is given in the facing-page translation, and my explorations with several dictionaries do not indicate any other possible interpretation but Keller's translation.

Your true love is
Your creator
Your redeemer
Your lover and paramour"[83]

Here, the bride's body falls into death as her soul enflames with love, and the heat of passionate love for Christ culminates in the realization of the Beloved's nature: He is both creator and paramour, lover above all other lovers.

While the *Speculum Virginum* and the *St Trudperter Hohelied* both depict a mystical love-relationship, following similar trajectories towards union with the divine Bridegroom, the *Speculum Virginum* lacks the vivid, emotional, and often erotic passages that characterize the *St Trudperter Hohelied.* While the *Speculum Virginum* targets young virgins newly sworn to monastic life, the *St. Trudperter Hohelied* addresses an entire community of religious women, each at different stages of spiritual development. The *St. Trudperter Hohelied* presumes spiritual mentorship can come from a woman, and the author makes specific provisions for the community to work together to ease young virgins into their new relationship with Christ. In contrast, the *Speculum Virginum*, instruction comes from a male figure and the careful emphasis on chastity reflects the sexually charged situation in which Peregrinus conducts his lessons. For a man—even one vowed to celibacy—to speak to a young virgin of breast fondling, kisses, passion, and paramours would be highly inappropriate, while a matronly figure giving similar advice to a younger

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[83] Ohly and Kleine, *Das St. Trudperter Hohelied: eine Lehre der liebenden Gotteserkenntnis*, 307-308.
Das heißt, wenn das Fleisch abzukühlen anfängt
Und der Geist warm zu werden beginnt;
Das heißt, wenn die lose Liebe an dir abkühlt
Und die Liebe zum ewigen Leben in dir heiß wird
Wenn die Hitze des Zornes in dir abkühlt
Und die Liebe zum Nächsten in dir entbrennt;
Wenn die Hitze der Unkeuschheit in dir abkühlt
Und die Liebe des Gottesgeistes zu deinem rechten
Geliebten hin in dir erst richtig heiß wird.

Dies (dein Geliebter) ist
Dein Schöpfer,
Dein Erlöser,
Dein Lebhaber.

woman in confidence was a common preparation for marriage.[84] The *Speculum Virginum*'s classroom setting requires a dispassionate, didactic transformation. The *St. Trudperter Hohelied*, conversely, re-explains erotic love poetry to make it appropriate for chaste communal living. While the *Speculum Virginum* operates as a "self help" manual, a didactic twelve-chapter kit containing everything a virgin might need to prepare herself for spiritual union with the Bridegroom, the *St. Trudperter Hohelied* emphasizes group support and collective transformation. Despite this difference in approach, the two texts both express the spiritual development of religious women in terms of a marriage metaphor and express particular concern with the introduction of new virgins to their life through coming to know Christ as a Bridegroom.

The emphasis on the virgin as the ideal type is both a reflection of the exegetic practice of identifying the human soul as virginal and female, and of the widespread medieval cultural perception of virginal maidenhood as the perfect moment in a woman's life. In recent publications on the medieval idea of maidenhood, Kim Phillips argues that in Medieval England a woman's perfect age was between sexual maturity and marriage, while the male attained perfection with middle age. Phillips writes that "representations of the perfected woman's body in death depict the woman as a maiden."[85] Whatever the age of the woman, she would be remembered always as virgin and maiden, in her best and most beautiful moment. As Phillips emphasizes, maidenhood was not the culmination, a point at which a woman could linger and settle, but instead the perfect moment, transient and idealized. Maidenhood is a time of learning to become a woman, and an appropriate situation to address the ideal attributes of a

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[84] Several of the vernacular texts Ann Marie Rasmussen discusses in *Mothers and Daughters* contain just such passages. Older, sexually experienced women often shared their wisdom and sexual experiences with virginal daughters or girls in their care, either to calm a girl before her wedding or to encourage her to take up a new relationship. An excellent overview of the phenomenon can be found in her introductory chapter, though examples with analysis are given throughout the book. Ann Marie Rasmussen, *Mothers and Daughters in Medieval German Literature*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

[85] Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England 1270-1540*, ed. S. H. Rigby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 43.

woman.[86] Vowed celibacy and entrance into monastic life denied the possibility of becoming a woman through marriage and motherhood, yet virgins who entered the convent could not remain half-formed morally, spiritually, or emotionally. In the fictive convent classroom of the *Speculum Virginum,* Theodora's lessons with Peregrinus develop her theological understanding and lead her to a state of chaste maturity; spiritual education confers the same virtues of maturity as a secular marriage.

In the *Speculum Virginum* there are over 200 instances of *virgo* but fewer than 20 of *sponsa.* Unfortunately, Jutta Seyfarth did not index *mulier, mater, puella* or *femina*, but there are also over 200 instances in which the Bridegroom (sponsus) appears, and well over 300 iterations of *amor.*[87] The emphasis on virgin over bride in this treatise identifies Theodora's spiritual and physical status as a religious woman. While she is a *virgo*, young and chaste, she is still learning to love Christ, still preparing for her union with the Bridegroom. However, Peregrinus underscores Theodora's spiritual progression in the heavenly hierarchy when he calls Theodora *sponsa.* The Bridegroom is static, pure, unchanging, a goal that remains eternally desirable; but to achieve the Bridegroom, Theodora must first become a worthy bride. In both the *Speculum Virginum* and the *St. Trudperter Hohelied,* mystical bridal raiment signifies the completed transformation, marking a soul as worthy of the divine bridegroom. This bridal gown borrows from the *Song of Songs,* but also refers to the change of clothing which accompanied the *Consecratio Virginum* and a nun's religious profession. This ritual also includes a gifting of new robes, but incorporates the giving of a ring and a veil, several vow exchanges, and sermons. It is preceded by a period of religious instruction, and its completion celebrates the initiation of the new virgin as a bride of Christ.[88] René Metz's history of the early history of these rites in *La consécration des vierges dans l'église*

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[86] As a thoroughly cynical authorial aside, I must say it is hardly surprising that the medieval male imagined the ideal female as one only half-mature, pure, virginal, beautiful, but not yet in possession of developed intellect or morality. The modern media portrays the ideal female in exactly this way, virginal yet sensuous, empty headed and waiting to be molded. It seems to be an eternal male fantasy.

[87] *Speculum Virginum.*

[88] For more information on the development of the rites for the consecration of virgins and initiation of women into monastic communities see : René Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1945); René Metz, "Les conditions juridiques de la consécration des vierges dans la

Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie, emphasizes the close correlation between marriage ceremonies and initiation ceremonies. Metz concludes that the complicated rituals' symbolism served only one purpose: "the ceremony has a symbolic character; it is mimicking liturgy of marriage."[89] These consecration rituals included veils, crowns, and the gifting of new clothing, all of which were integral to contemporary pagan marriage rituals. In the *Speculum Virginum*, Peregrinus describes the heavenly garment awarded to virgins after they become virtuous as ethereal, sprinkled in jewels, and a gift of God:

> As an example of this heavenly garment, consider the Lord's mother—the ornament of sacred beauty, the mirror of holy virginity…. This is Mary the root of an eternal flower, the flower and fruit of eternal blessing. Imitate this chief of virgins as far as possible, virgin of Christ, and you too, with Mary, will seem to give birth spiritually to the Son of God.[90]

Here Peregrinus describes bridal raiment as a sign of the virgin's transformation. Though this cosmic gown probably refers to the woman of *Revelation,* transformations marked by clothing characterized the consecration of virgins and nuns.[91]

The ritual of the *consecratio virginum* bears many similarities to aspects of Theodora's instruction and development. The ceremony often incorporated the reading of the life of St. Agnes, concluded with a choral celebration, and entailed the giving of a new robe, a crown, a veil, and a ring. Unlike Theodora,

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liturgie latine des origines a nos jours," *RDC* 1 (1951); René Metz, "La couronne et l'anneau dans la consécration des vierges. Origine et évolution des deux rites dans la liturgie latine," *RevSR* (1954); René Metz, "Benedictio sive consecratio virginum?," *EL* 80 (1966); Columba Hart, OSB, "*Consecratio Virginum*: Thirteenth-Century Witnesses," *The American Benedictine Review* 23, no. 2 (1972); Anne Bangall Yardley, "The Marriage of Heaven and Earth: A Late Medieval Source of the Consecratio Virginum," *Current Musicology* (1990).

[89] Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie*, 188. "cette cérémonie a été diversement interprétée. A notre avis, une seuel explication paraît plausible : la cérémonie a un caractère symbolique ; elle est empruntée a la liturgie du marriage comme d'autres rites de la consécration des vierges que nous recontrerons dans le pontifical romano-germanique."

[90] *Speculum Virginum*, 274.

[91] See for instance, the Romano-Germanic pontifical, which was in prominent use in twelfth-century Germany: "who promised to give the faithful 'the vestment of salvation and the clothing of eternal joy" to bless "this clothing which signifies humility of heart and contempt for the world" and "the habit of blessed chastity" and to grant "that he whom you temporarily clothe with the vestments of the venerable promise may be clothed in blessed immortality." He then put clothing on the novice as a sign of the religious life." Giles Constable, "The Ceremonies and Symbolism of Entering Religious Life and Taking the Monastic Habit from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century," in *Segni e riti nella chiesa altomedioevale occidentale* (Spoleto: 1987), 812.

hese virgins were explicitly called *sponsae,* and one pontifical from the twelfth century explicitly stated that the ceremony was a marriage to Christ: "*Sponsus earum (virginum) est Chrustus* [the husband of those virgins is Christ]."[92] Giving the veil was of particular importance as it symbolized chastity.[93] Over time, the gifting or wearing of monastic clothing became synonymous with taking the monastic vow, and eventually "putting on the monastic habit increasingly took on the character of an implicit vow."[94]

The *Speculum Virginum* does not explicitly describe Theodora's monastic initiation or her marriage to Christ, but her spiritual transformation is defined through the acquisition of symbolic adornment. The mystical garments are a mirror of sacred virginity: "As an example of this heavenly garment, consider the Lord's mother—the ornament of sacred beauty, the mirror of holy virginity."[95] Peregrinus returns to this wreath or crown again after recounting to Theodora the passions of four virgin martyrs, making the distinction between the white crown and the red, the crown of the virgin and of the martyr. The flowers which make up these crowns are no longer personifications of virtue, or the virgins themselves, but have become tokens or medallions indicating the nature and triumphs of the one they adorn. Though the virtues emphasized remain virginity, chastity, devotion, perseverance, and the object of the virgin's dedication is still the heavenly Bridegroom, the metaphor now elucidates another of Peregrinus' lessons.

After describing these two inverted wreaths of red and white, of complimentary virtues, Peregrinus offers to make for Theodora a crown of her own: "Would you like me to weave you a garland with just a few flowers?" he asks Theodora. "Which ones," she replies, "Lilies, roses and violets—that is chastity, charity and humility," is Peregrinus' response.[96] Peregrinus explains the importance of each species of virtue, and Theodora, delighted, exclaims, "O how beautiful is the virgin's crown, more

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[92] Metz, *La consécration des vierges dans l'église Romaine: Étude d'histoire de la liturgie*, 189.

[93] Constable, "The Ceremonies and Symbolism of Entering Religious Life and Taking the Monastic Habit from the Fourth to the Twelfth Century," 798.

[94] The importance of clothing, transformation, and nakedness, will be taken up again in chapter 4. Ibid., 810.

[95] *Speculum Virginum*, 283.

[96] Ibid., 290.

precious than any badge of royal dignity!"[97] This floral crown of virtues symbolizes Theodora's upcoming wedding and emphasizes the many different virtues that transform a woman into a bride of Christ.

In the final lines of chapter twelve Theodora finally becomes a bride of Christ. Theodora, generally the passive student, determines that her lessons are complete. She then suggests that a wedding song be sung to celebrate the union of Bride and Bridegroom.[98] Peregrinus now is the passive figure, and his response only confirms Theodora's realization that her lessons are over, that the bride and bridegroom are to be united.[99] While there is nothing conclusive to suggest that Theodora is the Bride whose marriage is about to be celebrated, the culmination of her spiritual formation is a wedding celebration.

Like the brides of Christ in the *consecratio virginum*, Theodora has heard the tales of exemplary virgin saints, been awarded mystical garments as a sign of her virtues, and completed a course of theological education and meditation. As these virgins became *sponsae* with the opening words of the liturgy, Theodora becomes a *sponsa* at the conclusion of her lessons. Fully prepared for her Bridegroom, she is now a bride herself, and the students of the *Speculum Virginum*—whether the virgins of the *Epistula* or the men and women who read the treatise, meditated over its lessons, and used it in their own spiritual formation—has also completed Peregrinus' course in transformation-through-virtue. Theodora's assumption of the role of bride offers hope that the student reader of the *Speculum Virginum* will one also become a bride of Christ.

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[97] Ibid., 291.

[98] " Modis omnibus satisfactum mihi censeo, sed omnia praetaxata brevi suavique, obsecro, concludantur epithalamio, ut sponsi voce Christi sponsae magis in admiratione aeternorum exitatae proclament: "Quoniam apud te est fons vitae, et in lumine tuo videbimus lumen" *Jungfrauenspiegel*, 1014.

[99] " Sicut gratia beatudinum immensurabilis est sic appetitus quarentium sit insatiabilis, ut licet minoris ad maius, id est ad infinitum momentanei brevis aut nulla sit comparatio. Mens tamen in deum exsurgat ima fastidiendo, summa praegustando. Itaque dilecte matris nostrae, "quae sursum est Ierusalem" vel memoria delectemur in via, donec "veniat, quod perfectum est, et evacuetur, quod ex parte est," in patria." Ibid.

As a bride of Christ, Theodora has a pure soul and refined virtues. She has conquered every sin and mastered the key tenets of high medieval theology. The author of the *Speculum Virginum* has provided a careful guide to how to live, pray, think, and mediate, though not a mystical text. Instead, the relationship between Theodora and Peregrinus shows how a woman (with the help of a man) can learn virtue and earn Christ's loving embrace. The woman should be quiet, obedient to her confessor, but inquisitive and an individual, while the father should in turn be a patient, skilled, and sensitive teacher who carefully guides the women in his care towards a meaningful union with God and restrains his own lust, no matter the temptation. In the following chapters, I shall explore both how women expressed themselves as brides of Christ—genuine women, not fictive characters like Theodora—and how the relationships between women, men, and Jesus, became more complicated and difficult in the later middle ages. Married women embraced the idea that virtuous living, constant prayer, and a heartfelt love for Christ could elevate even the sexually tainted, transforming any human's soul into a bride of Christ. By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the ideal qualities for a good Christian woman were re-expressed through harsh mystical language and asceticism, but the bride of Christ was still a model woman who taught others how to purify their own souls and win divine love. The themes and concerns introduced in my discussion of the *Speculum Virginum* will tie these chapters together.

Taking Jesus as a Second Husband

In the thirteenth century, new models of female piety became increasingly popular and socially acceptable. Though to the best of our knowledge most famous members of this "women's religious movement" were virgins—or at least unwed—the apostolic renewal of both the beguines and the mendicant orders was hardly limited to celibate religious. Lay people became actively involved in religious life without joining one of the new religious orders, entering a beguinage or becoming tertiaries. The new model of active worldly piety introduced by the beguines and the mendicants could also accommodate enthusiastic acts of charity, prayer, penance, poverty, and pilgrimage from men and women of unexpected social positions. As married women (and men) pursued holy lives, the models for holy living had to be adapted to accommodate children, spouses, and social obligations.[1] Women (and men) with religious inclinations began devoting themselves to Jesus without first removing themselves from the world by severing ties to family and property. In the process, models for female piety were redefined, and the saintly mother/wife figure became an increasingly important female exemplar. Some of these women were mystics, and some of them identified as brides of Christ. In this chapter, I examine the complicated situations that arose when worldly women—married women, mothers, widows—began to follow a model of spirituality first designed for virgins and other unattached women.

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[1] Obviously these are broad generalizations about new religious movements of the thirteenth century, including the new mendicant orders, the beguines, and a rise in lay piety characterized by such things as the corpus Christi festivals and the development of confraternities and other lay organizations. Grundmann remains a foundational study. Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995).

When women who already have husbands became brides of Christ, the relationship could be problematic both for their familes, their hagiographers, and the townsfolk they saw every day. I begin this chapter by briefly introducing the theological argument which made it possible for married women to become "religious" women—the common-sense assertion that a virtuous wife is certainly better than a sinning virgin. This concept, first expressed in patristic warnings to virgins to mind their behavior, had, by the twelfth century, developed into a certainty that spiritual virginity (the intention to remain chaste) was more important than physical virginity (the fact of having kept chaste). After introducing this crucial theological argument, I turn to hagiographic accounts of married saints from the the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I take a new definition of married female piety from the highly influential model lives of Mary d'Oingies, Bridget of Sweden, and Elizabeth of Hungary, then explore how two fourteenth-century married brides of Christ consciously followed these models.[2] Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau were both mothers and wives from similar social backgrounds who pursued a religious life in the world. Each negotiated autonomy from her husband, went on pilgrimage, and married Jesus in a documented mystical vision. However, Dorothea von Montau was also—at least according to her hagiographer—obedient, while Margery Kempe was civilly disruptive. My examination of these two women's lives considers Dorothea and Margery followed newly established models for married female piety as well as how Dorothea's behavior was reinterpreted and sanctified for canonization proceedings. In the final section of this chapter, I look at a fifteenth-century mystic and widow, Katharina Tucher, who also married Jesus. While Katharina conforms socially to saintly models of female piety by retiring to a convent as a widow, I will argue that her marital relationship with Jesus and general manner of living are quite radical. Katharina's experience and religious freedom was made

[2] Outside the German context, there are quite a few other women who could be added to this discussion, including St. Helena of Skövde, Catharine of Sweden, St. Frances of Rome, Angela of Foligno, Margaret of Cortona, Umilita of Faenza, and others I no doubt have not yet come across. Though Margery Kempe is not German/Dutch, her *Book* offers a valuable account of a married woman who actively patterned her spirituality after married saints, and Margery's connections with Germany are numerous: her son lived there and married a German woman, she miraculously was able to understand German for a time, she was recognized as a holy woman by German religious and pilgrims, and she visited Germany on pilgrimage—she may even have known of Dorothea von Montau, as they were contemporaries.

possible by the acceptance of married women religious in previous centuries, the complications that arose from incorporating married and sexually active women into existing models of female piety (especially the bride of Christ) contributed greatly to a growing suspicion of female mysticism and religious freedom in the later Middle Ages.

~ 3.1 ~

Virgins and Wives

"If therefore there be set before us a virgin about to continue so, but yet disobedient, and a married woman who could not continue a virgin, but yet obedient, which shall we call better? shall it be (the one) less praiseworthy, than if she were a virgin, or (the other) worthy of blame, even as she is a virgin? So, if you compare a drunken virgin with a sober married woman, who can doubt to pass the same sentence? Forsooth marriage and virginity are two goods" Augustine *On the Good Marriage* paragraph 29

Augustine's scenario, which requires a rather good wife and a fairly bad virgin, is put forward in a tract composed specifically to defend and define Christian marriage. By praising virginity and celibacy so highly, the early church gave rise to a popular misconception that virgins could "get away with" certain sins while married people would by default receive less reward in heaven despite virtuous living. Jerome, in his famed 22nd letter to Eustochium, describes the misbehavior of virgins, while in previous centuries Tertullian reprimanded virgins for refusing to wear the veil and acting haughty, and Cyprian chastised virgins who visited mixed public baths, suggesting in the second through fifth centuries, vowed Christian virgins were not at all saintly.[3] Unlike other patristic authors, who often defend marriage in brief asides and often openly described it as horrific, Augustine provided theological justification for good marriage and allowed that married Christians could achieve spiritual rewards for virtuous living. Though Augustine repeatedly encouraged the married to have sex for "begetting children only," he also accepted the need for "satisfying lust" in marriage.

As Dyan Elliott demonstrated in *Spiritual Marriage*, married Christians certainly sought religious lives despite the Church's organizational preference for celibate virginity.[4] Though Elliott's research indicates that Christians with a strong religious inclination would sometimes escape marriage through vows of celibacy, others clearly could not or would not wait for freedom from marital obligations to

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[3] Tertullian *On the veiling of virgins*, Cyprian *On Virginity*, Jerome's letter to Blaisilla, etc. I say centuries due to the debate over Tertullian's dating, but really they were probably both 3rd century.

[4]For a thorough examination of celibacy and marriage in the early and medieval Churches: Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 91. Although Elliott's focus is on celibacy within marriage, her sources and discussion provide useful background to the thirteenth-century rise in married religious women. Elliott demonstrates how hagiography provided models for celibate marriage but does not closely examine other options for Christian living within wedlock.

begin their religious careers. Elliott rightly points out that: "the main difference between the virgin wife and her plainer sisters, who lived to become sexually active and conformed to the late and relatively unspectacular transitional model of spiritual marriage, was probably only on the level of success rather than that of intention or desire," meaning that for each virgin wife and vowed virgin, there may have been many other women who attempted chastity but failed to convince their husbands and parents.[5] The eleventh and twelfth centuries mark the beginning of a trend towards accommodating married people into more active involvement in the Church. Elliott believes that this shift coincides with the Gregorian reform and the new emphasis on chastity for salvation, commenting that "something new had happened. The laity's spiritual awakening was a rude one. They almost instantly began to question, and ultimately to doubt, whether they could be saved while continuing in their station."[6] Elliott's research does indicate an increase in spiritual marriages in the eleventh and especially twelfth centuries, but I suspect that the same impulse that lead to spiritual marriages also encouraged the Church to find other exemplary types of marriage that accommodated sex and childrearing. The layfolk were certainly concerned about salvation, and could not possibly all be accommodated within the existing monastic structure, or be persuaded to practice saintly spiritual marriage.

Just as increased emphasis on virginity as a path to salvation in the third and fourth centuries gave rise to the "bad" virgins described by patristic authors and a need to reassure the married of their own path to salvation, the new emphasis on heroic celibacy in the eleventh and twelfth centuries created social problems. The *Speculum Virginum*, introduced in chapter two as a progressive twelfth-century approach to female chastity and religious education, draws from patristic literature to address concerns about misbehaving virgins and virtuous married fornicators. In several chapters Peregrinus suggests that protecting chastity is less important than practicing virtue. According to Peregrinus—who has certainly studied his Patristics—a humble wife earns a better reward than a haughty virgin, while the vowed nun

[5] Ibid., 218.

[6] Ibid., 107.

who has considered marriage is in a worse spiritual state than a faithful wife. When Theodora marvels at the seemingly unattainable spiritual prize of a holy virgin, Peregrinus suggests that if she finds the examples of virgin martyrs too intimidating, she should take advice from the "thousands of holy widows or even the life of married women [which] diligently studied, will urge the virgin of Christ to follow the Lamb for the glory of continence and the immaculate bridal bed."[7] In Book 7, Peregrinus addresses the threefold rewards for virgins, widows, and wives, further developing the *Speculum Virginum's* argument that virtue is more important than virginity. Though Peregrinus warns against lust, marriage, and childbirth, telling of murder, cannibalism, war, and other sorrows that befall those who marry, he and Theodora agree that the unchaste can still follow the Lamb and find salvation on the day of judgment, though they cannot reach this destination by following or imitating every aspect of Christ's life. Theodora comments that "it remains a bit odd that those who have lost their physical virginity, like those of the remaining believers who follow the Lamb, are not following Him wherever He goes (Rev. 14.4), but they are able to go where he has gone."[8] Here, Theodora is summarizing a lengthy lesson, as is often the case in the *Speculum Virginum*. Peregrinus must of course explain the exception to the situation: although it is true that virgins may follow the Lamb wherever he goes, this is not true of virgins born in pagan times: without Jesus, chastity does not grant salvation. The general message here is that only virgins can imitate Christ's life fully, but those who have wed but continue to lead virtuous lives will also eventually find their way to heaven and receive the same full salvific reward.

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[7] "Audi filia. Vita pudica inter aculeos temptationum omni tempore delicias habet rosarum et lilorum. Et certe si uirginum exempla ad incitamenta profecuts tui minus suppeterent, uiduarum sanctarum milia uel etiam coniugatarum uita diligenter inspecta per gloriam contentie et thori immaculate Christi uirginem ad agnum sequendum urgerent." , ed. Jutta Seyfarth, 1st ed., Speculum Virginum, vol. V (Brepols: Turnholti, 1990), 148, ll. 1011-116; *Speculum Virginum: Selected Excerpts*, trans. Barbara Newman (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 291.

[8] Restat igitur, ut sequantur agnum ceteri fideles, qui virginitatem corporis amiserunt, non "quocumque ierit", sed quocumque ipsi potuerint. , ed. Jutta Seyfarth, trans. Jutta Seyfarth, Speculum virginum = Jungfrauenspiegel (Freiburg im Breisgau ; New York: Herder, 2001), 626. The Dutch version simplifies this and makes the situation clearer: "it seems to me that all good and believing men follow the lamb in whatever state they may be, but none follow him "wherever he may go" other than the maidens [Iet schynt, dat alle goede gelouige menschen den lame volgen, in wat staete, dat si syn, mer niemant en volcht hem, *so waer dattet heen gaet* (Rev 14.4), dan alleeen de maechden."Irene Berkenbusch, *Speculum virginum: mittelniederländischer Text: Edition, Untersuchungen zum Prolog und einleitende Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995), 272. "Rev. 14.4: It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are chaste; it is these who follow the Lamb wherever he goes; these have been redeemed from mankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb

Throughout the *Speculum Virginum,* Theodora is warned that guarding her virginity is insufficient. Instead, to win Christ's love she must cultivate virtue, something that any woman or man might do, whether enclosed or living in the world as a wife and mother. Bernards lists this trait of the treatise as one of the *Speculum Virginum's* "misconceptions [*Mißverständnisse*]," though he acknowledges that the opinions voiced by Peregrinus and Theodora were also expressed by Augustine, Rupert von Deutz, Bernard of Clairvaux, and later Albert the Great and his school as well as Thomas Aquinas. Bernards comments that "like with the pseudo-Bernard, a humble widow is of higher rank than a haughty virgin. A penitent, who has converted herself, earns a higher rank than a woman of religious orders who had thought of marriage. In spite of the marriage bonds married people can, through their own virtues, surpass lazy religious, and even virtuous heathens can surpass unsound Christian widows."[9]

Though the *Speculum Virginum* claims to have been written for virgins, its appeal extended beyond the cloister—Bridget of Sweden read it, and other married women may have as well. The *Speculum Virginum's* message that good and pious living was far more important than chastity or monastic vows would make the treatise appealing to the spiritual fathers of the *Devotio Moderna* as well, but in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, there was a clear need for exemplary spiritual alternatives for layfolk, both married and unwed. The new mendicant movements and the women's religious movement in the Low Countries both address the same spiritual panic that Elliott identifies as a major contributor to the developing popularity of spiritual marriage. However, the options offered by these new religious movements did not immediately accommodate those who remained within a sexually active marriage. Beguines were obliged to maintain celibacy while with their communities, though there

[9] Deshalb lehrt das Speculum, wie auch Pseudo-Bernhard, daß eine demütige Witwe höhersteht al seine stolze Jungfrau. Eine Büßerin, die sich bekehrt hat, erhält den Vorrang vor einer Ordensfrau, deren Gedanken auf die Ehe gehen. Den Ehefesseln zum Trotz können Verheiratete durch ihre Tuenden lässige Ordensleute, können ebenso Heidinnen unzuverlässige christliche Witwen (Eph 4:22 5, 25; 1 Thes 4 405 1 tim 5, 6 ,15, 12) Matthäus Bernards, *Speculum Virginum; Geistigkeit und Seelenleben der Frau im Hochmittelalter* (Köln,: Böhlau, 1955), 53.

was great tolerance for penitent unwed mothers.[10] Though the mendicants would develop tertiary orders, the earliest spirit of the mendicant movement was nearly as concerned with chastity as with poverty.[11] Working within the existing models for spiritual marriage and female piety, several women began making slow changes to the boundaries between marriage and religious fulfillment in the medieval church.

[10] Simons notes that in one beguinage sent pregnant women away but would allow them to return after a year, adding that this was "perhaps because beguines strove for continence rather than virginity." Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 73.

[11] Especially for women. Clare's forced enclosure and the limitations on the Clarissan rule are one clear example of this. For a fine synthetic study and overview, see [add biblio and footnotes, I know I read this somewhere] Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*.

~ 3.2 ~

Exemplary Married Brides of Christ

As with all models for female Christian virtue, the married Bride of Christ is in part a reflection of Mary, who was the first Bride of God but also a wife to Joseph and mother to Jesus. However, medieval insistence on Mary's virginity and her chaste relationship with Joseph limited the practical utility of Mary as an exemplary Christian wife. Other exemplary figures came from the Bible and hagiography, but the emphasis continued to be on celibacy within marriage with little accommodation for the conjugal debt or childbearing.[12] However, in the thirteenth century three holy women brought spiritual marriage and marital piety into the public eye. Of the three, Bridget of Sweden is by far the most important. She was a wife, a mother, the foundress of a new order, a mystic and prophet, and a saint whose popularity spanned Europe. She was a model for both Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau. Katharina Tucher had a vision where "birgitta" presided over the breaking of the six seals of Revelation.[13] The connection between Margery and Bridgette of Sweden is apparent from several comments in the *Book,* and a recent article suggests that the very details of Margery's wedding to the Godhead in Rome have a direct connection to Bridget.[14] All of these women were married mothers who sought chastity and experienced profound visions. However, the details of Bridgette's relations with her two husbands (Jesus and Ulf) are more straightforward—and far more chaste—than the moments Margery shares in her *Book* or what Johanness von Marienwerder hints took place between Dorothea and Adalbert.

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[12] The *Speculum Virginum* takes examples from classical literature, matriarchs from the Hebrew Bible, and a handful of married saints, including Helena and Monica. Dyan Elliott gives an overview of the early hagiographic models in Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 16-51, 94-131.

[13] Katharina also knew of Dorothea von Montau: Katharina Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, ed. Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 5,32.

[14] Yoshikawa suggests that the location and description of Margery's marriage to the Godhead is connected to Margery's contact with holy sites dedicated to St. Bridgette during her sojourn in Rome, an argument that, while compelling, does not take into consideration Margery's rivalry with Bridgette. Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn: Influence of St Bridget of Sweden.," *Reading Medieval Studies* 28 (2002): 39.

Elizabeth of Hungary (Thuringia) and Marie d'Oignies are also important thirteenth-century married exemplars of female virtue. [15] Elizabeth of Hungary, a pious matron and widow, was the third most popular patron saint for beguinages, and cited by Johannes von Marienwerder, Dorothea von Montau's hagiographer, as proof that "not only virgins and those who live chastely enter the kingdom of heaven but also married people who with true faith and good works earn God's grace."[16] Katharina Tucher called her an apostle to the nobility, while Margery Kempe compared herself to Elizabeth of Hungary and Marie to justify her devotional weeping and her pusuit of a religious life as a married woman.[17] Katharina also owned a copy of Elizabeth's life.[18] Marie d'Oignies, who was one of the first beguines, was a wife without being a mother, but her devotion and relationship with her husband, as described by Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, provided another important model for married female piety.[19]

Because there is a close connection between spiritual marriage and the experiences of married brides of Christ, Dyan Elliott's assertion that "the actual format of spiritual marriage was also absorbed through traditional saints' lives... [and that] in the later Middle Ages there was a greater tendency among

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[15] Elizabeth of Hungary 1207-1231, was married young, had 3 children, and beceame a very influential Franciscan tertiary, after her husband died on crusade when she was 20. Her cult spread rapidly across Europe after her death, as she was believed to have worked several miracles and to have served as a missionary to the aristocracy and laypeople. As a married woman, prominent royal figure, and dramtically harsh ascetic, Elizabeth modeled the life of a religious widow, and was an important model of feminine sanctity for the women I will be discussing in this chapter.

[16] Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 88; Johannes von Marienwerder, ed. Ute Stargardt, trans. Ute Stargardt, The Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth-century Recluse (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1997), 57.

[17] Katharina Tucher may have made a pilgrimage to Elizabeth's shrine, and Margery clearly knew of her: "Also, Elizabeth of Hungry cryed wyth lowde voys, as is wretyn in hir tretys." Margery Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Published for TEAMS (the Consortium for the Teaching of the Middle Ages) in association with the University of Rochester by Medieval Institute Publications Western Michigan University, 1996), l 3664. Elizabeth's life and visions were popular in fourteenth and fifteenth-century England: Elizabeth of Hungary, *The Two Middle English Translations of the Revelations of St. Elizabeth of Hungary: ed. from Cambridge University Library MS Hh.i.11 and Wynkyn de Worke's printed text of ?1493*, ed. Sarah McNamer, Middle English texts ; 28. (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1996), Introduction.

[18] The 1995 edition cites the catalog as containing: *"Item ein puch; das helt in im von sant Elßbet als ir leben und ire wunderwerk...*[Item: a book, which contains the life and miracles of Saint Elisabeth]" Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 20.

[19] Jacques de Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, ed. Margot H. King and Hugh Feiss, 4th ed., Two lives of Marie D'Oignies (Toronto, Ont.: Peregrina Pub. Co., 1998).

the laity to internalize hagiographical models due to the increased circulation of saints' lives..." is especially relevant to my own investigation. Elliott draws attention to some of these connections between the laity and hagiography, directly addressing the connection between the prototype matron-saints and their fourteenth- and fifteenth-century followers: "Bridget of Sweden's career and revelations had a considerable impact on Dorothea of Montau and on Margery Kempe. Margery was also influenced by Mary of Oignies, and may well have known and emulated the example of her contemporary Dorothea of Montau. Margery had actually visited Dorothea's hometown of Danzig; the two women were from the same class and had parallel religious experiences, and both had many children."[20] Those women who, as Elliott puts it, had less success in negotiating chaste marriages, were candidates to become married brides of Christ. While both Dorothea von Montau and Margery Kempe *eventually* convinced their husbands to live chastely, they did not postpone their religious careers or their mystical marriages. Bridget of Sweden, who had far less trouble with her earthly husband than either Margery or Dorothea, did not fully develop her religious mission until she was a widow in Rome. However, Bridget's *Life* and visions do demonstrate that she was an active mystic while her husband lived, and Bridget would become a natural model for matron-mystic in the late middle ages.[21]

Each woman who experienced mystical visions during marriage and into widowhood, each became a bride of Christ, and each presented a unique example of the arrangements a worldly woman must make to accommodate the needs of both her earthly and heavenly husbands. While the three exemplars and their later followers experience Christ from a mother's perspective, identifying with the suffering the Virgin Mary experienced at the death of her child, each also takes on the role of his wife to varying degrees. Margery's bridal experiences, I will argue, are the most physically detailed of these three mystics, but each woman's experiences involves a negotiated relationship between two husbands' competing claims.

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[20] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 216.

[21] Ibid., 207, 226-27, 239-40.

Of my three exemplary married women, only Bridget of Sweden is recognized by hagiographers as a bride of Christ. Marie d'Oignies is described as a "handmaid" rather than a bride—another common hagiographic title. Jacques de Vitry does describe the three standard roles for women in his introduction to Marie's life, and carefully frames her marriage within the rules for Elliott's spiritual marriages, but never legitimizes Marie's holiness through a nuptial relationship with Christ.[22] In the introduction to Marie's *Life,* Jacques emphatically associates serving and wedding the Bridegroom with all types of beguine activity, though he does not include the option of serving the Bridegroom for the sexually active married:

> With what zeal did they preserve their youthful chastity, arming themselves in their honourable resolve by salutary warnings, so that their only desire was the heavenly Bridegroom. Widows served the Lord in fasts and prayers, in vigils and in manual labour, in tears and entreaties. Just as they had previously tried to please their husbands in the flesh, so now the more did they attempt to please their heavenly Bridegroom in the spirit.... You have seen holy women serving the Lord devoutly in marriage and you rejoiced, women teaching their sons in the fear of the Lord, keeping honourable nuptials and "an undefiled wedding bed" (Heb 13:4), giving themselves to prayer for a time and returning afterwards together again "in fear of the Lord lest they be tempted by Satan" (1 Cor 7:5). Many abstained from licit embraces with the assent of their husbands' and, leading a celibate – indeed, an angelic – life they were so much the more worthy of the crown since they did not burn when put in the fire (cf. 1 cor 7:9) [23]

While it is only to be expected that virgins should guard their chastity and desire the heavenly bridegroom, Jacques describes widows serving the spiritual Bridegroom as they did their earthly husbands, and even suggests that those who keep a celibate marriage are leading an angelic life and are even more worthy of the crown—presumably the crown granted by the Bridegroom to his bride at the moment of marriage. However, though Jacques makes bridegroom and crown an attainable goal for

[22] For Elliott's reading of this marriage, which focuses far more on the hagiographic model and the importance of chastity: Ibid., 239, 248, 253.

[23] de Vitry and Cantimpré, 42.

virgins, widows, and wives in celibate marriages, he implies that those who did not abstain from their husbands' embraces were consequently unworthy of the bridal crown.

Bearing in mind the introduction's carefully drawn distinction, one may be surprised that Jacques' presents Marie as a handmaid rather than a bride. If the other nameless holy women of Liège had all earned the bridal crown, Marie's carefully arranged celibate marriage should certainly have qualified her as a bride of Christ. However, it seems likely that this *Vita*, composed to publicize beguine piety and spiritual renewal and promote Marie for possible canonization, carefully avoided the problematic and provocative claim that a married woman was also a bride of Christ *while her husband was alive*, even if the couple were celibate.

Jacques' description of Marie's marriage is brief. He writes that she was married at fourteen and, after breaking free from her worldly parents, engaged in passionate religious devotion and asceticism. Then, "after she had lived in marriage with her husband, John, in this fashion for a short time, the Lord looked on the humility of his handmaid and hearkened to the tears of the suppliant, and John, who previously had had Marie as a wife, was inspired to entrust her to the protection of God."[24] Though Jacques does not openly say it, Marie was clearly not a virgin. He admits that "she clearly did not have power over her own body," and that John had previously possessed Marie as a wife— this is implicitly a carnal relationship.[25] During the sexually active phase of Marie's marriage, she engaged in secretive ascetic practices, as would Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau, but though Marie slept on hard planks, tightly bound by coarse ropes she hid beneath her clothing, she probably shared her bed and her body with John.

Jacques' depiction of Marie's marriage and her negotiations for chastity also provides an important model for later married brides of Christ. Marie's tears and prayers elicited a divine intervention, but John must still decide to set aside his conjugal rights, much as would be the case with

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[24] Ibid., 55.

[25] Ibid., 54, 56.

Margery Kempe and her own husband John. However, Jacques, even in this crucial scene, describes Marie as a handmaid rather than a bride. When John relinquishes his role as husband, God does not step in to take his place. According to Jacques' version of things, Marie's marriage continues in chaste cohabitation, though she and her husband live in poverty and chastity.[26] Furthermore, the couple would be rewarded in heaven—Marie for suffering through marriage, and John for giving up "carnal commerce on earth."[27] As would be the case for Margery and John Kempe, this lifestyle was condemned by townsfolk and family: "Worldly people, as well as their own relatives, looked at them and gnashed their teeth... the persons made poor for Christ's sake were now condemned and mocked."[28] Little more is known of their marriage, but Jacques ends this section with an address intended more likely for women reading and meditating on Marie's life than for the couple themselves. "Do not fear, O handmaid of Christ, to put aside worldly joy and honour, to approach the persecutions of the Cross with your Christ, your Bridegroom" he writes, reminding those committed to religious life that family and comfort must be set aside to suffer with Christ and earn divine favor. Here, at last, there is mention of the Bridegroom, and implication that the handmaid is also a bride, though by switching to a generic "you" after a long description of Marie's experiences, this passage seems most likely to be an authorial aside, indicating that even while writing, Jacques viewed Marie as a suitable example for brides of Christ—the virgins, chaste wives, and widows he first described in the introduction, though he chose not to openly name Marie a bride of Christ.

Jacques' preference for describing Marie's acts of piety (fasting, labor, outward manifestations of mystical experiences) rather than any visions she may have had, and his insistence on calling her a handmaid indicate that he may have been reluctant to publicly portray a married woman—even a celibate one—in a religious relationship customarily reserved for virgins. Still, his *Life of Marie d'Oignies*

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[26] Ibid., 56-7.

[27] Ibid., 56.

[28] Ibid., 57.

demonstrates how tears and prayer can free a woman from conjugal obligations, opening a new path open for devout laywomen to earn Christ's bridal crown. This *Life* would provide an important model that we know with certainty inspired at least Margery Kempe, and most likely encouraged other married women to enter chaste marriages *but also to pursue a religious life during marriage,* even if they were not able to convince their husbands to live chastely. When Marie died in 1213, the model for a married saint was in flux, shifting from one that insisted upon celibacy to one that allowed sexuality and piety to co-exist.[29] There was no existing model that could have allowed Marie to be described regularly or comfortably as a "bride" rather than a "handmaid," but in her *Life* Jacques honestly wrote about a married woman who successfully negotiated for control of her own body, engaged in an active worldly mission, and received visions and blessings from God that were recognized by the Church. Because Jacques' *Life* was presumably composed for canonization proceedings, he would have had to carefully incorporate facts into existing hagiographic models and accommodate existing concepts of female piety, though there very few (unmartyred) married female saints to draw upon.[30] Though Marie was not officially described as a bride of Christ by either Jacques de Vitry or Thomas of Cantimpré, she became an exemplar of married female piety, and textual asides, such as Jacques' comments about wives and widows serving the Bridegroom or the assurances he offered to other women in spiritual marriages, indicate that the idea of a married bride of Christ was slowly gaining acceptance.

By the fourteenth century, the theological and hagiographic framework was in place to support married brides of Christ. Bridal mysticism, though initially the domain of virgins, might now extend to the newest category of sanctified femininity, the pious married woman. Though women still needed to break free from marital bonds to achieve full religious freedom, it was less of a hagiographic problem for a married woman to have a bridal relationship with Christ. Bridget of Sweden, who would become the

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[29] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 94-5.

[30] The obvious examples are Helena and Monica, though Macrena and Jerome's Paula might also have been useful to Jacques. de Vitry and Cantimpré, 10-11.

most important exemplar for later married brides of Christ, was a mother of eight, a mystic and visionary, and by all accounts a good wife as well. Her visionary experiences followed a childhood conversion, and would continue throughout her life. Though Bridget negotiated a vow of chastity from her husband successfully, she also arranged worldly marriages for her children, including her daughter and fellow saint, Catharine—despite the latter's resistance. Bridget's religious career began as a pious mother raising children in her care with Christian values, and after her husband's death, she would become a bride of Christ. Bridget, then, was a good wife and a good mother, as well as a good mystic.

In the Middle English account of Bridget's marriage to God, the version Margery Kempe would have known, Bridget is not free to marry the divine until she is formally released from the bonds of marriage. Although Olaf and Bridget shared a chaste marriage, God could only wed Bridget after she became a widow. In this case a vow of celibacy between spouses is insufficient: "I have chosen you and taken you to be my spouse, for it pleases me and suits me to do so, and because I will show you my private secrets. For you are mine by a manner of right forasmuch as you assigned your will into my hands at the time of your husband's death, after whose burial you thought deeply and made prayer about how you might be pure for me."[31] Here, God must wait a reasonable amount time after Bridget becomes a widow before arranging a new marriage. Yet the passage indicates that the marriage could have taken place sooner if Bridget herself had been willing. This nuptial ceremony follows Olaf's burial and comes at Bridget's invitation. There is also a clear sense of divine prerogative, for God, suggesting that God waits by choice: "thus I take you to myself as my spouse for my own proper delight, as it is right and proper that God has his delight with a chaste soul. As you know, it is a spouse's duty to be honestly and

[31] I haue chosen þe and taken þe to mi spouse, for it pleses me and likes me to do so, and for I will shewe to þe mi prevail secretis. For þou arte mine be a manere of right foralsmikill as þou assigned thi will into mi handes at þe time of diinge of þi husband, efter whose beringe þou had grete þought and made praiere how þou might be pore for me. Julia Bolton Holloway, *Saint Bride and her book: Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations* (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Texts, 1992).Bk. I chp 2 ll 14-28

appropriately arrayed and to be ready when the husband wants to make the wedding."[32] Here, God implies that if he had tried to marry Bridget during Olaf's life, Bridget would have been obliged to comply, despite her existing marriage. The wedding does allude to several bridal tropes, including the clothing of the chaste soul and the pleasure of the husband, but Bridget's nuptial ceremony is brief and unadorned in comparison to those of later married mystics, including Margery, Dorothea, and Katharina Tucher. In many ways, Bridget's marriage to Christ is easier than Dorothea's or Margery's. She is already free from sexual obligations to her husband, as well as to concerns of household and family. This removes the problem of conjugal debt, as well as the possibility of social derision for breaking the acceptable modes of behavior. A religious and chaste widow is far more acceptable as a bride of Christ/God than any married woman.

The religious freedom granted by widowhood was also an important factor in Angela of Foligno's spiritual development. Though Angela is more of a penitential mystic engaged in fervent devotion to Christ's passion than a bridal mystic, she, like Margery and Katharina, made a religious conversion during marriage.[33] In what is certainly the most infamous passage in her writing, Angela describes her spiritual conversion and strong desire for the death of her family:

> But then I began to reject fine foods, fancy clothing and headdresses. But there was still shame and sorrow, because I did not yet feel any love. And I was still with my husband - and so there was bitterness when I was spoken to or treated unjustly; nevertheless I endured as patiently as I could. And then in accordance with God's will, my mother died; she had been a great hindrance to me. Later, my husband and all my

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[32]wherefore I take þe to me as mi spouse vnto mi awen proper delite, eftir it is accordinge and seminge þat God haue his delite with a chaste saule. As þou knawes, it langes to a spouse to be honestly and semingli araied and to be redi when þe husband will make þe wedding. Ibid.

[33] Angela's *Memorial* contains only one explicit bridal reference, though Mazzoni sees echoes of erotic mysticism in some of her visions. In this sequence, Jesus says to Angela: "My daughter and my sweet bride." And He said, "I love you more than any woman in the valley of Spoleto. Now that I have settled and come to rest in you, just settle yourself in me and be at peace in me. You petitioned my servant Francis, who loved me very much and for whom in turn I did very much. And if anyone should love me more, I would do even more for that person. Indeed I myself will do for you what I did for my servant Francis - and more - if you love me." Here, the bridal connection is extremely weak, as Angela is being compared to St. Francis rather than the Bride. Though she is called a "sweet bride," this does not seem to be an important part of her spirituality or her self-identification as a mystic. Instead, she is consciously modeling herself after St. Francis. Angela of Foligno, *Angela of Foligno's Memorial*, trans. Cristina Mazzoni (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 41.

> children died within a short time. And because I had already begun the way of the cross and had asked God that they should die, I felt a deep consolation following their deaths. I knew that God had accomplished these things for me, and that my heart would always be in God's heart and God's heart would always be in mine.[34]

Angela alludes to a spousal refusal to cooperate (much as Adalbert would reject Dorothea's religious vocation), and indicates that she could not fully pursue her religious calling while under obligation to care for her ailing mother, her children, or her husband. She desires freedom, and through her prayer and piety God "grants" her their deaths. Just as Marie d'Oignies' tears elicited divine intervention and won her chaste spiritual marriage, Angela's piety and religious behavior are understood to have brought about autonomy. In both cases, this autonomy frees the woman to become a bride of Christ, an active holy woman, and a recognized mystic and prophetess. However, like Bridget of Sweden and to a lesser extent, Marie d'Oignies, Angela of Foligno had already made her religious conversion and began living piously prior to the death of her family. The hagiographic need to prevent married women from engaging in saintly careers, which reflected social concerns about the marital debt and the authority of secular husbands and family obligations, continued to weaken.[35] Though Angela is free from family obligations thanks to several convenient deaths, both Bridget and Katharina deal with their children after entering a religious life, but neither must give further care to an earthly husband. While both Katharina and Margery express particular concern for the spiritual wellbeing of their spouses and offspring, Margery, like Angela of Foligno, wishes her husband dead.[36] However, both Margery and Angela also voice concern about the souls and well being of their families. Angela comments that "living then was

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[34] Ibid., 26-7.

[35] Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, see especially 141-2.

[36] For the deathwish, see ch. 11, where after reminding John that he was to be slain suddenly she adds "I hope I schal han my desyr" while on p. 199 Margery asks for a blessing for her family, using her sexual relationship with Christ as leverage. Christ promises her to look after them, saying "And for the gret homlynes that I schewe to the that tyme that thu art mekyl the bolder to askyn me grace for thiselfe, for thin husbond, and for thi childryn, and thu makyst every christen man and woman thi childe in thi sowle for the tyme and woldist han as meche grace for hem as for thin woyn childeryn. Also thu askyst mercy for thyn husbonde, and thu thynkyst that thu art meche beholdyn to me that I have govyn the swech a man that wolde suffryn the levyn chast, he being on lyve and in good hele of body..." It goes on for a while, listing the sins of her spiritual counselor as well.

more painful for me than the pain I felt at the deaths of my mother and children - more painful than anything I could imagine," while after negotiating chastity successfully, Margery later comments that John is a good husband, and finds herself returning to the role of wife to nurse John on his deathbed, just as Dorothea von Montau nursed the aging Adalbert, and Katharina Tucher prayed for her husband's soul.[37]

By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the old model of pious wife and spiritually active widow, which descended largely unaltered from the patristic period had been adapted to accommodate new types of lay spirituality. Beginning with Marie d'Oignies and Elizabeth of Hungary, increasing numbers of spiritual marriages and married saints in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries disproved the assumption that the ideal form of female piety was a chaste enclosed virgin. Of these new married holy women, Bridget of Sweden stood out as an exemplary model of female piety. Though she did not supplant Marie d'Oignies, Bridget's success would legitimate the religious careers of a new generation of mystics who could not break free of their marital obligations and refused to wait until their husbands' deaths (or eventual acquiescence to celibate marriage) to pursue a religious career. Though some of these women would eventually enter traditional religious vocations, joining convents, becoming recluses, or entering a beguinage, others, like Margery Kempe, remained firmly in the world, unbound by walls, vows, or regulations. While the names and histories of some of these women survive, scattered evidence indicates that there was a significant increase in married women's religiosity, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries at least in Germany and the Low Countries. For instance, the foundation of the first women's convent of the *Devotio Moderna* was brought about by wealthy wives and widows who did not meet Geert Groote's stipulation that residents of the Sisterhouse should be poor and single.[38] In the Sisterbooks from Germany, spiritual marriage, the liberation of widowhood, and even married mystics

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[37] Foligno, *Angela of Foligno's Memorial*, 44.

[38] The foundation of Diepenveen is described in the life of Johannes Brinckerinck: Wybren Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993), 13-15.

are mentioned.[39] Unlike male-authored hagiographical texts, these Sisterbooks were generally sympathetic to marriage and express no discomfort when chronicling the mystical lives of married women.[40] Lewis finds several examples of celibate marriage (Josephsehe), mentions at least one wife who prayed for her husband's death, describes women portrayed by the chroniclers as ideal wives and mothers, and even evidence of at least one woman who pursued an active religious and mystical career while having sex with her husband. Like Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau, Irmendraut of Gotteszell lived a full and active religious life prior to widowhood. She lived in poverty with her husband, cared for lepers, much as Marie d'Oignies had, and regularly attended church with the blessing of her husband. During her husband's lifetime she was also, apparently, prone to raptures and other mystical experiences. The Gotteszell chronicler writes that "it often happened [to her] that God granted her great graces and she received divine consolation while her husband was sleeping with her in bed, *so ir wirdt bey ir an pette sliff."*[41] Irmendraut's relationship with the divine was clearly not hampered by marriage, and this euphemistic passage suggests that she had mystical encounters, possibly erotic or bridal ones, while in bed with her husband. "In bed" indicates, at the very least, an intimate location, a space shared between husband and wife, and may even suggest sexual intercourse, just as we use the phrase "sleeping together" to allude to something quite other than sleep. Lewis interprets this phrase as sexual, writing that "the text is quite explicit: even marital intercourse did not interfere with 'divine consolation.'"[42] Though she does not gloss divine consolation, this phrase is a standard descriptor for mystical experiences. Unlike Marie, Dorothea, and Margery, Irmendraut would enter a convent as a widow, but

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[39] Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-books of Fourteenth-century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 210-215.

[40] Lewis also notes that the Sisterbooks generally present a balanced view of husbands, unlike the *vitae* written by clerics. Ibid., 214-15.

[41] As quoted in Ibid., 214. If I can get the entire book from Gotteszell to check the quotation, I want to see if there is more to this passage.

[42] Ibid.

her entry in the Gotteszell chronicle confirms that married women did not always wait for widowhood to pursue satisfying religious careers.

Because the Sisterbooks drew their models of sanctity from existing hagiographic expectations, it is significant that Irmendraut is portrayed as a wife and mystic, actively pursuing her religious vocation during her husband's lifetime.[43] This corroborates my hypothesis that during the thirteenth, fourteenth, and especially fifteenth centuries, it was increasingly acceptable for married women to pursue the title of bride of Christ, whether through mystical experience or worldly shows of piety. By the fifteenth century, Katharina Tucher's visions and religious activity were considered so commonplace that she merited no note in any extant convent chronicles or ecclesiastical records. Our only evidence of her existence, aside from her own writing and the list of books she brought to St. Katharina's, is in town records where she is described as a wife, widow, or daughter rather than a potential saint.[44]

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[43] According to Lewis, "The Sisterbooks thus stand in the forefront of a new hagiographic trend begun in the thirteenth century." Here she is referring to their sympathetic depiction of sex and marriage, but her observation extends to the category of married bride of Christ. Ibid.

[44] Though Katharina is not the most eloquent of mystics, and her visions were fairly unremarkable, it is still unusual that the only surviving traces of her existence are secular. Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 1-5.

~ 3.3 ~

Margery Kempe and Dorthea von Montau

Margery Kempe and Dorothea von Montau's mystical experiences, superficially at least, follow the pattern of other medieval women. Both had visions and auditions, engaged in contemplation, fasting, and other types of self-discipline, and shared a vivid and passionate relationship with Christ. Margery's displays of weeping, pilgrimages, public outbursts, and even her defiance of religious and civic authorities are not outside of mystical norms, while Dorothea's asceticism, inconvenient contemplation, tears, pilgrimages, and even her decision to become an anchoress are all in keeping with late medieval religious values. However, their status as married lay women hindered and complicated their religious careers. While the women discussed previously in this chapter—notably Bridgette of Sweden—had similar mystical experiences and were also married women who lived and worshipped in the world, Margery and Dorothea explicitly enter bridal relationships with Christ before their husbands' deaths, and even before permanently entering into celibate marriages. Though Margery's sexually active marriage overlaps with the beginning of a sexualized love-relationship with Christ, and her marriage in Rome occurs prior to her husband's death, Margery's official marriage to God does at least follow their permanent vow of chastity—her apparent marriage to Jesus, however, is harder to place. In contrast, Johannes von Marienwerder obscures Dorothea von Montau's relationship with Adalbert but it is clear that she, Adalbert, and Jesus had settled on an arrangement similar to the one negotiated among Margery, John, and Jesus. Dorothea probably entered a marriage with the divine prior to obtaining Adalbert's consent to celibacy. Because Dorothea's life was transformed into hagiography, her marriage with Adalbert better preserves the late medieval ideal of a married saint. Consequently, problems alluded to in Dorothea's life are made far more explicit in the *Book of Margery Kempe*. In this section, I want to begin by looking at Margery's relationship with John Kempe and their shared relationship with Jesus, treating Margery's account as the more candid version and Dorothea's *Life* as an idealization of the married bride of Christ. Throughout this section, I will be referring to Dorothea and Margerys' two husbands—because, as the

title of this chapter should make clear, each of these women became a bride of Christ, and for each of these women, Jesus was a second husband.

Around 1430, while in the care of a travel companion by the name of Thomas Marshall, Margery Kempe stopped off in Leicester. After a meal and a prayer, and at her request, this Thomas Marshall wrote a letter to John Kempe so that he might fetch her home. While Marshall was off writing, the inn-keeper came to Margery's room and took her bag and asked her to come speak with the mayor, which she did. How did Margery introduce herself? "Sir, she said, I am of Lynn in Norfolk, the daughter of a good man who has been Mayor five times of that town, and an alderman also, and I have a good man, a burger of that same town, Lynn, as my husband"[45] Though recognized in her travels as a religious woman—and though her marriage was now chaste—Margery here introduces herself as a worldly woman, identified by place of residence, father, and husband. Yet the mayor does not believe her self-presentation as a respectable married woman. Perhaps her weeping and sobbing at Church earlier in the day had aroused his suspicions, and perhaps her reputation preceded her. In any case, this mayor of Leicester wished her jailed and tried as a Lollard, based on behavior which identified Margery as an unorthodox religious woman rather than a secular wife. Trying to escape being imprisoned with men, Margery pleaded that she be given separate accommodations "so that I may preserve my chastity and my bond of wedlock to my husband, as I am bound to do."[46] In this interchange, Margery is trying to represent herself as a wife, constrained by the vows of marriage and her duties to John Kempe, rather than seeking protection in her vow of chastity or her relationship with Jesus.

The situation is eventually resolved, as Margery manages to convince her accusers that she is both a respectable wife and a reputable holy woman, but the scene in Leicester highlights how different Margery is from other women mystics. Traveling was not unheard of, nor were accusations of heresy or

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[45] Syr," sche seyd, "I am of Lynne in Norfolke, a good mannys dowtyr of the same Lynne, whech hath ben meyr five tymes of that worshepful burwgh and aldyrman also many yerys, and I have a good man, also a burgeys of the seyd town, Lynne, to myn husbond Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, 2622 ff.

[46] that I may kepyn my chastité and my bond of wedlak to myn husband, as I am bowndyn to do Ibid., 114.

suspicious locals, but how many women religious, if called before the town mayor, would make reference to an earthly husband as sign of legitimacy? Margery's long and loving relationship with Christ began during her earthly marriage to John Kempe, spanning years of childbearing and housewifery, as well as pilgrimage, celibacy, and tearful contemplation. Margery Kempe was more than a visionary while her husband lived. She began an erotically charged love-relationship with Jesus while still under the obligation of the marriage debt, and entered into a relationship of bridal mysticism with Christ years before her husband's death, wedding the Godhead while in Rome only a year or so after the Kempes agreed to live chastely. Scenes where Margery negotiates for her chastity with John or prays for the salvation of her husband and children contrast with moments where Jesus comforts Margery over her lost virginity or encourages her to care for the aging John Kempe—and often, as with Irmendraut of Gotteszell, those interactions take place in the marital bed.

The tense dynamic between Margery's obligations as mother and wife and her mystic identity demonstrates the perceived reality of her marriage to Christ—a perception shared to some extent by John Kempe, who actively competed to protect his conjugal rights from Margery's new lover. The very sexual nature of Margery's mystical experiences complicated her relationship with John Kempe, though both husbands (John and Jesus) press her to fulfill marital obligations.

Margery has her first vision of heaven as she lies in bed with her husband. Soon afterwards, she begins her campaign for chastity. "One night, as this creature lay in her bed with her husband, she heard a sound of a melody so sweet and delectable, she thought she was in paradise. And then she jumped out of her bed and said 'Alas that I ever did sin because it is truly merry in heaven"[47] In this scene, there is some question as to whether Margery is simply lying in bed or if they are in fact engaged in sexual

[47] On a nyght, as this creature lay in hir bedde with hir husbond, sche herd a sownd of melodye so swet and delectable, hir thowt, as sche had ben in paradise. And therwyth sche styrt owt of hir bedde and seyd, 'Alas, that evyr I dede synne, it is ful mery in hevyn. Ibid., 26, l. 241-244.

intercourse at the moment of vision.[48] Margery jumps out of the bed, laments the sins she has committed in that bed, and longs for heaven. The moment of bliss haunts her memories.[49] Margery's famed fridgity follows this visionary experience.[50]

Here, Margery is still exhibiting the sort of obedience that Johannes Marienwerder will attribute to Dorothea von Montau—submission to the husband's demands for sex was widely understood to have no taint of concupiscence in canon law, and so it was acceptable for married holy women to give in to the conjugal debt out of obedience.[51] Their reluctance and disgust could even become penitential. Margery, at this early state in her negotiations, is not yet able to break from the traditional role of an earthly wife. While she wishes to live in chastity, she will not set aside tradition and break with the understood marriage debt. Apparently John Kempe is not swayed by the fact that his wife has lost all

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[48] I cannot find a helpful gloss for this, but it seems as if it should be intercourse here. Leien in (one's) bed being "to have intercourse" according to the MED. Partner misses this possibility. She describes the scene in equally ambiguous terms: "one night, jumped out of her marriage bed proclaiming that it is far happier in heaven, felt a sudden and complete revulsion from intercourse with her husband." Nancy F. Partner, "Did Mystics Have Sex?," in *Desire and Discipline: Sex and Sexuality in the Premodern West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 300. However, if Margery and John were having sex at the moment of the vision, that would make for a very interesting scene indeed. Following such a reading, Margery's experience of paradise and the sweet melody could even be read as an orgasmic moment, perhaps her very first?

[49] "when she heard any mirth or melody thereafter it reminded her of the vision she had had and she wept copiously with abundant tears of highest devotion and loud sobs and sighs for the bliss of heaven, and forever after she dreamed this dream she had in her mind the pleasure and the song that was in heaven, so much so that she could not restrain herself from speaking of it (what heaven was like)" whan sche herd ony myrth or melodye aftyrward [it reminded her of that vision and she had] ful plentyuows and habundawnt teerys of hy devocyon with greet sobbyngys and syhyngys aftyr the blysse of heven… and evyr aftyr this drawt sche had in hir mende the myrth and the melodye that was in heven, so meche that sche cowd not wyl restreyn hyrself fro the spekyng therof. Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, 26, ll. 245-50.

[50] "And after this time she never had any desire to have sex with her husband, because the debt of matrimony was so abominable to her that she would rather, she thought, eat or drink the weeds and muck in a ditch than consent to any sort of sex, and she only did so out of obedience" And aftyr this tyme sche had nevyr desyr to komown fleschly with hyre husbonde, for the dette of matrimony was so abhominabyl to hir that sche had lever, hir thowt, etyn or drynkyn the wose, the mukke in the chanel, than to consentyn to any fleschly comownyng saf only for obedyens Ibid., 26, l. 255-25.

[51] See especially Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, chapter 4 and her discussion of John and Margery's marriage on 253-4.

interest in sex, for "he insisted on taking what he wanted and she obeyed with great weeping and sorrow because she was not able to live chastely"[52]

This bed-vision also marks the beginning of Margery's ascetic practices: "she got herself a cloth from a kiln of the type that men use to dry malt and laid it inside her shirt as subtly and privately as she could so that her husband wouldn't see it, and he didn't, even though she lay by him every night in his bed and wore the hair shirt every day, and bore him children in the same timespan."[53] Like Dorothea von Montau and Marie d'Oignies, Margery performed secret ascetic practices that should, by all rights, have been incredibly obvious to her husband. Here we see the complications that accompany the juxtaposition of Margery's developing piety, her desire for chastity, and her continued sexual relations with John. For Margery, sex itself became an act of penance, and though John is often portrayed as incredibly patient and sympathetic, her need to hide her hairshirt from him suggests that he would have strongly reprimanded her new asceticism.

That Margery had sex with her husband, of course, is hardly a surprise, though their marriage bed would become a regular locus for mystical experiences, much as in the life of Irmentraud from Gotteszell. For Margery, meeting Jesus was something that might often take place in the marriage bed she shared with her earthly husband, but in later chapters, carnal scenes are between Margery and Jesus, rather than Margery and John. The two men share her body and her bed, as is revealed in a passage where Christ consoles Margery, reassuring her of her worth to be his wife: "you know well that I treat you like a husband should his wedded wife. When he marries her, he thinks that he is certain enough of her and that no man shall part the two asunder, for then, daughter, they may go to bed together without any shame or dread of the people (of gossip) and sleep in rest and peace if they want to. And thus,

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[52] I may not deny yow my body, but the lofe of myn hert and myn affeccyon is drawyn fro alle erdly creaturys and sett only in God... he wold have hys wylle, and sche obeyd with greet wepyng and sorwyng for that sche might not levyn chast Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, 26, l. 261-2.

[53] Than sche gat hir an hayr of a kylne swech as men dryen on malt and leyd it in hir kyrtylle as sotyllych and prevylich as sche mygth that hir husband schuld not aspye it, ne no mor he dede, and yet sche lay be hym every nygth in his bedde, and weryd the hayr every day, and bar chylderyn in the tyme. Ibid., (ll. 277 ff)

daughter, it is between you and me."[54] The intimate scene between Margery and Christ which follows is one between a husband and wife, rather than a soul engaged to be wed after her death—or the death of her husband.

Though Christ speaks of Margery as his wife and describes their shared marriage bed, the sexual relationship could be more explicit, and it in fact does become more explicit in other passages. For instance, immediately after the marriage between Margery and the Godhead in Rome, Christ encourages Margery to take him as her husband when she is in bed. "And if I were as corporeal on earth as I was before I died on the cross" he begins, "I would not be ashamed of you as many others have been, and I would take you by the hand and walk with you amongst the people and cheer you up and let them know very well that I love you, because it is proper that a wife should be familiar with her husband."[55] This aside that Christ would not be ashamed of Margery *as many other men ben* seems to be a veiled reference to John Kempe, the primary rival for Margery's love and attention. Here, Margery and her scribe consider Jesus to be the husband with rights to Margery's martial debt, rather than John. The next sentence emphasizes this sexual claim: "Be he ever so great a lord and she so poor a woman when he marries her, yet they must lie together and rest together in joy and peace... that's how it must be between you and me, because I care not at all for what you have been but only for what you want to be, therefore I must be familiar with you and lie with you in your bed." Here, Margery's marriage to John seems entirely annulled, supplanted by her new marriage to the Godhead, and Christ expresses an explicit desire to have sex with her—to be "homely [intimate, familiar]" with her and lie with her in her bed. Jesus intuits that Margery also desires a lover's relationship, encouraging her to "boldly, when you are in your bed, take me to yourself as your wedded husband, your beloved darling, as your sweet son, because I want to

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[54] For thu wost wel that I far lyke an husband that schulde weddyn a wife. What tyme that he had weddyd hir, hym thynkyth that he is sekyr anow of hir and that no man schal partyn hem asundyr, for than, dowtyr, may thei gon to bedde toggedyr wythowtyn any schame er dred of the pepil and slepyn in rest and peese yyf thei wil. And thus, dowtyr, it farith betwixt theand me… Ibid., 200-201 ll. 5074-5078.

[55] And, yyf I wer in erde as bodily as I was er I deyd on the cros, I schuld not ben aschamyd of the as many other men ben, for I schuld take the be the hand amongs the pepil and make the gret cher that thei schuldyn wel knowyn that I lovyd the ryth wel. For it is convenient the wyf to be homly with hir husbond.Ibid., ll. 2094 ff.

be loved as a son should be loved by his mother and desire that you love me, daughter, as a good wife owes her love to her husband." She may hold him in her arms as if he were her nursing infant, but the preference here seems to be for her to take him to bed as her carnal-mystical husband. Though the complicated familial relationship—loving like a son, a mother, a wife, a daughter—represents a common aspect of women's relationships with Jesus, the intimacy of this scene is sexual, and the embrace occurs in Margery's bed. Jesus' directions are clear: "therefore you may boldly take me up in the arms of your soul and kiss my mouth, my head, and my feet as sweetly as you want to."[56]

Though Christ instructs Margery to use the arms of her soul, the language here is descriptive and sexual. Why Margery must embrace Christ with her spiritual body is evident from his previous statement: *if* he still had a physical body, he would love her with it, treating her as a husband treats his wife, but because he no longer has a physical existence, Margery can only love him with her spiritual body. Although Margery's sexual relationship with Christ occurs in the spiritual realm, that does not necessarily indicate that the descriptions are intended to be purely metaphoric. If Margery were striving to explain the ineffable experience of union with Christ on a spiritual level, she would not be using the language of sexual fantasy, in my opinion. She has demonstrated her ability to describe vague mystical and emotional experiences, as with the earlier vision of heaven that was experienced as a beautiful song, and here the described activity should not be mistaken for allegory. Instead, her experience of Christ is apparently sexual as well as spiritual, and these sexual encounters present a serious problem for her first husband, the earthly John Kempe.

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[56] Be he nevyr so gret a lorde and sche so powr a woman whan he weddyth hir, yet thei must ly togedir and rest togedir in joy and pes,... Ryght so mot it be twyx the and me, for I take non hed what thu hast be but what thu woldist be… Therfore most I nedys be homly with the and lyn in thi bed with the.... Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, and thu mayst boldly, whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi wedded hosbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, and as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be lovyd as a sone schuld be lovyd with the modyr and wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good wife owyth to love hir hosbonde... therfor thu mayst boldly take me in the armys of thi sowle and kyssen my mowth, myn hed, and my fete as sweetly as thow wylt. Ibid., 94-95, ll 2094-2107. note again the use of the word "bed" to indicate sexual activity. All of this is to occur in Margery's bed, and she is encouraged to be bold about bringing her husband to bed as well.

Following Margery's bed-vision, John Kempe was presented with a difficult situation: he still desired to have sex with his wife, but she no longer was interested. John was not easily capable of suppressing his lust.[57] Margery is disgusted by physical sex with her husband, but the reader is informed both that she still felt lust towards other men, and that she desired spiritual sex with her new love.[58] For John, at first, the solution seems to have been in the marital obligation Margery owed to him. Though she did not desire sex, she would not deny it to him either, and so "he used her as he had done before, and he would not spare her."[59]

Only with divine assistance can the problem of John's physical desire for Margery be solved—just as was the case for Marie d'Oingies. One hot summer night, things came to a head. As the *Book* tells it, "It happened on a Friday on Midsummers' eve in extremely hot weather..."[60] Surely the summer heat and the sounds of young couples in the fields as Margery and John walked along the road inspired John to ask his wife a question he did not want honestly answered: "Margery, if a man came up to us with a sword in his hand and threatened to cut off my head unless I were to have sex with you as I used to do, tell me the truth—because you say you will not lie—would you let my head be cut off or else put up with me meddling with you again as I used to do?"[61] John's question puts Margery in a very difficult situation. First, he plays upon her oath to tell the truth, and second, he asks her to choose between her chastity and his life. Margery attempts to avoid the question, asking why he must ask this question when they have been living chastely and happily for two months, but finally admits "Honestly, I would rather you be killed than that we return to our former uncleanliness." John responds, "You really are a terrible wife"

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[57] Ibid., 26-7.

[58] In Elliott's reading of Margery, this is interpreted as a disgust for the marital debt and a lack of control over her own body. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 227-8.

[59] he usyd her as he had do befor, he wold not spar. Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*, 27, l.268.

[60] "It befell upon a Fryday on Mydsomyr Evyn in ryght hot wedyr… Ibid., 37, l. 519.

[61] Margery, if her come a man with a swerd and wold smyte of myn hed les than I schulde comown kindly with yow as I have do befor, seyth me trewth of yowr conscience – for ye sey ye wyl not lye – whether wold ye suffyr myn hed to be smet of er ellys suffyr me to medele with yow agin as I dede sumtyme? Ibid., 37, l. 521-525.

and what could politely be described as an awkward conversation follows.[62] Margery asks why he has been able to lie in bed with her for eight weeks without "meddling" with her, and John replies that every time he was about to he was so filled with fear that all lust left him—Jesus has made him impotent. Margery then gives John an even more difficult choice, reminding him that three years have passed since she promised John would be killed suddenly and offers to pray for him in exchange for a vow of chastity. Just as John asked Margery to choose between chastity and her husband's life, she has now put the decision back in his hands. John will not agree, rejecting the harsh duality of his choices, by refusing chastity and ignoring the promised death: "No, he said, I do not want to grant you that, because right now I can use your body without incurring mortal sin and if I granted you chastity I would no longer be able to do so."[63] John expresses two related concerns here: the first that he avoid deadly sin, and the second that, even if he were to swear to chastity, he would not be able to keep the oath. John and Margery are both extremely conscious of the rights and obligations of the marital debt.

The two continue down the road in the heat, and at last come to a large cross. Again playing on Margery's new religiosity, John kneels down before the cross and pulls his wife to him, saying "Margery, grant me my desire and I shall grant you yours. My first desire is that we should lie togther in bed still as we have been accustomed to...."[64] Margery is most reluctant to break her habitual fasting, and John responds that he will meddle with her again, apparently right there before the cross. Christ counsels Margery to break her fasting, insist on chastity, and agree to pay John's debts, saying "and he [John] shall have what he wants." Apparently, Jesus has finally tamed John's lust.[65] When Margery makes her offer to

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[62] Forsothe I had lever se yow be slayn than we schuld turne agen to owyr unclennesse. ... Ye arn no good wife Ibid., 37, l. 528.

[63]Nay, he seyd, that wyl I not grawnt yow, for now may I usyn yow wythowtyn dedly synne and than mygth I not so. Ibid., 37, l. 537-539.

[64] Margery, grawnt me my desyr, and I schal grawnt yow yowr desyr. My first desyr is that we schal lyn style togedyr in o bed as we han do befor; the secunde that ye schal pay my dettys er ye go to Jherusalem; and the thrydde that ye schal etyn and drynkyn with me on the Fryday as ye wer wont to don. Ibid., 38, ll. 543-548.

[65] an he schal han that he desyreth Ibid., 38 l. 561.

John, he agrees, and the way is cleared for two important events: Margery's trip to Jerusalem and her marriage with the Godhead.

In traveling to Jerusalem and Rome, Margery follows the path of Bridget of Sweden, and her marriage to the Godhead in Rome shares certain elements with the union described in Bridget's revelations. However, unlike Bridget, Margery is a reluctant and unhappy bride, and her transformation does not gain worldly recognition. Though Christ waits to wed Margery until after the final vow of chastity, the material world continues to see and treat Margery as a married woman and a mother. Her behavior as a bride of Christ is all the more suspicious because of her social status, and the problems she faces on her return to England stem largely from her non-traditional marriage and living arrangements. Like Bridget, Margery is promised secret knowledge of Christ before their nuptials "Daughter, I want to have you wedded to my Godhead, because I am going to show you my private thoughts and counsels, for you shall live with me without end."[66] However, Margery's wedding and its consummation have an entirely different tone than Bridget's. Bridget's marriage was explicitly spiritual, her soul was praised for its chastity, and later for having the four qualities God desires in his bride. Though Margery is invited into marriage because of her piety and devotion to Christ, she is also chastised for fearing the union and is then comforted when she fears that she is not worthy of such an elect type of love.[67] When asked what her response is to the Godhead's offer of marriage, Margery "did not want to answer the Second Person but instead wept quite a lot," and Christ had to intervene.[68] Margery was extremely hesitant to marry the Godhead because "all her love and all her affection were set in the manhood of Christ … and

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[66] Dowtyr, I wil han the weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn the my prevyteys and my cownselys for thu schalt wonyn with me wythowtyn ende. sIbid., 91.

[67] "Dowtyr, I am wel plesyd wyth the inasmeche as thu belevyst in alle the sacramentys of Holy Chirche and in al feyth that longith therto, and specialy for that thu belevyst in manhode of my sone and for the gret compassion that thu hast of hys bittyr Passyon.[Daughter, I am truly pleased with you because you believe in all the sacraments of the holy church andin all the faith that comes with it, and especially because you believe in the humanity of my son, and for the great compassion that you have for his bitter Passion]" Ibid. *general note according to staley the Ms has "in her soul" marked out, as if to indicate that some redactor wanted to make the wedding physical rather than spiritual*

[68] wold not answeryn the Secunde Persone but wept wonder sor... Fadyr, have hir excused, for sche is yet but yong and not fully lernyd how sche schulde answeryn Ibid., 92, ll. 2023-2028.

she did not want to be separated from him under any circumstance."[69] Apparently, Margery is reluctant to comply because she is under the impression that marriage to the Godhead would supersede her special intimate relationship with the Son. Again Jesus's voice of reason, temperance and moderation persuades Margery to obey and wed the Godhead.

The marriage takes place in a scene that has much in common with a worldly wedding: the family and friends (including Saint Katharine and St Margaret as well as Mary, three exemplary virgins, which may be a textual hint that Margery is here being rendered an honorary virgin) gather together to hear vows very similar to those common in late Medieval England. The Godhead promises to take Margery "for my wedded wife, for fairer, for fowler, for richer, for poorer, so that you be gentle and obedient to do what I bid thee to do. For daughter, there was never a child so gentle to the mother as I shall be to thee both in wellness and in woe, to help you and comfort you. And thereto I make thee a surety."[70] Throughout the scene, it is as if John Kempe had never existed. While the Godhead speaks of Bridget's widowhood, no mention is made whatsoever of Margery's husband and family. However, Margery's marriage is not the narrative focus of this chapter. Instead, her marriage introduces the various gifts her new spouse has given her, including the fire of love that Dorothea von Montau will also feel. The chapter closes with a final reassurance from the Bridegroom: "If you knew, daughter, how much you please me when you willingly allow me to speak inside of you, you would never do anything else (than allow me to do this)... this life [your religious lifestyle] pleases me more than wearing a habergeon or a hairshirt or fasting on bread and water, for if you said a thousand pater nosters daily, you still would not please me as much as you do when you are in total silence and allow me to converse with you in

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[69]or sche was ful sor aferd of the Godhed and sche cowde no skylle of the dalyawns of the Godhede, for al hir lofe and al hir affeccyon was set in the manhode of Crist and therof cowde sche good skylle and sche wolde for no thyng a partyd therfro Ibid. 91

[70] I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was nevyr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the bothe in wel and in wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrté. Ibid., 92.

your soul."[71] With these words, the Bridegroom, now the unified Godhead, explicitly tells Margery that it would be better to cease her pilgrimages, ascetic practices, and constant prayer and instead lie in the arms of her beloved.[72]

Despite her fears, Margery's marriage to the Godhead in Rome does not end her intimacy with Jesus or her spousal obligations to John. In fact, the two husbands continue to vie for Margery's attention until John finally dies—much as Bridget of Sweden did not fully escape into God's embrace until she became a widow. In one conversation with Jesus Margery is reminded of the crucial role her divine lover played in liberating her from her wifely obligations to John Kempe. Though Margery may boldly say "Jhesus est amor meus"—the phrase she had engraved on her ring, Jesus reminds her too that she has a special reason to love him: "Daughter, if you think about it honestly, you have a very big reason to love me above all things because of the great gifts I have given you in the past. And yet you have another even more important reason to love me, because you have had your desire granted to live chastely as if you were a widow, even though your husband lives on in good health."[73] Jesus' words remind both Margery and the reader that she experiences the privileges and freedoms of a widow, *even though* her husband is alive and in good health. Jesus will say much the same thing to Dorothea von Montau

Amongst Margery's special privileges is calling Jesus her love and her husband. This entire arrangement is possible because Jesus intervened and granted Margery her wish to live chastely, but also because John has acquiesced. Here, the freedoms that come with a spiritual marriage are Margery's

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[71]yyf thu knew, dowtyr, how meche thu plesyst me whan thu suffyrst me wilfully to spekyn in the, thu schuldist nevyr do otherwise,.... this lyfe plesyth me mor than weryng of the haburjon or of the hayr or fastyng of bred and watyr, for, yyf thu seydest every day a thowsand Pater Noster, thu schuldist not plesyn me so wel as thu dost whan thu art in silens and sufferyst me to speke in thy sowle. Ibid., 93 llines 2077-2082

[72] The idea that God prefers his brides in a state of constant contemplation resurfaces in *Christus und die Minnende Seele,* and will be a major theme in chapters four and five.

[73]Dowtyr, yyf thu wilt bethynk the wel, thu hast rith gret cawse to lofe me abovyn al thyng for the gret gyftys that I have govyn the befortyme. And yet thu hast an other gret cawse to lovyn me, for thu hast thi wil of chastité as thu wer a wedow, thyn husbond levyng in good hele. Kempe, *The book of Margery Kempe*.ch. 65 ?*sigh* what is wrong with endnote?

special gift from her Bridegroom, and the best cause for her to return his love. However, the very ring that Margery wears is one that was made prior to her pilgrimage to Rome, and thus quite possibly prior to her official vow of chastity.[74] This ring is, in fact, Margery's wedding ring to Jesus, as she herself calls it her "good wedding ring to Jesus Christ."[75] Clearly, Margery's intimacy with Jesus was part of an actual marriage in her own understanding, and her reluctance to participate in union with the Godhead at Rome must be understood as she literally explained it—in a sense, Margery has *three* husbands, and she did not want to set aside Jesus to marry the Godhead. Pinpointing the moment of Margery's marriage to Jesus may be impossible, but it seems to predate her confrontation with John Kempe on midsummer's eve, and John's final acquiescence that "may your body be as freely given to God as it has been to me [As fre mot yowr body ben to God as it hath ben to me.]"

Despite taking a vow of celibacy and wedding the Godhead, Margery continues to owe a debt to John, at least in the eyes of the world. In chapter 76, Margery explains how she came to return to her role as wife to John Kempe after "the husband of this creature" fell down a flight of stairs. That John managed to do this barefooted and pantsless did not make the situation any better, and the neighbors all blamed his fall on Margery being a non-traditional wife "because she might have kept him as a husband [taken care of him] and chose not to.[76] Again, Margery must negotiate conflicting loyalties, choosing between her love for Jesus and her worldly husband's life, just as John asked her to do before the cross that Midsummer's eve. Margery pleads that Christ might allow John to live a while longer, so that she would not be lynched for his death. Christ then said to her mind "daughter, you shall have your boon, and he will live and this is a great miracle I have worked for you, that he has not in fact died. And I ask

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[74] Ibid. ch. 32 lines 1809-11 "The forseyd creatur had a ryng the whech owyr Lord had omawndyd hir to do makyn whil she was at hom in Inglond and dede hir gravyn ther upon, "Jhesus est amor meus. '[the aforementioned creature had a ring which our lord had commanded her to have made while she was still at home in England and he had her engrave upon it "Jesus is my love"

[75] bone maryd ryng to Jhesu Crist Ibid. 1822-3

[76] the husbonde of the sayd creatur... they dwellyd not togedyr, ne thei lay togedyr… and therefore to enchewyn alle perllys thei dwellyd and sojowryd in divers placys wher no suspicion schuld ben had of her incontinens… forasmeche as sche myth a kept hym and dede not. Ibid., 171-2 ll. 4249-4255.

that you take him home with you and take care of him out of love for me."[77] Margery is most reluctant to do so, wishing to continue her current lifestyle, but the Lord explains to her that she must, and that she will be given as much spiritual reward for nursing John Kempe as if she were in church the whole time praying. Here, too, an acknowledgement is made of Kempe's sacrifice in conceding Margery to Christ and agreeing to a chaste marriage: "I ask that you now take care of him out of love for me, because he once fulfilled your desire and mine as well, and he has made your body free to me so that you might be able to serve me and live chastely and purely, and thus I want you to be free (of me) to heal him and look after his needs in my name."[78] Margery concedes and spends a very unpleasant time tending to the incontinent John Kempe, surmising that this end to her first marriage was a suitable punishment for its beginning—that is, that her dealing with the filth of his body was fair penance for the filth they produced during sex.[79]

What I find most interesting about this situation is Christ's plea to Margery. Here, he indicates that he owes a debt to John Kempe for his cooperation, perhaps suggesting that even Christ cannot break the sacrament of marriage, that even divine intervention cannot force a husband to relinquish his conjugal rights. If John had not conceded to a celibate marriage, it seems that Christ would have had to wait for his death to fully enter into a sexual marriage with Margery, just as God had to wait to wed Bridget of Sweden. In fact, Christ is always more kindly towards John Kempe than Margery is, and seems very aware of the sacrifice John made in giving up a sexual relationship with Margery.

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[77] Dowtyr, thu schalt have thi bone, for he schal levyn and I have wrowt a gret myrakyl for the that he was not ded. And I bydde the take hym hom and kepe hym for my lofe Ibid., 173, ll. 4269-4272.

[78] I prey the now kepe hym for the lofe of me, for he hath sumtyme fulfillyd thi wil and my wil bothe, and he hath mad thi body fre to me that thu schuldist servyn me and levyn chast and clene, and therfor I wil that thu be fre to helyn hym at hys need in my name. Ibid., 173, ll. 4275-4277.

[79] "And therefore she was glad to be punished with the same person's body and took it all the more easily and served him and helped him, as she thought to herself, as she would do for Christ himself." And therfor sche was glad to be ponischyd with the same persone and toke it mech the mor esily and servyd hym and helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wodle a don Crist hymeslf Ibid., 173, 4290-4291.

Margery's bridal mysticism was troubling to her contemporaries not because she was a married woman who had a sexualized relationship with Christ, but because this relationship precedeed both her spiritual marriage and the death of her earthly husband. In other words, Margery frequently encountered opposition from the establishment because she did not conform to expected models of sanctity and refused to show reverence towards authority figures. Margery's scribe/hagiographer was willing to record each problematic detail of her sexualized relationship with Christ openly, just as he recorded her run-ins with secular and religious authorities. Apparently, Margery's mysticism and her complicated marital situation could pass as signs of her spiritual progress. While Margery has no lingering affection for her husband John, she is torn between two conflicting loyalties. She loves Christ and owes an obligation towards him as a bride, but also swore a vow to John Kempe to nurse him in poor health, meet his sexual desires, bear his children, and look after his household. Margery fails to fulfill her obligations to John Kempe, but is more concerned over her sexual past with John than her continued obligations towards him as a wife and caretaker. In her own mind, she is not a virgin, she is not pure of soul, and thus is not fully worthy in her own estimation to be a divine bride. Throughout her life, Margery is recognized as a wife and mother, both by Jesus and by those in the world. She even represents herself that way when convenient or necessary. She was a wife to both John Kempe and Jesus Christ, but more remarkable than her accomplishments as a married bride of Christ is the tacit understanding between John and Jesus. Though Margery negotiates for her chastity with John, her two husbands truly come to an arrangement that granted Margery a great deal of freedom and allowed them both to experience Margery as a wife and lover.

Though Margery's two marriages are recorded in unusual detail, Dorothea von Montau also seems to have had very similar experiences negotiating for chastity with her husband Adalbert and juggling her obligations to her worldly and spiritual husbands. However, while it seems quite plausible that John and Christ come to some sort of understanding out of their shared love for Margery,

Dorothea and her two husbands had a far more strained relationship—at least according to her hagiographer, who turned Dorothea's marriage into a martyr's travails.

Johannes von Marienwerder, Dorothea's hagiographer, served as her confessor in the last years of her life, and was one of the main advocates for her canonization. His presentation of Dorothea's life and death carefully worked to show how Dorothea met fourteenth-century expectations for sanctity and holiness. Dorothea was a pious child, an ascetic, and an ideal woman in every respect: a good Christian wife and mother, as well as a living saint. However, Dorothea's husband Adalbert required careful accommodation, because, unlike the husbands of other saints and married brides of Christ, he quite obviously had refused to grant Dorothea spiritual and physical autonomy at an early state in her religious career.[80] Dorothea's *Life* is an important source for late medieval sanctification of married brides of Christ According to Johannes presentation, a married saint should be an obedient and devoted wife, a faultless mother, and a bride of Christ who finds mystical/sexual satiation through the Eucharist. From what he has chosen to preserve of Dorothea's religious experiences, it is apparent that by the late fourteenth century it was no longer bizarre for a married woman to also be a bride of Christ. Though certain nuances of Dorothea's bridal role required delicate treatment, her position as an earthly wife and her sanctification as a spiritual bride both contributed to Johannes' argument for Dorothea's saintliness. Although Dorothea's canonization was postponed until the twentieth century, the popularity of her cult suggests that Dorothea was a convincing model for female sanctity and filled a social need for female saints who offered an attainable model of sanctity.

As a hagiographic account composed for canonization proceedings, Johannes von Marienwerder's *Life* of Dorothea von Montau shares many similarities with Jacques de Vitry's *Life* of Marie d'Oignies, though we know more of Dorothea's visions, penances, private devotions, and marital life than Jacques reveals about Marie. While Marie's marriage is covered in a few brief pages, Dorothea

[80] Of Dorothea and Adalbert, Elliott writes: "Her husband, Adalbert, clearly perceived his wife's mystical raptures as a way of escaping household duties... Adalbert complained freely about his wife's subordination and seems to have found a ready audience among his fellow husbands." Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 259-60.

and Adalbert's marriage becomes a lengthy and violent melodrama. Margery Kempe's marriage to John was complicated, frustrating, and often dramatic, but never abusive. Unlike John Kempe, Dorothea's husband Adalbert was neither sympathetic nor cooperative—if John Kempe can be viewed as a saint for his patience, Adalbert might best be understood as the persecutor who made Dorothea a saint. Adalbert's cruelty becomes an obstacle to Dorothea's religious vocation and presents another problem: Dorothea fails to meet the material needs of her husband, and thus defies the hagiographic model for a good wife and mother.

Though Adalbert is a far more brutish figure than John Kempe, Dorothea and Margery have very similar experiences negotiating for autonomy from and caring for aging husbands. In Dorothea's *Life*, God again intervenes, helping Dorothea win a promise of chastity from Adalbert. Johannes von Marienwerder subtly contrasts Adalbert's violence and brutality with Jesus' tenderness in his lengthy accounts of spousal abuse. After listing several of Dorothea's encounters with Adalbert's short temper—each precipitated by her neglect of wifely duties in favor of meditation or prayer—Johannes presents one of Dorothea's conversations with Jesus. Just as Margery credits Jesus with liberating her from an unwanted marriage, Dorothea is told that she should praise the Lord for taking her away from her husband through mystical raptures. This is a clear sign here that Dorothea viewed herself as a bride of Christ during Adalbert's lifetime and that her mystical experiences were interpreted as the husband who truly possessed her reclaiming her from a mortal husband. Here, a vision introduces the notion that, despite long years of marriage, Dorothea was always Jesus' woman, not Adalbert's:

> The Lord immediately wounded her with many arrows of love and ignited her with hot, burning love and said: "You must love me greatly, for I have so often pulled you away from your husband; while he was still alive and thought he possessed you, I drew you and possessed you. It is appropriate for you to speak highly of me for I have helped you, often without your knowing it, and have come to your assistance throughout your life, which was full of pain and torment. Now weep heartily and thank me profusely. My suffering and torment were greater than yours. But you performed a service of love for me too, when out of your own free will you left the house you just as well could have kept. But you loved poverty and misery for my sake and in accordance with my will were happy to be deprived of all transitory things all the days of

> your life." When Dorothea heard this from the Lord, she shed sweet tears and thanked Our dear Lord, as she had been commanded.[81]

In this passage, Dorothea is clearly having a mystical experience—the wounding hot arrows of burning love are a trademark of her iconography and her spirituality. Dorothea's weeping is also typical, though she is weeping at divine command in this case, while in other circumstances she wept spontaneously. Though this conversation clearly takes place well after Dorothea's enclosure as an anchoress, it reveals crucial information about her married life. Dorothea was actually the possession of the Lord, not Adalbert, and she suffered at Adalbert's hands as Christ suffered during the passion. Dorothea's fifteenth-century hagiographer insists that submission and obedience in an unhappy marriage could be a form of imitating Christ. This is a strong change from the *Speculum Virginum's* assertion that the married could not follow Christ in all things but might still attain salvation.

The passage quoted above ends a chapter entitled "How in Gdansk she was often in ecstasy and therefore suffered greatly at the hands of her husband," providing a theological interpretation for Adalbert's violent punishment for Dorothea's neglect of such essential wifely duties as cooking and shopping. Her failure to cook fish quickly enough infuriated her husband, who split her lip and pummeled her face, while being drawn into ecstasy and forgetting to do the shopping earned her a blow so powerful that she spat up blood for many days.[82] Dorothea falling into contemplation precipitated each of Adalbert's violent responses. The sequence of events so often repeated in Dorothea's *Life* (fall into contemplation, irritate Adalbert, receive beating, take comfort in suffering out of love for Jesus) is sanctified and reinterpreted through Dorothea's revelation. Dorothea's raptures are brought on *by* the divine Lord. The intention was to take her away from her husband, to remind Adalbert of who truly possessed Dorothea, and though each withdrawal results in physical abuse, the Lord explained that this suffering was also a gift. By taking Dorothea up into spiritual contemplation and provoking an angry

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[81] Marienwerder, 102.

[82] Ibid., 100-101.

attack by Adalbert, Dorothea learned to love poverty and misery, to submit herself to God's will and do without spiritual comforts. In effect, Adalbert's rage becomes a source of catharsis and spiritual refinement, and the Bridegroom repeatedly provokes him to teach Dorothea patience. Adalbert is an unknowing participant in Dorothea's education by her "true" possessor, the divine Bridegroom.[83]

Dorothea would serve as wife and mother for most of her adult life, despite her religious vocation. Though Johannes tried to emphasize her patience, meekness, and dutiful obedience, the *Life* acknowledges that Dorothea's role as wife limits her opportunities as holy woman. Johannes frequently describes these years of frustrating marriage as slow refinement, interpreting Dorothea's own words and experiences as "the Lord [bringing] his elected bride Dorothea to perfection."[84] Johannes cannot suppress the intense spiritual experiences that complicated her marriage. "At that time she was still married," he writes, "and because of her responsibilities to her husband, servants, and the world she could not entirely cleave unto God and abandon everything. For this reason the Lord sent her the Holy Spirit who was to console her and correct her whenever she offended God."[85] Though her worldly obligations separate her from complete and perfect union with God, Dorothea's years as a wife become a period of education, with both husbands (God and Adalbert) taking on the role of chastising schoolmaster. Just as Adalbert's abuse teaches patience and imitates the blows of Christ's tormentors before his crucifixion, the raptures themselves became opportunities for spiritual education. After years of "taking the Holy Spirit's punishments and instructions" with mixed success, Dorothea's soul would finally become "a sound lord and ruler... [granted] total dominion of Dorothea's body."[86] The implication here is that Dorothea's worldly obligations and especially her subjugation to Adalbert's will were a necessary part of her spiritual training. When Dorothea's soul is pure, she at last gains autonomy,

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[83] The abuse Christus of *Christus und die Minnende Seele* uses a similar display of violence to teach a bridal soul to let go of the world, love poverty, and become a bride of Christ.

[84] Marienwerder, 182.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Ibid., 182-183.

presumably through Adalbert's death and her subsequent decision to place their last surviving child, Gertrud, at a convent, and eventually be enclosed at Marienwerder.[87]

Johannes carefully positions this process of perfection in the narrative so that it all takes place prior to Dorothea's adornment and mystical marriage. Through textual arrangement he suggests that Dorothea's marriage to Christ took place only after Adalbert's death and the perfection of her soul.[88] However, Johannes himself hints that Dorothea had become a bride of Christ well before Adalbert's death or her enclosure. For instance, Johannes records that "the marriage ceremony between Jesus and Dorothea mercifully always took place at the time Dorothea received the holy, gracious sacrament of the true body of Our Lord Jesus Christ."[89] Johannes himself had brought Dorothea the Eucharist and seen physical signs of her daily union with the Bridegroom. However, the description of her spiritual marriage does not give any indication of when or where it may have first taken place, and Dorothea's devotion to the Eucharist predates both Adalbert's death and her own relocation to Marienwerder. Further evidence is the previously cited revelation that God had truly possessed Dorothea during Adalbert's life—a type of possession described as appropriate to a husband. Well before the end of Dorothea's childbearing years, we are told that "eventually, because of her ecstasies and the counsel of her spiritual advisors she little by little, though reasonably, began to remove herself from the conjugal embraces of the marriage bed, the intimate companionship customary among marriage partners."[90] Predictably, this incites Adalbert's rage, but the phrasing suggests something very similar to Margery Kempe's desire to withdraw from sex following her dream of heaven. Reading between the lines, it even seems possible that *because of*

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[87] The timeline is broken up in Johannes' *Life,* but it seems that Dorothea is counseled by the Holy Spirit to find a better confessor, but postpones this for two years to visit Rome for jubilee in 1390. While on her pilgrimage, Adalbert died during Lent. Prior to her permanent move to Marienwerder, Dorothea entrusted her only surviving child, Gertrud, to a Benedictine convent in Kulm. Ibid., 60, 123-4.

[88] The lengthy description of Dorothea's bridal experiences follows ch. 25 "How her soul was brought to perfection by the Lord and so grew rich" and makes no mention of Dorothea's husband or children.

[89] Marienwerder, 186.

[90] Ibid., 66.

her ecstasies she could not participate in the conjugal embrace of the marriage bed. Dorothea generally would fall limp and unconscious when in rapture, and extrapolating, as Elliot and Stargardt have, it is quite likely that Dorothea too had ecstasies in bed, possibly during sex.[91] Johannes chronicles other moments in Dorothea's life which may indicate that her union may have predated Adalbert's death, including her years of rapture and loving devotion to Christ during marriage, Johannes' description of her decision to withhold sex, and the miraculous replacement of Dorothea's heart, which occurred in Gdansk, when she was only thirty-nine.[92]

Though there is no explicit textual evidence proving Dorothea wed the divine Bridegroom prior to Adalbert's death, Johannes' careful arrangement of evidence—indicating, to this reader at least, that he had something to hide—and the similarities between Dorothea and Margery's experiences suggest that this is very likely exactly what took place. Johannes comes closest to saying this explicitly when excusing Dorothea's years of marriage and sexual activity:

> But in fear of God and in keeping with the law to render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's due she paid her marital dues whenever her husband demanded. Physically she became the mother of children, but she remained a virgin in spirit to do justice to her carnal bridegroom and at the same time not to withhold from her heavenly bridegroom the service that was his by right.[93]

Dorothea then, even during her marriage to Adalbert, years of motherhood and carnal relations with her husband, remained a spiritual virgin and a bride serving the heavenly Bridegroom. Despite Johannes' careful and delicate effort to obscure Dorothea's double marriage, her *Life* still contains several passages which suggest that, like Margery Kempe, Dorothea became a bride of Christ long before persuading her

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[91] Both make allusions to this possibility. Elliott points out that Adalbert views Dorothea's raptures as shirking wifely duties, while Stargardt writes that "married to Adalbert, she patiently tried to serve two husbands at once by rendering 'unto Caesar what is his due and unto God what is due him.'" Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, 259; Marienwerder, 10.

[92] Dorothea's new heart is a carefully chronicled miracle taking place five years after the vow of chastity but prior to Adalbert's death. Marienwerder, 77-82.

[93] Ibid., 60.

husband to enter a spiritual marriage. Dorothea, despite her husband and children, was involved in a bridal relationship of some sort well before Adalbert's death.[94]

In Johannes von Marienwerder's account of Dorothea's *Life*, serving as a faithful and caring mother and wife become steps along the way to spiritual perfection. He takes care to show Dorothea as both a good wife and a good mother—or at least as good a wife and mother as a woman prone to lengthy contemplation and paralyzing mystical rapture can be. Johannes presents Dorothea's children as a gift from God, casting her as an ideal Christian mother who "labored diligently to give birth to these same children spiritually whom she previously had born into the world physically... she was not one of those foolish, faithless mothers."[95] As a good mother, Dorothea nursed her children with both milk and the sweet name of Jesus Christ, praying and weeping for their wellbeing just as Job and Tobias did.[96] However, Johannes gives us no concrete examples of Dorothea as mother to her first eight children. He instead describes how she worked through her pregnancies and how "she had to forgo church attendance for forty days; this long absence caused her great irritation."[97] Dorothea seems to have spent more time at church than looking after her children, but Johannes clearly approved of this neglect. He writes that Dorothea would tend to housework and then she "commended the children to God's care and left for church...arriving before the church doors were even unlocked."[98] In general, Johannes seems to consider Dorothea's lapses as a mother and wife perfectly excusable, despite his claim that she gave full service to both her earthly and spiritual spouses. As a model of female virtue, Dorothea is first and foremost obedient and devoted to God, then to her husband, and finally to her children. Johannes takes greater care to show Dorothea as a caring wife and mother during years of pilgrimage and hardship. The

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[94] Ibid., 97.

[95] Ibid., 59.

[96] Ibid., 59-60.

[97] Ibid., 61.

[98] Ibid.

small family's pilgrimage to Aix begins a series of events which emphasize Dorothea's patient suffering and obedience as a wife and mother through difficult circumstances. I will discuss only two examples of Dorothea's mothering, both drawn from the family's journey to and from Einsiedeln.

After being robbed on the road, Dorothea and her husband settled in the village of Finsterwald on the Rhine for a year and half. While there, they fell in with a group of spiritual people, and Dorothea gained respect and wished to remain in the village. However, due to constant warfare and unrest, there was a shortage of food and "in this hostile environment and for lack of even basic necessities her husband frequently became quite despondent and impatient, and in his great wrath behaved in so hostile a fashion toward the blessed Dorothea as if to suggest that he wished her dead."[99] While in Finsterwald, Adalbert would often travel to another town to eat, leaving Dorothea and her small child behind to make do with "nothing more to eat all day than one piece of bread scarcely as large as a fist and scarcely enough for one of them."[100] Thanks to divine intervention, Dorothea and her daughter split the bread each day and were satisfied, despite the inadequacy of their meal. Apparently, the pair could have continued like this for quite some time, but unfortunately Dorothea's poor housewifery soon lead to a dangerous confrontation with Adalbert. She had been ordered to buy a week's worth of bread but "because of the great bliss in which she found herself at the time" she forgot to go shopping, as she often did.[101] The next evening, when preparing dinner, Dorothea found that her only ingredient was a very small piece of bread, from which she made a puree. And then "she served it to her husband with the other half [and] she fed the child with what was left over and gladly did without any nourishment."[102] Of course, Adalbert was unsatisfied with the meager meal, but before he could fly into a violent rage a grocer's wife miraculously brought the family food, appeasing his temper. According to Johannes—and

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[99] Ibid., 94.

[100] Ibid., 95.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid.

perhaps according to Dorothea—Adalbert "then realized that this merciful deed was not a reward for his merit but his wife's and therefore gave her unlimited leave to serve God. He even offered to mind the house, for from then on he did not wish to hinder her in her prayers nor be angry if she remained in prayer for a long time."[103]

In this sequence, Dorothea abstains from food, not as a pious woman, but as a good wife and mother. However, she seems to be more concerned for her husband than for her daughter. When Gertrud and Dorothea must share a meager piece of bread each day, they rely upon a miracle of satiation, but when Dorothea has to feed Adalbert on the same small piece of bread, she must take further action. First, she frugally disguises the single slice of bread, stretching the meal and diverting attention from her failed shopping trip. She does not rely on a miracle, though somehow there are leftovers when Adalbert finishes his bowl of bread soup, and Dorothea can then feed Gertrud, her young daughter. Dorothea herself chose not to eat, attending to the needs of her husband and child first. On the surface, then, she is a sacrificing mother, dutiful and attentive to the needs of her family. However, if Dorothea had successfully completed her shopping trip, there would have been no tense dinner of bread soup, and if she had been a more attentive mother, it is likely that she would have enlisted Adalbert to bring home leftovers from his dinners at inns for young Gertrud's sake. The real reason for Dorothea's lapse, theologically, must then be her unexpected rapture while at the market. Based on previously cited passages, I have argued that these raptures were sometimes meant to elicit Adalbert's anger, so that Dorothea could suffer patiently. However, in this instance, it seems almost as if Dorothea had been set up for the next day's miraculous rescue. Because she forgot to buy bread, the

[103] I say perhaps according to Dorothea, because with the very next paragraph, Johannes has returned to how much Dorothea "suffered many other injustices at the hands of her husband" while in Finsterwald. Even though Johannes suggests that Dorothea has been given spiritual autonomy for a short time, and was even about to be left behind in Finsterwald to live as a beguine, Adalbert changed his mind "and regretted having granted her this freedom. Therefore, when the priest arrived he complained about his spouse, claiming that she wished to be rid of him and stay there, and begged the priest to order and instruct her to travel home with him." Ibid., 95-6.

grocer's wife could bring a wealth of food, which in turn made Adalbert realize the value of his wife's prayer and piety.

In another episode from the family's pilgrimage, Dorothea again sacrifices for the sake of her husband and daughter. While traveling back to Danzig, Dorothea saved the lives of her husband and daughter. The family was traveling across a frozen lake when the ice cracked and their companions' sleigh was drawn in.[104] Though it was Adalbert who first realized the predicament "yelling to his wife "Hurry get off the sleigh right now," Johannes credits God with her quick motion to grab their staffs, satchels, and small daughter while "still ignorant about the accident."[105] Having jumped clear, Adalbert began crawling on the ice to try to help the horses, but "because of the extreme cold and his own weakness, he could not even pull himself up on the ice...Dorthea came, grabbed him by the feet, and laboriously pulled him away from the hole. He was drenched and would have drowned had she not helped him."[106] Though Dorothea rescued her daughter from the sinking sleigh, Gertrud admonished her mother "not [to] assume that it was you who helped me off the sleigh so I would not drown; the dear Virgin Mary helped me."[107] In perhaps her most realistically maternal moment, Dorothea then challenged her daughter, asking "why do you say that the dear Virgin Mary has pulled you off the sleigh when I took you off with my own hand?"[108] Undaunted, Gertrud insisted that she saw the Virgin Mary. This miracle might also be a snide child's criticism of an overly pious parent. Though only five, Gertrud

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[104] The scene is slightly confusing, but apparently the family was traveling on thin ice, and behind them was a sleigh carrying two raucous handymen. The ice cracked and their sleigh fell into the water, though it sounds very likely that Dorothea, Adalbert, and Gertrud were also on that same sleigh. The text reads "A sleigh came after them, pulled by three horses and driven by two handymen.... she jumped off the back of the sleigh... her husband also dropped off the sleigh..." Either the ice swallowed their own sleigh as well, or they were hitching a ride with the handymen. Ibid., 98.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Ibid.

[107] sIbid., 99.

[108] Ibid.

had certainly experienced enough of her mother's piety to make that sort of sarcastic remark, and Dorothea's response—as if to probe a lie—supports this interpretation.

The near-drowning raises several interesting questions. In the chaos of such a crisis, each person involved seems to have a different recollection of what actually happened, and though it is tempting to read the attributions of divine intervention as Johannes' reworking of events, feeling saved by God seems like a natural response to a near-death experience. However, the order of events as they were recorded reveals more about Dorothea's priorities as wife and mother—or at least Johannes' idea of what a good wife, mother, and holy woman should be. First, the sleigh falls through the ice and Adalbert, who was presumably in front, calls to his wife, saving her life—although credit goes to God, not Adalbert. Adalbert saves himself leaves Dorothea to rescue their daughter and possessions. However, as the "horses raised their muzzles out of the hole," Adalbert struggled forward to try to save them.[109] Adalbert trusted Dorothea to rescue their last surviving child, but heroically attempted to rescue the drowning horses himself. Due to his age and weakness, Adalbert collapsed, and Dorothea pulled her husband back onto solid ice, leaving the horses and the two handymen to drown. On the ice between Harburg and Hamburg Dorothea acted selflessly to save both her husband and her daughter, but her behavior—at least as it is presented by Johannes von Marienwerder—suggests that she was more concerned about her husband than her child.

In general, Johannes tries harder to present Dorothea as an obedient and perfect wife—despite the evidence—than as a good mother. Each of Dorothea's interactions with Gertrud is open to multiple interpretations. Either Dorothea is a selfless mother sacrificing everything for her child, or she is a neglectful mother abandoning her baby to spend time in prayer. In contrast, Dorothea tried to please her husband through obedience. Unexpected visits from the Holy Spirit cause her failures as a wife. Unlike

[109] Ibid., 98.

Dorothea, Margery Kempe reveals very little about her life as a mother, but she seems to have neglected her obligations as a wife far more often than her duties as a mother.[110]

If Dorothea's presentation by Johannes von Marienwerder is a conscious effort to make a woman's life conform with late medieval notions of sanctity, then being a good Christian mother and wife had become possible criteria for demonstrating sainthood on the eve of the fifteenth century. However, Johannes' account also describes in graphic detail Dorothea's harsh asceticism, miracles, and her bridal relationship with Jesus, indicating that holy women were primarily recognized for their asceticism and mysticism.[111] Dorothea is, despite her family, a traditional holy woman and mystic in Johannes' hands. Though Johannes weaves elements of the *Song of Songs* into Dorothea's experiences, emphasizaing her bridal relationship with Christ. Johannes wanted to emphasize the special qualities of Dorothea's espousal to Jesus, writing that "not only was she espoused in faith and mercy, as others commonly are, but in a special manner as well...I merely want to relate a little of what she had to say about one of them."[112] In the buildup to her nuptials, Dorothea obsessively checks to make sure she is clean and properly attired, and apparently "whenever she spied even the tineiest dust mote of a minute transgression, she or one of her handmaids washed it off immediately."[113] Much like Margery's marriage to the godhead in Rome, the wedding party is filled with remarkable figures. Prior to taking his bride, the Bridegroom alludes to the *Song of Songs*, saying "I will lead the bride I take as my wife into the wine cellar of my sweet love, that is into the paradise of passion and desire, and into my secret chamber. There I shall show her the secrets of my heart."[114] Like the allegorical bride of Christ, she is adorned and arrayed

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[110] She was clearly concerned for the wellbeing of her children, even expressing worry about her son's possible leprosy and bad marriage.

[111] I will address the role of asceticism and violence in becoming a bride of Christ in chapters five and six of this work.

[112] Marienwerder, 184.

[113] Ibid., 185.

[114] Ibid., 186.

by her beloved, led to the feasting table, taken to the wine cellar, and eventually to the bed chamber. Like Margery Kempe, Dorotheais showered with gifts by her bridegroom following the ceremony itself, though in keeping with the medieval German tradition of the morgengabe this now included material adornments.[115]

Unlike Margery and Katharina, whose deaths are not recorded, Dorothea's death is carefully and ceremonially performed. She begs for the eucharist—twice in one day—and when denied that, retires to her bed to die as a corpse, rather than as a martyr or a woman on a cross:

> At this point it is worthwhile to know that as she knew she was dying, the spotless, humble Dorothea positioned herself on her cot differently from the way she ever had before by placing her head toward sunset and her feet toward sunrise, the way the dead are placed in their graves. She had closed her eyes, her right hand cradling her right cheek. Her left arm was extended to her belt, her hand dangling from her cot. She was lying on her right side as if she were sleeping peacefully, dressed in her gown and veil, the habit in which she wished to be buried, with her body and feet covered modestly. From all this one can deduce that she expected to die upon retiring for the night, especially since as long as she had inhabited her cell she had never positioned herself in this manner but had always lain with her head at sunrise and her feet pointing to sunset.[116]

While Dorothea knew she was going to die, she staged her death in humble rather than dramatic fashion. Unlike dying nuns who lay out their arms and turned their head to the side in imitation of Christ on the cross, Dorothea lays herself out as if she were preparing her own corpse for burial, thus even in this last act she is to be understood as a humble, pious, and thoughtful woman.[117] She does not die and go to the embrace of her divine Beloved, instead "depart[ing] for a more blessed saintly existence."[118]

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[115] The morgengabe is a traditional gift of jewels and clothing made by the husband to his new wife after their wedding is consummated. Katharina Tucher would also describe receiving a morgengabe after her marriage to Christ. Ibid., 186-192

[116] Ibid., 208-9.

[117] For instance, Sister Lijsbet Hertgerts of St. Agnes at Emmerich gets ready to die and lays herself out as if she were on the cross: "Doe die tijt genacten dat dese heilige ziele ontbonden solde warden, soe schiecten si hoer seluer ende leide hoeren rechteren voet op den luchteren voet crucwijs auer een, gelick als onse lieue here Ihesus Christus aen den cruce ghenagelt wart." [When the time approached that this holy soul was to be set free, then she laid her right foot on top of her left foot crosslike just as our lord Jesus Christ had been nailed to the cross.]Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich* (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein e.V., 1998), 142. Sister Gerolama of Corpus Domini in Venice died in a similar fashion:When the hour of her death approached, she had

Dorothea von Montau was a wife, mother, and bride of Christ who emulated models of female piety with enthusiasm. While still serving as wife and mother, Dorothea took care to raise her children as good Christians and serve and obey her husband, but also lived chastely, in constant prayer, making charitable donations and longing for poverty (except when actual poverty threatened to enrage her husband). She took her self-sacrifice to the highest level possible while remaining in the world, finally achieving enclosure as an anchoress.[119] Unlike Margery Kempe, Dorothea was an early convert to sanctity. From youth to old age, Dorothea von Montau—at least as we know her through Johannes von Marienwerder— conformed to medieval ideals for Christian women by practicing asceticism, mysticism, and serving her family as a patient wife and mother. Dorothea led a double life, constantly torn between pleasing her spiritual and her earthly husbands.

According to Johannes, during Dorothea's childbearing years, when she was regularly called back from church to nurse her children or kept home to care for her husband, she "beat, stabbed, tormented, and wounded her body with various tools and in a variety of ways until nothing or very little of it remained whole. Beneath her clothes it was drenched with blood, so every movement was painful and bitter," yet Adalbert only grew angry when Dorothea ruined dinner[120] Though John Kempe never noticed Margery's hairshirt during intercourse, her choice to chastise her body without his permission was transgressive—he would clearly have disapproved, as she was, in effect, harming the body he possessed. Likewise, Adalbert somehow never noticed Dorothea's elaborate and brutal self-chastisement,

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herself laid on the ground and stretched out her arms like a cross, tilted her head to the right side, and rendered her soul to her spouse Jesus Christ, who chose for himself this pure virgin. Bartolomea Riccoboni and Daniel Ethan Bornstein, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 65.

[118] Marienwerder, 208.

[119] For a theoretical and culturally profound study of anchoresses, see Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). Mulder-Bakker argues that anchoresses, unlike enclosed nuns and canonesses, were able to serve the social and spiritual needs of their towns, and were generally located at commercial centers. Anchoresses could provide spiritual and personal advice, and those who failed to meet societal expectations were sometimes pressured to leave their cells and instead join a convent.

[120] Marienwerder, 62-3.

which she carried on from the age of seven until she was thirty-three.[121] Whether Dorothea's asceticism, harsh fasting, and care for her family originated in an early exposure to models of female sanctity, or instead were exaggerated to conform to existing models is uncertain. However, Dorothea's success as a mother, wife, and bride of Christ is compelling reason to believe that by the early fifteenth century, the idea of a married bride of Christ was no longer as problematic as it had been for Marie d'Oignies and Jacques de Vitry.

[121] Johannes takes special delight in describing Dorothea's penitential practices, which, though quite brutal, seem in keeping with the spirit of the time. Ibid., 44-52.

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Katharina Tucher

Katharina Tucher belonged to the same social class as Dorothea von Montau and Margery Kempe, and would also become a bride of Christ. However, Katharina's husband died when she was still quite young, she had only one known child, and she recorded her own visions in a small diary. Katharina was, in fact, quite literate and well educated, having copied several important religious works and even undertaken a translation of the Gospel of John from Latin into her own dialect. Yet despite her literacy, long years of freedom to pursue a religious career, education, and mystical experiences, Katharina made almost no impact on the written religious records of Nuremburg, or of the St. Katharina cloister where she would spend much of her life. Katharina was not tried for heresy, she only took short pilgrimages to neighboring towns, and she seems to have avoided dramatic public displays of piety in the form of weeping, fainting, screaming, or dressing in religiously significant clothing. Despite recording mystical visions and working as a scribe at an important fifteenth-century observant convent, Katharina is also almost entirely ignored by modern scholars, presumably because her dialect and spelling are atrocious and her visions lack the high literary quality and developed theology of German women mystics.[122]

Katharina's own behavior may in large part be the reason for this neglect. She was superficially an entirely unremarkable woman. At least during the years she kept her diary of visions, Katharina was prone to drinking, fits of temper, and abuse of servants. Katharina's confessor was a minor figure in this work, a man alluded to only rarely, rather than a dominating authorial voice. Katharina gives no sense of how their relationship developed, but her confessor clearly felt no impulse to promote the visionary as a

[122] As a diary rather than a crafted work of mystical literature, Katharina's Offenbarungen have been almost entirely neglected. The introduction to the 1995 edition provides the most thorough discussion of Katharina's life, social world, and religious experiences. Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 5. Since the publication of her Revelations, Katharina has made small cameo appearances in other works, the most significant being a paragraph in Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 178.

living saint. Katharina's life, visions, and experiences conform to the model of married bride of Christ which I have proposed in this chapter. Unfortunatley, there is no surviving evidence indicating whether Katharina began her religious life during marriage, but what little can be known about her, and more importantly, the pronounced silence about her life, have large implications for the fate of the married bride of Christ in the late medieval period.

Surviving evidence suggests that, like some other married brides of Christ, Katharina Tucher waited until the death of her husband to pursue a religious vocation, though her choice of lifestyle diverges from the archetype, as Katharina remained involved in the world and apparently prefered writing and studying to public displays of piety. In or around 1387, Katharina's husband Otto Tucher traveled to Nuremburg and probably met Katharina and the pair wed soon before Otto's exile from Nuremburg in 1392.[123] They moved to Neuenmarkt, Otto's hometown, where he was a prominent cloth merchant and ran a dye works. Otto had died by 1419, and within the year, Katharina and her daughter Kathrein moved back to Nuremburg. An entry on the town register for 1420 lists a "Cathrein des Ott Tuchers von Nuenmark wittib [Cathrine the widow of Otto Tucher of Nuenmarkt]" and suggests that Katharina was now under the legal protection of her father, Nikolaus. By this point, Katharina was presumably around thirty years old, and she arranged for the marriage of her daughter Kathrein to a burger of Nuremberg, a man by the name of UIrich Keppf.[124] Around 1433, Katharina entered the cloister of St. Katharina's at Nuremburg, possibly as a lay sister.[125] Aside from her work as a copyist, nothing is known of Katharina's time at St. Katharina's, but the convent itself was a prominent observant Dominican

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[123] Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 2.

[124] All of this biographical information is provided in the introduction to Katharina's visions. Her age is extrapolated based on typical ages of marriage in the region. All of the evidence is taken from town registers. Ibid., 2-3.

[125] This is based on the dating of the earliest manuscript she donated to the convent. Katharina brought twenty-six manuscripts to St. Katharinas, including several she copied in her own hand, including a complete copy of Suso's *Exemplar*. Krapp and Werner-Krapp speculate that she was a lay sister rather than a nun because of her age, marital status, and the lack of any record of her making full profession. Ann Winston-Allen accepts their hypothesis, but there is no real evidence, and Katharina's Latin literacy, wealth, and social status indicate she could have joined St. Katharina's as a choir sister as well. Ibid., 178; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.

house in the fifteenth century, and while there, Katharina was at a nexus of religious innovation and able to make use of the single largest German-language library in Europe.[126]

Katharina Tucher's *Revelations* have primarily been studied as responses to and meditations upon devotional literature and images.[127] While some of her dialogues are clearly influenced by her reading and prayer, others are unique and personal, revealing intimate details about her relationship with Jesus or mundane scenes of fifteenth-century Nuremburg.[128] Several of her visions echo the *Song of Songs* and traditional bridal mysticism. In vision twenty, dated to August 10-19, 1418, on St Sebaldus' and Laurentius' feast days (a big celebration in Nuremburg, as they were the town's patron saints), Katharina was crowned and then engaged in a game of hide and seek with Jesus:

> On St. Laurentius' day He took the soul by the arm and crowned her…The soul looked in all the chambers and in all the parlors. She did this for a long time but she could not find him. She said "My love, I have been looking for you, I cannot see you." He said "my bride sit here with me. We shall cuddle with each other. You are mine; I will give you eternal glory and will give you overflowing pleasures. I will amuse you, whatever sorrows you have had. Fly away with me lets be together for eternal life and you will show me greater pleasures"[129]

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[126] St. Katharina's was originally an aristocratic convent, and though hostile to the Reform, finally embraced observance in 1428 and would later be instrumental in reforming other convents, including St. Katharina's (St. Gall). St. Katharina's was a central location for copying and illustrating manuscripts, and several of the known fifteenth-century nun artists worked there. Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 145-8, 172-3, 175, 185.

[127] Deborah Rose-Lefmann has written the most on this subject, arguing that Katharina's visions borrow from Arthurian romance and , in a separate interpretive essay, focusing on how Katharina's visions are inspired by devotional art. Ibid., 178; Deborah Rose-Lefmann, "Lady Love, King, Minstrel. Courtly Depiction of Jesus or God in Late-medieval Vernacular Mystical Literature," in *Arthurian Literature and Christianity: Notes From the Twentieth Century*, ed. Peter Meister, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities (New York: Garland, 1999); Deborah Rose-Lefmann, " "As it is Painted" : Reflections of Image-based Devotional Practices in the "Confessions" of Katharina Tucher," *Studia Mystica* 17, no. 2 (1996); Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 34.

[128] I will address some clear borrowings from *Christus und die Minnende Seele* and Seuse's *Exemplar* in chapters 5 and 6

[129] An sant Lorentzzen tag. Er nam die sel an arm vnd kronnet sie... Die sel xvht in in allen kammern vnd in aln gemechen. Daz wert ein vutev weil, so fint sie in. Sie spricht: „Mein lieb, ich hab dich vmb vnd dvm gesvcht, ich sah dein niht." Er spricht: „Mein gespuntz, sitz her zu mir. Wir wollen mit ein ander kossen. Dv pist mein, ich wil dir geben ewig geloria vnd wil dir geben vber flvsige frevd. Ich wil dich ergetzzen, wahs dv hie gelieden hast. Flig wir mit ein ander in daz eqwig leben vnd sieh mein frewd." Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 39.

Here, Katharina is a textbook mystic, or perhaps echoing textbook mystics. Like the Bride in the *Song* she seeks her beloved but cannot find him—and like the Soul in *Christus und die minnende Seele*, she plays a game of hide and seek, but the crowning precedes the searching here, unlike in traditional texts. However, Katharina's vision continues in a new and unexpected vein:

> The soul says: "Lord, I don't have any wings" He says: "The angel shall be your wings. I will crown you with my thorny crown, with which I will imprint you and give you a spear in your hand as a weapon, so that you, soul, will not take pleasure in the world until you have the joy that I shall give you. I will give you from my heart a drink of my precious treasure, that you crave far less than worldly things, but which is the source from which you take eternal life."[130]

Though the gist of the dialogue remains within the expected framework for female religious expression—the dialogue ends on a Eucharistic note—and Katharina is presented with trappings of the crucifixion, there are some odd aspects to this scene. First, Katharina is urged to fly to heaven with her beloved, but she is mortal and has no wings. Christ suggests that an angel, presumably Katharina's guardian angel, will carry her there, and when she has arrived, she will be crowned and given a spear. Nevermind that she was already crowned before the chase sequence, or that Christ did not carry a spear on the cross. The addition of an angel to the scene is slightly unusual, but may be a reference to depictions of souls ascending to heaven as in depictions of Judgement day. It seems very odd, however, that Christ crowns Katharina with the thorns of the passion but gives *her* the spear with which he is wounded. This brief love-dialogue incorporates some very odd elements into an otherwise familiar scene of pursuit and affection. Here, Katharina has combined nuptial imagery with an interactive crucifixion sequence, suggesting that she will be crucified when she finally reaches heaven (Jerusalem), and that the crown of thorns supersedes the bridal crown.

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[130] Er sprach: „Die engel schvln dein flvgel sein. Ich wil dich kronen mit meiner dvrnein kron, mit der wil ich dich drvcken, und giv dir ein sper in dein hant zu eim waffen, daz dv, sel, nimer frollich scholt werden hie in der zeit, pies dir die frevd wirt, die ich dir geben wil. Ich wil dir geben auz meim hertzzen ein trvnck meins kospern schatz, daz dich nimer mer gedvrst nach kaim vergenckklichem ding, daz ein avsprvnck nimt in daz ewig leben vnd sieh mein frewd" Ibid., 40.

Some of Katharina's conversations with Christ seem almost to be meditative prayers. For instance, in vision 13, Christ gives the soul (Katharina) five words or phrases he thought to himself internally as he was going to his death.[131] These short lines evoke a meditation, much like those Suese describes in his *Exemplar*: "Argh, Argh pain, heart, argh! Woe how great is my agony! Father mine your son is in bitterness, in sorrow! Ack, the monstrosity of sins, which I am weeping for! Oh behold all my martyrs, they let them have mercy!"[132] Katharina frequently meditates on the passion or expresses Eucharistic devotion. In vision fourteen, Katharina mixes these two characteristic themes of late medieval mysticism in a short dialogue with Jesus:

> [Christus says]: "Look at me, feed your soul with love, when you want to drink from my heart. That is warm and not cold. Give me a drink on the cross, as a man nailed my hands to it." [Katharina replies:] "Dear lord, how should I drink of you?" [He answers:] "With a mind set free from caution and the decline of obedience, with those things you shall drink of me. In the same way I will drink of you in my heart."[133]

Here, Katharina is playing two roles. On one level, she is the attentive woman who brings Jesus a drink on the cross, reenacting a gospel scene, but she is also an ardent soul drinking the blood of salvation from Christ's wound. Yet Jesus drinks of Katharina as well, and so she becomes the salvific body on the cross, if only within Christ's heart. His suggestion that he will drink her blood may be alluding to Katharina's spiritual transformation.

This layering of imagery and intermingling of roles and religious concepts is typical of Katharina's visions, and may contribute to Winston-Allen's impression that Katharina's revelations were

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[131] "die funf bort ret der herr in seiner inbendigkait do er zu seim sterben ging"Ibid., 36.

[132] Achen, achen, smertz, hertz, achen! We, wie grozz mein angst! Fater sich dein svn in piterrikait, in leiden! Ach, der vngestalt der sunden wie wird ich gepeinigt! O alle die mein marter sehen, die laszen sich erparmen! Ibid.

[133] "sich mich an, speiz die sell mit dem leib, wend v wilt avz meinem hertzzen trincken. Daz ist warm vnd niht kalt. Gib mir ein trvnck avf dem krevtz, als man mich nagelt mit den henden." ":lieber her, wi schol ich dich trencken?" "mit eim warn gelaszen gemvt vnd mit eim vnder gang in gehorsam, dam it trenckst dv mich. So wil ich dich trencken avsz meim hertzzen, daze in avsprnck nimt in daz ewig leben." Ibid.

intentionally presented as dreams—the jumbled effect does have a dreamlike quality.[134] However, Katharina's visions are often very clearly grounded in scripture and devotional imagery. In another passion-based vision, Katharina reveals the devotional activity which triggered Christ's voice. While holding a small cross in her hand, presumably praying over it with the crucifix close to her mouth, Christ interjects, saying "You shall not kiss me on my mouth. You are not worthy of this, only my mother is. Take yourself to the foot of the cross and join Mary Magdalen. Prostrate yourself there and flow to the goodness of my heart. Hide yourself there until the last days. [*Flevh*] there in the suffering of my cross, and help carry me."[135] Here, Katharina reveals her own devotional practice. She may have been kissing the cross while praying, and as her lips fell where they should not, Katharina is immediately reprimanded. However, the reprimand transitions to Katharina stepping into a portrait of the pietà. Now, Katharina becomes an active participant in the crucifixion itself, joining Mary Magdalen and Mary mother of Jesus in adoring and mourning for Christ's body. By kissing the cross, she imagined or transported herself into the moment of Christ's crucifixion.

In another vision sequence, which has been treated by both Rose-Lefmann and Winston-Allen, Katharina and Christ seem to step into the world of courtly love.[136] Rose-Lefmann argues that this vision sequence is derived from the hunt scenes of Arthurian romance.[137] The vision opens with a sequence evoking *Song* 5.7 and the stripping of the Soul in *Christus und die minnende Seele*, before

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[134] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 178.

[135] "Mir wart gegenbvrtig, ich het ain krevtzlein in der hant. "Du scholt mich niht kvssen an mein mvnt. Dv pist sein niht wirdig, wen mein mvter allein. Halt dich zv den fvzsen mit Maria Madalena, da laz dich an genvngen, vnd flevh zu meim gvtigem hertszen. Verpirg dich dare in an dein letzten zeiten. Flevh hinder den schaden meins krevtz, hilf mirs tragen." Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 67.

[136] Visions 24 and 25 Ibid., 42-43. Though the visions are separated by headers, they are obviously related, as they both take place in Jerusalem and are part of the same nuptial sequence.

[137] Rose-Lefmann links these two visions and also provides partial translations. I have given my own version, which I think evokes the biblical passages, but have referred to her translations for clarification of difficult passages. Rose-Lefmann, "Lady love, king, minstrel," 150-3.

transitioning to a stag hunt which is "a traditional pastime of the court in Arthurian romance."[138] I will discuss the imagery and signifance of stripping and bathing the soul in chapter five, but wish to point out that the vision opens with an explicitly bridal theme.[139] Christ takes up a girdle and dresses the soul, then says "come, we shall ride out to the hunt, we desire to fell a stag who has one hundred wounds and one hundred miracles."[140] He mounts Katharina on a little lamb, which despite its small size is quite fast enough to chase a stag. This stag is an expressly allegorical figure, though the meaning of the hundred wounds and miracles is obscure. It has three horns [drw horner] which may be a reference to either the he-goat or the ram in Daniel 8, and in what may be an allusion to the hart thirsting for flowing waters in Psalm 42, the stag is run down in a beautiful broad flowing river—perhaps the same river that Katharina and Jesus will fish beside in the next vision.[141] When cornered in the water, the stag splashes about and lowers its head to drink, seeming to be in a good mood. At some point after being mounted on the lamb, the voice of the soul disappears and the lamb itself begins speaking, leading to a possible interpretation that Katharina turns into the lamb.[142] The lamb calls out, fearing that the river current is too strong, but the King reassures it, and then invites the stag to his court, saying "If you want to come to my court, I

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[138] Ibid., 150.

[139] Smith explores the artistic representation of bride and Bridegroom as naked and beaten or filthy in: Susan L. Smith, "The Bride Stripped Bare: a Rare Type of the Disrobing of Christ," *Gesta* 34, no. 2 (1995).

[140] „Der her nimt ein gvrteln vnd gvrt sie vorn zv im."Wol avf, wir wollen iagen reiten, wir woln ein hirssen feln, der hat hvndert bvnder vnd hvndert marackel." Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 42.

[141] "Vnd der her iaget den hirs in ein schon grosz flissent waszer..."The likely figure from Daniel is the goat, which is described as having one great horn between its eyes, but as goats also have two other horns, this goat might then have been imagined as having three horns. The significance of the hundred wounds and hundred miracles is unclear. Rose-Leffman suggests this may be an allusion to Psalm 42: "this vision blends biblical motifs—the stag that pants after the flowing water (Psalm 42:1)..." Williams and Williams-Krapp suggest that this vision borrows from *Christus und die minnende Seele,* but add that this is an allegorical dream, and that Katharina gives her readres no way to interpret the vision.

Ibid., 8, 42; Rose-Lefmann, "Lady love, king, minstrel," 151.

[142] „the Lamb of God, which speaks here with the voice of the soul..." "In one dream sequence Katharina speaks in the voice of a soul accompanying her divine Lord on a hunt, then as a lamb."Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 178; Rose-Lefmann, "Lady love, king, minstrel," 151.

will free you, I will guarantee your safety, that no injury will befall you."[143] The stag agrees to this proposition, and the King suggests that they should ride through the woods a bit more, to see what other animals they might find, and have a series of confrontations with a serpent, a bear, and a wild man, before riding off together to Jerusalem.[144] In this vision sequence, what begins as a clear bridal theme—the soul being bathed and dressed by her beloved in preparation for eternal glory—transitions into a seemingly allegorical vision with no clear precedents in either biblical or mystical literature. Clearly, Katharina's courtship with Jesus is entirely original, coming from her own experiences or imagination. The ambigious relationship between her soul and the Lamb echoes the peculiar exchange of blood when Jesus suggests he will drink from *her* heart—again, Katharina, despite her sinfulness, has become Christ. Though the vision has certain courtly elements, the obscure symbolism and Katharina's decision not to provide any interpretive explanation, either in her own words or Christ's, sets this scene between the soul and her Beloved outside the tradition of medieval bridal relationships, and is something unique and original to Katharina's own experience.

In the next vision, Katharina's soul weds Christ in a scene entirely unlike those presented by Bridget, Dorothea, or Margery.[145] This chapter also plays out in Christ's heavenly Jerusalem, which, unlike its earthly counterpart, has become a pleasure garden through which a mighty river flows.[146] Jesus calls to the soul: "Ah dear soul, turn your face to me, we will fly to my city of Jerusalem—I want to teach you how to fly...we will go fishing and have our pleasure [*wollust haben*]."[147] Again, Katharina is encouraged to

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[143] „Der kvnnig sprach dem hirs zv: Wiltv an meim hof sein, ich wil dich freien, ich wil dich sichern, daz dir kain verservng geschicht." Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 42.

[144] The confrontatiosn in the woods have some fairly obvious connections to Arthurian legend (the wild man) and the lamb scaring off a serpent seems to be a clear allegory for Jesus stomping on the devil. Ibid., 151-2.

[145] The full vision is in no. 25 Ibid., 42-3.

[146] Possibly this is a development of Ezekiel and Isaiah, where Jerusalem becomes a paradise and a mighty river fertilizes crops. Credit to Carrie Duncan for suggesting this possibility.

[147] "Ach sel, avf dein gemvt zv mir, wir wollen fligen in mein stat Iervssalem. Ich wil dich wol lern fligen." Der her spricht: "Hor vnd merck, wir wollen fischen, wollust hgaben, wan dam it ist dir wol." Ez wahs ein schon, lavter, grosz, flissent waszer,vnd ez wahs vol fisch. Die sah ich an dem grvnt vnd ab farn

fly, though this time she is capable of flight under her own power, and Christ does not need to call up an angel to carry her. By the river, a "clean, broad, gushing water... full of fish," the soul and her lover settle down and take their pleasures. Soon they begin a game of dice, with Katharina's soul as the wager:

> "The lord said "hey soul, we're going to play a game to see if you or I, soul, are going to win or lose."
> She said "Lord, whatever you want of me, I desire to be yours." The soul asked: "Dear lord, let me have the first roll." The lord indicated that it was her turn. He gave her two dice and it befell that the soul had the initial roll. The soul cast the dice and rolled four pips. The lord took up the dice and rolled a pair. The lord said "Now have another roll. It's your turn." The soul rolled the dice and rolled a three. The lord rolled a five.
> He said "I have defeated the soul. Three pips are my cross, which you shall carry; Five pips are my wounds, which I will hammer into you on the cross. You shall bring that weapon to my father."[148]

Unlike other brides of Christ, Katharina is not wooed or seduced in this vision. She is instead won in a game of dice and taken to God's heavenly court to be displayed as a trophy. The dice game has no again has no clear connection to bridal traditions, mysticism, or the devotional literature Katharina is known to have read. Though the pips of the dice are interpreted allegorically to represent Christ's wounds, and the gambling itself could possibly be read as an allusion to the soldiers dicing for Christ's clothing, the entire vision seems to be unique to Katharina's own internal experiences, and Christ again indicates that he will crucify Katharina. Though Katharina's union with Christ coincides with her taking up the markings of his crucifixion, the way she becomes a bride is entirely unorthodox. Yet, just as in the last vision, there is a quick transition from the obscure and bizarre to more familiar mystical language. When the bride is taken to court, she becomes a bride of Christ in the traditional sense, and Katharina returns to the

[148] Thanks to Anne-Marie Rassmussen and Jen Welch for helping me work out this game of dice, and for suggesting that "vorbvrf" simply indicated who's turn it was to roll. : "Der her sprach: "Wol avf, wir woln spiln, ob ich dich, sel, gebin oder verlies." Die sprach: „her, verlevcst du mich ich wil dennoch dein sein." Die sel begert: „Lieber her, lasz mir daz anheben." Der hergab ir den vorburf der sel. Er gab ir zben bvrffel. Ez wart ir derlavpt, daz die sel an hvb. Die sel barf vnd barf vvmb den bvrf vnd barf fir avgen. Der her nam die bvrffel vnd warf ein tavs. Der her sprach: „nvn heb an anderbeit. Dv hast den vorbvrf." Die sel warf vnd barf drew avgen. Der her warf fvnf avgen. Er sprach: „Ich hab die sel gebvnnen. Drew avgen sein mein krevtz, daz scholtv tragen. Fvnf avgen sein mein bvnten, die wil ich in daz krevtz drvcken. Daz waffen soltv mein fater pringen."

"ich/mir" of the first person.[149] After the game of dice ends, the King calls for a celebration and then Katharina is wed in typical fashion: "and it seemed to me that two angels led me as a bride before the king. He handed me the scepter, he crowned me, he clothed me, he gave me beautiful jewelry for my arm and everywhere. He put a ring on my finger and wed me. He said to the father: "this is the wealth I have gained, this is my spouse."[150] With the Father's approval, she is welcomed into the family, given servants, and a land of her own to rule. Though the wedding itself is fairly typical, taking place in heaven with a ring and a gift of jewelry which Rose-Lefmann recognizes as a *morgengabe*, the bride is granted her own realm to rule over.[151] The scene ends with a heartfelt prayer from Katharina which seems to have been added well after the end of the vision: "Oh you dying God, whom I have been drawing to myself for so very long, this may make my heart break from sorrow!"[152]

In other sequences, Katharina's marital status and her complicated reliationship with Jesus come into prominence. In vision 29, Katharina takes on the guise of the unwed woman in John 4, yet despite these allusions, Katharina and Jesus voice autobiographical details as the vision diverges from its biblical foundation. The vision begins in a "heathen town" where Jacob's spring (Genesis 29: 9-17) flows. Jesus calls to Katharina: "Give me a drink" and, still loosely following John, then says "I will give you a drink from the living water, that is the source from which we take eternal life, if you desire it."[153] Like the Samaritan woman, Katharina is eager to drink from Jesus' living water, and responds: "Oh yes lord, I

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[149] (the gambling and the flying took place in the thirdperson of the soul, something Willimas and Williams-Krapp identify as Katharina borrwing from *CMS*, though this gambling scene does not occur in any of the known manuscripts).

[150]Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 43-4.

[151] Rose-Lefmann, "Lady love, king, minstrel," 152.

[152] "Oh dv sterben gotz, daz ich mich also long von dir gezogen han, daz moth mein hertz zvprechen vor laid" Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 44.

[153] "Der her rvt dar avf vnd sprach: Gib mir zv trincken... Dar vmb wil ich dir geben daz lebendig waszer, daze in avfsprvnck nimt in daze wig leben, dez dv begerst." Compare to John 4:7 and John 4:13-14 "Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ... Jesus said to her, "Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."Ibid., 45.

very much desire that it should be this way for me! Ah lord, you are wise, you know the contents of all hearts. How shall I ask this of you?"[154] Jesus responds in an altered version of the biblical passage, saying "Give me your heart.... [and] bring me your husband."[155] Like the Samaritan woman, Katharina replies, "Lord, I have no husband," but here the texts diverge significantly.[156] While the Samaritan woman has instead five lovers (but no husband), Katharina is a widow and Jesus' response is significantly different: "You just don't know you have a husband."[157] He adds "your desire, your commitment, your reason, your understanding: that is your husband, [he] who should rule your five senses, whom I have given to you and when you do that and choose me entirely then I will go to your town and make my residence with you. I will sit in your heart and be your schoolmaster, in this time and in eternal glory."[158] Katharina, as a widow, is elligable to find a new husband—Christ—who will teach her and make her worthy of his love, before settling down with her in a comfortable middle-class marriage.[159] This discussion of the union between Katharina and Jesus is again a mixture of orthodox and unorthodox elements. The Samaritan woman in John certainly never becomes a bride of Chirst.[160] By juxtaposing drinking the living water with learning from Jesus and becoming his bride, Katharina's vision suggests

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[154] "Ja her, moht mir daz warden! Ach her, dv pist weisz, ein bekenner aller hertzzen. Wo sol ich dich an peten?" In John, however, the woman uses different language: The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw." Ibid.

[155]"Er sprach: Gib mir dein hertz... pring mir dein man" John 4:16 reads: "Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." Ibid.

[156] "Her, ich hab kain man." Williams and Williams-Krapp add a note here which reads "Katharina ist offenbar Witwe [Katharina is obviously a widow]," and they seem to have entirely missed the John 4 allusion in this vision. Compare to John 4:17 Ibid., 46.

[157] "Da bekennstv sein niht" Compare to John 4:17-18 Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, `I have no husband' for you have had five husbands, and he whom you now have is not your husband; this you said truly." Ibid.

[158] "Daz ist dein wil, dein bekantnvs, dein vernvnft, dein verstantnvs: daz ist dein man, die da raigirn scholten dein fvnft sin, die ich dir geben hab. Vnd wen dv daz dvst mit eim gantzzem zv ker zv mir, so wil ich ein gen in dein stat vnd wil pei dir bonnvng haben. Ich wil dein hertz besitzzen vnd wil dein schvlmaister sein, hie in zeit vnd in ewiger gloria." Ibid.

[159] Christ as schoolteacher seems to be a common theme in German medieval mystical texts. This appears in CMS and the visions of Dorothea von Montau as well as in Mechthild's *Fleißende Licht*.

[160] Introducing bridal themes through a reference John 4 is an interesting development, especially considering that Katharina began a translation of John in the vernacular. Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 21.

that salvation and mystical union are part of the same process. Katharina is eligible for the second and better salvation—cohabitation with Jesus following intense schooling—because she has no husband and is a widow. After her education, she will choose Jesus and then they will dwell together in love, an idea very similar to those expressed in *Christus und die Minnende Seele*.

In vision 29, Katharina describes an orthodox bridal mysticism, suggesting that bridal union can only take place if one is single, baptized, saved, and have studied diligently with Jesus, but in another vision, Jesus suggests that Katharina is entirely unprepared for this path. Vision 55 opens with a revelation that Katharina has been prone to sinfulness since her girlhood: "These ten things have been with you since your young days."[161] Williams and Williams-Krapp suggest hesitantly that this may be Katharina talking to herself [Selbstgespräch Katharinas?] but the caption and nature of the dialogue indicate that this is just as likely a reprimand directly from Jesus.[162] What follows is a list of sins and failures that reveal a great deal about Katharina's experiences, personal life, and many failings:

> The first is unchastity, as you well know. The second is the anger between your parents, father and mother, and their marriage. The third is lying. When you speak a genuine truth two of these [faults] will be unmade. The fourth is arrogance/haughtiness, when someone was attracted to you and your conversation and you would not talk to them. The fifth is inconstancy with the course of your life, *itzzvnt* with joyfulness, with unjustified mourning. The sixth is a lack of wisdom and shortsightedness, now and even as a child you were terrified that you didn't know the difference between good and evil. The seventh, willfulness. The eighth, that you are always wanting to be well known by everyone. You must therefore separate yourself from other people. The ninth, that you have done good for God with your words and... the tenth, that you are addicted to eating, to drinking, and more addicted to taking love than your soul is. These things are found with you every day.[163]

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[161] "Die zehen stvck sein gewahssen fan jnvgen tagen mit dir." Ibid., 55.

[162] As with most of her visions, no. 55 is captioned "Iesv zv lob sein lieplichen fvnf bvnden" – to Jesus in praise of his beloved five wounds" and I would argue that this is Christ's monologue primarily because of the "dir" and "dv" which are indicitaive of his speaking. When Katharina voices her own thoughts, it is usually with an "ich' or a "sie sprich." Moreover, the "when you speak a word of truth, these two sins will be unmade" indicates that Katharina is receiving information from someone capable of undoing and forgiving her sins—this is not the sort of conversation she typically has with her confessor, and so I presume that this is Jesus talking. Ibid.

[163] „Die zehen stvck sein gewahssen fan jvngen tagen mit dir. Daz erst ist vnkevsch, als dv wol waist. Daz ander ist zorn zbissen dein eltern, fater vnd mvter, vnd den ehalten. Daz trit ist ligen. Wen dv ain worhait sagest, so warn zbai vnbor.

This list of Katharina's ten failings reveals both her own weaknesses and her ideas of what good Christian behavior should be. Like the *Speculum Virginum's* author, Katharina believes a bride of Christ must also be a virtuous woman, but Katharina is intemperate, a glutton, a drunk, a woman who desires worldly recognition and considers herself too good to talk to those who admire her godliness. She is also unchaste, disobedient, a terrible liar, *willful,* and does not intuitively know the difference between good and evil. She has been this way since childhood, and persists in these sins into widowhood, despite her visions and bridal relationship with Jesus. Though Katharina understands that the good Christian woman should be a chaste, obedient, humble person who never lies or sins, who eats moderately and never gets drunk, Katharina's own successful mystical experiences indicate that this type of behavior was not necessary to effect actual results. Furthermore, point four suggests that, despite her sinful way of living, Katharina had attracted followers or admirers of some sort. Yet she was not just a drunk, she was apparently having an extramarital affair, as she persisted in unchastity and, moreover, her body is more addicted to "taking love" than is her soul—an indication that she is a sexually active woman and may in fact have sex more often than taking communion or experiencing visions. Her lack of chastity dates to her girlhood and presumably indicates that prior to her marriage—or perhaps even during her marriage—Katharina was sexually adventurous. Katharina demonstrates that a bride of Christ, by the fifteenth century, did not need to be a stereotypically "good" Christian woman, though she should still strive to become one.

This sense is reaffirmed in vision 80, where the Virgin Mary warns Katharina against remarriage:

> I kneeled in our lady's chapel. This then came to me in a vision: "Kneel a bit lower now, Do you see my child? You shall be his bride. He is inconsolable. He may well help you. I plead with my child diligently for

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Daz firt ist hoffart, wen man dich pas dar avf gezogen het vnd in dein worten vnd wolst niht leiden red. Daz fvnft ist vnstetikait mit spil deins lebens, itzzvnt mit freidikait, itzzvnt mit vnrehtem travrnen. Daz sehst ist vnbeishait vnd vnfersihtigkait, wider nvn die kindlein pescheid sein zv fvrhten, wahs gvt vnd pos ist. Daz siebent, gar aigenwillig. Daz aht, dich albeg zv schetzzen for den levtengros vnd pesser zv sein, wan dv fan inen pist gewessen. Dar vmb uvstv ankretig sein fan den menschen. Daz nevnt, daz dir got gvtlichen hat geton mit einsprechen vnd dez vnenpfencklichen pist gewessen vnd fergessenlichen. Daz zehent, daz dv gar genaigt pist gewessen zv essen, zv trincken, vnd mer genaigt pist gewessen hin zv pringen den leib wen die sel. Dar inen finst dv dich altag."

> you. When you think often of taking another husband, as often as you do this you do a great and terrible sin against me." Praise be to Mary.[164]

Again, Katharina's vision is brought on by a devotional action—in this case, kneeling before an altar to Mary, presumably one with an image showing Mary with the baby Jesus. Katharina is chastised for thinking of remarrying, and is warned that she is offending Mary when she thinks such thoughts, because Katharina is already promised as a bride of Christ. Here, Katharina's actual behavior—thinking of marriage, perhaps having an affair with the man she is considering marrying—is unbefitting a bride of Christ. To remarry would be to betray her heavenly bridegroom, yet Katharina herself did not consider this to be an issue, and we may presume that her spiritual practices and experiences were not worrisome to the man she dreamed of marrying. Katharina's situation represents the contradictions that occur when a married woman—or a widow—becomes a bride of Christ. Despite her marriage to Jesus, Katharina remains concerned about her deceased husband and interested in other men. Even though certain visions indicate that her relationship with Christ was made possible because of her status as a widow, and that she should strive to live virtuously for the sake of her Bridegroom, Katharina's presentation of bridal experiences and behavior suggests that there were ambivalent attitudes about sexuality, marital status, and female piety in late-medieval Nuremburg.

Though she marries Christ, Katharina is an atypical bride, and her marriage truly seems to precede significant spiritual progress. Like a patient husband or the schoolmaster residing in her heart, Jesus tries to teach Katharina better behavior, but she is unwilling or incapable of changing her ways. He often reprimands her for her short temper, drinking habits, and general bad behavior, as in vision 79, where Katharina begs for help from Jesus but is warned that he cannot help her unless she gives up wine:

> On Saint John's day, [Dec. 27, 1420], during service, I had a vision as if a part of my life had elapsed, as I had already done the same things that day. I thought "dear lord, help me, this should never happen to me"

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[164] Ich knit in vnser frawn kapeln. Da wart mir gegenbvrtig: „Knie wieder nieder. Sihstv mein kint? Der schol dein gemahel sein. Er ist vntotlich. Er mag dir wol helfen. Ich pit mein kint fleissig fvr dich. Also oft dv gedenckst, ain andern man zv nemen, als oft hastv ain dot sund getan groslich wider mich." Maria zu lob. Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 65.

> "Why should I help you? Thus drink no more wine" "Dear Lord, then I must surely die." "Yeah, now have you no remorse, thus you must let go of drinking, and you mean that you can do no other sin to me? So know, you, that drunkenness is the worst of all sins for a woman to be guilty of , it is the sin from which all others spring, and it is all shame and disgrace before god and before the world… And if you break away from [this drinking] then I will help you.[165]

Katharina's drinking is the source of her sinfulness. She is denied divine salvation until she can quit drinking, yet when faced with the choice between life and death, Katharina would rather risk death than give up wine. Jesus is the chastising husband who intervenes, trying to help Katharina recover from her apparent alchoholism, but she cannot be saved unless *she* is willing to take the steps necessary to merit divine intervention and salvation. Katharina's situation is tense. She is at church, concerned for the state of her soul, and already far enough in her spiritual development that she is capable of conversation with Jesus, yet she has not made the personal sacrifices necessary to fully possess his love and salvation. Katharina wants to be able to continue in her worldliness—to drink, to dally with men, to lie, to lose her temper with servants—but to keep her loving relationship with Jesus as well.

While Anne Winston-Allen views Katharina's visions as self-censored and non-controversial, easily represented as dreams to stern confessors and church superiors seeking to quell heretical and spectacular women's religious writing, Katharina's *Offenbarungen* are both a distillation of late medieval German piety and a sometimes radical expression of her own lifestyle and convictions.[166] Some of Katharina's visions are typical of bridal mystics—her love for Jesus, and her devotion to the passion—

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[165] „An sant Johens tag vnder dem amp da wart mir gegenburtig ain tail meins vergangen lebens, daz ich avf den selben tag getvn het. Ich gedoht: Leiber her, hilf mir, daz sein niemer geschech an mir." Wieh schol ich dir helfen? si trinck kain wein mer" leiber her, so mvz ich sterben" "Eia nvn hastv kain getrawen, daz dvs mvgst lazsen, vnd dv mainst doch kaind ot *Sv*nd wieder mich zv dvn. So wiz, daz trvnckenhait ain havbt fraw aller *Sv*nd ist, dar avs all *Sv*nd enspringen, vnd scham vnd schant for got vnd for der werlt ist vnd kain weishait da pei ist. Dv dich sein ab, so werden dir ander tvgent dester e geben.Sich an, wie hat dein got vnd hetr gallen und essig trnvcken vnd die pres treten dvrch dein wiln. Vnd prich dir ab, so wil ich dein helfer sein." Ibid., 64-5.

[166] "The *Revelations*, written down between 1418 and 1421, take the form of dreams and dialogues between herself and Jesus, Mary, her confessor, or other figures. Yet the format is ambiguous, so that these conversations might be construed as religious insights or reported dreams rather than supernatural phenomena or visions that were subject to censorship"Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 178.

but Katharina is an even more peculiar holy woman than Margery Kempe. Margery made a full conversion before truly beginning her religious career, but Katharina drinks, carouses, contemplates remarrying, and is reluctant to change her lifestyle even after several years of visionary experiences, regular church attendance, and devotion and prayer before religious images. Katharina is relatively unimportant in the grand history of women's religion, or of western mysticism. Her visions are often borrowed from or inspired by other texts and images, her prose lacks the inspired elegance of the canonical mystics, and her lifestyle is hardly exemplary. She faded into anonymity well before her death, retiring to a convent, perhaps in response to Mary's warning against remarriage, but perhaps also to gain greater access to religious books and an environment better suited to the lifestyle change she knew she needed to make. Though Katarina is at best a second-rate mystic and quite obviously a bride of Christ the Church would have been reluctant to recognize and accept, what little she tells us reveals a great deal about late medieval attitudes towards women, piety, and mysticism. Katharina's spirituality was intertwined with devotional books and images, as is apparent from her evocation of biblical passages and altar paintings and texts like *Christus und die minnende Seele*. Her experiences confirm a rise in lay piety and lay mysticism, which is corroborated by evidence that most vernacular books in convent libraries were gifts from laypeople.[167]

The *Offenbarungen* suggest that Katharina and her contemporaries felt it was fully possible to live as good and perfected Christians within the world. Katharina's complicated sexual relationships and mystical experiences confirm that, by the late middle ages, there was a social desire for and acceptance of the possibility for a personal, spiritual, and mystical relationship with Christ for married people. Yet Katharina's obscurity suggests the married bride of Christ was no longer a model of sanctity. Though the jarring psychic dissonance created by having a married or widowed woman enter a sexualized relationship with Jesus is one of many themes contributing to the decline of mysticism and the

[167] Ibid., 175.

decreasing importance of the bride of Christ and bridal relationships prior to Trent, the married bride of Christ also belongs to a developing lay spirituality.

A Hard Man and a Sweet Lover: Rebellion and Submission in *Christus und die minnende Seele*

In chapter 3 I examined some of the complicated situations that arose when married women became brides of Christ, suggesting that as this model of religious expression and identification gained popularity, there was a perceived increase in "unsuitable" brides: women who were neither sworn to chastity nor obedient to the Church hierarchy but still married Jesus. As more women and men became brides of Christ, the position itself lost its unique sanctity. According to popular understanding, each and every Christian might become a bride of Christ by living virtuously,. While married, worldly women who insisted they were Christ's wives and brides represent one of the most extreme forms of unsuitable brides, the appeal of this imagery extended to other problematic women, including beguines. I argued that the rejection of Margery Kempe and Katharina Tucher were consequences of a Church-wide response to the widespread appeal of Christ as spouse, a trend in women's religiosity inextricably connected to Grundmann's observed "new" women's religious movements. Women of questionable social status claimed unique and personal encounters with Jesus and some, like Margery and Katharina, expressed theological opinions potentially tainted with heresy. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many brides of Christ were considered unsuitable and in need of restraint, regulation, and re-education at the Council of Vienne and in the writings of major church figures, particularly of the Dominican order.[1]

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[1] For a discussion of these repressive trends see especially: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

In this chapter, I examine a late fourteenth-century text that encouraged transformation through mystical and ascetic practices and attempted to restrain and discipline the experiences of Christ's brides by encouraging them to keep silent and invisible. *Christus und die Minnende Seele (CMS)*, a violent poetic dialogue between Christ and the female soul he seduces, abuses, and ultimately weds, is a useful case-study to explore whether mystically inspired ideas of total submission of will and self-identity represent a new ideal for female virtue. *CMS* opens a window into late medieval popular piety and gender roles and raises fascinating questions about christocentric piety, medieval devotional practices, and mysticism's infiltration into late medieval popular religion. Just as the *Speculum Virginum* served as a model-text, a didactic dialogue representing the twelfth-century ideal of Christ's bride, *Christus und die minnende Seele* encapsulates new developments in the women's religious movement in southwest Germany in subsequent centuries. Though the tone of *CMS* differs significantly from the *Speculum Virginum*, both treatises address the problems of women's religious training and devotion for the same general geographic region—the Black Forest and the towns in the vicinity of Lake Constance, or more broadly speaking, Swabia. Furthermore, both treatises teach ideal behavior through the training of an exemplar soul, gendered female as the framework for educating women religious in proper Christian behavior. While the relationship between Theodora and Christ is chaste and distant, negotiated and chaperoned by the teacher-father Peregrinus, the relationship between the Soul and Christus in *CMS* is intense, physical, personal, and, to modern sensibilities, disturbing. There is no confessor-figure to guide the female soul as she negotiates her relationship with Christ, and *CMS* stresses the importance of keeping a bridal relationship secret and private. In this chapter, I shall focus primarily on the first third of *CMS*, where Christus prepares his bride for courtship in a series of brutal scenes that follow the archetype of prophetic marriage in the Hebrew Bible but also evoke Christ's passion, violence in Christian mysticism, and the legal mistreatment of wives by secular husbands. If *CMS* represents an idealized and model relationship between Christ and a bridal soul in the later medieval period, then the violent actions of

Christus and the absolute degradation of the Soul which precede final nuptial bliss must be accounted for, either theologically or through social factors. If this model for marrying Jesus was as appealing to pious women as the extant evidence suggests, then there must be some reason for the replacement of free self-expression and spiritual exploration of the thirteenth-century bridal mystics with this new model of total submission and self-abnegation.

~4.1~

Christ's Loving Discipline

for love is strong as death,
jealousy is cruel as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a most vehement flame.
Cant. 8:6

"And if she does not feel raped by God, even in her fantasies of rape, this is because He never restricts her orgasm, even if it is hysterical. Since He understands all its violence" –Irigaray, *Speculum of the other woman,* 201

"Its [*mystics*] literature, therefore, has all the traits of what it both opposes and posits: it is the trial, by language, of the ambiguous passage from presence to absence. It bears witness to the slow transformation of the religious setting into an amorous one, or of faith into eroticism. It tells how a body 'touched' by desire and engraved, wounded, written by the other, replaced the revelatory, didactic word." De Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, 5

As the *Song* laments, love can be cruel, like death, like hell, like consuming flames. When mimicking the patterns of women's mystical writing in *La mysterique*, Irigaray captures elements of mystics' embodied and internal pain—the self deprecation, submissive degrading behavior, physical and spiritual wounds that wreck a mystic's body but purify her soul and culminate, following Irigaray's reading, in orgasmic rape. Even Certeau, whose treatment of the mystic only rarely addresses eroticism, describes the violent love and submission of some mysticism as revelation carved into the mystic's soul-body by an amorous God. What is alluded to, promised, described, re-enacted in each of these passages, is the violent love of mysticism, the total subsumption of personal identity by the Divine, a consuming of the Soul by her Beloved. The mystic's suffering soul, whether interpreted through biblical allegory or psychology, experiences periods of agonized suffering that end only when she abandons her own will and identity, submitting completely to the whims and commands of her divine lover. This violent love, also found in *CMS,* is characteristic of the German mystical sense of Gelassenheit—generally translated as detachment, a sense of letting go of the world and submitting or serenely accepting whatever may

come next—an idea introduced by the great mystical theologians Eckhardt, and his students Tauler, and Suso, in a form that had trickled down to the popular masses.[2]

This theme, undercurrent, and refrain—that love both hurts and heals—is near the core of the mystical experience. Hadewijch wrote that "in Love nothing else is acquired but disquiet and torture without pity, Forever to be in unrest, Forever assault and new persecution" adding that there is "nothing but the constant acceptance of caresses and blows."[3] Beatrijs of Nazareth also wrote of painful love: "It is a heavenly passion, a sharp torture, a long sorrow, a treacherous death, a dying life!" (7.3) In a longer lament, Mechthild described the anguish and torture of love unrequited. She begs her Beloved to return to her but he warns that he cannot—his touch causes more pain than the ache of separation: "No matter how softly I caress you, I inflict immense pain on your poor body… For a thousand bodies cannot fully satisfy the longings of a soul in love. And so, the higher the love, the holier the martyr."[4] Each of these bridal mystics experienced love as suffering *inflicted by the Beloved*, yet violent love, is not the primary mode in these mystical texts. By the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century, however, the violence of mystical love and the violent asceticism sometimes used to invoke God's presence became a new way to teach submission and obedience to Christ.

The image of a bride seeking and suffering martyrdom to win Christ's love is an undercurrent in thirteenth-century bridal mysticism that would dominate bridal literature in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Each passage so far quoted describes the frustrations of carnal love, the emotional agony of spiritual love, and, quite probably, the ascetic practices of the mystics themselves. Love, for Hadewijch, Beatrijs, and Mechthild, is a sweet suffering of absences and longing, bittersweet but tender embraces, and constant compromises. *Christus und die minnende Seele* mimics this thirteenth century dualistic

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[2] For further discussion on Gelassenheit see: Heinrich Seuse, *Henry Suso: the Exemplar, with two German sermons*, trans. Frank J. Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989); Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 137; Romuald Banz, *Christus und die Minnende Seele: zwei spätmittelhochdeutsche mystische Gedichte* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1977), 117; Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Frank J. Tobin and Elvira Borgstädt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986).

[3] Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Columba Hart (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 356-8.

[4] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank J. Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 94.

presentation of love as suffering and joy by tracing an unremarkable soul's transformation into one of Love's naked martyrs. Only after martyrdom is the soul worthy of Christ's love and the nuptial crown. Just as Hadewijch describes love as a passive acceptance of whatever the Beloved may offer, whether caresses or blows, *CMS* shows the soul's encounters with Christ's love as an alternately brutal and tender lesson in submission to divine will. In three phases, the first brutally violent, the second a lover's chase, and the third an overwhelmingly tender nuptial ceremony the soul is taught that only passive obedience will earn the Bridegroom's caressing embrace. What makes *CMS* radical and bizarre is not that it depicts violence, submission, or love as suffering within a mystical context but that Jesus himself is explicitly placed into the role of dominant and abusive lover, not only encouraging his bride to become a martyr, but wielding the instruments of her passion. The strong responses this text elicits in modern readers are a direct reaction to the anonymous author and illustrators' depictions of Jesus as brutish and domineering. But the same passages which seem disturbing to a modern eye served a clear didactic purpose for medieval readers by mimicking mystical experiences and ascetic practices, revealing the logic behind both cloistered life and ascetic mystical practices and describing one path to obtaining divine love. Though the scenes of the dialogue contradict many values of monastic life and seemingly shame and denigrate women's devotional practices, *CMS* was used as a meditative and devotional text in convents as well as by lay women. Jesus' violent degradation of the Soul in *CMS* consciously mimics the language, patterns, and events of actual mystical experiences to teach readers how to win Christ's love, and both *CMS* and this suffering-based mysticism are rooted in medieval passion devotion and a medieval understanding of the Bride in the *Song of Songs* as the suffering Israel.

Written during a pivotal era, when heresy and mysticism grew ever closer and the disciplining of female religious experiences was urged by prominent church figures including Jean Gerson and Albertus Magnus, *CMS* is a dangerous and subversive treatise which advocates a type of mystical relationship with Christ that undermines both the authority of the Church and the importance of communal religious life,

but also denies the individuality and authority of the Christian soul.[5] Women sought this text out, copied it, gave it to their sisters, meditated on its scenes and illustrations, and apparently found within its chapters guidance to wooing and loving Christ. Significantly, their spiritual fathers seem to have raised no objections—one surviving copy of *CMS* was preserved in the male house of St. Georgen in Villingen, suggesting that the work was popular with both genders.[6] Although passion mysticism and the superficial connections between *CMS* and orthodox mystical experience may explain why the poem was embraced rather than destroyed, the few records we have of how women read the treatise suggest that the violent side of the Soul's relationship with Christ was largely overlooked by the medieval audience, as I shall show in chapter 5.

This treatise is, in my opinion, *both* mimetic and didactic, recreating a mystical process and teaching readers how to achieve union with the Divine through behavioral changes. As a teaching text, *CMS'S* presentation of Christ's bride as a battered and submissive woman raise several concerns: is this a description of actual asceticism, perhaps including the disciplining assistance of a male confessor, as for instance is given in the life of Elizabeth of Thuringia?[7] Is this, as Hildegard Keller argues, a treatise which equates ascetic discipline with earthly marriage and mystical union with erotic love, recognizing a strong distinction between love and marriage while accurately depicting the horrors of secular marriage? Or does *CMS* describe ascetical mysticism through the *via negativa via purgativa* and *via unativa* as Banz insists? How can we explain or account for the appeal of this violent imagery to both women and men, lay and professed religious? In the first part of this chapter, I shall examine several frameworks for interpreting *CMS'S* thematic progression, first evaluating Banz's and Keller's theories, then suggesting an

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[5] For a discussion of the political circumstances of the women's religious movement and late medieval mysticism, see Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*.

[6] For a more detailed discussion of *CMS´* readership, transmission, and appeal to male and female religious, see ch. 6.

[7] For a brief discussion of Elizabeth of Thuringia, see ch. 4 and also, for an overview of scholarship on Elizabeth and especially feminist and traditional reactions to her abusive confessor, see: Ulrike Wiethaus, "Naming and Un-naming Violence Against Women: German Historiography and the Cult of St. Elisabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231)," in *Medievalism and the Academy*, ed. Leslie Workman, Kathleen Verduin, and David D. Metzger, Studies in Medievalism (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1997).

alternative reading which understands *CMS* within a biblical model for the bride of God which was incorporated into mystical treatises and used to explain mystical experiences. While some of these themes can be re-interpreted as a retreat from the world into the cloister, even in the cloister, sisters were expected to live and work, contributing to the community through their labor and their prayers and songs.[8]

[8] See chapters 5-7.

~4.2~

Mystical Marriage and the Prophetic Marriage Metaphor

The genre and intended purpose of *CMS* are both open to dispute. While I consider it a didactic piece which models a bridal transformation, I do not agree with Banz's suggestion that *CMS* "illustrates in dialogue the mystical life...[which] must however only take place after many difficulties because this sort of story can only naturally follow in a cycle, a cycle which parallels the asceticism of the *via purgativa*, *illuminativa* and *unitiva*."[9] While the treatise does illustrate in dialogue form the mystical transformation of a soul, it does not parallel the traditional three phases of mystical theology. In Banz's model, the early violent interchanges between Christus and the soul are a representation of the ascetic practices of the *via purgativa*. Though Banz acknowledges that *CMS* does not fully describe these phases, he suggests that the text runs a parallel course to the traditional tripartite mystic progression and is a careful and reverent depiction of the mystical experience. While I agree that *CMS* uses mystical language and imagery, and that the author intentionally develops the Soul's relationship with Christus to resemble the mystical process, Banz' theory cannot account for the treatise's often explicitly abusive power-dynamic. Even in the courtship sequences of *CMS* Christus always manipulates the loving Soul. In early chapters, Christus also uses disturbingly forceful language, speaking words that have no apparent connection to the biblical Jesus. For instance, Christus warns the soul that she is helpless before him, and about to experience extreme physical discipline in an early chapter: "I am going to bend you over and beat your back for you. You cannot defend yourself… I demonstrate my strength, that nothing is equal to my might; I can do whatever I want to."[10] However, even in later chapters, where Keller insists that the Soul has usurped his

[9] Das Gedicht schildert in Rede und Gegenrede Christi und der Seele das mystische Leben. Eine Entwickelung, ein fortschreitender Stufengang ist gewiß beabsichtigt; die Ausfuhrung mußte aber auf viele Schwierigkeiten stoßen, weil manches, das sich im Gedicht natürlich in zeitlicher Abfolge beiten läßt, nebeneinander gedacht werden muß, wie ja auch in der kirchlichen Aszese die via purgativa, illuminativa und unitiva nicht vollig geschieden sind, sondern vielfach parallel laufen. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 36.

[10] Du woltest mich schier vertroken, Darumb wil ich dich hie buken Und dir din ruggen beren. Des magst du dich nit erweren… Das nútz ist wider min macht: Ich mag wol tün was ich wil, Ich nim und gib wem ich wil. Ibid., 284.

power and become the dominant partner in the relationship, Christus is clearly the one in control, playing music to make the soul dance uncontrollably, or giving her a spiked love-drink to drive her mad with passion. Even when the soul seems to have gained a moment's control, whether by piercing Jesus through the heart with an arrow or trapping him and tying him up, she is only fooling herself. This power-dynamic itself is not out of place for mystical writing—Jesus punishes those whom he loves best with terrible sufferings, as Meister Eckhardt warns Schwester Kathrei—but Jesus' arrogance and brutality may be unique to *CMS*.

In her introduction to *CMS*, part of a larger work on eroticism in medieval German religious literature, Hildegard Keller acknowledges this power dynamic, arguing that the treatise "uses erotic and marital allegories as a means to orientate human beings toward God by fitting them into a certain power structure… the hierarchical difference between the lord and husband, who is omnipotent, and his wife, whose duty is to be obedient," adding, as I have previously cited, that "it is radical and bizarre."[11] Keller believes the violence in *CMS* reflects a medieval gender hierarchy, and convincingly argues that a violent and dominant Christus bullies the soul into obedient submission to teach the value of the spiritual over the worldly. However, Keller's interpretation is limited: she recognizes Christus' dominance in the first chapters, but presumes that in the second half of the text the Soul gains power, signifying this reading with sub-chapter headings such as "the woman and the restoration of balance."[12] Keller justifies her interpretation by arguing that the soul conquers Christus by shooting and capturing him, but the message in each of these scenes is in fact the opposite. The soul learns that it is impossible to posses, control, or dominate Christus. She is reminded that she can never catch or fully possess her beloved, and that even his capture/wounding was allowed, made possible only because *Christus* willed it to happen so that he could further instruct her. Banz at least notes that in both of these scenes, the soul is at a disadvantage.

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[11] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 185.

[12] Ibid., 212.

He describes her as "trunken, närrish [drunk and foolish]" in book 10 and notes that the soul runs away in shame after realizing shooting Jesus will not allow her to fully possess him.[13]

Keller builds on Banz's assessment that *CMS'S* cycle of violence and reunion models ascetic and transformative mysticism, noting that while other scholars have described the treatise as a vulgar and popularized version of bridal mysticism, it does closely follow mystical experiences. She suggests that the breaking of the soul and subsequent erotic frolicking are a "two-phase process … in which spiritual marriage structurally absorbs the discourses of secular marriage and love. The mystical threefold schema of *via purgativa, via illuminativa,* and *via unitiva* is reduced to a two-stage relationship which parallels the discourse of secular and spiritual marriage…" Here, Keller suggests that there is a second parallel between marriage as a means of discipline without eroticism and erotic love as the union of two equal souls. Keller's theory that *CMS* uses a secular idea of marriage presupposes that this concept of marriage—submissive wife, dominant husband—developed from secular literature, but that *CMS* switches to biblical language as it moves into the spiritual marriage sequence by taking on the language and imagery of the *Song of Songs*. However, there are problems with this argument, not the least of which is that even the earlier chapters, featuring punishment, are pictorially depicted in pleasure gardens and palaces.[14] Moreover, the relationship is not a two-phase one, but instead unfolds around four pivotal decisions the soul makes: the first to marry Christ (ch. 1), the second to submit fully to his discipline (ch. 9) the third to passively await his love rather than pursuing him (ch. 15 and 16), and the fourth to keep her relationship with Christus a personal secret (ch. 20). These decisions take place over the course of three days, allegorically symbolizing Christ's death and resurrection, and there is a simple solution to the new tone in Jesus' relationship with the Soul. The clues to this interpretation lie in the soul's lessons in

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[13] Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 38.

[14] Illustrated scenes including the flogging, blinding, and crucifixion are set on grassy heaths and the interior spaces have the features of a palace, including gothic-style thrones. I have provided copies of many in appendix 9.2 Banz describes grassy background with trees and flowers for most of the sequences, and detail aristocratic clothing, gothic thrones and crowns, and even points out that the plates and goblets shown are in keeping with a nobleman's home. Ibid., 222-249.

submission and obedience: she first engages in a pact with Christus, then must learn to obey and accept him, before becoming eligible for a blissful and transformative marriage. The pattern of wooing, discipline, pursuit, and final union in *CMS* is also found in the medieval exegetic tradition of the *Song of Songs*, a tradition based in the prophetic marriage model of the Hebrew Bible.

Both Keller and Banz acknowledge that *CMS* does not easily lend itself to a tripartite mystical process and neither can fully account for the text's extreme violence. I agree that *Christus und die minnende Seele* describes mystical experiences and ascetic practices and incorporates the imagery of both the *Song of Songs* and secular courtly romance, but it also uses violent imagery to teach that the Soul must submit to Christ's harsh discipline before she can experience the love of a spiritual marriage. This combination of violence and submission accurately mimics both the reported experiences of women mystics and the cycle of violence and forgiveness found in prophetic marriages.

While the experiences recorded by women mystics drew upon the language and themes of the *Song of Songs*, medieval exegetic understanding of both this book and of metaphoric marriage in a wider context was dependent upon the descriptions of metaphoric marriages between God and Israel in Old Testament prophetic books.[15] In these passages the pattern of love and marriage is not a straightforward wooing, betrothal, and union. Rather, God first selects his beloved, and they share a period of happiness before the wife strays, falling into sins and betrayals in a series of actions and responses that describe the political situation of Israel through metaphoric language. God chastises his wife through symbolic acts of violence that draw upon ancient near eastern divorce traditions, punishing but also reminding her of the correct behavior. When the bride is broken and repentant, God takes her back into his embrace, and only at this point does final union occur.[16] In mystical texts, the process of violence and discipline may

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[15] Ann W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 25-30.

[16] For a detailed discussion of the symbolism, significance, and especially the influence of ancient near eastern customs upon this metaphoric language see R. Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1999); Gerlinde Baumann, *Love and Violence: Marriage as Metaphor for the Relationship between YHWH and Israel in the Prophetic Books* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003).

appear as sickness, longing or pining for the beloved accompanied by a rejection of the female soul's advances, physical displays of weeping or pain, or the physical suffering of Christ's passion. In *CMS* the pattern is more explicit: Christ has chosen the soul for his bride, and her worldliness—a sort of adulterous betrayal—must be eradicated through symbolic acts of violence.[17] In *CMS* the Bridegroom resumes his Old Testament role as husband who must chastise and train his willful wife. By denying their demands for companionship, enforcing fasts and flagellations, and withdrawing his customary favors, God tames his brides. In the biblical model, God's relationship with Israel began in her early youth and fell into a state of distrust and violence that lasted until her old age. Only when the bride is fully repentant and willing to obey her spouse in all matters does she earn forgiveness, reconciliation, and union. These relationship stages are characteristic of both Old Testament prophetic marriage metaphors and medieval mystical marriage metaphors.

Translated onto medieval bridal mysticism, faithful love and turning away from foreign idols becomes casting aside the world in favor of love and devotion to the divine, while teaching submission and obedience through violence and shame remain constant. Feminist biblical scholar Richtsje Abma identifies three aspects that make Israel God's special love: extensiveness of time, intimacy, and pleasure. [18] These three aspects endure in medieval mystical texts, including *CMS*. Male and female mystics also have extensive relationships with God that last the majority of their lives, exhibit a deep intimacy and awareness between the lovers, and share experiences which elicit pleasure both for God and his bride.[19]

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[17] These violent acts symbolize religious practices and values, such as charity, abstention from rich food and clothing, contemplation, and penance.

[18] "What is distinct in God's love for Israel? I see three keywords: extensiveness in time, intimacy and pleasure. In the first place, the love of Yhwh as it is implicitly or explicitly present in Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3 and Isaiah 54, is part of a dynamic relationship with Israel... In the second place, love means intimacy. There is no shade of sexuality or procreation in the relationship with Yhwh, in that sense clear boundaries have been set, but there is intimacy between Yhwh and Israel. Yhwh "knows" what Israel experiences, is aware of her plight and acts on her behalf. (Isa. 54:4-8) ... Israel is the unique and irreplaceable partner of God and God is the unique and irreplaceable partner of Israel. The relationship between God and Israel is thus a special and intimate form of partnership in which the on for the other is special and incomparable. In the third place, God's love for Israel implies that he takes pleasure in the people and in their being with him" Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)*, 258.

[19] In the Hebrew bible, God also is wounded by his bride's adultery, and in turn causes her deep suffering and shame, an aspect of the Old Testament metaphor that is not always present in medieval mystical texts. The concept of a wounding

In both mystical and prophetic marriage metaphors, union with God can only occur after the bride repents and transforms. The God of Israel and Christus in *CMS* both violently punishes their brides to teach obedience and fidelity.

The power-issues, violence, and voyeurism in these biblical passages have inspired readings which use the language of pornography, while recent feminist studies of women's mystical experiences also use the same imagery.[20] Beginning with a definition of pornography introduced to Old Testament criticism by Setel, recent feminist biblical scholarship focuses on aspects of shaming and violence in these marriage passages. Setel's definition highlights three aspects of pornography, all of which are present in the biblical passages: "a) female sexuality is depicted as negative in relation to a positive or neutral male standard; b) women are degraded and publicly humiliated; c) female sexuality is portrayed as an object of male possession and control."[21] Each of these characteristics is also present in medieval bridal literature, though the public humiliation and degradation is not always enacted. This prophetic marriage sequence was built into medieval exegesis of the *Song of Songs*, where the bride's blackness, suffering, and separation were understood as references to her sinful past—she was both Solomon's bride and Israel in exile. In *CMS*, violent discipline transforms the willful soul into Christ's perfect bride. This treatise's depiction of gender and power and its graphic treatment of the Soul's body create a

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bride in medieval mystical treatises seems to be largely based upon the bride of the Song of Songs, who ravishes her lover in 4:9. "Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain from thy neck." This verse was visually presented as a physical wounding, most dramatically in the *Rothschild Canticles*, where the bride spears her bridegroom, a naked and bleeding Christ. For a discussion of the bride wounding her divine lover see Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 248-9.

[20]In *Sensible Ecstacy*, Amy Hollywood uses film theory and the imagery of snuff films to build a complex narrative of violence and fascination that explains the torment of women mystics, while Vanandabeele builds a compelling argument that anyone who reads Hadewijch's intimate love poetry is participating in a voyeuristic pornographic exercise, and that when the godhead caresses her wounds, the reader is sharing an intimate and violent moment. Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Bart Vandenabeele, "Strelend wonden helen: over Hadewijch, erotiek en esthetiek," *Uil van Minerva (De): Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis en Wijsbegeerte* 13, no. 2 (1996-7).

[21] Abma, *Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)*, 27. Abma summarizes Setel's arguments and incorporates later feminist additions here. See especially T. D. Setel, "Prophets and Pornography: Female Sexual Imagery in Hosea," in *Feminist Interpretations of the Bible*, ed. L. M. Russel (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 87.

dynamic of female shaming and male control. The soul's mistreatment ends when she realizes that she exists only to please and gratify her male lover—the language of pornography, in the feminist critical sense, is as useful here as it is for biblical scholars.

In mystical love poetry, even when the relationship between Christ and the Soul is one of ecstatic bliss, there is always a power-dynamic between bride and bridegroom. The divine bridegroom seeks out and chooses his spouse. If she is unworthy, he does not care, as Christ reassures Margery Kempe, but the bride may only say yes, whether enthusiastically, reluctantly, or after coaxing.[22] When the bride seeks her beloved, he may reject her advances, but should the bridegroom seek out the female soul, she is unable to refuse his attention. He overwhelms her body and mind with his presence, shattering her will and identity. In these relationships the bride is always passive while the divine bridegroom instigates and controls each aspect of courtship and union, granting rewards and punishments in response to the actions of the female soul. In even the least erotic mystical writing, the soul's helplessness before God is a constant undercurrent.

CMS also has a pornographic aspect which emphasizes power-dynamics and the portrayal of gender. Any attempt to accurately summarize the plot gives the impression of a sadomasochistic relationship.[23] Though the couple's kisses and embraces are minimally illustrated, the scenes where Jesus strips, beats, starves, and mentally dominates the soul provide the reader with an elaborate voyeuristic experience. Both the poem and the manuscripts' illustrations emphasize the soul's violent treatment, her

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[22] For a discussion of the selection of a bride and her responses, see Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 138-148.

[23] I bring pornography into this discussion for two reasons, the first theoretical, the second practical. The ideas of shame, power, gratification, and voyeurism, as well as the response of the reader to a public female body in *CMS* can usefully be considered through feminist responses to pornography. The more practical reason for this discussion, however, is that when presenting this material to non-medievalists, one of the first questions is "is this S&M porn for monks?" and while I always encourage a context-oriented reading of medieval sources, there is clearly a need to explain that while *CMS* is not in fact medieval pornography, the modern question derives from our own expectations about nudity, gender, and violence. Thus, our modern assumption that this text is pornographic requires at least a brief analysis of pornography and gender-relations. We make these associations because *CMS* looks like sadomasochistic pornography from a modern perspective—that is, because the text is about violent physical love between one dominant and one submissive partner. Even though *CMS* was not written as pornography, modern preconceptions *about* pornography and sadomasochism are similar to certain medieval understandings about divine love and spiritual discipline.

nudity, and her absolute domination by Christus. In the image which accompanies chapter IV, for instance, the Soul is stripped to the waist, her hands held together in a pose which evokes the dual-meaning of prayer (to beg/plead), her mussed blonde hair recalling the ultimate penitent woman, Mary Magdalene. At her side, Christ stands over her brandishing what appears to be a palm branch in one hand, while pointing didactically towards the penitent Soul. [24] The pastoral background may remind the reader that the Soul is the bride from the *Song of Songs,* here suffering terribly in pursuit of her love. In a sixteenth-century version of this scene, the Soul is both topless and bound, and Christus holds the rope that forms her bond.[25] In both images, the soul's hair is down and loose, and her breasts are half-covered by hands held in a penitent pose, while Jesus uses physical violence to teach spiritual lessons. From context, this imagery refers to the passion sequence—the scourging—and the scene contains several didactic points—penitent position, flagellation, Christus' pointed finger, the Soul's calm face. However, taken out of context, it might also be described as "man whips half-naked woman in pleasure garden," highlighting the soul's powerlessness and the easy transformation from viewer to voyeur. For modern readers, these scenes seem scandalous unless the social and theological context the text belonged to are taken into account.

While *CMS* displays the female body in ways evocative of modern pornography, the text is pious and didactic, and, in comparison to other late medieval mystical texts, it is rarely erotic. The modern response to violence and nudity, as well as to intimate scenes between Christus and a young woman, reflect our own culture and contemporary Christology. We assume nudity is erotic, or, failing that, shameful, and we read images that include whips and naked torsos as alternately erotic or abusive. This

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[24] Banz's description of the illustration to Chapter 4 describes the flail as a bundle of birch branches, and suggests that the Soul is standing. He also mentions that in at least one manuscript, the soul is clothed in this scene. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 227.

[25] This "minnebund" or bond of love is a recurring visual image in *CMS* and associated texts, including *Kreutztragende mine*. For less than satisfactory art historical treatment of the imagery, see Ilse E. Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2001); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books ; MIT Press, 1998).

modern response explains Keller's characterization of *CMS* as radical and bizarre, even though other chapters of her own book *My Secret is Mine* discuss scenes of mystical violence and domination and their cognates in biblical literature. As a caution then, the most that can be garnered from reading *CMS* as pornographic or through the lens of feminist interpretations of pornography, is the realization that *CMS* has an explicit power hierarchy, with Jesus dominating the soul through physical and mental violence, and that the reader is placed in a voyeuristic position, watching intimate scenes play out between two figures who represent stereotypical gender roles. We as modern readers must repress our instinctive response to such scenes and instead strive to interpret the more graphic moments in *CMS* through a late-medieval theological lens.[26]

In *CMS,* the soul first must learn to obey. Once she has completely abandoned her own will and desire, she finally succeeds in marrying Jesus. The presentation of love, however, is unusual. Although the soul does technically give consent, there is no sense that she has come to Christus of her own free will. Even the Soul's new ardor is inauthentic—she was drugged and made mad with passion after drinking a love-potion of sacramental wine. The love-relationship described in *CMS* can be seen as following a simple biblical structure: the soul and Christ are in a close relationship (prior to ch. 1), but the soul strays by considering worldly marriage. This leads to a humiliating period of chastisement (ch. 2-9). When the soul is broken and penitent, (ch. 9) Christ begins her rehabilitation and reconciliation with a healing love potion (ch. 10). Now the text transitions into the imagery of the *Song of Songs,* the natural continuation of prophetic marriage scenes in medieval exegesis.[27] Christ and the Soul renew their love relationship with greater passion, as the soul earns Christ's love by correcting each of her earlier mistakes (ch. 10-22). When her transformation is complete, they are wed in blissful union (ch. 23-4). In *CMS,*

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[26] There is much more to this, of course. Barthes' ideas about the *punctum* and the *studium,* especially about wounding images and the viewer's helplessness before a pornographic image, may also be relevant here. The most important thing to keep in mind, however, is that the medieval reader would not have responded to these images (painted and written) the same way we do today. Displaying humiliated female bodies probably evoked the martyrdom of saints and Christ's own death, rather than scenes of sexual gratification/degradation.

[27] Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages*; Anne E. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: the Song of songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990).

ascetic practices, nakedness, penitence, shame, domination, and God's love, are described through the sexually charged relationship between a God-man and an everywoman in scenes which emphasizes the importance of submitting to God's absolute power.

To summarize, in every scene of *CMS,* Christus plays a disciplining master who teaches the Soul a new lesson in submissive love. In *CMS*, Christus' relationship with the soul follows the same general pattern of initial love, rejection, and blissful reconciliation in prophetic marriage sequences from the Hebrew Bible. The sequence is violent, exhibitionist, and at times erotic. Private and intimate moments between Christus and the Soul are made available for public consumption, so that readers can begin their own self-transformations.

The treatise opens with the Soul saying her prayers before bed. Though she has been in Christ's service for a long time, she is now apparently in love with a mortal and considering marrying him: this is the moment of adultery/idolatry, as the soul considers embracing the world and turning her back on the Divine. As her guardian angel looks on, she announces that should she come to rue her earthly marriage she will re-devote herself to God. In the middle of the night Christus appears at her bedside and rouses her (in some manuscripts she is naked in bed), though she is reluctant to wake up—the soul is sleepy, bleary-eyed and confused. Christus warns the soul against marriage, suggesting he would be a far more pleasant groom. The soul at last concedes that marriage to Christ would be preferable to the life of suffering and servitude that is, apparently, earthly marriage.[28] However, even as she agrees to be Christ's bride she is entirely oblivious to what she has said "yes" to. Jesus warns the soul that she will have to "take up the cross and learn to die… to enter the holy spirit's realm." which has already situated the text as a recreation of Christ's passion.[29] The Soul either does not hear or does not understand what he is

[28] This conversation borrows heavily from an anti-marriage tradition of ancient pedigree, but also has a great deal in common with the satirical piece *Teufel's Netzt,* and is clearly meant to evoke a grotesque but almost comical depiction of the horrors of worldly marriage Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 124-40; Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, "Die minnende Seele in des "Teufels Netz". Geschlechterpolemik kontrafaziert.," in *Text im Kontext: Anleitung zur Lektüre deutscher Texte der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Alexander Schwarz and Laure Ablanalp (Bern: Lang, 1997).

[29]nem das crútz uff sich und lern sterben… der wirt des hailgen gaistes rich" Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 267.

saying, and replies "Oh lord, let me be, I want to sleep a while longer."[30] Christ agrees, but his goodnight words are ominous: "So sleep… but I shall not forget you and I shall wake you up myself."[31] These words are crucial, marking the first transition in the text: the Soul, when she awakens, will begin spiritual training in anticipation of taking up the cross.

The next morning, far too early for the Soul's taste, Christ appears at her bedside and begins by giving her a disfiguring illness.[32] She is then forced to fast and complains that she will die of hunger. Christus then beats her thoroughly, preparing her body for him to live in it. This chastisement is insufficient, and he soon blinds and lames her to tame or domesticate her, to *force* her to look inwards and give up worldly distractions. As Jesus says, "therefore I must blind you. It is better to enter heaven blind than fall into hell with two open eyes."[33] Despite the Soul's protests, Christus insists that the blinding is for her own good, going on to complain about how, when she is at church, she looks about constantly and her distraction keeps him from drawing close. According to Christus, "you should stop

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[30] „Oh herr, ich mag das wol gelaßen; Ich müß ain wile schlaffen"

[31] So Schlaff und laß dir wol sin; Ich lon dich nit vergessen min, Won ich wil selber din weker sin Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 267.

[32] While the gift of sickness is a common theme in late medieval mystical and ascetical treatises, it also echoes the punishment of Jerusalem in Jeremiah : [**6**] For thus says the LORD of hosts:
"Hew down her trees;
cast up a siege mound against Jerusalem.
This is the city which must be punished;
there is nothing but oppression within her.
[**7**] As a well keeps its water fresh,
so she keeps fresh her wickedness;
violence and destruction are heard within her;
sickness and wounds are ever before me.
[**8**] Be warned, O Jerusalem,
lest I be alienated from you;
lest I make you a desolation,
an uninhabited land."

[33] Darumb müß ich dich erblinden lon.
Wäger ist dir blind kumen gen himelrich,
denn mit zwain ogen in die hell pinlich. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 288.
Christus here references Matthew 18:9 ("And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire").

going to church, you now have a temple in your own heart, and I am there inside you and making your mind spiritual."[34]

After the blinding and the beating, Christus commands the soul to take her clothes off as punishment for her love of rich clothing, makeup, and the approving gaze of townsmen at church.[35] Her shaming is again punitive and educational. When Jesus strips her, she protests, complaining of the cold and deviously pointing out that she could not possibly go to church naked. His response is curt—"So don't go to church, stay home and sit in front of the oven on the stone floor."[36] Church attendance is becomes a worldly distraction from true spiritual knowledge of Christ. The Soul remains uncooperative, though Christ explains that she can serve him better at home by making herself a temple, than in Church, distracted by the world. At last, the soul exclaims "If I am going to have to go naked I would rather be hung!."[37] His retort is ominous: "That could very well happen to you …therefore don't call out too loudly."[38] And indeed, in the next chapter this disciplining process comes to its head: Jesus hangs the Soul on a gallows to experience His crucifixion—when she complains, he reminds her that she in fact asked him to hang her.[39]

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[34] „du woltest nit gern ze kilchen gon,
Du solt nu den tempel in dinem hertzen hon;
So bin ich bi dir da inne
Und machen dir clainfüg [Banz glosses as vergeistigen] din sinne
Suss loffent dir dine ogen umb und umb,
Das ich zü dir ind en tempel nit gern kumml
Wann mich ieret als kofmanschaft,
Die bi dir ist behaft."Ibid., 289.

[35] Public shaming and nudity were common themes in biblical marriage imagery. In Jeremiah, Israel is stripped naked in an allusion to punitive rape: "And if you say in your heart, `Why have these things come upon me?' it is for the greatness of your iniquity that your skirts are lifted up, and you suffer violence. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil. I myself will lift up your skirts over your face, and your shame will be seen" Jeremiah 13:22

[36] Gangist nit zü der kilchen, so belib dahaim und sitz zü dem ofen uf den stain. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 304.

[37] Sol ich darzü nakent gon – Ich wölt mich e henken lon Ibid., 305.

[38] Dag mag dir wol beschehen…darumb ruff nit ze lut Ibid.

[39] I discuss the crucifixion in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

In ch. 9, the soul is suspended between heaven and earth, and while she hangs she speaks the words that will bring to an end her physical discipline.[40] Tellingly, at this moment, not only does her torment end, but she is at last allowed to sleep— the soul has been awake since Christ woke her up far too early in the morning at the beginning of Ch. 2.[41] However, sleep here also signifies that the soul has just survived the second day. When she awakens, she will be experiencing the allegorically significant third day—something repeatedly mentioned in the text itself. Thus, the Soul's experience overlaps Christ's death and resurrection, because on the third day she ascends from death (the gallows) to attain salvation.

In these early chapters, the soul vocally resents her harsh treatment. Her cries emphasize Christ's unbending cruelty but also the Soul's inability to comprehend the reason for her suffering. Just as Israel complains, questioning her treatment in Jeremiah, the soul protests loudly, and is told that her suffering is because of her own sinfulness and impurity: "Oh Lord, you are a hard man! You want to deny me any earthly peace."[42] "I am going to die from this!"[43] "Ah God, how much more will I have to suffer?"[44] "You hit me so hard I can no longer bear it!"[45] "Oh Lord, you have done enough to me! You have already blinded and crippled me!— to which he replies "only so that you will not forget me.[46]

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[40] Wer aber hie ain crútz wil liden, der wirt dört ein grösers vermiden. Nu gang her ab, … Diß liden ich nit lenger an dir lid… schlaf fast und laß dir wol sin Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 309-10.

[41] The ability to sleep after reconciliation between the bride and Bridegroom is another theme that echoes the use of marriage in the Hebrew bible, this time marking the transition to the Soul's position as beloved, echoing Psalm 127's "for he gives to his beloved sleep," but also Mechthild's desire for sleep in vision 23 of book two, where she is roused by her beloved but responds "Let me sleep, I don't know what you are talking about." Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, 87.

[42] Oh herr, du bist ain herter man; Du wilt mir doch kain weltlich fröd lan Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 308.

[43] Ja, die wil möcht ich wil gon sterben! Ibid., 303.

[44] Ach got, wie vil sol Ich noch lidens hon? Ibid., 287.

[45] Du schlechst mich also ser, Ich mag es nit liden mer Ibid., 281.

[46] Soul: O herr, du hettist mir gnüg geton, Das du mich hast erkrummet und erblindet lon... Christus: so wiltu nun vergessen min. Ibid., 291.

In *CMS*, submitting to suffering is the first step to earning Christ's love. Only when the Soul has completely submitted to Christ's will can the pair's courtship begin, and in the next chapter the treatise moves more clearly into the patterns and images of the *Song of Songs*. After the Soul has recovered from her mock-crucifixion, Christ appears bearing a love potion he calls a drink of mercy which will stir the flames of love—a Eucharistic reference and an allusion to the love philters of courtly literature. The soul drinks Christ's potion eagerly, then complains to Christ that "Your fiery love makes me sick when I drink from your drink of grace."[47] She is drunk and acts a fool, playing hide and seek with her lover, stripping off her clothing during the pursuit. The Soul soon tries to capture Christ—he hides, and she is entirely unable to see him though he is right next to her. At last she catches him, shooting him through the heart to control him completely. But even with her prey wounded and immobilized, the Soul is in a position of powerlessness. Christ calls her a fool, pointing out that it would be impossible to possess him fully while alive. She is not deterred though, and captures her love again, binding him up. As she looks down on her captive beloved, the Soul says "no one can be my equal, all kingdoms are in my hands: I have him, who created all."[48] Christ again dismisses her claims. He is merely playing along. In the next chapter he tries to buy his freedom with a bribe of gold, but the Soul wants only Christ's eternal love, and this new development triggers the wedding sequence at last. The lesson is clear: the Soul cannot force Christ to love her, she must earn his love by submitting to his will and letting go of the world.

Christ is so pleased that the soul has finally turned away entirely from the world and focused all of her essence on pursuing his Love that he begins to fiddle—though again Soul plays the fool, dancing as if bewitched as she strips her clothes off. Finally he offers her a kiss of mystery. When their lips touch he reveals his presence in full, the moment of mystical accomplishment and union. This kiss is ecstatic

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[47] Din minnefúr mich krenket,
Wan mich din gnadentrank trinket Ibid., 312.

[48] Nieman mag wesen min gelich,
In minen henden stand alle rich:
Ich han in, der es alles geschaffen hat Ibid., 331. translation in: Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 214.

and erotic. After their lips meet, the Soul rhapsodizes for over 100 lines, describing the pleasure of the kiss, which has apparently freed her from all sorrows and suffering.[49] Here, the soul echoes the words of the *Song of Songs* and of Hadewijch, saying of the kiss "It is in a spiritual fashion, mouth to mouth (no greater pleasure has ever been known) and breast to breast (was there ever a greater pleasure?), it is heart to heart."[50] This, then, is the "kiss of his mouth" (*Song 1:2)* that Bernard of Clairvaux pondered upon so long in his first sermons on the *Song of* Songs, but it also echoes the words of Hadewijch in Letter 9 when describing union with God:

> He will teach you what he is, and with what wondrous sweetness the loved one and the Beloved dwell one in the other, and how they penetrate each other in such a way that neither of the two distinguishes himself from the other. But they abide in one another in fruition, mouth in mouth, heart in heart, body in body, and soul in soul, while one sweet divine nature flows through them both, and they are both one thing through each other, but the same time remain two different selves—yes and remain so forever.[51]

Hadewijch is, here, more erotic in describing the level of union—mouth *in* mouth—either a kiss with tongue, or two bodies so connected that they have overlapped entirely—and heart in heart, body *in* body on every level, and goes on to explain the intermingling of the two lovers as eternal.[52] However, while Hadewijch's intention is purely to describe the joy of union for her "dear child," hoping that one day the

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[49] "Allen kumber lon ich ab,
Wann ich dich, lieb, gekússet hab
An dinen rosenvarwen mund." All of my sorrows vanished when I kissed you, my love, on your rosecolored lips." Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 343.

[50] "Es ist in gaistlicher wis mund an mund
(Größer fröd ward nie kund)
Und brust an brust
(Wa ward ie größer lust?),
Es ist hertz an hertzen." Ibid., 345.

[51] Hart, in a note, suggests that the "heart in heart" refers to the Sacred Heart. Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, 66. „daer sal hi v leren wat hi es, En*de* hoe wonderleke soeteleke dat een lief i*n* dat ander woent, En*de* soe dore dat ander woent, Dat haerre en gheen hem seluen en onderkent. Mer si ghebruke*n* onderlinghe en*de* elc anderen Mont i*n* mont, en*de* herte i*n* herte, En*de* lichame i*n* lichame, En*de* ziele i*n* ziele, En*de* ene soete godlike nature doer hen beiden vloyende, En*de* si beide een dore hen seluen, En*de* al ee*n*s beide bliue*n*, Ja en*de* bliuende.

[52] While Hadewijch paints a more erotic scene, the image itself is the same as in *CMS*, a parallel that Banz missed when collecting his mystical glosses.

young woman will experience something similar, the author of *CMS* frames this luscious embrace as part of the Soul's transformation, a reward for her success in winning Christ's love, thus earning a kiss and full knowledge of his secrets.[53]

At last, the soul expresses regret not just for her sins but for her coldness and stubbornness as Christ broke her to his will. They dance together and Christ offers the Soul a crown that would be a sign of his divine touch and grace visible to the living world, but the soul declines it, saying "oh Lord, I don't want your crown, I only want you."[54] She would rather have her crown in heaven and keep her love secret from the world. This secrecy motif demonstrates the soul's suitability as bride but also is a dangerous suggestion, encouraging mystics to keep their experiences private. In the final chapter, Christus and the Soul are at last wed. The opening lines of this final chapter incorporate both the *Song of Songs* and John 15:5, a short phrase found almost word-for-word in the writing of several notable thirteenth century mystics, including Mechthild of Magdeburg and Hadewijch of Brabant (as well as minnesingers): Christ says "Beloved, you and I are joined as one, thus we two have become one." The soul responds "I have grasped everything that my heart ever desired. O Lord, you are mine, thus I am yours; this pact shall last forever."[55] This passage again restates the main theme of *CMS*, that by entirely submitting to the Beloved you gain possession of him. The relationship is cyclical, suggesting that I am yours *therefore* you are mine, a relationship enabled by the soul's willing gift of her love, self, will, and

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[53] The chapter's image caption reads „Here he will kiss her and teach her his mysteries" [Hie wil er sich Laßen kússen und sy sin haimlichait lon wissen] and Christ's only couplet in the chapter is "Your love has conquered me, thus I am going to kiss you." (or thee, if you prefer, to preserve the rhyme structure). Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 343.

[54] O herr, ich beger nit diner kron,
Ich wil dich selber han ze lon.
Ibid.

[55] Christus sprach:
Lieb, ich und du sind all ain,
Alsus wirt ains us uns zwain.
Sy spricht:
Ich han begriffen alles das,
Deß min hertz ie begeren was.
O herr, du bist min, so bin ich din.
Die trúw sol iemer stät sin Ibid., 360.

body to Christus. This union and celebration, where the soul is finally given her reward, is meant to be read as the bride's triumphant union with God after learning faithful obedience and submission to Christ. However, it might also be interpreted as Christ's success as a teacher after the soul has, through his lessons, achieved detachment from the world and dissolution of personal will and desire.

Christus' brutal violence in the first section of *CMS* fits into the biblical prophetic marriage model. After the Soul submits and renounces the world, thus vowing obedience and renewing her love for Christus, the text moves into the language and imagery of the *Song of Songs,* the reconciliatory marriage between two estranged lovers. Using this model instead of Banz's proposed reading of *CMS* as an ascetic depiction of the mystic's *via negativa / positiva /unativa* provides a theologically plausible explanation for Christus' brutality and violence. In the Hebrew Bible, the God of Israel truly loves his bride, but her adultery forces him to punish her, to teach important lessons about obedience and faithfulness. In *CMS*, Jesus truly loves the Soul, but her adultery (in this case, her love of the world and worldly things) forces him to teach her how a bride of Christ/God should behave. In both contexts, the lessons are physically brutal and intentionally shaming and degrading, because the most important characteristic of God's bride is faithful obedience—the same chastity and obedience that women religious swear to keep. However, when the bride has learned, repented, and vowed to love and obey her beloved, the divine spouse takes her in his arms, heals her wounds, and the pair enter a blissful union. In *CMS*, the Soul's education occurs over two phases. In the first, she must renounce the world—her current adultery—in the second she must realize that she can never control or possess Christus.

~ 4.3 ~

Passion Mysticism and Bridal Mysticism

Even reading Christ's portrayal in *CMS* as based in God's chastisement of the adulterous Israel, as I did in the previous section, does not fully account for the hanging in chapter nine. Though this scene teaches submission and obedience to the divine Bridegroom, it is also explicitly a type of medieval passion mysticism, where Christians, through devotion to and fixation on Christ's passion, would step into the scene themselves and experience His suffering. In this final section, I want to look more closely at the hanging in chapter nine, and explore what a medieval audience would have understood when they saw or imagined the soul dangling from the gallows. Though medieval mystics and theologians often spoke of imitating Christ in all things, including the crucifixion, and crucifixion scenes are common, the soul is usually eager and willing.[56] In *CMS* the soul does technically ask to be crucified, but she is essentially tricked—she says she would *rather* be hanged than go naked, but she does not in fact ask to be hung. In *CMS,* the crucifixion is not a reward but instead a conversion experience. The soul at last remembers that Christus only wants to help her, and that she should submit obediently to his plans. Her realization is concisely expressed in a sistertext, *Kreutztragende Minne,* where the soul, as she goes to her cross, says "Oh Lord, you are so hard on me and yet you are so lovingly tender."[57]

Though the violent images which accompany *CMS* are all fascinating, the imagination is drawn especially to the depiction of Jesus crucifying or hanging the Soul at the opening of Book 9. This chapter miniature, which shows greater variation than any other image amongst the extant witnesses, depicts

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[56] In his mystical gloss to ch. 9, Banz provides numerous citationsbut they are generally not referring to mock crucifixions. One possible exception is his reference to Elsbeth von Regenhofen, who writes "herr, erhenck mich mit minn und begird" --Lord hang me with love and desire/lust. Banz preferences his suggestions by writing that the female author means the hanging in the sense of "being hung by the throat by love" [anhangen an dem holtz der Liebe] and adds that another possible reading would be that this seen is about desertion [verlassenheit] and desolation [trostlosigkeit], the desolation that Christ felt on the Cross, transposed onto the soul through mystical experience. Ibid., 76.

[57] Banz 254 "o herre, du bist mir so hart, und bist doch gar minneclich zart."

Jesus and the Soul in a complete reversal of roles—it is the woman who dangles, suspended a moment before death, while Christ stands to the side, sometimes pointing, sometimes holding her noose, but never weeping for her torment. The scene, which inverts the traditional positioning of the crucifixion, where Christ is splayed on the cross, weeping women to one side, also perverts Jesus' salvific role. Though the crucifixion is still transformational, enabling the soul's salvation, this salvation is no longer affected through Christ's helpless suffering. He is now the one performing violence, and it is his female companion who is suspended, helpless, whether from cross or gallows. This scene clearly caused discomfort to medieval audiences.[58] Katharina Tucher glosses over this scene in vision 8, where she clearly has internalized elements of *CMS,* stepping into the imagery and becoming the soul. Each of the extant manuscripts, as well as the surviving woodcuts and the illustration in the incunabulum, take a different approach to the moment. In some, the soul is hanging from a gallows, with Jesus either holding the rope-end of the noose or pointing to the dangling woman. In the only complete woodcut, the soul is *tied* onto a cross, while according to Banz's description of the image in Woflgang Schenck's incunabulum, the soul actually is crucified, naked.[59] Yet despite these variations, the image is included in every manuscript—even in the D manuscript, where several images have been cut out, the crucifixion/hanging remains.[60] Clearly, this difficult moment cannot be left out or ignored. It is absolutely crucial to the text's

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[58] While other scenes of violence also show striking variations in the surviving witnesses, the power dynamic and symbolism is generally unaltered. For instance, the blinding scene is more or less violent—in one of the picture-cycle woodcuts the soul is not blinded, in a manuscript she is blindfolded, while other manuscripts show her eyesockets gushing blood—but the biblical reference and allegorical meaning remain unchanged. However, the difference between crucifixion and hanging is significant to the soul's progression. If she is crucified, she has become Christ, but the text itself is explicit—she is *not yet crucified*—making the artists' depictions all the more significant. Their conscious decisions to alter the depiction or faithfully represent the ambiguous "hanging" can have strong implications on the scene's interpretation, as I shall demonstrate in this section.

[59] Being tied to a cross evokes the imagery and iconography of the bearded crucified female saint Wilgefortis/Kümmernis, though the connection between *CMS* and Wilgefortis is not yet fully established. For a dissatisfying discussion artistic depictions of crucified women in medieval Europe, see Friesen, *The Female Crucifix: Images of St. Wilgefortis since the Middle Ages.* Another example of a crucified woman is St. Julia of Corsica. I have included a Van Dijk painting of St. Julia for comparison. However, in both the Wilgefortis and Julia traditions, the women are crucified by pagan persecutors. Wilgefortis/Kümmernis' own father orders her crucified as punishment for miraculously growing a beard and refusing to marry the pagan king of Portugal.

[60] Banz describes in detail each of the chapter images, giving all known deviations from/additions to the picture-cycle. He notes that manuscript D (the Donau codex) is missing 7 pictures "D hat durch Ausschnitt die B. 4 und 16-20

development, despite the discomfort it seems to have caused for artists and viewers. On the cross, the Soul makes a profound spiritual breakthrough, realizing at last that the first step towards the bridal crown is submitting her will entirely to Christ. Furthermore, this crucifixion mirrors late medieval passion devotion. The desire to be crucified, to nail yourself onto the Cross with Jesus, was neither bizarre nor uncommon.[61] Though Banz omitted the hanging from his appendix of miniatures and could not account for the image ("what is supposed to be understood from "hanging" is not entirely clear") he too acknowledged the structural importance of the crucifixion sequence.[62] Keller realizes that this mock-crucifixion is transformative and about submission. She writes that the scene shows the soul's "unwillingness to suffer but also reflects on the violence of the husband…. The literal relinquishing of the world culminates in the gallows on which the divine bridegroom hangs his bride…a hanging which models itself on the act of the Crucifixion…" Keller adds that "the meaning of this allegory can be determined so simply that it is almost direct: the bride should be raised above the earthly: this will perfect her love for her divine husband."[63] According to Keller's reading then, the crucifixion/hanging is the pinnacle of Christus' cruelty as well as the soul's crucial transformation. Keller understands that the gallows-scene is the culmination of the soul's detachment from the world (Gelassenheit), and of Christ's brutality, but her interpretation of the allegory is, in my opinion, entirely off base. This scene does not teach that the bride should be raised above the earth to perfect her love (thus making the purpose of the hanging literally to lift her feet from the ground) but instead, that she must submit entirely to Christ's discipline before becoming worthy to receive his love. Keller goes on to point out that the text "documents the wife's training" in submissive love by achieving "uniformity with the will of her

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verloren [D has lost picture 4 and 16-20 because someone cut them out]" I base this translation on Winston-Allen's discussion of cutout pictures and glued in pictures in convent books at Kalamazoo, 2006 Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 223-249.

[61] "He took the second discipline when Christ had come to the place of the crucifixion and was being nailed to the cross. He would nail himself to Christ, never to leave him." Seuse, *Henry Suso: the Exemplar, with two German sermons*, 89.

[62] was unter dem "hängen" zu verstehen sei, wird nicht erklärt Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 38.

[63] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 209-10.

husband" and realizes that only this submission of will leads to the Soul's release, but remains unwilling to explore the scene further.[64] That so many scholars (and the one mystic known to have read *CMS*) have avoided, ignored, or downplayed this crucifixion image indicates just how problematic this pivotal moment in the text is. Despite arguments presented by Banz, Ruh, Hamburger, and others, the single most striking characteristic of *CMS* is not its depiction of love between *Christus* and the Soul—ending in a joyful union—but instead Christus' violent and transformative discipline in the first nine chapters of the poem. Both Banz and Keller have offered possible explanations for the rhetorical and theological function of violence and redemptive love in this treatise, though only Keller was willing to publish the image itself. Neither, however, can fully account for Christ's brutality or provide a satisfactory reading of the crucifixion sequence. Both scholars have tried to explain away the early violence, focusing on later scenes of love and union—scenes which, I have argued, are just as unbalanced in their power dynamic as the opening chapters.

In *CMS* the soul has opened herself up to be crucified by claiming that she would rather be hung up on the cross than go naked. When Jesus then hangs her on the gallows, she protests loudly, pleading for help, but he reminds her that she in fact asked to be hung: "I heard you well, I am doing to you now what I should. You say you want to be left to hang yourself, so that you can continue to wear evil clothing. You must be made my martyr"[65] Christ qualifies the type of martyrdom and reprimands the soul for complaining by describing her position as not-quite crucified—supporting the artistic depiction of hanging from a gallows or cross by rope rather than Schenck's naked crucifixion. Christus says: "Your hand and foot are not wounded and you are still healthy in your life. Your arms are not stretched out,

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[64] In a footnote, Keller expands on her reading, suggesting that the scene depicts atonement and meditation on the passion, but she focuses on Christ's brutality rather than the soul's submission, and does not consider how readers might have used or responded to the text. Ibid., 210.

[65] ich hör dich wol;
Ich tün doch nu, das ich sol.
Du spracht, du weltist dich e henken lon,
E das du in bösem gewand weltist gon.
Du müst mir min marter gelten,
Und das tu nit selten!Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 308. (978-82)

and you are not properly hung on the cross. The crown and the three nails are not yet properly driven into you, and the blood that ran from loving wounds, are not calling out yet. I shall hang the wounds and signs of my crucifixion on you and you will be my little martyr."[66] The imagery here clearly borrows from Christ's own crucifixion, though the Soul herself is not in fact with Jesus on the Cross. Instead, her situation is a faint imitation of Christ's sacrifice and martyrdom. Because she is still sinful, the Soul is not a perfect sacrifice, and, instead of suffering as atonement, the crucifixion/hanging becomes a punitive and transformational education through violence. Christus hangs the Soul to teach her the true meaning of submissive and silent suffering.

When suspended above the ground by her lord and lover, the soul is entirely reluctant, she protests her situation, helplessly swinging between heaven and earth, suspended from the gallows, neither living nor dead. Even though she asked to be hung—and Jesus reminds her of this—she cannot find her way down or enjoy the experience. The discovery is entirely accidental. She pleads frantically for her release, saying:

> "Oh lord, I can't help but wonder that hanging hurts so much. I shall think no longer of myself. I want to live for a day on the earth, and *then* I shall pledge myself as your martyr and will think about you all the time: So don't leave me hanging on this gallows any longer. Oh Lord, what you want, that is what I also want. Loosen me from this high gallows, where I have been for such a very long time. I shall thank you eternally and I shall tell everyone in the world what good you have done for me. I shall praise you so widely that everyone will know to thank you for your martyrdom and your suffering, you can be sure of this."[67]

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[66] Wie vertrúst dich ir so bald!
Du bist doch an götlicher minn noch kalt.
Dir sind doch hend und füß nit wund,
Und bist noch an dem lib gesund.
Dir sind din arm noch nit zerspannen,
Und bist noch an dem crútz nit recht erhangen.
Die kron und die nagel dry
Wonent dir nit recht by,
Und das blüt, das von minen wunden ran,
Gerüftest noch nie recht an.
Deß wil ich dich hie hangen lon,
Untz dir min marter ain clain werd kunt geton Ibid., 308-9. (lines 983-93)

[67] O herr, ich wond nit, das hangen tat so we.
Ich wil es gedenken niemer me.

Here, as she tries to negotiate her release, the soul inadvertently speaks the magic words—*oh lord, I want what you want*. She has lost her own individuality, her own desire. She is now willing to overlap and mingle with the divine, repressing her own needs to serve and follow Christus. The soul swears that she will praise Christus and serve as a faithful apostle, evangelizing the world if she is just taken down from the cross, which raises an interesting problem—how can a woman speak Jesus' praises to the wide world? Only through the written text of a mystic can such a thing be accomplished, though *CMS* openly discourages speaking about mystical experiences in other passages. In this transformative moment, however, the soul is still negotiating for her salvation and release. The reader's lesson then, is not only about proper female behavior (submission to husband), but also about mystical attitude—to achieve salvation and mystical transformation, one must first submit to Christ's will. Though her ploy is not immediately effective, or even necessarily a conscious attempt to win freedom, the Soul's first step towards submitting to Jesus' will initiates a crucial spiritual transformation which will culminate in her marriage to the Divine.

Jesus is not inclined to grant her request for release immediately, although the soul has finally submitted to his will. In an apparent aside, he says "She must therefore suffer as quietly and silently as I did, that will easily help her, I take her suffering onto myself that way."[68] He adds, "But whoever wants to suffer on a cross will evade a greater suffering. Now go from here… I shall not have you suffer more

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Die wil ich ain tag uff erd leben,
So wil ich diner marter pflegen
und wil an si iemer me gedenken:
won al disen galgen lon ich mich nit me henken.
Oh herr, was du wilt, das wil ich och.
Lös mich von disem galgen hoch,
won zit und wil ist mir ze lang.
Ich wil dir iemer sagen dank;
und was du mir guetes hast geton,
das wil ich menglich wissen lon.
Ich wil machen din lob so brait,
Das dir aller menglich dank sait,
Der marter und dem liden din;
Deß solt du von mir sicher sin. Ibid., 309.

[68] Si müßent darumb liden Wie still ich darzü schwigen, Das in mülich gehelfen kan, Ich neme denn mich ir selber an. Ibid., 310.

than what I have already given to you…sleep soundly and let yourself be well I shall not forget you and I myself will wake you."[69] These last words of course are a repetition of the closing from chapter one, when the soul has acquiesced to marrying Jesus and is at last allowed to go to sleep. If the soul obeys and goes to sleep, this will mark the end of her second day—as I mentioned in the previous section, the soul's courtship and marriage all take place on the allegorically symbolic *third day*, representing, presumably, Christ's resurrection and the Soul's transformation. However, in these few lines Christus also introduces another important thematic explanation to the text—the soul was crucified to avoid a "greater suffering," and in this context, then, the hanging must be understood as penitential and ascetically transformative. The hanging, a mock-crucifixion, becomes the Soul's own personal act of atonement, compensating for her years of worldly sinfulness. When she submits at last to Christ's will, the broken and tamed spirit is newly purged and clean. The stripping of clothing in the next chapter, making her naked, probably symbolizes the Soul's pure rebirth into a sinless nature.

After hearing Christ's words, and possibly having been taken down from the gallows, the soul finally remembers that he has promised to protect her:

> "Oh lord, I had it well from you that you would help me, when I was afraid that my time would be useless and that my death would be a victory for evil. So I said lord I want to be your servant; so [now] I am always worried when I am asleep because I am afraid I shall sleep right through matins and it would be better for me if someone hit me with a piece of wood. When you have suffered such great pain through my actions then I shall be forever by your side. If I should fail to thank you, it would be better for me, if I were buried right now."[70]

The meaning of this passage is ambiguous in several places, and with slightly different translation choices, can yield very subversive possible readings. Here, the soul *seems* to be thanking Christ for his sacrifice on the cross, but her refusal to sleep shows that she is not yet fully tamed. The phrase "wann du

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[69]"Nu gang her ab, won es ist zit Dis liden ich nit lenger an dir lid....Schlaf fast und lass dir wol sin: ich lon dich nit vergessen min, Wann ich wil selber din weker sin." Ibid., 310-11.

[70] „O herr, das han ich gern von dir, Das du wilt helffen mir, won ich fürcht, das zit gang mir unnutzlich da hin; das wär vast ain boser gewin. Sid ich, lieb, din diener bin worden, so schlaff ich allweg mit sorgen, wann ich fürcht, ich verschlaff die rechten mettizit. Besser wär mir, man schlüg mich mit ainem schit.Wann du dürch mich gelitten hast so große pin, das ich eweclich bi dir möcht gesin. Sölt ich dir des nit dank sagen, Wäger wär mir, ich wär ietz vergraben." Ibid., 311.

dürch mich gelitten hast so große pin" may show the soul expressing genuine thanks for Christ's sacrifice on the cross (because you have suffered so much on my account), but could also be understood as a threat, foreshadowing the Soul's attacks on Christus in subsequent chapters. The second reading seems more likely for structural reasons. At the end of ch. 1, Christus foreshadows the soul's violent mistreatment by warning her that she must take up the cross and die, becoming his martyr. The command to sleep, and the promise that Christus himself will wake the soul, mark a transition from day 1 to day 2. This same pattern emerges at the end of ch. 9, where the Soul is again commanded to sleep, and the surrounding lines may allude to what will happen to the soul when she again awakens. Furthermore, the Soul is revealing her secret disobedience—though her fear of sleeping through matins might be read as a chiasmus, suggesting that it would be dreadful to enrage Christus, the soul has previously used liturgical obligations to try to justify her disobedience. I choose to translate the "wann du dürch mich gelitten hast so große pin" as a threat and promise of future violence in subsequent chapters (where she attempts to control *him* and break *him to her will* by inflicting pain, thus forcing him to keep her close for all eternity), rather than a heartfelt expression of thanks for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. My reading is guided by the soul's attempt to escape the command to sleep (she immediately rejects his command to sleep by expressing her fear of sleeping through matins, using a devotional obligation as a ploy to disobey, as she previously did when trying to claim she needed her clothes to attend church in ch. 6.), and the pattern of foreshadowing established in ch. 1. I admit that „wann du dürch mich gelitten hast" could be a passion reference, but in the broader context of the text and its themes of subversion and violence—as well as the soul's apparent rebelliousness—I think this is less likely. The ambiguous nature of this passage would thus allow *CMS* to seem doctrinally sound while still expressing its subversive themes of violence, obedience, dissolution of self, and secrecy.

Whether these lines are subversive, foreshadowing violence, or grateful, with the soul expressing genuine thanks for her harsh treatment and salvation, the end of ch. 9 marks a clear break in *CMS'S* storyline. After Christus reassures her of his love and her salvation, the Soul again falls into a restful

sleep, bringing to an end the symbolic second day of her education. In the closing lines of this chapter, Christus comforts her, saying "My death is truly your escort, when you hail me with thanks. I shall let you relish these words and I shall help you gladly overcome all sorrows that the world has brought upon you, and the devil's guile that is always alert and will overcome my servant and find her in evil."[71] The closing words of chapter nine, like the end of chapter one, foreshadow the next phase of the soul's transformation. Just as she was warned she would have to become a martyr in chapter one, the soul now must learn to overcome the devil's trickery, and this again will be done with Christus' help. From previous experiences, the reader may assume or suspect that the soul will protest and resist his help, which, of course, she does, before finally learning the full meaning of obedient submission.

What little evidence survives of how *CMS* was read and used indicates that this text was recognized as a devotional piece. As I shall show in the next chapter, women (and men) read, copied, and meditated over this text in combination with other related devotional works, especially Seuse's *Exemplar*. The lessons Jesus teaches the Soul in *CMS* thus must also be recognized as lessons each reader would teach herself and implement in her own life. Katharina Tucher describes a series of events that closely parallel aspects of *CMS*. In the eighth entry of her confessions, she writes: "Then he hides himself and I search for him. He is sitting there but I cannot see him. When I finally find him, I shall say: 'Oh my handsome love, love me too! Stop hiding from me!' And then he will hang me up and leave me dangling"[72] Yet in Katharina's vision, the ascetic aspects of the story of *Christus und die minnende Seele* are entirely absent. Her presentation of these characteristic sequences is preceded by a passage which quite emphatically invokes the *Song of Songs*, even comparing the Soul's experiences to those of the bride of

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[71] Min tod ist wol an gelait an dir, wann du sin dank sest mir. Dess wil ich lassen geniessen dich und wil dir helffen frolich úberwinden alles laid, das die welt inne trait., und des tiefels listekait, die ze allen ziten ist berait, wie er min diener uberiwnde und sy an dem bösen finde."

[72] So verpirgt er sich vnd ich svch in. Daz sit er wol, vnd ich sih in niht. Wen ich in wieder fint, so wirt ich fro vnd sprich: „O mein schons lieb, peleib pei mir! Schaid dich niht wan mir!" So heht er mich den avf vnd lest mich hangen. Dez spils, dez kossen, dez lieplichen redens in frevntlicher gegenbvrtigkait, daz vber trift alle irdische lieb, frevd diesser werlt!" Katharina Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, ed. Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998).

Solomon. Katharina perhaps was expressing her own interpretation of marriage in this passage. She did not find worldly marriage to be onerous, and had even contemplated remarriage. By softening spiritual marriage in her visionary presentation of *CMS*, Katharina may be sharing with us her own view that violent discipline and male dominance were incompatible with either spiritual or earthly marriage.

Though Keller has suggested that *CMS'S* appeal to women readers was that it portrayed an accurate if horrific secular marriage with a blissful alternative in marriage to Jesus, Katharina's vision, based on *CMS,* indicates that this is unlikely. Because Katharina entirely excludes the violent and submissive aspects of *CMS*, it is clear that her reading of this text did not emphasize the transformative mystical experience or passion devotion (though she does also have passion visions). Instead, the text's appeal seems to be that *CMS* tells the story of a love between Jesus and a very human soul, one who is weak, flawed, but forgivable and loveable. By reading and meditating on the Soul's transformation, Christians might eventually marry Jesus.

CMS teaches that the key to capturing Jesus is to submit entirely to his every whim and command, no matter how humiliating. Yet the does not emphasize obedience to a religious order or ecclesiastical hierarchy. Jesus encourages the soul to avoid church, and the treatise encourages interior devotion: the message would have been incredibly subversive. According to *CMS,* the path to salvation is locked away at home, alone, without human contact, or any form of spiritual advice from confessors, clergy, or fellow Christians. Even physical discipline is secondary. The eye turns inward, the body becomes the church, and the soul's development takes place exclusively on an interior plane, where Jesus teaches through discipline. Though the concept of submission itself is not radical, the total disconnect between salvation and society, heaven and church, is extreme, and the presentation of Jesus' love as domination of a human soul is unusual. Even in the closing, triumphal chapter, where the Soul is rewarded with eternal salvation, her prize is a crown she denies, her reward is a promise of future tenderness, and her initial love for her bridegroom is still based upon the introduction of a love philter. The most dangerous aspect of this text is the emphasis on silence and secrecy. Produced during an era of

crackdowns on women's religious expression, this insistence on keeping the mystical experience entirely private might represent an open warning to potential brides of Christ. The world and worldly judges cannot appreciate the bridal experience, and should not be made aware of it.

In my presentation of *CMS*, I have suggested that the first half follows the trajectory of the prologue to the *Song of Songs* as it was understood by medieval exegetes: the chastisement of adulterous Israel by God her husband. The second half is a much clearer allusion to the text of the *Song of Songs*, with scenes of chasing and capturing, dancing, gardens, glorious clothing, and a final wedding. Jesus is both the loving son and cruel Father. Yet both sections also intentionally mimic the writing and experience of mystics who described themselves as Brides of Christ. But who read this peculiar, violent, and potentially subversive text? Why was it recognized as a manual for learning to love God, rather than as a heretical book? How could reading or hearing the story of Christ and the Loving Soul have inspired religious devotion or encouraged women and men to take religious vows? In the next chapter, I shall explore the interlinked network of scribes, readers, texts, and patrons associated with *CMS*, focusing on how the violent discipline and insistence on secrecy and obedience are characteristic of late medieval German religious literature.

Naked in the Kitchen and Dangling from the Gallows: Reading *Christus und die minnende Seele* in/to a Fifteenth-Century Convent

In Chapter 4, I argued that the cycle of violence and reconciliation in *CMS* reflected both biblical models and mystical experiences of a marital relationship with the Divine. In my discussion of the crucifixion sequence, I showed how the soul's experience in *CMS* emphasized mystical secrecy and the importance of submission to Christ's will, teaching that letting go of the world and individuality was the best way to win Divine love. I also suggested that this emphasis on secrecy would have been dangerous and potentially subversive in a late medieval convent environment. In this chapter, I will attempt to reconcile *CMS'ss* violent lessons in submission with the treatise's social context. Hildegard Keller suggestion that *CMS* is "radical and bizarre" is certainly valid from a modern perspective, but the text also belongs within the currents of late medieval mysticism and the literature of the women's religious movement. [1] In that context, it is only a little radical and certainly not bizarre. I will argue that *CMS's* depiction of love, discipline, violence, and obedience shares many features with experiences of mystics and nuns, focusing primarily on the connection between *CMS* and communities of readers, texts, and mystics who read, produced, or may have encountered this subversive work.

No scholarship on the text has thus far considered how the work fits into the social networks and religious movements Grundmann, Winston-Allen, and Lewis, among others, have begun to uncover. In the first section of this chapter, I examine the network of texts with which *CMS* circulated. *CMS'*s close resemblance to the writings of several thirteenth- and fourteenth-century mystics, first identified in a series of proposed textual connections offered by Romauld Banz in his 1910 critical edition, suggests

[1] Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 185.

that the author of this treatise may have intentionally pieced together an outline of mystical experiences within a culturally familiar model. The treatise was probably regarded as formational devotional literature, as *CMS* circulated with several other religious and mystical texts, including most notably Seuse's *Exemplar* and the Sisterbooks from Töss and Diessenhoffen, although other lesser-known illustrated devotional texts are also associated with *CMS's* manuscript transmission. In the second part of this chapter, I investigate possible thematic and textual connections between *CMS* and other late medieval German religious literature with which it was bound, copied, transcribed and presumably read. I will attempt to account for the appeal of violent imagery to both women and men, lay and professed religious—and to early printers, some of whom downplayed themes of violence and domination, while others added new layers to an already perplexing series of images.[2]

[2] One image added by Schecnk in his Incunabulem shows Christ the soul's clothes on fire with a burning branch: "Auch die Schencksche Inkunabel hat einige Bilder zu denen die Mss. Und das Einblatt keine Entsprechung aufweisen… Christus setzt mit einem brennenden Span das Kleid der Seele in Brand, die voll Entsetzen mit den Händen inde Höhe fährt " This image apparently accompanies the drinking of the love potion, when the soul exclaims "You set my soul on fire" Romuald Banz, *Christus und die Minnende Seele: zwei spätmittelhochdeutsche mystische Gedichte* (Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1977), 231. The image itself shows Jesus holding a giant flaming branch, which is pointed towards the Soul's hemline. She has her hands raised in a "stop-don't-shoot" posture, just as Banz described it. The caption reads : "How he set her afire with a burning branch."

~5.1~

Communities of Readers

… an sant silvester tag han ich Dorathe von höf dis bůch us geschriben...
Liebe úber wint
Alle alle ding
Deo gratias

[On St Silvester's day (Dec. 31st) I, Dorathe von Hof copied this book out... Love triumphs over each and every thing through God's grace][3]

Min hertzliebe swoster fonegka mumprätin... Ich anna mumprätin Schenk dis bůch vs hertzlicher trůw und liebi zů andrem das die gnad gotz durch mich armen súndern dem wirdigen gotzhus Zů úntzikoffen Zů gefůt hatt Vnd ich anna mumprin begerr demüticlich umb die liebe unsers herren das ir den allmechtigen gott für mich bittent das Ich von Im númer geschaiden múg werden und in Ewigclich werd loben. In Ewiger fröd und säligkait und in dissen Zitt leben und sterben nach sinem lob und wolgefallen amen. Geben uff unser frowen abend zů der liechtmeß im LXXXXXVII jaur [To my beloved sister Veronica Mumprätin... I Anna Mumprätin bestow this book with heartfelt faith and love to another, so that God's mercy and grace so that the mercy of God may stream through other poor sinners in God's house at Inzikoffen… and I Anna Mumprätin desire meekly that you pray to the almighty God on my behalf.... In eternity blessedly and in this time live and die after his praise and pleasure. Amen given on the Eve of Our Lady's feast at Candlemas (feast of the purification of Mary, Feb. 2) in the 98th year][4]

The surviving manuscripts of *CMS* and its sister-text, *Kreutztragende Minne* (KM) preserve a history of ownership and readership that includes lay women, apostate nuns, girls as young as sixteen, and male religious figures, suggesting that this text was diligently studied by men and women, lay and vowed religious, for at least a century. Some of the bound manuscripts were passed down and through several generations of women in a single family.[5] Others were held at prominent Dominican convents, and shared amongst sisters.[6] Though at least one copy fell into the hands of male academics by the eighteenth century and another was owned by a prominent male house, most of the extant manuscripts

[3] From Manuscript E" as transcribed in Ibid., 15-16.

[4] From Manuscript D, as transcribed in Ibid., 23.

[5] For instance, manuscript E" (Einsiedler Codex 752) was owned by a network of women, including the apostate nun Dorothy Ehinger, her sister Anna Otiliga Ehinger, and their mother Margaretha Ehinger, who Banz suggests commissioned the original illustrated poetic dialogue Ibid., 16.

[6] The Mumprat manuscript belonged to Anna Mumpratin, daughter of Courad Mumprats, who gave the book to her sister Veronika Mumpratin on Feb. 1, 1497 at the Dominican cloister of Inzikofen. In 1792 it was then given to a university professor. Ibid., 18.

clearly belonged to and were used by women. They were offered as gifts to younger sisters and daughters, transmitting the secret of attracting and sustaining God's love.[7] Because there are richly illustrated manuscripts and related poems in both Latin and German, and at least one account of a mystical vision based on *CMS*, it is likely that this rhyming dialogue between Jesus and a woman's soul appealed to nuns as well as pious burgers and noblewomen.[8] However, the surviving woodcuts, Schenck's incunabulum, and Katharina Tucher's visions suggest that the text also had a broader popular appeal, and was probably known and read throughout German-speaking territories. Though *CMS* chronicles a violent spiritual love, none of the extant notes and visions from women who read it address the treatise's violence or explain *why* women read this violent account of Jesus breaking and taming the woman He loves.

CMS is not an isolated poetic dialogue. It is linked to a collection of poems and pictures, in both German and Latin, all connected by the theme of Christ's discipline and crucifixion of a feminine soul—as well as to the secular social satire *Teufel's Netzt*.[9] This collection of texts and images depicting Christ and his bride cycling through violence, domination, and reunion, circulated within a partially fixed anthology of other religious texts, not all of which were mystical or ascetic. In particular, the association between *CMS* and Seuse's *Exemplar* has been used in speculations about readership and authorial purpose. However, *CMS'ss* relationship to numerous other unpublished middle high German illustrated devotional prescriptive works, including *Die vierzig Myrrenbüschel (allegorie des Leidens Christi)* [the 40 myrrh bushes, an allegory of Christ's suffering] and *Christus mit die Sieben Laden* [Christ with the seven shops],

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[7] Ibid., 8, 18, 24.

[8] Banz's suggestion that Margareta Ebner's visions preserve an early strand of *CMS* seems poorly substantiated—he suspects she had access to at least the pictures. I have already mentioned Katharina Tücher's vision in passing. For discussion of the various extant versions, see Ibid; Werner Williams-Krapp, "Bilderbogen-Mystik: Zu Christus und die minnende Seele. Mit Edition der Mainzer Überlieferung.," in *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Editionen und Studien zur deutschen Literatur des Mittelalters. Kurt Ruh zum 75. Geburtstag*, ed. Konrad Kunze, Johannes G. Mayer, and Bernhard Schnell, Texte und Geschichte, Würzburger Forschungen (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989).

[9] Banz provides a thorough, if dated, overview of the possible textual connections between what he terms the "MS" or "Minnende Seele" texts and their possible sources. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 124-154.

needs further study. Since these texts often share the same scribe and illustrator, the logical hypothesis is that there was some original intent and purpose behind gathering them together, though determining *CMS* authorship or original connection to these other treatises is impossible without extensive archival research.[10]

From the surviving manuscript evidence, it seems likely that *CMS* was originally written for an enclosed female audience, but soon spread across German-speaking provinces, to male and female religious houses, and into the secular world—possibly enabled by the rapidly developing library exchange system of women's Dominican observant houses. Readership is, however, far easier to determine than authorship. In his 1910 critical edition, Romauld Banz proposed that *CMS* represents beguine spirituality, was clearly written by a woman, and circulated in mystical circles.[11] Almost a century later, in the only English-language publication to deal extensively with this treatise, Hildegard Keller rejects each of Banz's theories, proposing that the illustrated manuscripts clearly point to a convent-setting, probably Dominican, that there is no reason to suspect female authorship, and that the treatise was probably read by both women in convents and their secular mothers, aunts, sisters, and friends, thus positing a broad female audience.[12] While Banz's speculations about authorship, founded on the close reading necessary

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[10] The possible connections between *CMS* and these two other illustrated allegorical texts cannot be made until the texts become available either in a print edition or through archival research. However, based on the few notes available, it seems probable that they are all part of an intentional educational and devotional construction designed, much like the *Speculum Virginum*, to teach the religious lifestyle through a variety of engaging texts and images. Banz provides a brief overview of *Christus mit die Sieben Laden* (this text first came to my attention via the now defunct St. Georgen klosterspuren web-page and a non-illustrated version is available at http://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/sammlung2/werk/cpg472.xml?docname=cpg472&pageid=PAGE0391).According to Banz, the plot focuses on an anchorite and a satanic shopkeeper who offers worldly goods and other temptations at his shop stand. The anchorite meets Christ in the form of a carter who has seven wagons laden with wares. The story begins without any transition, title, or introduction, picking up after the closing line of *CMS,* but also circulated alone, and at least 14 manuscripts survive. Ibid., 25. Vetter provides incipits and some general comments about the two copies of the 40 Myrrh Bushes which are preserved in G and U (two manuscripts which contain the Töss sisterbook, Seuse's Exemplar, Kreutztragende Minne and Christus und die Minnende Seele) Elsbet Stagel and Johannes Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), viii, xii.

[11] Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 8-12, 15-16, 33-36, 40.

[12] Keller points out that in several of the manuscripts, the soul wears a Dominican habit. However, in other manuscripts, she is dressed as a Cistercian, a Benedictine, or in richly colored and expensive secular clothing. Keller's arguments are based on Banz's discovery that the earliest and most ornate of the extant manuscripts contains the family crest of

to produce a critical edition of the text, are insightful—if at times archaic—Keller's revisionist approach considers recent scholarship on the intersections between lay and cloistered women's piety in the later middle ages. Enclosed women remained in contact with their lay friends, and religious books did circulate through convent walls. Keller rightly concludes that Banz's suggestion of female authorship reflects the attitudes of the early twentieth century, when it was unthinkable that a male author could write through the voice of a female soul. If these texts were not written *by* women but, instead, *for* women by a (male) spiritual advisor, the emphasis on submission and ascetic discipline as a precursor to mystical union takes on a new level of meaning.

Manuscript evidence indicates that *CMS* was read within the rich environment of both conventual and observant houses described by Anne Winston-Allen and Gertrud Lewis—several of the extant manuscripts were owned by convents in the region of Lake Constance, and three were copied in the same hand and in the same manuscripts as extant Sisterbooks.[13] Based on this manuscript evidence, two new possibilities for authorship emerge: the text might have been originally composed in-house by a sister at one of the convents associated with the manuscripts and subsequently disseminated through the convent interlibrary book-loan system described by Winston-Allen, or alternately have been written by a presumably Dominican spiritual father providing guidance for one or more women's communities. The second is the more likely possibility. A careful investigation of the surviving manuscripts should support a hypothesized male author writing a formational text, rather than a female patroness or quasi-heretic's involvement.

The possibility of a male author drastically alters the depiction of marriage's horrors in the first chapters of *CMS*—no longer is this an autobiographical lament. Instead, Christus' treatment of the Soul

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Margaretha Ehinger Capel. She proposes that the wealthy Basel patroness commissioned the original text as a gift for one of her daughters upon her entrance to Engelthal, and extrapolates from this hypothesis that the portrayal of marriage in *CMS* was guided by the experiences of a wealthy secular woman. Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 186-190.

[13] Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 4-10; Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-books of Fourteenth-century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), appendix; Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, 1-8.

becomes a lengthy warning against worldly temptations and enticement to the spiritual life, similar in structure and intent to less violent treatises on virginity and sermons for female religious audiences. Indeed, the horrors of secular marriage outlined in chapter 1 of *CMS* closely parallel those found in the thirteenth-century English treatise on virginity, *Holy maidenhood,* as well as other anti-marriage/pro-virginity texts dating as far back as late antiquity. However, the clearest direct connection between *CMS* and an anti-marriage text is the MHG social satire *Teufel's Netzt*, which Banz has demonstrated *CMS* borrows from, often word-for-word.[14] Since *Teufel's Netzt* as well as *Holy Maidenhood* are indisputably male-authored and most other anti-marriage texts are also written by men, the argument that the author of *CMS* presents an autobiographic account of a woman's lot in marriage is very unconvincing. Just like these male-authored texts, *CMS* sets up worldly marriage as horrible, making spiritual marriage the desirable alternative.

Banz argues that *CMS* must be written by a woman because not even the carnal and feminized Seuse talks about a feminized soul in his *Exemplar*, but *CMS* expressly focuses on the same themes as the *Exemplar*—self-crucifixion, asceticism, descriptions of exemplary devotional practice and prayer, and *gelassenheit*. Seuse and the *CMS* author both write with didactic intent, focusing on themes given minimal attention in the only known women's writings they circulated with. Like the *Speculum Virginum*, *CMS* takes the form of a dialogue between two fictionalized personifications—in this case Jesus and the soul of a religious practitioner—using the female's spiritual progression to model the ideal stages of religious devotion and development and supplementing the written text with explanatory images. The most

[14] The entry for *CMS* in the *Verfasserlexikon* diagrees with Banz's approach to proving connections with the *Teufel's Netzt*, suggesting that the passages Banz sets into parallel to support his argument are often taken out of context or assembled piecemeal, but later scholarship disagrees, finding some connections between the two texts and a clear layer of borrowing by *CMS*, particularly in the first chapter. However, the borrowings from *Teufel's Netzt* are found primarily in book I of *CMS*, where Jesus is describing the horrors if *worldly* marriage, and does not account for Jesus' treatment of the soul during their own marriage, nor do Keller's theory about worldly and spiritual marriage account for this. Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, "Die minnende Seele in des "Teufels Netz". Geschlechterpolemik kontrafaziert.," in *Text im Kontext: Anleitung zur Lektüre deutscher Texte der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Alexander Schwarz and Laure Ablanalp (Bern: Lang, 1997); Wolfgang Stammler, Karl Langosch, and Kurt Ruh, *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters : Verfasserlexikon*, 2., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage / ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1978); Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

compelling reason to believe that *CMS* was written as an instructional text, probably *by* a male spiritual father *for* a women's convent or a single spiritual daughter is, however, the nature of the texts circulated with *CMS*. The extant manuscripts *do* contain women's writing, but not women's mystical writing. The only mystical or devotional texts are either explicitly male-authored (as with the *Exemplar*) or are allegorical rather than mystical—and again probably male authored. However, in known women's work bound with *CMS*, didactic intention is expressed *by a male author/editor*. In Johannes Meier's conclusion to the Töss Sisterbook, he wrote that Elizabeth Stagel's book would teach by example, suggesting that the reader could, by studying the accomplishments of these exemplary nuns, find a way to follow in their footsteps. Meier, in his conclusion, thus is suggesting that Stagel's Sisterbook is a useful teaching text, providing model virtuous Christian women to emulate and admire. In the prologue to his *Exemplar,* Seuse categorizes his little book as another didactic text, writing that:

> Good actions are, without a doubt, more instructive and uplift one's heart somehow more than words alone… [my book] describes a person making progress… Anyone who would like to become a good and blessed person and share special intimacy with God, or whom God has singled out by severe suffering—which he is accustomed to do with his special friends—such a person would find this book to be a comforting help. Also, for well-disposed persons it lights the way to divine truth and for thoughtful people it points out the right path to supreme happiness.[15]

Seuse is conscious of the fact that he is writing for a mixed audience and inserts passages to make his book useful to those who are *not* spiritually advanced, noting that "more ordinary teachings had been added so that everyone might find something for himself."[16] Even the title of the book, the "Exemplar," indicates the intended method of teaching and reading—to present an ideal version of spiritual development for each reader to reflect upon and mirror in her own devotion and spiritual exercises. This same theme is used to frame the Sisterbook from Töss in Meier's reworking, but Stagel herself frames the book differently. She views the lives of the sisters not as a model for emulation but as proof of God's

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[15] Heinrich Seuse, *Henry Suso: the Exemplar, with two German sermons*, trans. Frank J. Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 57-9.

[16] Ibid.

love and mercy, writing "How many times now has the loving God worked wonders with his mercy for this holy order in every church and convent, so he has thus wonderously given his love to this convent since it was enclosed..." [17] According to Stagel, the Sisterbook from Töss chronicles God's love for the Dominican order and for her particular convent, rather than the exemplary model lives of women religious. Even though Stagel expresses a clear and non-didactic agenda for the history of her "cofent," Meier reframes the Sisterbook as an exemplary text, and later scribes and editors recognized it as such based on his words, transmitting it with other devotional works. Meier's reframing of the Töss Sisterbook gives the most compelling reason to suspect that *CMS* is probably male-authored, and probably intended to be a devotional text—women's religious writing from this period were not intentionally pedagogical in the same ways as devotional texts written by male spiritual fathers for the edification of women in their care.

If *CMS was* written by a theologically trained spiritual advisor, presumably a Dominican who was familiar with women's mystical writing but also with scholastic theology and biblical interpretations, the staging of events in *CMS* teach idealized female behavior. The short scholastic-style dialogue between *Christus* and the *Seele* that is appended to several of the manuscripts would further support this possibility, again suggesting an intentional organization and presentation of exemplary texts intended for religious formation and meditation[18] Moreover, if the treatise was (as Banz presumed) read not by Beguine mystics—those semi-heretical and liminal women who learned theology from their souls' experiences rather than the Church's teachings—but instead by trained nuns from high society, Christ's violent treatment of the Soul can no longer be treated as the product of a female mind untrained in

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[17]"Wie manigvaltiklich nun der mineklich Got hat gewurket mit sinen gnaden in disem hailgen orden in ieklichen cofent sunderlich, so hat er doch sunderliche lieby bewiset gegen disem cofent von angeng das er gestiftet wart, und iemer me tun wil, ob wir es mit unseren schulden nit verlierent"Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, 12-13.

[18] This fifty-line piece, which is titled "Ain disputieren zwüschent der minnenden sel und unserm heren" is present in all of the Einsiedeln manuscripts as well as U. (These manuscripts all contain at least Seuse's exmplar, and U also has the sisterbooks from Töss and Diessenhofen, as well as the allegory of the 40 myhrr bushes). Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 364-8. The recent discovery of a Latin prose version of the *Minnende Seele* dialogue also supports this interpretation. Williams-Krapp, "Bilderbogen-Mystik: Zu Christus und die minnende Seele. Mit Edition der Mainzer Überlieferung.," 351-2.

theology (as Banz would like), but instead must be brought into the upper-class world of the Dominican convents around Lake Constance.[19]

Though some of Banz's efforts to situate *CMS* within a more mainstream body of German and Latin religious literature while simultaneously blaming its eccentricities on beguine authorship cause him to overlook the treatise's provocative and radical ascetic message, his careful discussion of textual borrowings and manuscript provenance demonstrates how well the text fits into late medieval women's religious movements. His glosses and annotations show that *CMS* was not the product of a mystical experience but instead a work composed after reflecting on a wide range of mystical writings as well as theological works, biblical commentaries, and secular literature. One of his most important observations is the close connection between *CMS*, the much shorter poem *Kreutztragende Minne* (*KM,* cross-bearing love) and a short prose dialogue in the scholastic style, which he titles "Ain disputieren zwüschent der minnende sel und unserm heren [a disputation between the loving soul and Our Lord]."[20] As I have already mentioned, these allegorical dialogues between Christ and a feminized soul are bound together in two of the Einseidlen codices and separated by Heinrich Seuse's *Exemplar*. In both codices, the two poems are illustrated by the same artist, indicating that the works were composed and collected

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[19] Though he categorized *CMS* as a mystical poem written by a woman, probably a beguine, Banz also felt that that the original author was not a mystic herself, basing his interpretation on a single couplet: "sadly I have not lived my life in a saintly enough way for God to let me know his secrets." In this instance, Banz ignores the wide range of mystical literature that uses similar phrasing as a humility topos but also disregards the context of the couplet—the words are voiced by the Soul in a closing speech where she thanks Christ for his transformative role in reforming, clothing, and crowning her, and God for having given humankind His son. The immediately preceding line reads: "Thus I want to have for a saint he who might live, that God gave his son for their sins" [So welt ich den für ainen hailgen haben, Wer dem wol mochte leben, Das im got sinen sun wurd geben.] The general sense of the passage develops previous verses ("I want for a master… God gave his son") and is clearly a humility topos on the part of the soul: she wants a saint and a master, and even though she has been taken into Christ's company and is beautiful before Christ's throne [In dem hochsten trone da bin ich vor dir schone], she has attained this position by learning to humble herself. The disclaimer itself should not be taken as evidence of a non-mystical author, but instead as part of the climactic recapitulation of the treatise's message. The verses which immediately show that this is not an authorial aside revealing spiritual status. The Soul closes with a prayer of praise, simultaneously thanking Christus for his assistance and asking for help to enter heaven—while reminding the reader that Christ can perform this service for any soul, no matter the sins. Though there are other textual reasons to suspect that *CMS* is the work of someone mimicking and outlining mystical experiences rather than an autobiographical account of some sort, Banz's use of this verse-pair from the closing chapter of *CMS* is probably erroneous.

[20] Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 364-8.

simultaneously, for some specific devotional purpose. Furthermore, in each of the extant manuscripts, *CMS* was copied in the same hand as the other related devotional texts and convent histories, and the same illustrator provided miniatures for each of the works, which indicates an intentional gathering of books considered of similar utility for the convents in question. Not only was *CMS* intentionally composed as an exemplary text and transmitted with similar texts, these collections were subsequently transmitted to other local convents to serve the same general devotional purpose.

Both Hildegard Keller and Jeffrey Hamburger have suggested that this grouping of texts indicates a mystical agenda of some sort, possibly using Seuse's *Exemplar* as an interpretive tool to soften the imagery of *CMS* and *KM* (Keller) or re-frame the reading of the *Exemplar* (Hamburger).[21] While these are intriguing suggestions, neither Hamburger nor Keller develop the possibility. Hamburger uses *KM* and *CMS's* positioning in the Einseidlen codex to argue that the Exemplar was read as "a script for an exemplary devotional dialogue" and does not consider other possibilities indicated by this grouping.[22] Hamburger's brief discussion of these three texts glosses almost entirely over the extreme plot elements of both *CMS* and *KM*. Hamburger sums up *Christus und die minnende Seele* and *Kreutztragende minne* in two innocuous sentences: "Prefacing the first poem is a miniature depicting a well-dressed woman who reluctantly follows in Christ's footsteps as she is beset by a demon. The female protagonist of the second poem eventually enters Christ's embrace, a conversion represented by her shedding off her worldly finery and donning a nun's habit."[23] From this brief summary, it is apparent that Hamburger either never read the lines accompanying the images. If he has, he must think it entirely insignificant that the woman in the first poem is eventually crucified—at first quite reluctantly—or that the woman in the second dances uncontrollably to Christ's music as she strips her clothes off, and must be crucified before eventually

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[21] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books ; MIT Press, 1998), 268-70; Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 28-30.

[22] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany*, 268.

[23] Ibid., 270.

entering Christ's embrace. In *KM* the female soul is warned that to enter Christ's kingdom she must bear his cross. Though she truly wants to follow him into eternal life, the path of martyrdom becomes difficult and she attempts to end her harsh treatment, proclaiming her youth and beauty and asks why she must suffer, complaining: "Oh Lord you are so hard on me, and yet you are so lovingly tender.[24] The soul finally accepts her crucifixion though, and the poem closes with her quiet prayer: "Ah sweet lord and father mine, now will I be completely in your eyes, I shall die on your cross, in order that I shall acquire all good from you. Amen."[25] Hamburger entirely overlooks the words that accompany the text, simply suggesting that the woman is a reluctant follower of Christ, beset by the demons of her own sinfulness. The poem itself suggests otherwise, emphasizing suffering and submission as the key to salvation and fully capturing Christ's attention and blessings.

When Hamburger describes the soul's change of clothing in *CMS* as a sign of her spiritual accomplishment, he entirely overlooks earlier scenes in *CMS* where nakedness or change of clothing demonstrate Christ's domination and the soul's humiliation. Hamburger also overlooks Jesus' graphic blinding, beating, and starving of the soul in his one-sentence summary of *CMS*. Despite the woefully cursory examination of content of *CMS* and *KM*, Hamburger is correct in his general assumption that the gathering of these two poems with the *Exemplar* probably indicates that they were intentionally grouped together for careful reading and meditation. I agree that both *CMS* and *KM* were used as devotional texts, though Hamburger's suggestion that the grouping of texts indicates the *Exemplar* should be read as a devotional dialogue presupposes that *CMS* and *KM* were actually devotional dialogues—and

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[24] "O herre, du bist mir so hart,/ Und bist doch gar minneclich zart."Banz lists several variants on these verses in other extant versions of *KM* including: „Oh here, wie bistu mir also recht hart! Ich wont, du werest mynneclich und zart" and "Wie bystu dan so rechte hart myne aller lyebste brudegame zart!" Wu bistu my dus ernstliche hart, myn allerleueste brudegam sart!" [Oh Lord, you are also quite hard on me! I wonder that you were so loving and sweet…Why are you so hard on me my all-loving tender bridegroom!... how are you so truly hard on me my sweet and everloving bridegroom…] In each variant, Christ's harsh treatment of the bride is contrasted with his sweet and loving nature. This verse has more variants than any other in the poem according to Banz's apparatus, though the general sense of the lines does not change significantly with the rewording. Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 254.

[25]Ach zarter herr und vatter min, Nu wil ich gantz din aigen sin. An dinem crútz ger ich ze sterben, Das ich dich, ainigs güt, mug erwerben. Amen Ibid., 258, lines 69-73.

that the *Exemplar* was not usually employed in this way. Both presumptions are open to dispute. The *Exemplar*, as well as the Sisterbook from Töss, and *CMS*, should be understood as they direct readers to understand them. Each is an instructional devotional work which teaches spiritual lessons through a variety of helpful enlightening and allegorical stories about *real humans* who have made both progress and failings, or imaginary exemplary figures who have realistic weaknesses.

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Crucified Brides of Christ

Christus und die minnende Seele was almost certainly composed to serve a pedagogical function by teaching women (and men) how to know and be loved by the Divine. The anonymous author wove together mystical accounts, biblical imagery, anti-marriage rhetoric, and possibly even personal experiences into a coherent story of love, violence, and spiritual transformation. This violence had biblical roots, but there are also similarities between *CMS's* most violent scenes and late medieval religious mystical and devotional works which describe blinding, nakedness, shaming, submission to Christ's will, and crucifixions, although the level of violence and potential for subversive readings is not always as high as in *CMS*. Through a topical examination of scenes from other late medieval religious literature which include crucifixion, blinding, and nakedness, I hope to identify which aspects of *CMS's* violence are culturally normative and which might have been read, by late medieval standards, as radical, bizarre, or subversive. My reading is enabled by Banz's detailed mystical glosses to *CMS,* but also incorporates other texts that Banz did not consider, and offers corrections to some of Banz's century-old readings.[26]

Banz is determined to convince his readers that *CMS* is normal, not bizarre, and though I share his sentiment, he overlooks several troubling passages and entirely fails to accommodate the soul's brutal treatment in the buildup to her crucifixion. In an eloquent passage introducing his section on *CMS'ss* mystical connections, Banz writes that "the concept of the Christian, especially the virginal soul who is dedicated-to-God as a bride of Christ is not really unique to our story. The idea is just as old as

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[26] Despite the preponderance of manuscript evidence which suggests *CMS* was intended to be a "how-to" rather than a semi-autobiographical mystical treatise, Banz insists on *CMS's* mystical character. He carefully constructs a compelling assemblage of mystical texts and vocabularies that bear some resemblance to themes and ideas in *CMS*, though he often seems to be overcompensating for an eighteenth-century scholarly dismissal of the text as vulgar, at best a satire. According to Banz, eighteenth-century scholars entirely overlooked the religious aspects of the treatise, misreading its every-day language as lay or vulgar and rejecting its graphic scenes and contrived rhyme schemes. Banz over-emphasizes the "normative" mystical aspect of *CMS* to transform the poem into respectable piece of religious writing, and often over-emphasizes mystical parallels in the process while Keller de-emphasizes the mystical language of *CMS* to argue for a secular perception of marriage. I will not be drawing connections between *CMS* and secular marriage, but I do want to investigate some of Banz's posited mystical explanations for the violence in *CMS*. Ibid., 40.

Christianity itself and lives on in the modern Catholic Church, for instance the office of the holy maiden in the breviary, the roman pontifical ritual for the profession of nuns are above all known in this context. The holy writings themselves offered this interpretation, above all by their allegorical meanings."[27] Recognizing the marital imagery of *CMS* as part of a broader trend in Christian spirituality, and grounding his reading in this, Banz then moves to redefine *CMS* as a religious and mystical text, rather than a vulgar vernacular parody, by emphasizing how *CMS* resembles bridal mysticism. Banz suggests that this version of Christ's love for the bridal soul is just another mystical story, a breeze "billowing over the sea of German mysticism," and that "what glitters above the water is of the same nature as the flood surging in the depths."[28] Here, Banz again highlights both the relationship of the marriage in *CMS* and bridal language German mysticism. He acknowledges that some of the connections he makes are tenuous, sharing at the best only superficial similarities in language and themes, but argues that *CMS* draws on the language of mysticism and is representative of late-medieval German mysticism in general.[29]

A brief examination of Banz's attempts to reaffirm *CMS's* mystical nature shows both his careful and thorough research and his tendency to overlook problematic/extreme readings in favor of simple interpretations that firmly connect *CMS* to the regulated world of the medieval cloister. His careful compilation of similarities between *CMS* and a broad range of German and Latin religious texts presents an overwhelming and compelling argument for *CMS* being well within medieval theological norms, even though some of the connections he draws are, at best, tangential. For instance, in his gloss to chapter VIII (where Jesus commands the soul to strip naked), Banz associates Jesus' command that the soul

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[27] Die Auffassung der christlichen, zumal der jungfräulichen gottgeweihgten Seele als einer Braut Christi ist unsere Gedicht nicht ausschlieslich eigen. Der Gedanke ist vielmehr so alt wie das Christentum selber und lebt in der katholischen Kirche heute noch fort, wie das Offizium der hl. Jungfrauen in Brevier, der Ritus des Pontifikale Romanum für die Profeß der Klosterfrauen u. a. beweist. Die hl. Schrift selbst bot in diesser Beziehung, besonders bei der Vorliebe frühere Zeiten für ihre allegorische aus deutung... Ibid., 42.

[28]Die mystischen Gedichte sind gleichsam das Wellengekräusel auf dem See der deutschen Mystik. Was oben glitzert, ist die gleiche Flut, die in den Tiefen wogt. Ibid., 52.

[29] See especially Ibid., 110-12.

should stay home rather than attending church with a series of passages that seem to be advocating monastic enclosure rather than avoidance of Church and the secular temptations of religion in the world.[30] Though both passages stress the importance of hearing service in an enclosed space rather than entering the world to attend Church, the second passage is simply an exhortation to hear services behind the modest screen that separated nuns from the clerics who provided their sacramental care. Christus' words to the soul bear no resemblance to a convent's privacy screens. In *CMS* the soul sits naked on the stone floor of her own kitchen, and the church is now internalized: her body becomes the new temple, where religious services will be conducted on an interior plane.[31] This is necessary—according to Christus—because church itself, is a terrible distraction that will draw the soul's eyes and mind away from her bridegroom.[32] Christus' explanation emphasizes not only the dangers of the world, from which the cloister offers sanctuary, but also the explicit dangers of attending church service, warning not only against the dangers of onlooking townsfolk, but also of corrupt clergy. However, Elisabeth von Nuestadt, cited by Banz as expressing a similar sentiment to this "stay at home" passage in *CMS* does not take an anti-clerical approach. There is no warning against the dangers of church, preaching, or sacrament, only a familiar reminder that the cloistered woman experiences church ceremonies through a protective screen, a barrier which offers shelter from the world and the desiring gaze of both the male

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[30] Where *CMS* reads "Don't go to church but stay at home and sit on the stone floor in front of the oven" Banz suggests this expresses a sentiment shared by the German translation of a German adaptation of Elizabeth von Neustadt, found in Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv. The cited German reads: "She said: you shall go to hear God's word at the shuttered window, remain here sister in the cloister and thereby shall you win meed and crown. *CMS*: „Gangist nit zü der kilchen, so belib dahaim und sitz zü dem ofen uf den stain." Elizabeth von Neustadt: "Do sprach si: du solt zû dem Gottes wort gan an das bredige venster, belibest du aber sus in dem closter, darumb sol dir lon und crone,, Ibid., 75. Banz's notes use a cryptic abbreviation system that lists *FDA* as the "Freiburger Diözesen-Archiv. Organ des Kirchl.-hist. Vereins… der Ezdiözese Freiburg" (XIII) but his reference here does not specify where to find the passage he cites, or what the work by Elisabeth v. Neustadt is.

[31] Christus tells the soul that she must make her body a pure temple that he can come down from heaven to visit: "Du bist doch selb der temple rain,
Den ich selber mir main
Von himel herab dar in ze komen." Ibid., 304.

[32] He cites onlooking townsfolk and the competition of dressing well and performing modesty as especially dangerous Ibid., 304 lines 896-912.

priest and the lay churchgoers. [33] *CMS'ss* strong insistence on private devotion completely contradicts a convent's regularized performance of liturgical offices. The Sisterbooks praise exemplary women for their dedication to performing and attending services. This emphatic reverence for attending services is demonstrated in the life of Elsbet von Cellinkon, a sister at Töss, who was determined to sing in the Choir despite her sickness and advanced age:

> She also had other virtues belonging to the category of obedience, such as great devotion to all the aspects of the order and wonderful skill at sitting (in meditation?), [and] that she was always going to the choir: when she was really very old and sick, she still went daily to mass. Though by then she was around 90 years old and lay in the sick house, she was reluctant to be away from the choir stalls during mass, even in the coldest winter or the heat of summer. And she was before the altar but heard and saw very little, she would stand there as if she could not move and she would complain that she did not know where she was, and she never wanted to leave but would always insist that she wanted to go to mass.[34]

For the elderly Elizabeth, participation in singing the Hours was absolutely crucial, and she evidently continued to sing with her sisters many years longer than she should have. The inclusion of this passage as an example of Elizabeth's virtue suggests that Elizabeth Stagel considered Elizabeth's dedication to

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[33] Within the cloister, attendance at daily services was taken very seriously. The Sisterbooks describe nuns participating in the Hours even when deathly ill, emphasizing that neither spiritual gifts nor physical illness would keep them from their office, but there are no accounts of sisters being permitted to simply meditate in the dormitory or the kitchen to the exclusion of fulfilling their duties. Excellent accounts are provided by both Lewis and Winston-Allen. Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*; Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

[34] "Sy hat och vor andren tugenden zů der gehorsami als grossen andacht und zů allen den stuken des ordens und sunderlich zů den zitten, das sy die in dem kor begieng: do sy joch gar alt und krank was, do gieng sy alle tag zů meti. Do sy by den nútzig jaren was und in dem siech hus lag, do wer sy ungern in dem kalten winter oder in dem summer zů meti uss dem kor gewessen. Und won syh von alter wenig gesach ald gehort, so stiess sy sich etwenn, das sy sich fast gewursset, und veriret dik, das sy nit wist wo sy was, und lies doch darum nit aby sy wolt alle tag zů meti gon. Und kurtzlich ê sy in das todbett kem, do hat sy ain schwester gebetten das sy ir alle tag saiti, so man metti luti, won sy nit wol gehort; des vergass die schwester zů ainem mal untz das die meti gesungen ward, und do sy fúr den kor kam, do gehůb sy sich als kläglich das wir sy nit getrösten kundent, und wolt och fúr das nit an ir růw gon. Ir gewonhait was das sy dik vor meti uff stund und gieng denn bald in den kor, so man erst das erst zaichen lut. Und sait úns ain schwester, die och gewonlich, so man das erst zaichen lut, in den kor gieng, und do sy ainest in dem advent in den ko rkam, do was der kor als fol guttes sch*m*akes als in dem summer die rosen smekent, so ir fil ist an ainer stat. Also gieng sy in dem kor hin und her, und wundret sy was es möchtti sin, und do sy fúr schwester Elsbeten stůl kam, do was der sschmak da als stark das sy sicher was das er von irk am, un dwas och niement in dem kor; won úns sait och ain tugenthafti Schwester Gepe sälig von Tetingen das ir die sälig schwester Mechthilt von Constanz saiti das sy die selben schwester Elsbeten ze ainem mal in der nacht vor irem bet sach ston, und was ir lib als durchlúchtett das ain so wunnenklicher schin von ir gieng, das enkain stat in dem dormiter was man heti ain nadlen ab der erd gesechen ze nemen." Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, 92.

Choir performance an inspirational model, and that other nuns also remarked on Elizabeth's remarkable devotion to choir duties. The evidence from the Sisterbooks, and even Banz's own proof-text, the German translation of Elizabeth von Neustadt, suggest that staying home naked before the stove in constant contemplation is the exact opposite of spiritual life within the convent, and therefore that Christus' exhortation to the Soul would not have been read as advocating an enclosed and regulated life. While the Soul is supposed to remain immobile, locked away from all society, the sisters at Töss and Gotteszell, as well as other convents, participated in an active and social kind of religion, one that involved *going to* spaces, like the choir, and *working* by singing. Travel, action, work, singing, and church ceremonies were in fact described as exemplary parts of daily devotion.

When Banz glosses Christ's command to stay in the kitchen rather than attend Church as a reference to entering the cloister, he spins the concept of cloister as an escape from the world to soften *CMS's* extreme message of retreat. The "stay at home" verses are better understood within the context of nakedness and renouncing rich clothing. Putting Christus' words back in context, the command does not encourage claustration, but rather the creation of a domestic hermitage, and in context, the couplet is actually advocating casting aside worldly clothing. While casting off worldly clothing and taking up a nun's habit was an important part of profession, Christus does not tell the soul to *change* her clothing, but instead to renounce all worldly clothes. Furthermore, Christus insists the soul should stay home naked only because she has deviously insisted that she could not possibly go to church naked. Christus' response undermines the Soul's ploy by denying the worth of church attendance and emphasizing the most extreme of personal retreats, a retreat not only from the world, but from Church services. According to this passage, clothing is unnecessary for those concerned with heaven, and church attendance is less useful than quiet contemplation. The soul's universe contracts as she becomes Christ's temple—and a naked female body shivering in her kitchen. Yet even in the cloister, where worldly clothing is set aside, the wearing of the habit remained symbolically important.[35] Banz's suggestion that

remaining home rather than attending church refers to enclosure ignores Christus' subversive message that salvation could be found at home, alone, through meditative practices.

Banz's amassed evidence of mystical parallels, though at times tenuous, clearly shows that *CMS* uses the language and imagery of late medieval mysticism, though often the scenes are uncomfortably different. Even Christ's blinding of the Soul, which was graphically depicted in several manuscript illustrations, expresses a common late medieval fear that wandering eyes would hinder spiritual progress. In an anecdote from the Diepenveen Sisterbook, a young nun was chastised for looking around the room rather than concentrating on performing the office. Sister Leisbeth came up to the young sister, "sat her down and taught her how to hold her eyes in her head (to pay attention)...the lesson is to keep your eyes in your head through devotion to Jesus Christ, his life and his troubles, because he is the head of us all."[36] Just as Liesbeth interprets distraction as dangerous and tries to stop the young nun from looking about wildly, Jesus blinds the soul because her eyes were rolling round and round in her head, yet the two actions are not equivalent. Blinding is a bloody and violent solution, while Liesbeth teaches how to turn the eyes away from the world and towards Christ with kind patience. Symbolically, Christ's blinding of the soul in *CMS* may be seen as one of the basic lessons for successful religious devotion, or a literal rendering of Matt 18:9, but the Soul's loud protests and Christus' violent behavior underline the soul's utter helplessness before a cruel man with good intentions.

Though Banz points out many of these connections, his gloss on *nakent* in the above-mentioned "stay home naked" sequence misses the likely mystical connections. Banz includes patristic and late medieval quotations that describe the soul's nudity in positive religious terms, including a line attributed to Tauler, which reads "If the Godhead is bare, then the spirit also be naked before all things, so that

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[35] "Wearing the monastic habit properly has a highly symbolic significance for the nuns"
Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*, 226.

[36] In het koor zag zij eens dat een jonge zuster om zich heen zat te kijken. Daarop boog zij zich een beetje buiten haar koorstoel en zei tegen deze zuster dat zij haar ogen in haar hoofd moest houden. Na de dienst nam zij haar apart en leerde haar hoee zij haar ogen in haar hoofd kon leren houden: door haar hart en gemoed te richten op Jezus Christus, op Zijn Leven en Zijn Lijden, want Hij is ons aller hoofd. Wybren Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993), 62.

God is not exposed." [37] Though Tauler's words give no qualification to nakedness—the soul is simply bare, *blos,* we do not know how s/he feels about it—*nakedness* for the Soul in *CMS* is shameful, horrific, dreadful.[38] The Soul soon brings up her nakedness again, lamenting that "he won't let me spin any longer, I must only love. I must go nearly naked, because I can't [afford to] have my old fashionable clothes."[39] In this passage, the soul is protesting Christ's command that she abandon her feminine trappings—rich clothing and the spindle. These are worldly trappings, yet clothing and spinning were also important parts of convent life. Many lives in Sisterbooks describe clothing, whether rich (and cast aside) or intentionally poor and threadbare, and emphasize the importance of spinning.[40] If Banz had connected the soul's impoverished and poor attire to leaving behind worldly things, or even to the daily work and trappings of a cloister, he would have found much textual evidence to support his claims. However, his gloss focuses on "nakent," and he can give only a single line from Mechthild's *Flowing Light of the Godhead* in support: "Lord, now I am a naked soul"[41] Yet in Mechthild's writing, nakedness is never unpleasant or unwanted. Though Mechthild also delights in clothing, even describing Jesus as her soul's

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[37] Als die gotheit blos do ist, also müß ouch der geist entbosset sin von allen dingen, die got blos nit sint. (Banz cites this as coming from Tauler's *Das Buch von geistlicher Armut, bisher bekannt als J. Taulers Nachfolgung des armen Lebens Christi, her. V. Fr. H. S. Denifle, München 1877)* Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 74-5.

[38] Recall that she would rather be crucified than go naked, and in some versions of *CMS* Christ must physically force off her clothing, either by grabbing it or burning it away. After her crucifixion, she is twice enticed to strip naked, first in drunkenness, then in response to music.

[39] „Er wil micht nit lon spinnen, Ich müß allain minnen. Ich müß schier nakent gon, so ich nit tuches mag gehon" Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 298.

[40] Examples are abundant, both from Germany and the Netherlands. Many can be forthcoming if my dear readers think it helpful/necessary. I have quite a few on spinning, including visions in the spinning room, but this section's gone on long enough and examples must be saved for a different project. See especially Anne Bollmann, ""Mijt dijt spynnen soe suldi den hemel gewinnen". Die Arbeit als normierender und frömmigkeitszentrierender Einfluß in den Frauengemeinschaften der *Devotio moderna*.," in *Normative Zentrierung: Normative Centering*, ed. Rudolf Suntrup and Jan R. Veenstra, Medieval to Early Modern Culture / Kultureller Wandel vom Mittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2002).

[41] Herre, nu bin ich ein *nakent* sele Banz, *Christus und die minnende Seele*, 72.

underwear (You clothe yourself with my soul and you are her most intimate garment) when she is naked, there is no shame in her nakedness.[42]

The one mystic known to have read *CMS*, Katharina Tucher, presents a dialogue with Jesus about nakedness and clothing which entirely reverses the premise in these scenes. In this vision, Katharina kneels naked before the divine throne to pray for eternal glory, as she has been commanded, but her appearance attracts divine rage: "The Lord said to the soul 'You are filthy (unsavory), I want a clean (beautiful) woman. Now you are naked, and I want a woman with clothes one who is rich, I do not want you."[43] Taken aback, Katharina begs: "Dear lord, clothe me, make me beautiful" and the Lord then takes her and dresses her and takes her on an allegorical hunting-trip through the wild woods outside Jerusalem.[44] In this vision, Katharina's nakedness is interpreted as unsavory, and Jesus does not want her unless she is clean, beautiful, and clothed in rich garments. The symbolic clothing of bridal souls in the raiment of the heavens was drawn from the *Song of Songs* and is common in medieval bridal literature, though shamed and naked brides are rare. Though Katharina's nakedness perhaps reflect Adam and Eve's discovered nakedness after falling into sin, the only way she can become desirable to the Lord is to put on rich attire—and the text does not specify that this is allegorical or spiritual attire. In other passages, Katharina expressly delights in her fine clothes, and as a former fabric-merchant's wife, her interest in rich cloth and well-cut material may be understandable. However, Katharina's nakedness before God is entirely unconscious. She does not know she is naked or that her nakedness is good or

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[42]„Du kleidest dich mit der sele min/ und du bist och ir nehstes cleit" Dirk De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige Punten van onsen oelden Zusteren : naar het te Arnhem berustende Handschrift met Inleiding en Aanteekeningen uitgegeven* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1919), 57; Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The flowing light of the Godhead*, trans. Frank J. Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 76.

[43] Die sel knit nieder vnd pit den herren. Der her spricht zv der sel: "Dv pist vnsavber, ich wil ein schonne haben. Nvn pistv plosz, ich wil ein kleitev haben vnd ein reichev. Ich wildein niht."Katharina Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, ed. Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998), 42.

[44] „Die sel spricht: „Lieber her, klaid mich, mach mich schon." Sie erpat in, daz er ir daz zepter raicht, vnd haist die sel avf sten. Der herr nimt ein gvrteln vnd gvrt sie vorn zv im. „Wol avf, wir wollen iagen reiten, wir woln ein hirssen feln, der hat hvndert bvnder vnd hvndert marackel..." Ibid.

bad until the Lord recognizes and judges her body. The imagery of *CMS* is entirely absent in this scene, which is particularly interesting considering how thoroughly Katharina internalized other sequences from the text. Katharina is in a passive position when the Lord robes her naked body, but this vision references neither *CMS* nor the *Song of Songs*. While some other naked female mystics voice shame when appearing before her Lord unclothed, and the Soul in *CMS* also expresses a sense of shame at her nakedness, for Katharina nakedness is shameful, and only rich clothing will earn her the love of her Lord.

The tension between nakedness as a sign of innocent virtue and rich clothing as a protection from shame re-appears in an entry in the chronicle from Meister Geert's Huis in Deventer. In the closing lines of the entry for Sister Eefce Neghels (d. 1423) nakedness before Jesus (and before men) is again described as inconsequential for the spiritually advanced, yet still recognized as shameful in a worldly context. According to the chronicler from Deventer, Sister Eefce was on her deathbed, lying in the infirmary. Apparently, she was not quite right in her head, and when father Iohan Hoef came in to visit her, she laughed and gestured that she wanted to take her shirt off. One of the attending sisters asked her "Sister Eefce, what would you like to do now, will you make yourself naked while our father stands here?' She answered her directly saying 'A naked bridegroom wants to have a naked bride.' And then our father said this: "dear Eefce, have you rehearsed this already just in case it might come in handy?"[45] Eefce's deathbed performance brings discomfort to the living, but makes a profound theological statement as well: Jesus died on the cross, naked or nearly naked. Furthermore, the pure soul was often portrayed as a naked child or, in Judgement day art, as a naked human adult ascending towards heaven.[46] From Eefce's perspective, then, taking her clothing off just before death signified the purity of her soul

[45] " Doe dese guide zuster in oere lester ziecten lach, soe verhengedet onse lieve Here, dat si opt leste gien verstant of memorie en hadde. Doe gevielt opeentijt, dat onse vader, her Iohan Hoef, int ziechuys quam ende wolde sien, hoe dattet myt oer weer. Ende als hij stont ende sach si aen, so lach si ende arbeide, dat si geerne oer heemde uut gehat hadde. Doe vragede oer een zuster ende segede: "Suster Eefce, wat myende nu, wildi nu uselven naeket maken, daer onse vader bi state?" Doe antwoerde si weder ende segede:"Een naeket brudegom die wil ene naecte bruyt hebben." Ende als onse vader dit sach, soe hadde hi ghenechte in oeren bedryve, ende hieromme segede hi: "Guede Eefce, dat gi altoes gheoffent hebt, dat trecke gi noch te handen." De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 57.

[46] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 29.

and her eagerness to please her waiting bridegroom. However, like Banz, the editor of the Deventer Sisterbook looks for explanations to nudity in the mystical writing of major late medieval theologians. De Man's notes to Eefce's claim that a naked bridegroom wants a naked bride suggest connections to the anonymous "Der Sang von Blossheit [song about nakedness]" and "Meister Eckehart und der nackte Bube [Meister Eckhart and the naked youth]." The latter is a short legendary poem about Meister Eckhart, who encounters a naked young man in the woods. When asked his identity, the young man responds in cryptic couplets that reveal he is, in fact, Jesus. De Man's citation confirms that there was an idea in circulation that Jesus might appear naked—not just in infant form, or in his loincloth on a cross, both more common—but as a naked adult or adolescent male.

Sister Eefce is at the end of her life's work and about to die. To meet Jesus she wants to be naked—he is naked, she is about to be his bride, she too must be naked. Though the attending sister politely asks if Eefce really wants to take her clothes off with the Father in the room, she does not intervene, and Iohan Hoef is patient and understanding, realizing that Eefce wants to make herself ready for her husband. No one is as concerned with worldly modesty as they are with preparing Eefce for her Bridegroom. A woman's nakedness before Jesus is not a cause for shame or distress—here, Eefce *wants* to be shirtless, yet in *CMS*, the soul repeats her protests against nakedness across several chapters. Only when she is crucified does she find something more serious to protest about than giving up her clothing. From these few examples, it seems that nakedness, especially female nakedness, was viewed shamefully in late medieval society, but could also symbolize purity in certain theological contexts. The ambivalence remains, however: does Jesus want his bride naked or clothed? In *CMS* at least, the answer seems to be that Christus wants the bridal Soul to change her attire to mark each spiritual transformation, and that when her soul is pure, her raiment will be both glorious and appropriate.

In *CMS,* the soul's initial reluctance to remove her worldly clothing triggers her transformation on the gallows. As I argued in chapter 4, the crucifixion scene acts as a fulcrum for the larger work. After the soul submits herself to Jesus' will, she is finally eligible to become a Bride of Christ. But in this

chapter and those immediately preceding it—which follow the earlier stages of Christ's passion, including his beating, nakedness, and public humiliation—emphasize a special type of passion devotion that is particularly prevalent in women's mystical literature. In contrast to the events in *CMS*, accounts of Christ gifting women with physical torments in other contexts emphasize that he also grants them the ability to endure the pain. For instance, the Töss chronicle, which sometimes circulated with *CMS* and Seuse's *Exemplar*, describes a sister who experienced Christ's passion and wanted "to suffer voluntarily with God all the passion that he suffered for us." For this sister, Jützi Schulthasin, the problem was not the pain of the experience, but the fear that she might die from it, and perhaps be guilty of suicide: "as a consequence of her courageous attitude she was often in such pain that she thought she would not leave a particular place alive. And this, at times, made her afraid; [she wondered] whether, if she then died, she herself would be responsible."[47] Jützi finally asked the convent's confessor for advice, and he encouraged her to continue her devotions, reassuring her that she would not be guilty of suicide if she died, and that he himself "would answer for her before God" if she died. The confessor permitted her to continue her devotions, saying "Die, just die!" and, according to the Chronicler from Töss, after this, Jützi continued to experience Christ's pain during the passion, "and had no more to fear at all."[48] Moreover, Jützi took such great pleasure in suffering sweetly as Christ's martyr that she was no longer in either the earthly or the heavenly kingdom on account of this pleasure. According to the Töss chronicle, women experiencing

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[47] As quoted and translated in Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*, 188. Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, 70-71. The author first describes Jützi's daily devotion and meditation on Christ's passage, then comments that "Und zů disem gebet gewan sy als grossen ernst, und kert ir hertz und kraft sogar dar uf das de kain uppiger gedank in ir hertz kam, oder in dem gebet iemer wort gesprech, das sy ward, so fieng sy e saber fornen an, und so sy von unmässiger krankhait ald von dekainer sach geirret ward das sy es des tags nit mocht getůn, so tet sy es aber nachtes. Und sunderlich so ward ir min als gross das sy willeklich gern wolt haben gelitten alle die arbait die ie kain mensch gelaid, und das ir das ain frölich ding wer gesin das sy mit Got sölte haben gelitten alle die marter die er durch úns gelitten h*a*t. Und von disem ernst, so ward ir dik als we das sy gedacht das sy aber der stat niemer lebendig kem, und hievon gewan sy etwenn forcht: ob sy also sturb, das sy an ir selber schuldig wer. Und disen kumer lait sy bruder Hugo dem Profincial fúr: der was ir bichter. Der sprach also: wer das ir dis beschâche von dekainer usswendigen übung, das verbutt er ir strenklichen. Do sprach sy das es ir nit wider für won von inwendigem ernst und von grosser min die sy zů Got hat. Do antwurt er ir und sprach: das wölt er ir erloben, und sturb sy also, so welt er Got fúr sy antwurt geben. Und sprach do: „Sterb, so sterb", and davon ward sy getrösttet und gieng ir die forcht gantzlich ab. Und also nam sy zů alle tag an gnaden und an minen, und ward ir únsers heren marter also süss, so sy betrachtet und bekant was gütes ir und allen menschen beschechen was von siner marter, und so ward ir fröd so gross das sy dunkt das sy in ertrich noch in himelrich nit me fröden bedörfte.

[48] Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*.

the crucifixion through Divine grace and constant imitative meditation did not protest at the pain, or express fear and reluctance when Christ made their bodies suffer. Furthermore, such experiences were presumably common enough that Jützi's confessor was not taken aback—he even encouraged her to continue, reassuring her that death by Christ was not suicide. The main concern for Jützi was not physical pain (she had spent much of her life sick and in pain), but a mortal fear that her soul might be tarnished if her body were to die while experiencing torments she had prayed to receive. Unlike *CMS* and the biblical prophetic marriage sequences, women's suffering in the Sisterbook from Töss is not described as punitive, embarrassing, uncomfortable, or unwilling. Yet in the account of a thirteenth-century beguine from Vienna, presented via her confessor, Agnes Blannbekinn, experiencing Christ's pain during the passion was a body-shattering and deeply humiliating moment, albeit one she too prayed for and pursued willingly.

According to her confessor, Agnes asked, as a sign that her prayers had been heard, that she might know the agonies Christ suffered during his passion and crucifixion. Within moments, her request was granted:

> And soon a voice came to her [speaking]" Quickly move behind the altar." Yet when she came behind the altar, she immediately began to feel the most excruciating pain throughout all of her body in the extremities and the joints of the extremities of her whole flesh, so that she could not hold herself [up] and fell to the earth. And through this she was not less crucified in her heart, but rather the pain and bitterness of the Passion were as great in her flesh as in her heart so that she earnestly believed that she was about to breathe her last breath [lit. exhale the spirit]. And she did not believe that the pain of death could be compared to this anguish. And although her crucifixion was most intense both in body and heart, she was nonetheless not less filled in heart and soul with a miraculous and indescribable sweetness and bathed incessantly in an exceedingly abundant stream of devout tears. And when she thus expected death, and death was not given to her ….[49]

Agnes' suffering is a physical one, so powerful and immediate that she fears her own death. However, the fear of death was not as mortifying as the fear of missing her habitual prayer routine, or of being

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[49] Ulrike Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations; translated from the Latin with Introduction, Notes and Interpretive Essay*, ed. Jane Chance (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2002), 142-3.

seen on the floor behind the altar, in a space women were not permitted. For Agnes, as for Christ, the crucifixion becomes a shaming event: the spectacle of a public and naked death contrasts with the spectacle of a public and paralyzed woman in agony behind the altar. At last she is forced to pray for the experience to end, and this prayer too is granted:

> She began to feel anguish that she was not home in a hidden and for her [situation] appropriate space.
> The reason was that she could not in any way move herself away from the place where she lay, until she prayed in her heart to the Lord that if she were not to die from such bitterness of anguish, the Lord should give her the strength to leave that place and perform her usual prayer exercise. For she was always very careful and diligent to say her hours. And behold the miracle: pulling herself together, she regained her strength, got up, and left, yet the pain did not ever return.[50]

While Agnes' physical suffering of Christ's passion was consensual, she does not consent to a public display of her experience. While she obeys the commanding voice, she is painfully aware of her inappropriate behavior, and begs to have the scene brought to a halt.

Agnes and other mystics also practiced asceticism, including fasting and flagellation, which bear strong similarities to Christus' purgative abuse of the soul in the first 9 books of *CMS*. Agnes' flagellation practice was closely connected to a desire to imitate Christ's passion, and the one explicit account of her beating herself occurred as part of her Easter devotions, just as some of the Soul's abuse was connected to recreating Christ's suffering and becoming a martyr. In her prayers, Agnes asked God to prove himself by giving her the strength to "physically suffer and to endure much without failing" and that she be granted at all seven hours the grace of tears. She then undertook to flagellate herself the entire day, "on the day of the Lord's Passion she received a thousand blows by flagellating herself with a juniper branch. She covered herself thoroughly in blood, because that branch was so rough, and she did not beat herself lightly…. Also at Matins and when she read the other hours, such an abundance of tears was given to her by the Lord that at times, she completed the hours only with difficulty because of her tears.

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[50] Ibid., 143.

Thus gaining confidence, she prayed and received the answer that her prayer was received favorably."[51] For Agnes, imitating Christ by becoming an incarnation of the passion was an important expression of her heartfelt devotion and piety.

In "This is about the Confessor's Daughter," which pretends to be a collection of discussions between Meister Eckhardt and Schwester Kathrei, this desire to suffer everything Christ has suffered is a constant theme. Kathrei, before undergoing her spiritual development, asks her Father to teach her the "shortest way" to the Godhead, but he warns her "not [to] be presumptuous. It is not meant for women." Kathrei acknowledges that "women can never come into heaven; they have to become men first," adding by explanation that she will become a man by suffering "everything Christ has suffered."[52] When her confessor asks for further explanation and then counsels her against what he considers to be her "evil intent," Kathrei announces that she will no longer heed his advice because he has "prevented me from obtaining my eternal salvation… you did not show me immediately the fastest way… If you and other clerics had not prevented me, I would have spent my time more virtuously than I have done."[53] This interchange provides a theological framework for suffering everything Christ has suffered. Kathrei describes it as the fastest way to the Godhead, and she also points out that the advice of the Holy Spirit trumps the advice of mere mortal spiritual fathers. When she returns, after her spiritual transformation, her father does not recognize her ("where do you come from?" "From distant lands" "Where were you born?" "Father, don't you recognize me?" "God knows, I don't!").[54] Kathrei then tells of the wonders she has experienced in her soul since ignoring her confessor's advice and seeking to suffer in full and perfect imitation of Christ. Soon after, she dies and becomes God (her soul dwells

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[51] Ibid., 55.

[52] Meister Eckhart, *Meister Eckhart: Teacher and Preacher*, ed. Bernard McGinn, trans. Frank J. Tobin and Elvira Borgstädt (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 350-1.

[53] Ibid., 352.

[54] Ibid., 356.

forever in the Godhead), thus achieving her mystical goal through suffering.[55] More than any other mystical text, the words attributed to Schwester Kathrei express the same violence, submission of will, and desire to follow Christ into self-oblivion that is found in *CMS*.

Like the soul in *CMS*, the sister from Töss, Agnes Blannbekin, and Schwester Kathrei, Katharina Tucher asks Jesus to let her experience his suffering on the cross. When she describes this in a vision, she reveals both her fear and suffering and later thankfulness for the experience:

> 84. To Jesus in praise of his five beloved wounds
> I desired: "Dear Lord, give me your sorrows"
> "They are already given to you. But you must now call to me with a louder voice and weep, as this is no small gift... I will then stab the base of my cross into your heart. And know, those whom I give this to, these people can commit no sin."
> And I, a poor little sinner, thought "Dear, you thrust that into my heart and I shall scream loudly." I was so naive.
> "No, you will not die from this"
> Praise be to Jesus[56]

Here, Katharina looks back on the pain and fear of experiencing Christ's sorrows with newfound wisdom, realizing that Christ fully knew the limits of her own body, and that the gift of crucifixion had granted her new wisdom and a deeper level of devotion to the cross. I have never seen another case of being stabbed through the heart with the *cross*, certainly a violent action perpetrated by Jesus if ever there was one, but Katharina's attitude and emotions are shared by other mystics, and Jesus' intentions are expressed without the language of brutality found in *CMS*. For Katharina, meditations on the passion and crucifixion filled every day. She kissed the cross—and was even reprimanded for kissing Jesus on the

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[55] In ch. 7 I will compare the "fastest" path to God (mysticism/asceticism) with the "surest" passage to God (work and prayer in the *Devotio Moderna*)

[56] 84. Isv zv lob sein lieplichen fvnf bvnden.
Ich pegert: „Lieber her, gib mir dein leiden."
Ez wirt dir geben. Aber dv mvst noch mer haisser zeher dar vmb wainen, wan ez niht ain klainew gab ist. Wem ichs gib, in dem fint man all tvgent, der aim menschen not ist. Vnd ist ain schvl, dar inen man lernt vnd geoffenbart wirt, daz svst dem menschen verporgen ist. Ich wil den stam meins krevtz in dein hertz stozsen. Vnd wies, wem ichs giv, daz der mensch kain dot svnd mag getvn."
Vnd ich arm svnderin gedoht: „Lieber, zvtost dv mir mein hertz, so wirt ich lavt schreien." Also grob wahs ich.
„Nain, dv stirbst niht dar fan." Zv lob Iesv.
Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*.

mouth—she stepped into a depiction of the pietà and adored Jesus' dead body. Yet she separated her bridal experiences from her passion devotion and even when meditating on the passion, she does not fixate on the violence. Even in vision 20, discussed in ch. 3, where Katharina is first a bride and then given some of the trappings of the crucifixion, the order of events makes it clear that her bridal state was not brought about by suffering or submitting to a crucifixion sequence. Moreover, though Katharina knew Seuse's *Exemplar* well, and owned copies of other harsh ascetical works, including the *Spiritual Scourge*, her attitude towards discipline, obedience, and violence was haphazard at best—for instance her reluctance to obey Jesus' command to stop drinking wine. While the idea that experiencing Christ's passion prevented future sin echoes Schwester Kathrei's remark that the fastest way to salvation through suffering, Katharina does not ever embrace the concept of submitting to Christ.

From these four examples we can hypothesize that being crucified by Jesus was viewed as a special religious gift appropriate for women, and was the goal of some devotional practices, at least from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries in Germany. Passion devotions such as those of Katharina, Agnes, Schwester Kathrei and Jützi Schultasin is a common theme in women's mystical practices, and is clearly present in *CMS* as well as *KM* where the female soul becomes a hung martyr for Christ's love. Amy Hollywood explains the phenomenon as essential to the mystic's identification with Christ, suggesting that the mystic "moves from sensible identification with his [Christ's] suffering body to the incorporation of that body within her own… [which] leads her to joyful ecstasy."[57] In her reading of Angela of Foligno's famous crucifixion scene, Hollywood proposes that "meditation on the details of Christ's abjection is essential to the mystic's and the reader's identification with him."[58] Though Hollywood characterizes the experience of Christ's passion as a joyful ecstasy, several women mystics qualify their experiences of the passion as moments of shameful impotence.

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[57] Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 77.

[58] Ibid., 78.

The embarrassment and discomfort accompanying mystical experiences of the crucifixion, as well as copious tears—described as divine gifts, but also recognized as a response to humiliation and impotence, and more commonly associated with the weeping Marys—feminize Christ's passion. Yet women mystics who experience the crucifixion, either in visions or through re-enactment, describe shame, helplessness, and nakedness—and almost always profuse tears, a second gift accompanying the first. Like the Soul in *CMS*, these women first seek to be crucified, then regret the blessing when it is granted. Even Jützi from the Sisterbook in Töss may have regretted her devotional practices when actually racked with pain, though if she did, this is not included in the Chronicler's account. At the very least, we know that she became concerned about the possibility of dying. When Angela of Foligno prayed to suffer as Christ did, moved by her own intense sorrow after contemplating the passion, she "beg[s] him to grant me this grace, namely, that since Christ had been crucified on the wood of the cross, that I be crucified in a gully, or in some very vile place, and by a very vile instrument. Moreover, since I did not desire to die as the saints had died, that he make me die a slower and even more vile death than theirs. I could not imagine a death vile enough to match my own desire."[59] Yet the torment she experiences is overwhelming, and her description emphasizes helplessness: for Angela, the experience of crucifixion is like that "of a man hanged by the neck who, with his hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air."[60] Angela, or her scribe and confessor, thus also conflate crucifixion and execution on the gallows. This state of being between life and death, helpless, unsupported, swinging in the breeze, emphasizes the humility and shame of Christ's own death, but stresses impotence rather than sacrifice. Just like the Soul, hanging suspended between heaven and Earth, Angela's experience emphasizes the absolute powerlessness of being crucified by Christ. Though Hollywood suggests that "in this context, the making visceral of Chris's suffering in the soul (and, at least occasionally, on the body

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[59] Angela of Foligno, *Angela of Foligno's Memorial*, trans. Cristina Mazzoni (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), 92-3.

[60] Ibid., 112.

with phenomenon like the stigmata) of the believer is a means of inducing emotion only in order to redeploy that suffering toward certain narrative and salvific ends," women's descriptions of their own crucifixions downplay both the saving grace of Christ's death and the salvific merits of meditating on the passion, and instead stress Christ's own humiliation and the suffering and helplessness of the mystic.[61]

This sort of self-crucifixion or gift of crucifixion was not exclusively for women. Heinrich Seuse's *Exemplar* contains several graphic passages which focus on these same themes. In one vision Suso sees Christ as a crucified seraph, on whose wings are written "Receive suffering willingly, bear suffering patiently, learn to suffer as Christ did." This succinct lesson is the same as in *CMS*: do not protest your affliction but learn to suffer silently as Christ did on the cross. In ch. 16 of *The Life of the Servant* he describes the most important of his ascetic practices, his "desire to bear on his body some sign of his heartfelt sympathy for the intense sufferings of his crucified Lord."[62] Seuse builds himself some very complicated crosses with nails, which he wears for years under his clothing, crucifying himself a little each day in his prayers: "For a long time, besides wearing this cross, he took the discipline twice daily in the following manner. He struck the cross with his fist driving the nails into his flesh where they remained stuck, so that he had to pluck them back out again with his clothing… he took this first discipline when he had come in his contemplation to the pillar where his handsome Lord was so cruelly scourged. He begged him to heal his wounds together with his own. He took the second discipline when Christ had come to the place of the crucifixion and was being nailed to the cross. He would nail himself to Christ, never to leave him."[63] Seuse's self-crucifixion was part of his very intense devotion to Christ's passion, which he described in detail in *The little book of Eternal Wisdom*. In the *Little Book*, Christ, in the guise of the feminized Eternal Wisdom explains to Seuse that "no one can reach the heights of the divinity or unusual sweetness without first being drawn through the bitterness I experienced as a man.

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[61] Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History*, 78.

[62] Seuse, *Henry Suso: the Exemplar, with two German sermons*, 88.

[63] Ibid., 89.

The higher one climbs without sharing the path of my humanity, the deeper one falls… against your old ways you must be taken captive and bound."[64] Christus speaks almost exactly these words to the Soul in *CMS*. When Seuse has made the first steps towards self-crucifixion, eternal wisdom gives him the second part of the lesson: "You should surrender yourself and all that you have to me freely and never take it back. .. then your hands are truly nailed to my cross. Embark upon good works joyfully and persevere in them steadfastly. Then your left foot is fastened. Make your capricious spirit and distracted mind constant and firm in me. Then your right foot has been placed on my cross. Your spiritual and bodily powers should not be paralyzed in tepidity…. From this you will become lovable and the color of blood, as I am." Seuse's response to the voice of eternal wisdom shows that he, like the Soul hanging from the gallows, has learned the most important lesson of self-crucifixion: submission. He says "Eternal Wisdom, bring now my good will to completion for your highest praise according to your dearest will." [65] The most important lesson of self-crucifixion and salvation for Henry Seuse is, as with *CMS,* submissive suffering. Seuse's devotions represent another extreme form of self-crucifixion, and the pairing of *CMS* with the *Exemplar* in several extant manuscripts is entirely intentional, as I outlined in the first section of this chapter. For Seuse, Schwester Kathrei, Katharina Tucher, Agnes Blannbekin, and the sisters at Töss, crucifixion and submission were a highly developed form of devotion and spirituality. However, though Seuse, a man, experienced and pursued mystical crucifixion, he never finds himself naked or voices shame, fear or pain about the process. These qualities may be unique to the female experience of mystical crucifixion.[66]

In each account save Seuse's, the mystic recreates the crucifixion and is caught, helpless, as she loses control of her body. She weeps, her tears described as a gift from God, yet once she has recovered

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[64] Ibid., 214.

[65] Ibid., 222.

[66] Though Seuse does recoil from the suffering, it is self-inflicted. He writes that "When he fastened this cross to his bare back for the first time, his human nature recoiled from it and he thought he would be not able to endure it. He took it off and bent the sharp nails a little on a stone. Soon he regretted his unmanly cowardice, and so he sharpened them all again with a file and put it back upon himself..." Ibid., 89.

she explains that her anguish is not due to physical suffering but rather to deep shame and embarrassment. Only after the experience can she speak, reflect, and appreciate the experience. These painful and tear-filled mystical crucifixions seem to have been woven into a biblical allegory by the author of *CMS*. The soul's nakedness, wounding, and crucifixion capture a widely attested transformative mystical experience, effectively incorporating the concepts of nakedness, impotence, submission, and transformative love into the first nine chapters of *CMS*. Like the crucified mystics, the Soul in *CMS* is helpless as she re-enacts the crucifixion. Although Jesus plays the punitive lover to the Soul's whoring wife, merging the *Song of Songs* with the Hebrew Bible's prophetic marriages, the passion and crucifixion are never far from the storyline. *CMS's* was presumably popular because it offered an entertaining and easily understood guide to the mystical shortcut to salvation.

A particularly violent scene in the Sisterbook from Töss describes Adelhait von Frauenber's desire to be tortured and ripped into little pieces, but she only asked that this be done for His sake, not that Christ violate her body with his own hands. Elsbeth Stagel writes of Adelhait that she "desired with heart-felt loving eagerness that all her body be tortured as a service to the sweet child. She desired that her skin be pulled off to make a diaper for our Lord, her veins to make threads for a garment, and she desired that her marrow be pulverized to make mush and desired that her blood be shed for a bath for him and her bones be burnt for a fire, and she desired that her flesh be used up for all the sinners and that she be wounded with a heartfelt sorrow, that the little drops from her eyes serve as his milk, so our lady recommended that she nurse our lord."[67] Stagel's commentary on this passage is very matter-of-fact. She introduces Adelheit's heartfelt desire to be made into Jesus' diaper by saying "though she had a particularly great love and devotion for our lord's childhood, and devotedly prayed to our lady, that she

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[67] Sy begert mit hertzlicher minender begird das aller ir lib gemartret wurd dem sussen kindli ze dienst: sy begert das ir ir hut wurd abgezogen unserm herren zu ainer windlen, ir adren ze fedemly im zů ainem rokli, und begert das ir marg gebulfret wurd im zu ainem muslin, und begert das ir bult vergossen wurd im zu ainem badli, und ir gebain verbrennet wurd im zu ainem fúr, und begert das ir flaisch alles verschwanet wurdi fúr alle sunder, und gewanden ainen hertzlichen jamer, das ir ain tropfli wer worden von der milch, so únser frowen enpfiel, do sy unsern herren sogt. Translated in Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*, 229.

might help him with his sorrows, his whole life."[68] Moreover, Stagel does not interpret or incorporate Adelheit's wish into a theological narrative, or pause to explain what the significance of this startling request might have been. She does not even stop to ponder the bizarre image of the baby Jesus nursing from a nun's eyeball, but instead simply continues on by naming Adelhait's three virtuous forms of devotion: "She had many holy things in her life and high virtues about which I could say quite a lot, but the most impressive of them is her three aristocratic virtues of devotion…" moving on to describe each of these virtues in detail.[69] Adelhait is comfortable with violence and eager to suffer for her beloved Christ, but even in such a graphic case of violence, Christ is not active in the soul or body's suffering. Katharina Tucher, who internalized the imagery and events of *CMS* and experienced mystical crucifixion also was reluctant to make Jesus a figure of violence. Even when he promised to thrust the base of his cross into her heart, she did not respond with fear.

Whatever this treatise was written in response to, however we attempt to fit it into medieval mystical practices or the power dynamics of secular marriage, its message is deeply subversive, placing personal meditative practices ahead of obedience to the Church or good works in the world. The Soul in *CMS* so completely separates herself from the world in her pursuit of martyrdom that her experiences push beyond the bounds of orthodoxy, entering the liminal territory of the semi-heretical branches of German mysticism. Though the message of *CMS* is, I believe, extremely subversive, it reflects the anti-establishment approach of mysticism in general, and clearly belongs within the tradition of German mystical piety. The Soul's transformation teaches Schwester Kathrei's short-cut to salvation. At the end of *CMS*, obedience to Jesus is all that is required for salvation. Though women seemed to delight in self-degradation as a form of penance and religious devotion, the message in *CMS* is still peculiar, because it

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[68] Sunderlich do hat sy alwegent grosse min und andacht zu únsers herren kinthait, und erbott sich únser frowen dik andachteklich, das sy ir mochte zu hilf sin kumen, irem ainigem lieb Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, 52.

[69] Wie manigfaltiklich sy sich ubt an hailigem leben und an hochen tugenden, davon wer fil ze sagen. Aber sunderlich so hat sy iii edeltugend an ir, mit den sy ussgenomenlich lucht und in den sy wirdig ward und och behielt alle die gnad… Ibid.

is Jesus, rather than the religious person, who is enacting or initiating the violence. Becoming a bride of Christ is no longer about virtuous behavior in the world, and this mystical path to salvation would be recognized as a very real threat. In the next chapters, the tension between obedience to the church and salvation through private and mystical devotion will become more apparent.

Face to Face with the Bridegroom: Brides of Christ and Suppressed Mysticism in the women's branches of the *Devotio Moderna*

The nuns and pious women of late medieval Germany were bold mystics who embraced violent imagery, sacrificing their bodies and souls willingly for their beloved Jesus. Sister Adelhait from Töss offered her body's basic components as clothing and food for the holy infant, and others, like Katharina Tucher, imagined themselves receiving physical and spiritual torment from and for Christ. The violent and self-destructive mysticism described in chapters four and five was an important aspect of the late-medieval German bride of Christ's identity. Texts like *Christus und die minnende Seele* and Seuse's *Exemplar* emphasized the transformative destruction and forced submission of bridal souls, while convent chronicles from southern Germany and Switzerland praised harsh asceticism and spectacular mysticism in resident Sisters *vitae*. The network of religious texts and ideas I sketched in chapters 4 and 5 suggest that convents, spiritual fathers, and lay women religious all attempted to imitate Christ by suffering as he had suffered, enacting penitential and meditative recreations of the Passion to transform themselves. Though Passion devotion was extremely popular across late medieval Europe, the type of self-dissolution in several of the German texts discussed in previous chapters presented a dangerous threat to the established church hierarchy. Schwester Kathrei and *Christus und die minnende Seele* both advocated private self-transformation and violent mystical union while simultaneously downplaying the necessity of an intermediary confessor-figure. Even Jützi Schulthasin from Töss, who asked her confessor's advice before continuing a possibly lethal form of mystical crucifixion, was seeking assurance that she was not risking suicide, not asking for an evaluation of her religious experience or for permission to continue a dangerous form of devotion. This broad trend towards submissive mystical transformation posed

numerous threats, including subverting the Church hierarchy. However, a greater and more basic problem was clearly that some devoted religious could not achieve mystical transformation, despite their ascetical practices and earnest desire to submit fully to Christ or suffer as he had suffered.

In the Netherlands, roughly contemporary with the violent and subversive texts discussed in previous chapters, a new religious movement posed an alternative path to imitating Christ, one which emphasized emulating his life rather than his death. Geert Grote, founder of the *Devotio Moderna*, or Modern Devotion/New Devout, inspired a lay religious movement which proscribed a much surer path to self-transformation by emphasizing obedience, constant communication with fellow Devout, and training in virtues.[1] The women who joined and propagated this religious movement, which is often characterized as barely mystical, described themselves as Brides of Christ—though only some were nuns, and very few were mystics.[2] They read Seuse's *Exemplar*, the *Speculum Virginum*, the Bible, and Bernard of Clairvaux' sermons—though not his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*—all translated into Middle Dutch for broader dissemination, and they used the language of bridal mysticism in their own writing.[3] However, the Sisters of the Common Life and the nuns who joined the *Devotio Moderna's* Augustinian convents identified themselves as brides of Christ in ways other nuns and mystics rarely did. While several scholars

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[1] For a concise introduction to Geert Groote's life and reform agenda see: John H. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 5-25, 36-44.

[2] Scheepsma gives an excellent history of the women's branches of this movement in his introduction: Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The 'Modern Devotion', the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, trans. David F. Johnson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), 1-31. The introductions to each of the edited Sisterbooks also provide useful historical information, as does Rehm's study of the Sisters of the Common Life in Germany and Klug's recent publication on women's work as a devotional practice within the Modern Devotion: *Levensbechrijvingen van devote zusters te Deventer*, (Utrecht: W.J. Kühler, 1910); Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich* (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein e.V., 1998); , ed. D. A. Brinkerink, Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen: ('Handschrift D') (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1904); Martina B. Klug, *Armut und Arbeit in der Devotio moderna : Studien zum Leben der Schwestern in niederrheinischen Gemeinschaften* (Münster: Waxmann, 2005); Dirk De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige Punten van onsen oelden Zusteren : naar het te Arnhem berustende Handschrift met Inleiding en Aanteekeningen uitgegeven* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1919); Gerhard Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom Gemeinsamen Leben im nordwestlichen Deutschland: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Devotio Moderna und des weiblichen Religiosentums* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1985).

[3] For an overview of women's reading and writing in the Devotio Moderna see Thomas Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," in *Grote lijnen: syntheses over Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. F. P. van Oostrom and W. van Anrooij, Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1995), 130-1; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, esp. 227-245; Irene Berkenbusch, *Speculum virginum: mittelniederländischer Text: Edition, Untersuchungen zum Prolog und einleitende Interpretation* (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 1995), 11-14, 91-108.

of the Modern Devotion have latched onto deathbed sequences where Sisters are at last joined with their holy Bridegroom, the majority of recorded sisters' lives and deaths minimize bridal language, and the writing of the best-known and most controversial Devout mystic, Alijt Bake, is characterized by passion devotion rather than erotic or bridal language. Despite this, De Man, in the introduction to his edition of the Sisterbook from Meester Geertshuis in Deventer, insists that "in her [the typical Sister's] devotion to Christ her devotions reached a pinnacle. This Christ was, for her, the 'beloved Bridegroom,' and she could name herself a Bride of God through this connection."[4] In De Man's reading, each nun eagerly looked forward to death, not as a reprieve from long suffering, but as a blissful joining with the beloved Bridegroom.[5] This same interpretation characterizes Wybren Scheepsma's many publications on the Sisterbooks. He co-authored a short overview of the surviving texts which bears the title "Wachten op de hemelse bruidegom. De Diepenveense. nonnenviten in literairhistorisch perspectief"—that is, "Waiting for the heavenly Bridegroom, the nuns' lives from Diepenveen in a literary-historical perspective." Scheepsma and Jongen open with the death of Salomé Sticken, a bride of Christ, but devote far more time to discussing manuscript provenance and stylistic tropes than characterizing the nuns' lives as a long and impatient wait for death and union with Christ. This same insistence that the nuns from Diepenveen were primarily identified as brides of Christ reappears on the front cover of Scheepsma's modernization of the Diepenveen Sisterbook, where he (or his editor) advertises the paperback as an account of true Brides of Christ: "Poverty, obedience, and humility are the trademarks

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[4] „In de Christusvereering bereikte haar devotie een hoogtepunt. De Christus was voor haar de "geminde Bruidegom", en in verband daarmede konden zij zichzelf "Godsbruid" noemen (9c)" De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, XLIII.

[5] "Het was het geloof in de kracht van het zoenoffer gebracht door den Christus, den Verlosser (12d, 102d, 134d) en het vertrouwen in de verdiensten harere goede werken (10d, 132d), dat den zusters hoop gaf tenslotte de hemelsche zaligheid te verwerven. Het vurig begeeren voor immer met haar geliefden Bruidegom vereenigd te worden, deed haar soms innig verlangen naar haar stervensuur (3b, 127c), vooral bij ziekte (1a), of wanneer zij haar einde niet ver meer waanden (3b). Het moest louter de liefde tot den Christus zijn, welke haar zoo naar den dood deed verlangen; niet de wensche bevrijd te worden van de smarten eener langdurige ziekte; daarom maakte een zuster zichzelf er een verwijt van, toen zij op haar ziekbed lag, en naar den dood verlangde, daar zij vreesde, dat haar stervensbegeerte alleen voortkwan uit den wensch van haar lichaamslijden te worden verlost (135s). [it was this belief in the strength of the offer of the son brought through Christ (the redemptive sacrifice) and the trust in her service and good work that the sisters hoped to receive heavenly sanctity. The ardent desire for each one was to be joined with her beloved Bridegroom...
Ibid., xlvii

of the true Bride of Christ. The Biographies of the Nuns from Diepenveen make an outstanding example of a mirror of these virtues."[6]

De Man, writing in the early twentieth century, was predisposed to viewing religious women as mystics and brides of Christ, while Scheepsma, with a flair for the dramatic, uses this language on dustcovers and chapter headings that accompany nuanced historical descriptions of the sisters' daily lives, concern for virtue and discipline, and especially their literary accomplishments. Yet neither presentation takes into account how very few of the nuns and sisters in the surviving chronicles are described as brides of Christ, or examines how the best-known female mystic of the Modern Devotion avoided bridal language. In this chapter, I turn to the writings for and by women of the fifteenth-century Netherlands to examine how mystical language and training in virtue combine in women's *own words* to create new brides of Christ. While it may seem as if there were innumerable references to brides of Christ in these sources, the material I am presenting represents a small fraction of the extant texts, and may give a false impression that bridal language was common or even dominant—the opposite is the case.

The Modern Devout distrusted mysticism and monastic asceticism, their women's communities produced few mystical texts, and their Sisters were more often described as "holy souls" than as "brides of Christ," yet bridal imagery and the language of the *Song of Songs* can be found in preserved texts. I begin with an examination of the Sisterbooks and their presentation of bridal language in deathbed scenes, daily life, and rare mystical experiences. One Chronicler describes an outbreak of pestilence which killed several sisters as a "Great Wedding," and bridal language often accompanies death and sickness. Extremely virtuous behavior also earns some Sisters the title of bride, while the few mystical experiences described by chroniclers often carefully avoid the expected mystical language, instead describing a sister's appearance or behavior during a moment of rapture, pointing to a preference for

[6] „Armoede, gehoorazaamheid en nederigheid kenmerken het leven van de ware bruid van Christus. De biografieën van de nonnen uit Diepenveen vormen bij uitstek spiegels van deze deugden." Wybren Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen* (Amsterdam: Querido, 1993).

pious living that was characteristic of the Modern Devout. I introduce genre characteristics of the Dutch Sisterbooks, then explore ways the bridal language appears in these lives, looking primarily at deathbed scenes. In the last section of this chapter, I look at several bridal references that accompany allusions to mystical experiences. The tension between salvation through work and careful cultivation of the virtues, as advocated in the Sisterbooks, and salvation through mystical union, comes to a fore in the life, writings, and tribulations of Alijt Bake. In the next chapter, I compare Alijt Bake and Salomé Sticken, two Devout prioresses and authors, one a bride of Christ, the other a mystic who was exiled for advocating mystical practices. In the convents and Sisterhouses of the Modern Devotion, women became brides of Christ the moment they resolved to dedicate their lives to religion.

~ 6.1 ~

Brides of Christ in the *Devotio Moderna*

Console me, my sweet love, comfort only me:
Every other consolation is insufficient for me
With your eternal sweetness (comfort me)
And don't leave me alone!

My heart suffers so great a pain
That I must depart this life
From my loving lord
Here I will take up the cross
And with Christ learn to die.

To stand with Christ on the cross
And topple him with my love
In dying all things
That make then his picture likeness
They before us die from love.[7]

This anonymous poem, transcribed in the mid 19th Century by Hoffmann von Fallersleben in a multi-volume collection of late medieval Dutch religious poetry, voices a lamenting soul's efforts to imitate Christ in death. Though the poem is of the fifteenth century, and from the region where the

[7] Troost mi, mijn soete life, allein:
Al ander troost is mi te clein,
Ontsteket mijn herte van binnen
Mit uwer ewigher soeticheit
Ende laet mi niet allein!

Mijn herte dat doghet so grote pijn
Dat ic dus moet verscheiden sijn
Van minen lieven heren.
Hier om wil ic dat cruce omvaen
Ende mit Cristus sterven leren.

Mit cristus aen den cruce te staen
Ende hem mit minnen omtevaen
In sterven alre dinghen:
Dat make tons sinen beelde ghelijc
Die voor ons starf van minnen.
Hoffmann von Fallersleben and August Heinrich, *Niederländische geistliche Lieder des xv. Jahrhunderts* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1968), 117. I have provided the full poem with translation in 9.1.

Devotio Moderna flourished, it has no known provenance.[8] This short song was glossed by Banz as a possible analog for the soul's crucifixion in *Christus und die minnende Seele*, and though both texts are rhymed and describe learning to die with Christ, the anonymous Dutch poet portrays a willing and eager soul who seeks crucifixion as a salve for lovesickness. The idea of learning to die with Christ echoes through the religious vernacular literature of the later Middle Ages, but in the surviving literature from women's communities of the Devout, learning to die with Christ can only follow learning to live virtuously.[9] The spiritual tenor of the Modern Devotion revises the mystical and penitential literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, emphasizing instead a manageable program for spiritual development and personal salvation.

Religious biographies written in the convents and sister houses of the Modern Devotion belong to a newly defined genre.[10] Though entries follow the conventions of hagiography, where the acts and miracles of saints demonstrate virtues including piety, humbleness, and perseverance, the sisters chronicled in these books were neither saints nor miracle-workers. While the lives of saints were written to inspire wonder and admiration, rather than imitation, books of sisters, including those from the Low

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[8] Von Fallersleben gives minimal archival references. This poem comes from a manuscript "B 27" but he does not include the necessary apparatus to determine what manuscript that might have been, much less its provenance. His critical apparatus is provided in volume 1 of : Hoffmann von Fallersleben and August Heinrich, *Horae belgicae. Studio atque opera Hoffmanni Fallerslebensis* (Hannoverae: C. Ruempler, 1836).

[9] Passion devotion was a prominent theme in Devout women's writing, though it will be treated only superficially in this project.

[10] Following Scheepsma's usage, I refer to the vernacular lives of sisters in these books as *viten,* or *Lives* and the lives of saints in Latin as *vitae.* I have, however, used books of sisters and Sisterbooks interchangeably, rather than following Gertrud Lewis' suggestion that fifteenth-century Dutch books should be called "books of Sisters" while fourteenth-century German books should be called "Sisterbooks" or "Sister-books" to clarify provenance. I find the phrase "books of Sisters" particularly awkward and Lewis' distinction to be unhelpful, as both the Dutch and the German books belong to the same genre of writing. For a discussion of the Sisterbook as a genre, see Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-books of Fourteenth-century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 48-57; Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 177-9. For an excellent overview of women's religious houses and an analysis of many of the Sister Books, including those from Emmerich and Diepenveen, see Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 2, 19-65, 183-4. A recent study of the canonesses of the Modern Devotion, their convent life, their writing, and their influence is: Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*. Dated but still useful is: Wilhelmus Johannes Kühler, *Johannes Brinckerinck en zijn klooster te Diepenveen* (Rotterdam: W. Nevens, 1908).A more focused study on the Sisters of the Common Life in north-western Germany can be found in Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom Gemeinsamen Leben im nordwestlichen Deutschland.*

Countries, chronicle "normal" women's lives. Unlike the German Sisterbooks which were primarily "concerned with documenting the monastery's history and the community's saintliness," in the Dutch context, the emphasis on saintliness is replaced with piety and virtuous living. [11] When adapting the genre of hagiography to the biography of simple pious women, the anonymous authors of extant Dutch Sisterbooks carefully avoid describing miracles, substituting anecdotes which served the same narrative functions, primarily when describing virtues worthy of emulation. The end result is a new type of religious life which Scheepsma describes as integrating collected "good points [*goede punten*]" into a hagiographic framework.[12] In this chapter I examine the presentation of brides of Christ in these *viten* recorded in books of sisters from Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer and the convents of Sts. Mary and Agnes at Diepenveen and St. Agnes Emmerich.[13]

The first Dutch Sisterbooks were compiled 1470 and 1512, a period where women's writing was more closely regulated by the hierarchy of the Devout.[14] Written in a religious context that is often

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[11] Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*, 16.

[12] The good points [*goede punten*] were positive things sisters noticed about each other, which would be shared communally. According to Scheepsma: "the authors of the *viten* turned to hagiography for models in structuring the rich but amorphous material concerning the deceased sisters. Thanks to their daily exposure to these legends, the sisters were very familiar with this literary genre. What was more natural than to model the biographies of their fellows after the saints lives? ... But there are also important differences between the devout *viten* and the classical *vitae*. The miraculous events so characteristic of the traditional saints lives are for the most part absent... the sisters of Diepenveen were not saints— a fact which the authors of these texts fully realized, despite their admiration for their subjects—so no miracles occur in the *viten*...We do, however, encounter events that border on the miraculous." Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 142.

[13] Three extant manuscripts from Diepenveen survive, as well as one copy of the book of sisters from Deventer and one copy of the Book of Sisters at St. Agnes in Emmerich. Other Sisterbooks are known but have not yet been published. Each is anonymous, though the chronicle from Emmeirch does give the author's initials. Edited transcriptions of these texts are available in : *Levensbechrijvingen van devote zusters te Deventer*; Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*; *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*; De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*; Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*.

[14] The Windesheim congregation forbade all original women's writing in response to the mystical reform agenda of Alijt Bake, who was prioress of the convent of Galilea in Ghent and author of several mystical treatises. For a discussion of Alijt Bake and the crackdown on women's writing see: Alijt Bake, ed. R. Th.M. van Dijk and M.K.A. van den Berg, Tot in de peilloze Diepte van God: de Vrouw die moest zwijgen over haar mystieke Weg (Kok: Kampen, 1997); Anne Bollmann, "Een vrauwe te sijn op mijn selfs handt: Alijt Bake (1415-1455) als geistliche Reformerin des innerlichen Lebens," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 76, no. 1-3 (2002); Anne Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," in *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004); Orlanda S.H. Lie, "Middelnederlandse literatuur vanuit Genderperspectief: een Verkenning," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 117, no. 3 (2001); Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low*

directly connected to the Reformation and a northern Renaissance, these chronicles describe a devotional world that retains medieval values and sensibilities. The chroniclers describe every day events as if they were saints' "miracles" to demonstrate Sisters' virtues. This stylistic innovation also de-emphasizes any possible subversive or mystical reading when Sisters are described as brides of Christ.[15]

In one colorful episode from the life of Salomé Sticken, founding mother at Diepenveen, the anonymous chronicler takes two mundane stories about cats and the things cats do—catch mice, vomit, meow loudly, stretch and lay down where they please—and turns them into almost-miracles which show both the authority of Sticken and the virtue of obedience to religious superiors. Teaching a cat to obey is, at the very least, the work of a skillful and authoritative woman. The authors of the Sisterbooks used these mundane episodes to demonstrate spiritual qualities, amaze readers, and provide examples of model behavior without ever suggesting that the sisters themselves were saints or performed miracles. Simple moments from daily life are described much as miracles would be in hagiography: exemplary virtues demonstrate a sister's particular piety but also give readers goals and role-models. Mundane miracles in the Sisterbooks taught, among other things, a disciplined approach towards food, the importance of charitable acts towards children, and a disregard for worldly clothing. Even stories about events important to the development of a convent incorporate hagiographic models, as is the case with the story of Souke van Dorsten's conversion in the book from Diepenveen. Though some of these lives describe mystical experiences or name a particular sister as a bride of Christ, performance of exemplary virtues is far more important in these accounts than reiterating the lesson of the *Speculum Virginum*—that

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Countries, 197-226; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 113-14, 228-30. Another factor in the writing at Diepenveen and Deventer was the outbreak of a plague in 1452, which killed 90 people at Diepenveen and more in Deventer. According to the Sisterbook, this was called "the Great Wedding of Diepenveen." Although the convent rapidly replenished its numbers, the concentration of deaths may have spurred the writing of a convent history. Thom Mertens, "Middelnederduitse exempelen over verschijningen te Diepenveen," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 76, no. 1-3 (2002): 108.

[15] For some rather dated arguments about whether the Modern Devotion was a Christian renaissance and a forerunner of the Reformation, see especially Albert Hyma, *The Christian Renaissance: A History of the "Devotio Moderna"* (New York: Century, 1925); R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion. Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968). John van Engen presents an excellent overview of the debate and its resolution, as well as a helpful history of the movement in his introduction to Johanne Autenrieth, Michael Borgolte, and Herrad Spilling, *Litterae medii aevi: Festschrift für Johanne Autenrieth zu ihrem 65. Geburtstag* (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1988), 5-36.

virtuous living will win the Bridegroom's love and lead to the nuptial bed. Though many women are identified as brides of Christ, bridal status is less important than their contributions to their communities in these Sisterbooks.

Like the better-known convent chronicles from Germany and Italy, Sisterbooks from the Modern Devotion follow a set pattern standard which identifies this genre. As with hagiography, each entry ends with death and the promise of spiritual rewards in heaven.[16] Spiritual lives in these Sisterbooks often begin with family background, sometimes including mini-biographies of a sister's parents or noteworthy kin. From the Sisterbooks, it seems as if almost every sister came from a good family—generally pious, aristocratic, or both.[17] The chroniclers then turn to the moment of conversion and entrance into religious life.[18] Once within a communal environment, the narrative provides examples of each woman's virtues and contributions in anecdote form, leading up to a deathbed scene, where, on occasion, the dying sister joins her Bridegroom in heaven.[19] Each of these phases presents opportunities

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[16] While Van Engen notes that the authors of these Chronicles intentionally borrowed from the Lives of the Desert Fathers, Wybren Scheepsma has presented compelling evidence which shows how the women authors of these books drew on hagiographic models. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 26?

[17] While the Sisterhouse founded in Deventer was for poor women and widows, the new convent at Diepenveen drew its membership from the local aristocracy. As Diepenveen's reputation grew, *adel* young women (aristocrats and lower nobility) from the Dutch-speaking territories began seeking entry. Notable aristocratic sisters from Diepenveen include Katharina van Naaldewijk and Souke van Dorsten. The Sisterbooks from Emmerich and Deventer (MeesterGeerts-Huis) do not contain as many references to wealthy families. For a discussion of class and status in these convents, framed by Katharina's conversion story, see Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 31-47.

[18] The process of conversion is crucial in the thinking of the Modern Devotion, and was characterized by making "a good resolution [een geode opzet] to live a life of work, prayer, breaking the will, following Christ, and practicing the virtues. For an overview of the conversion process and some of the main spiritual concerns of their religiosity, see Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 28-35.

[19] Scheepsma writes that "The lives from Diepenveen vary in style, length, and narrative technique, but they all follow the same basic structure. A life is set out in three parts: the conversion, the life in the cloister, and the death" [Die Diepenveense viten lopen qua stijl, lengte en verhaalwijze nogal uiteen, maar ze voldoen allemaal wel aan een bepaalde basisstructuur. Doorgaans bestaat een vite uit drie onderdelen: de bekering, het kloosterleven en het sterven] Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 178. Further comments on the pattern of nuns lives may be found in Anne Bollmann, "Weibliches Frömmigkeitsleben am Rande der Neuzeit. Volkssprachliche Schwesternbücher als Deutungsmuster sozialer und literarischer Kommunikation in den Frauengemeinschaften der *Devotio moderna*," in *Literatur -- Geschichte -- Literaturgeschichte: Beiträge zur mediävistischen Literaturwissenschaft. Festschrift für Volker Honemann zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Nine Miedema and Rudolf Suntrup (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003); Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women*; Bartolomea Riccoboni and Daniel Ethan Bornstein, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*.

to highlight a woman's particular virtues. The chroniclers flag exemplary anecdotes with phrases like "it once happened that," or "then one time," or statements of particular virtuous attributes, such as "She was poor and modest in her clothing," alerting readers that the stories which follow provide an example of progress in the virtues.[20] In general, sisters who played a prominent role in an institution's history have much longer entries in the Books, and it is in these longer entries that exemplary anecdotes are most frequent, and where Sisters are more often identified as brides of Christ.

In the critical essay which accompanies his modernization of the Sisterbook from Diepenveen, Wybren Scheepsma observes that "the Diepenveen Sisterbook above all wants to be an example of the good and fruitful cloister life... the Sisterbook is thus in a sense a mirror of virtues out of which you can easily read the ideals of the Modern Devotion itself."[21] Scheepsma restates the recorded intentions of the Sisterbooks. Each of the edited Sisterbooks includes an introductory prologue which explains that the book has been composed to preserve memories of the good deeds and virtues of the first generation of sisters, so that current readers might be inspired by their efforts and learn how to progress in the virtues. "Here follow some of the edifying points of our older sisters. It is good to hold their lives before our eyes, for their ways were truly like a candle on a candlestick, casting light upon all those in the house... Let us listen with inner desire to how these devout maidens of Christ, our fellow sisters, did their exercises, and not imagine it impossible to imitate what they did before us in this same place and at nearly the same time," writes the Chronicler of Meester-Geertshuis, while the chronicler at St Agnes in Emmerich explains that she has gathered up the lives of "the honorable deceased fathers and mothers, and after them the sisters, and also in order everyone else who has died, one after the next... so that we can follow their examples and virtues which they have given to us, which we might learn from the Lord

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[20]"Eens op een tijd..." "doen het beval dat..." "Sij was arm ende oetmodich in oeren clederen" From the life of Gertrut ten Colke (d. 1432) De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 108.

[21] "Het Diepenveense zusterboek vooral een voorbeeld wil zijn voor een goed en vruchtbaar kloosterleven ... Het zusterboek is in die zin een deugdenspiegel waaruit de idealen van de Moderne Devotie zich gemakkelijk laten aflezen" Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 177.

Jesus Christ, amen."[22] The D manuscript of the Sisterbook from Diepenveen also opens with a few lines guiding the reader, though this is a far shorter prologue: "Here begins a small portion of the virtues of the ardent and edifying sisters from Diepenveen, who once lived in our house."[23] The Diepenveen prologue is reinforced by a message of imitation in virtues found in the manuscript's epilogue, and by several passages within each of the *viten* which explicitly state that readers should follow the edifying example of the first generation of Diepenveen. In each of these surviving Sisterbooks the authorial intent is explicit: to provide examples of successful training in the virtues which would inspire both amazement and imitation by the current residents of the house, though only the exhortation from Meester-Geertshuis describes the chronicled women as maidens of Christ, implying some sort of bridal relationship, and interestingly, this is the only women's community which did not become a convent.[24] The chronicler from Meester-Geertshuis seems most aware of the difficulties exemplary models may present for Devout readers, as she encourages readers to believe it fully possible to imitate these wonderful and inspirational elder sisters in their virtue-training, but each of these prologues introduces a Sisterbook as an inspirational guidebook teaching progression in the virtues, intended for use by residents of a women's house of the Modern Devotion.

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[22] Translation of the prologue from Meester-Geertshuis can be found in Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 121-2. "soe wil ic dat beghijnnen als ijerst van ons eerweerdighen ouersten paters ende maters die gestoruen sijn, ende daer na die susteren, een ijeghelick soe als die sijn gestoruen, die een nae den aenderen... op dat wij hoer exempel ende dochden moeten nae volghen, die si ons voer gegaen hebben, welck ons verleenen moet die here Ihesus Christus, amen." Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 38.

[23] "Hijr begin teen wyenich van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van deepen veen, welker eendeels wt onsen huyse aldaer geset weren." *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*, 1a. The DV manuscript of the Diepenveen Sisterbook begins instead with the life of Johannes Brinckerinck and has no framing prologue statement. This manuscript's version is available only in an abridged modernization: Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*.

[24] The Sisterhouses were lay communities and residents never made lifelong religious vows. While some of them would become associated with Franciscan tertiaries, and others later became convents. The remainder continued on, free of official affiliation. The Sisterhouses differed from beguinages in repute and concern. Though both organizations were lay, popular, and oriented around work and prayer, by the fifteenth-century beguines had gained a reputation as licentious, transgressive, and overly mystical. Simons mentions that when reformers from the Modern Devotion attempted to convert beguinages, they encouraged the "contemplative" life and restricted travel. Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 136-7. For an overview of Sisterhouses in Germany see Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom Gemeinsamen Leben im nordwestlichen Deutschland*. Scheepsma also goes over the history of the Devotio Moderna and the difference between its convents and Sisterhouses in his introduction : Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*.

The virtues of the "Elder Sisters" of the Modern Devotion, like the reform-agenda of the broader movement, derive from apostolic themes and the teachings of Jesus Christ, as the chronicler from Emmerich states in her prologue.[25] Many of the anecdotes included in these lives portray nuns directly following Jesus' New Testament teachings to the Apostles, though the authors never make direct connections between sisters' actions and biblical verses. Like any medieval mirror-literature, the Sisterbooks present idealized virtues for emulation.[26] Yet in hagiography, the genre from which these Sisterbooks ultimately derive, readers are more often expected to admire a saint's accomplishments than try to imitate them. Bynum and Kieckhefer have both pointed out that hagiography is primarily about admiration, not imitation, citing Augustine, Bonaventure, and others as voicing just this concern. Bynum adds that admiration and imitation were often set up as opposing goals in religious literature, where medieval audiences were more often urged to wonder at the feats of the saints.[27] In the Sisterbooks, this tension is resolved by presenting the elder sisters as women who have made significant progress in the virtues while simultaneously implying that the author and readers are only beginning down the same path. Though not yet perfected, each chronicled woman is presumably farther along than those reading her life. Consequently, stories taken from every-day life which demonstrate a particular sister's remarkable virtue serve a dual purpose: to inspire wonder and awe, and to model ideal behavior, showing sisters what *can* be accomplished through dedicated training in the virtues. Presumably, identifying the possibility of eternal union with Christ in death for pious women would inspire readers to more diligently perfect their own virtues.

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[25] Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 161.

[26] De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 3-7, 253-7; Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 307.

[27] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *American Historical Review* 102, no. 1 (1997); Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-century Saints and their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 13-14.

~6.2~

Good Sisters

From the very beginning the Modern Devotion offered a program of spiritual renewal that any Christian could follow. Providing texts modeling progression in the virtues was consequently the main concern for the women chroniclers of the Modern Devotion, though the use of mundane miracles presented scenes more suitable for admiration than imitation.[28] The tension between admiration and imitation is often a problem in exemplary anecdotes from the Sisterbooks of Diepenveen and Deventer, though the book from St. Agnes in Emmerich only rarely includes semi-miraculous episodes, reserving this narrative style for the lives of extremely important sisters who are not generally suitable for emulation—the St. Agnes Sisterbook also is more hesitant to identify brides of Christ or mystical experiences. Anecdotes from Diepenveen, Emmerich and Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer sometimes express ambivalence as to whether a particular sister's virtuous behavior should be fully emulated. In most cases, this tension stems from situations where a sister's particular virtue makes her disobedient. Of all the virtues, obedience was the most important. A sister who learned obedience could be instructed and trained in every other virtue, as a collation from Diepenveen states: "Obedience is a very easy path to the eternal life. If we may arrive at the eternal life upon a swift horse, why should we wish to walk?"[29] This sentiment clearly references the promised "quick path" to salvation offered by mysticism in Schwester Kathrei's writing, substituting obedience for mystical transformation. Yet despite the importance of obedience within Devout communities, many exemplary sisters fell into disobedience while perfecting another virtue. In a lengthy passage in the Book of Sisters from Meester-Geertshuis, Gertrut ten Colke's complete disinterest in worldly clothing becomes a cause for concern and an inhuman virtue, though her detachment originates in an identified bridal experience. Though not a nudist, Gertrut habitually gave away and exchanged her clothing. Rather than encouraging readers to

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[28] Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 145-52.

[29] Ibid., 133.

imitate Gertrut, the chronicler uses Gertrut's improbable behavior to encourage other sisters to cultivate a less extreme form of detachment. Gertrut's apostolic detachment from possessions leads to acts of disobedience, and while her behavior causes the narrator to openly marvel, Gertrut is never identified as a figure to emulate.

The chronicler tells us that Gertrut devotes herself fully to work and prayer after recovering from a life-threatening illness that involved vomiting blood, one of the main symptoms of the "pesten" or plague which claimed many sisters lives at Deventer, Diepenveen, and Emmerich. Gertrut's trademark virtues—generosity and a superhuman detachment from worldly goods—are understood as developing from her dramatic illness. The chronicler writes that: "she [Gertrut] was poor and modest in her clothing and whatever she had, that someone else might benefit from, she would willingly give it over to that person without complaining, so that she might always be free in her way to give and to take, whatever she wanted."[30] In a short reminiscence, Gertrut's detachment from clothing is fleshed out when the Mother at Meester-Geertshuis gives Gertrut a fleece which "was taken from her and given to another sister, who seemed to have a greater need. And this demonstrates how she is so virtuous and generous that she paid attention to nothing external that might go against her."[31] The author provides two interpretations of Gertrut's behavior. First, she insists Gertrut's detachment is virtuous and honestly generous, then she tries to provide a motivational explanation for this extreme detachment, suggesting that "nonetheless, it is a good theory that she developed this nature from when she was sick and about to die; because she had taken the wedding clothes of love spiritually, [therefore] she had no interest in a

[30] "Sij was arm ende oetmodich in oeren clederen ende als si wat hadde, dat enen anderen gadelick was, dat gaf si willichlike over sonder croenen, soedat oer oversten vry tot oer mochten wesen te geven ende te nemen, wat dat sij wolden." De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 108.

[31] "Op een tijt gaf oer oer moder enen nyen pels, ende die wart oer voert genoemen ende wert eenre ander zuster gegeven, dien hi meest noetdruftich scheen te wesen. Ende hier bewees si oer soe doegentlick ende guederhande in, datmens van buten niet mercken en conde, dattet oer contrary was."Ibid.

new fur or any other worldly thing."[32] Seemingly, the author of the Sisterbook felt that even though Christ had commanded a complete detachment from clothing – "if they take away your coat, give them your shirt too" (Luke 6:29) – Gertrut's behavior went beyond apostolic living. The chronicler's second level of interpretation, which suggests that Gertrut's detachment was directly related to a near-death experience, accounts for her extreme behavior by identifying Gertrut as a bride of Christ who has already tasted heaven and, presumably, has now lost her worldliness in Christ's embrace.

According to the presentation offered by the Deventer chronicler, a near-death experience has granted one of the sisters a semi-miraculous detachment from worldly possessions. This virtue, though commendable, can consequently never be fully imitated by other sisters, even if they too are brides of Christ. However, women might earn bridal raiment without near-death experiences. According to a note in de Man's gloss, Johannes Brinckerinck, spiritual advisor to the women at Deventer, described the bridal clothing in a collation presented to the Sisters and recorded in a *raparium*. While the Deventer chronicler suggests that Gertrut's near-death experience stripped her of her worldly clothing—and thus her attachment to worldly goods—and that she remained in bridal attire spiritually even after regaining her health, Brinckerinck describes the bridal clothing as something each sister could wear and attain in the world: "but on account of your being here [in this gathering of the Devout] so that you should be clothed in the bridal clothing of love, and this is the work of penitence."[33] When encouraging the sisters to live piously and penitently, Brinckerinck suggests that they can earn the bridal raiment through worldly action, and that this new attire requires neither monastic vow nor mystical experience. In contrast, Gertrut's experience suggests bridal raiment only comes when virtuous women die. Both models would appear in other Sisterbook entries.

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[32] "Nochtan ist wal te vermoeden, dat si naeder natueren oer daer al merclick in te sterven hadde ; mer opdat si dat bruloftscleet der mynnen, mit welken dat si van bijnen verciert was, geheel ende ongeschoert mochte hoelden, soe en ruecte si niet vele op den pels of op ander uutwendige dijnge" Ibid.

[33]"Hetzelfde beeld gebruikt Brinckerinck in een zijner collaties: ' mer daerom bistu hier, dattu mitten bruloftsclede der minnen ghecleet soudste werden, dit is die arbeit der penitenciën.' ... 'die ander cleedinge is die mynne.... cleet der onnoselheit." Ruusbroec ... Zie ook de noot bij christus als bruidegom der ziel."
Ibid., 107.

Though Gertrut is a model of virtue who has earned Christ's wedding gown, the Deventer chronicler also presents Gertrut's detachment from the world as potentially subversive. Gertrut's attitude towards clothing and her general behavior might easily be misinterpreted as disobedient or rebellious: when the mother allocated a garment to a particular sister, she was supposed to keep it and use it, yet Gertrut's refusal to show interest in her belongings caused her to ignore commands from her superior.[34] Yet Gertrut is not disobedient; instead, she is disinterested and apathetic, gladly letting other sisters benefit from her possessions. Gertrut, then, has achieved *gelassenheit,* or in Dutch, *laten* to "let go," one of the mystical goals that Alijt Bake would exhort the women in her care to pursue.[35] Just as Alijt Bake's teaching was perceived as dangerously subversive, undermining the order's hierarchy while encouraging women to pursue a risky road to salvation, Gertrut's lack of interest in worldly possessions and her implicit disregard for the Mother's distribution of goods could have been read as rebellious or dimwitted. Preemptively, the chronicler provides a second story which resolves the tension between the virtues of obedience, generosity, and detachment from worldly things to show that Gertrut had achieved a heightened spirituality. The mother of Meester-Geertshuis tests Gertrut's [dis]obedient tendency to give away or exchange her allocated possessions, and Gertrut's behavior receives unofficial approval. The chronicler writes that: "on another occasion, our Mother gave her a new head covering, and this was also taken away from her, and another ragged gray hood was given to her in its place. Then it happened that our mother came to her and saw that she was wearing an old grey hood on her head." In this episode, one of the other sisters is responsible for swapping out the new head covering, and though Gertrut was not concerned with the state of her headgear, she soon found herself having to explain what she had done with the new black hood. The chronicler writes that "then it happened that our Mother came to

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[34] Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 31-47; Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 176-86. Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom Gemeinsamen Leben im nordwestlichen Deutschland*, 204-208, 284-5.

[35] Bollmann identifies four keywords as representing Bake's writing and teaching: *kennise en minne* [knowledge and love] and *laten en lijden* [acquiescence and suffering]. Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," 67.

her and saw that she was wearing an old grey hood on her head," seeing this, she said 'you have a better hood to wear, I gave you a new one, where is it?" Here Gertrut is put into a difficult situation. If she admits that she exchanged the new hood with one of the sisters, she may come off as insubordinate—though she is expected to accuse fellow sisters of faults, Gertrut's kindness would not allow her to blame another—but to lie would be sinful. Gertrut replies carefully, neither lying nor admitting that she has exchanged coverings with another sister: "dear Mother, you know that I have another cover better than this one, I have also a black one by our beds." Though Gertrut speaks of a black hood, it is not the one she was assigned to wear, yet this response is satisfactory according to the chronicler. "Even though she and others knew that she had no better head cover by her bed; the black one was even more ragged than the gray one that she [Gertrut] currently had on her head."[36]

Here, Gertrut's misbehavior is tacitly acknowledged and her honesty and commitment to obedience are subtly tested by an authority figure. Because Gertrut truthfully answers that she has a black hood she is not wearing, albeit perpetuating a misconception that she still has the allocated black hood, the mother overlooks Gertrut's potentially disobedient exchange of possessions. In this *goede punte*, Gertrut's disinterest in clothing is clearly abnormal—it must be ascribed to her near-death experience—and potentially subversive. The chronicler is aware that if all of the residents at Meester-Geertshuis began following Gertrut's example, chaos would ensue. Gertrut's behavior is thus portrayed as impossible to imitate, nearly miraculous, and a gift from God following a near-death experience. Any sisters reading or listening to Gertrut's life would hopefully be inspired by her example but realize the impossibility of achieving Gertrut's particular level of detachment. This is accomplished by weaving

[36] Doe ghevyelt op een tijt, dat oer moder hier quam ende sach, dat si dit oelde, grawe covelken op oer hoevet hadde. Doe sach si sie aen en segede: "Gertrut, en hebdi giene beter covele te dragen, ic gaf u ommer latest ene nye; waer is die? " Doe antwoerde si oere moder vrendelike weder ende segede: "Wanne, lieve moder, myendi dat ic giene beter covele en hebbe dan dese? Ic hebbe noch ene swarte covele bi onse bedde." Ende aldus satte si oer moder tevreden, soedat si anders niet en wiste, dan dat si noch ene beter covele bi oeren bedde hadde; mer die swarte covele was veel snoeder dan die grawe, die si op oer hovet hadde. Ende aldus, gelick date en guet boem altoes van sijnre gueder wortelen guide vruchten voertbrenget, desgeliks oec dese guide ende goddienstige zuster conde uut oeren zueten ende vredigen herten die dijnge aldus vergueden ende op dat beste vercallen, opdat overall die mynne ende die sichticheit ongequesset ende onghebroecken mochte blyven." De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 108-9.

together a series of biblical passages which suggest that Gertrut is like someone who lives with God [*die huysgenoeten Gods*], and describing her as someone who had already achieved virtues others were still trying to bring about.[37] Gertrut's bridal transformation was, however, initiated during her earlier sickness, when she was granted bridal raiment as she hovered between life and death. Her subsequent detachment from clothing, Gertrut's characteristic virtue, resulted directly from this bridal transformation. According to this *Life*, becoming a bride of Christ could give a sister near-saintly virtues, and might happen well before death, but the special gifts that came with marrying Jesus could not commonly be attained by the living.

For Gertrut ten Colke, the Deventer chronicle reframes a potentially subversive detachment by portraying Gertrut as someone who has already left the material world. Gertrut was no longer a normal woman, and her extreme virtue was possible only because of a transformative near-death experience which turned the rest of her life into an extended marriage ceremony. Dressed as Christ's bride, her mind and soul were already in heaven, and her irreproachable behavior was suitable only to wonder at, never to fully imitate. Gertrut was a bride of Christ during her life, but only because she had essentially died. Other sisters at Deventer, Diepenveen, and Emmerich would become brides of Christ well before death, either explicitly, or through biblical connections to the *Song of Songs*. For instance, Sister Heylewich ten Velthave (d. 1418) is compared in passing to the Bride of the *Song,* implicitly becoming a bride of Christ because of her industry.[38] A Sister Beel at St. Agnes in Emmerich was praised for being like a bride of

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[37] The passage incorporates excerpts from Mt 7:17, 12:33, Lk 6:43, Mt 13:41, Prov 31:21, Mt 18:4, 23:12, and Lk 14:11, 18:14, ending with „Al desgelikes was oec dese guede zuster Gertrut ten Colke...[and the good sister Gertrut ten Colke was just like this too]." The life closes with: " Ende noch veel ander oetmodiger oefnijnge hadde si over oer, daer si oersselves ziele ende ander guede menschen mede stichte in doechden. [And there were even more pious signs which she had about her, the sort of virtues that we and other good people are still trying to accomplish for our own salvation.]" Ibid., 109.

[38]However, she was interiorly very beautiful before the eyes of God. And about this [her internal beauty] they might well say, that the bride in the Canticles spoke, and said: 'Although I am dark, I am still beautiful' (Cant 1:4) because she was disrespected for her appearance and was never before anyone who god did not know them, however she was beautiful and truly desirable before Him, who was not at all interested in her external beauty but only in the service of her hear ... nochtan was si van bijnnen seer schoene voer den ogen Gods. Ende hieromme mochte si wal seggen, dat die bruyt in Cantica spreket, ende secht: "Al bijn ic swart, ic bijn nochtan schoene" (cant 1 4); want al scheen si ongeachtet ende niets weert voer diegene, die Gode niet en kennen, nochtan was si schoene ende seer suverlick voer Dengenen, die niet an en siet cierheit ende schoenheit van buten, mer allene die verdienste der herten. (1 sam 16:7, which reads "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD sees not as man sees; man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.") Ibid., 28.

Christ at communal meals: "At many meals she kept her eyes low and sat like a bride of Christ though the others did not [do so] and thought over the things the Lord had done for her."[39] Beel and Heylwech were brides because of lived virtues, rather than a transformation through death, just as Johannes Brinckerink suggested was possible in his collation.

The St. Agnes Chapter rules also describe the sisters as brides of Christ when outlining behavior for the dormitory and the treatment of novices. According to Chapter 4 of the Rule, which discusses sleeping arrangements for the sisters, asks sisters to behave by reminding them of who is watching, and who they are wed to:

> "In all manner of things we should be so decent, in sleeping and in waking up, in dressing and in undressing as chastely as if it were our very last day on earth, thinking of God's presence and the presence of our holy angels, our guardians, and remembering that we are Brides of Christ. Not only our souls, but also our bodies are consecrated to the king of maidens and the lover of purity.... Therefore our bodies are earthly vessels with which we carry all costly treasures for Jesus Christ, and our community (lidmaat members of the congregation so presumably members of the order?) are temples for the Holy Ghost. And that is a duty and a concern of a bride of Christ, that she be immaculate, pure, and chaste in both soul and body."[40]

In this passage, Sisters are warned to keep their bodies free from sin, because they already belong to Christ the Bridegroom. This traditional exhortation to chastity reminds women who have become nuns that their vows have made them brides of Christ, and that their physical and spiritual purity must be carefully guarded. The sentiments expressed in the twelfth-century *Speculum Virginum* are unchanged

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[39] Si was mennige maeltijt dat si niet ens hoer ogen op en sloch ende sat als een bruijt Christi die aenders niet en dacht dat om die dinghe die den Heren aen gijngen. Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 245.

[40] In alle onse manieren sullen wy wesen soo geschickt, in slapen te gaen ende opt e staen, in cleden ende ontcleden soo eerbaer, of onse ouersten daer tegen woordich waren, denckende Godts tegenwoordicheijt ende van onsen heiligen engel, onsen behoeder, ende dat wij syn bruijden Christi, die niet alleen onse sielen, maer oock onse lichamen toe geheijlicht hebben den coninck der mageden ende en lief hebber der suiverheijt. Daerom seijt den heiligen apostel Paulus; Leert ende draeght Godt in u lichamen, ende dat een ijegelick sijn vat, dat is syn eygen licham, besitte in heijlichheijt ende in eeren ende niet mishandele nae die quade begeerlickheijt als die Godt niet en kennen.Dan onse lichamen syn eerde vaten, daer wij in dragen den alder costelicksten schat Jesum Christum, ende onse lidtmaten syn tempelen van den heiligen Geest. Ende dat is het eygen weerck ende becommernisse van een bruijt Christi, dat sij reijn, suiver, ende eerbaer sy nae siel ende lichaem. Ibid., 314.

here. The passage clearly is warning against illicit behavior, improper dress, and especially against sexual activity. However, instead of enticing nuns with promises of spiritual rewards or lengthy discussions of flowers or biblical exempla, as the *Speculum Virginum's* author did, the St. Agnes Rule elaborates on a simple command to chastity by warning the sisters to remember, first of all, who is *watching them* (God and their guardian angels) and second of all, who truly *owns* their bodies and souls (Christ the Bridegroom). In this short passage, the convent has become a panopticon. Each sister is under constant observation, her body and soul evaluated during even the most mundane activities—dressing, undressing, sleeping, waking up. Though the dormitory itself obviously lacked privacy, this reminder that God was watching too may have reminded Sisters that even the slightest infraction would be noticed, and might sully body and soul, thus tarnishing one of Christ's beloved treasures.

Several sisters were praised for behaving virtuously like brides of Christ during their lives. For instance, Sweene Holtijncs (d. 1439), a sister at Meester-Geertshuijs, was compared to the bride from the *Song* in a short passage reiterating her many virtues:

> With all humbleness and modesty she stood before her superior (the Lord) and was [like this] before Him from the beginning of her conversion to the end of her life, subservient and obedient. She was extremely meek and detested herself and had a great and high feeling from one another, so that after her darkness there was sunshine on all sides, except for her. Behold, as she was thus very capable and pure externally and internally, and she had many virtues moreover and graces, which Our Dear Lord had given to her, so that so that you might well hear it said of her too, that which Our Dear Lord the lover of souls spoke in the Canticles: "You are beautiful, my girlfriend, you are beautiful, my bride, and there is no stain upon you."[41]

[41] Mit alre oetmodicheit ende nederheit stont si gebuget onder oeren oversten, ende was hem van den beginne oere bekieringe hent totten eynde oers levens onderdanich ende gehorsom. Sij was seer oetmodich ende verworpen in oerselven ende hadde een groet ende hoge voelen van enen anderen, soedat nae oeren duncken alrewegen die sonne scheen, behalve in oer. Siet, aldus was si seer bequaeme ende suverlike verciert van buten ende van bijnnen overmyds mennichvoldigen doechden ende graciën, daer si onse lieve Here mede begavet hadde, soedat hieromme tot oerwert wal behoerde, dat onse lieve Here der mynnender zielen toespreket in Cantica:"du bist schoene, myne vrendynne; du bist schoene, myne bruyt, ende giene vlecke en is in dij." (cant 4:7) De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 142-3.

Here, Sweene becomes a bride of Christ implicitly, because her spiritual beauty has made her desirable. However, this is a comparison made by analogy—Sweene is *like* the bride in the Canticles, but she is not explicitly called a bride of Christ.

A Sister from Diepenveen who perished in the Great Wedding—and thus by default must have been a bride of Christ—was, like Sweene, recognized as a bride of Christ for her virtuous living, rather than her monastic vows or mystical experiences. This woman, known only as "The Sister from Diest Voersz, a devoted lay sister [ene devoete conversynne]" from the Rhineland, was especially pious and had, through hard and disgusting work, accomplished many of the ideals of the *Devotio Moderna*:

> Because she lay down a fundament of true humbleness and clung to the holy cross of penitence with great fervor, and persisted in this until the end of her life, because she was disposed towards all humble works both early and late and she sought nothing for herself. She regularly served the sick and was very merciful towards them. And when a sister was about to die in the infirmary, then she would make it her work to wash away any filth that dying sister had made [to cleanse her corpse and the deathbed]. She was hard on herself, but merciful to others.
> She was not picky [onsoekelic] at the table whenever she had eaten a great big dish of potage and then turned the eating vessel over and would fill her dish up again. Of the bacon, she would take the most rancid and yellow [pieces], and she always did it before anyone else could see her. And this was like how she acted in every thing else, but she would eat the worst of it and let others take the best food. She almost never drank good beer, but when the sisters had eaten, then she would often take up the leftover beer that had gathered up in the cracks and set it in her place and drink that. She did all of these things with great force because of her nature, and her habit was righteously base, and she desired thus most of all to die for the love of her beloved bridegroom.[42]

[42] Want sij legede dat vondament der waerachtiger oetmodicheit Ende ommevenck dat zalige cruce der penytenciën myt groter ynnicheit Ende (306) volherde daer in totten eynde hoers levens Want sij was bereyt tot allen oetmodigen werke vroe ende laete ende en sochte hoer selven niet. Sie plach die sieken te verwaeren ende was hem seer guedertieren. Ende als daer een suster gestorven was, soe was dat hoer werck dat sij dan vluchts wiesch dat die suster onreyn gemaket hadde. Hoer selven was sij hart, mer enen anderen guedertieren. --Sie was seer onsoekelic ander tafelen want als sij ene grote schottele pottays gegeten hadde ende dan dat pottay over genck Soe vulde sij hoer schottele weder. Van den specke nam sij dat gaste ende dat geel; ende ende dat hadde sij en wech, eer een ander toe sach. Ende des gelijcks dede si in al dat sij at, mer enen anderen gunde sij wal dat hij dat beste nam. Selden dranck sij enen dronck guedes biers; mer als die susteren gegeten hadden, soe plach si dat bier dat daer ovre gebleven was, te vergaderen in een kenneken ende settet op hoer stede ende dranck dat. Hoer natuer dede sij in allen dingen groet gewelt hoer habijt was soe recht verworpen; ende aldus pijnde sij hoer over al te sterven Om die mynne hoers gemynde brudegoms.
Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen, 305-6.

This sister also chastised herself regularly, keeping a flail by her bed, and seems to have generally been a bit of an ascetic, though probably not a mystic. Pottage was a hated dish apparently, and one that many sisters dreaded eating. Learning to be onzueclick/onsoekelic—disciplined at the table—was one of the most extreme types of asceticism practiced by women in the Modern Devotion, though by late medieval standards it was very mild indeed.[43] Care for the sick was another dreaded task, and many of the sisters complained about bad beer. The sister from Diest Voersz was a bride of Christ, in this account, because of her modest asceticism and hard work, rather than because of her convent death or a resolution to serve Christ. Though she was a lay sister, she died a bride of Christ. These same qualities were praised in other sisters, and in other Sisterbooks. For instance, the chronicler from Meester-Geertshuis uses an unexpected scene from communal dinner to model the ideal attitude towards food.

Grieten van Nyënbeeke was particularly well known among the sisters for her extreme discipline at the dining table.[44] The Sisterbook from Deventer contains several stories which indicate a general trend within the community to eat humble, poor quality food with varying levels of gusto, much as some female saints showed special devotion to harsh fasting or eating repulsive foods. However, Grieten's behavior at a fast-week dinner is quite remarkable, even in a community of sisters who virtuously ate cheap and disgusting food. According to the chronicler, Grieten would always sit down to her meal with great temperance and deliberation, treating each Lenten bowl of greens "as if she had never eaten anything in her life but chard cooked with bacon."[45] One evening, Grieten lifted the lid on her dinner vessel and found a dead mouse nested in with her greens, all burned up from the cooking fire. Rather than scream or refuse her dinner, or break her fast from meat by forcing herself to eat the roasted

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[43] The Devout discouraged the harsh asceticism practiced in other devotional circles. Though Catherine of Siena and Heinrich Seuse arguably scourged their bodies more harshly than Christ suffered during the passion and Francis of Assisi and Angela of Foligno drank puss, the Devout praised women who gustily ate the coarse plain food they served at communal meals, and identified a lack of squeamishness as the virtue of being ontzuekelic. This term is glossed in De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 49-50.

[44] de Man glosses "Onzueclick" as having to do with a particular discipline at the dining table, a willingness to eat even the most disgusting and poor food, and a refusal to waste anything edible.

[45] "alsof si al oer leven niet dan speck ende warmoes gegeten en hadde" De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 49.

animal, Grieten "took the mouse out of the casserole and laid it by her on the table and ate the whole of the chard up. And then she took the mouse gently in her hand and lay it down again in the casserole and she said nothing, nor did anyone say anything to each other; no one heard a sound as she sang softly and blessed it when the pot was covered with the lid"[46] By eating the chard as if nothing were wrong with her dinner, Grieten perfects the practice of discipline at the dinner table [being onsoekelic/onzueclick]. In this scene, the silent room may indicate that they all were upholding an observed silence that evening. Though Grieten then would have broken the observed silence by singing a hymn and blessing the deceased mouse, she is also performing another important Christian virtue—care for the dead—that was central to the Devout.[47] In this scene, as in previous excerpts virtues common to monastic living, such as silence and obedience, were trumped by virtues taught by Christ and the Apostles.

Grieten's performance at the dinner table exemplifies perfect behavior— she keeps silent, shows reverence for the dead, and even eats all of her vegetables. From the tone of the anecdote, it sounds as if the entire community was quite tired of chard and even before this incident, Grieten's enthusiasm for the greens was noted and praised by an elder sister, yet her willingness to *keep* eating her greens even after finding a dead animal in her dinner underlines Grieten's dedication to disciplined eating. Whether other sisters could be reasonably expected to copy Grieten if ever one should find a dead animal in her dinner is irrelevant in this case. The likelihood of a repeat incident of a varmint in the greens was extraordinarily slim, and one interpretation of the Chronicler's presentation might be to remind other women of the importance of eating what was put on the table. The presentation of Grieten and the greens encourages both imitation and wonder. The reader must both wonder at Grieten's iron stomach and be inspired to imitate her discipline when eating. Not quite miraculous, but still something more than ordinary,

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[46] "Doe si dat sach, nam si die mus uuter schottelen ende legede si bi oer op die taefle, ende aat dat wermoes al deger uut. Ende doe nam si die mus suverlijk in oer hant, ende legede si weder in die schotele, ende si en segede niets, niet dat enc noch dat ander; noch men en hoerde oeck naemals niet, dat si daer enyghe croeninge of callinge van maecte, datmen den pot so quelke gedecket hadde of diergelick"Ibid., 49-50.

[47] Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 162.

Grieten's pious and temperate response to a bizarre situation provides both a model for behavior and a story to marvel at.

This episode describes only one of Grieten's virtuous displays, as her rather long entry contains several anecdotes, including many about the "impure work" she enjoyed doing.[48] She refused to join her natural sister and make profession at Diepenveen, preferring an active life in the world with the sisters at Meester-Geertshuis, though she would be buried at Diepenveen. She died at the same time as Katharina van Naaldwijk, the reputable librarian and prioress at Diepenveen, and the closing lines of Grieten's entry suggest that she and Katharina died together "so that the pair of them should rest together in the earth, so that they could rule together with Christ in the heavens."[49] Though Grieten was a very influential figure at Meester-Geertshuijs and exhibited the same semi-ascetic qualities that earned the anonymous sister from Diest Voersz the title of bride of Christ, Grieten herself becomes a bride of Christ only on her deathbed. Like so many of the sisters, Grieten fell sick with a pestilence, "and came at the last to a holy end, and was taken away by her bridegroom Jesus Christ."[50] After her death, the sisters found the following written in her little notebook: "Although I have made no profession, swearing neither to obedience nor to purity, nevertheless I have both of these virtues, and that is my bridal treasure."[51] Grieten herself recognized that a laywoman who cultivated virtues could prepare her trousseau and become a bride of Christ, without ever making a formal profession. This same sentiment comes through in another chapter of the St. Agnes rule dealing with the training of novices and how women should make their profession; it again alludes to the nun's bridal relationship, that ancient symbolic marriage between chaste woman and divine lover. After specifying the appropriate ages for

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[48]al hadde si oec onrenlick werck gedaen De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 48.

[49]„Hieromme, als zuster Katheryna van Naeldwick, supprierynne desselven cloesters van Diepen-veen gestorven was, soe waert dat heilige hoevet mede in dat vat ghelecht, opdat diegene tesaemen solden rusten in der eerden, die tegader mit Cristo solden regnyeren in den hemel. Ibid., 49, 52.

[50] Ende quam ten lesten to tenen zaligen eynde, ende vercreech alsoe van oeren brudegom Ihesu Cristo Ibid., 50.

[51] All en hebbe ic ghiene professie gedaen, nochtan gehorsomheit, reynicheit ende niet eygens te hebben, dat is mijn trowelschat Ibid., 51.

novices (ideally 14-16, no younger than 7, no older than 27, no widows of ill repute) and addressing the role parents might take in a woman's conversion, the Rule turns to the office of *magistra novitiarum*, the mistress of novices. Among other things, this *magistra* should teach the novices to be affectionate towards the heavenly bridegroom and please him with their purity and simple obedience.[52] Novices were to be "industrious in their work, their prayer, and reading of the holy scripture... and with fiery devotion to choose Our Dear Lord Jesus, our purifier and bridegroom."[53] Before taking vows, then, the novices were already becoming brides of Christ. However, though the novitiate was envisioned as preparation for marriage to Jesus, the convent's profession ceremony describes no bridal imagery. Each sister who was able should simply copy out her profession statement, kiss the foot of the cross behind the altar, then lay the statement down on the altar and be enclosed.[54] While bridal imagery was part of each nun's identity, and the novitiate was apparently imagined as a preparation to become a bride of Christ, at St. Agnes the marriage itself could come at any time, either at the moment of enclosure, or when a girl first made her conversion, or on the deathbed.

A young nun hoping to make her profession at the convent of Diepenveen became a bride of Christ before she even made the decision to renounce the world and her rich fiancé in an episode which suggests that even an unstated resolution to devote one's life to religion could transform a woman into a Bride of Christ. The story of the conversion of Souke van Dorsten is one example where an important event in the history of Diepenveen is sanctified through hagiographic motifs. Like a number of virgin saints and martyrs Souke was forced to choose between a mortal husband and physical death or death to

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[52] moet aldermeest daer op leten, dat die personen niet alleen uytwendich maer deuotelicke uytter herten sijn, met affectie, om den hemelschen bruijdegom te behagen ootmoedelick ende simpelick gehoorsam sijn Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 321.

[53] oock dat sy vlytich syn te aerbeijden, te bidden ende te lesen die heilige schrift in synen tijt met een inich toe kier tot onsen lieuen heer Jesus, onsen salichmaker ende bruidegom Ibid., 322.

[54] While it is highly likely that the ritual involved the traditional symbolic veiling, gifting of ring, and other marital elements, the rule itself does not include them, and the profession text itself does not include any bridal language. An image of such a profession statement, currently held at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, is included for reference.

the world.[55] This story dominates Souke's biography, yet does not model a progression in the virtues, provide an edifying tale, or offer any striking examples to emulate. The importance of Souke's admission to Diepenveen becomes apparent, however, when the size of her dowry is revealed.[56] The only daughter of a fabulously wealthy Friesian family, Souke brought 3000 guilders to the convent, as the convent's rector, who heroically intervened on Souke's behalf, habitually marveled.[57] Not only was this wealth extremely important for Diepenveen, it in all probability is the reason for the melodrama which accompanied Souke's conversion. Moreover, the admission of a wealthy and exotic young woman demonstrated Diepenveen's renown—Souke *heard* of Diepenveen and *traveled* there to make her profession. By telling Souke's conversion story according to the conventions of the lives of virgin saints, the chronicler could engage in a sanctified sort of bragging about the wealth and renown of her own convent.[58]

Souke fled to Diepenveen to avoid an arranged marriage, but soon after her arrival, her fiancé's family appeared and demanded that she leave the convent. Souke was asked to choose between two bridegrooms, and put on her worldly clothing—rich Friesan traditional garb—before making her way to the gate of the convent. There she paced back and forth trying to decide what to do, until one of the older sisters, moved to pity by Souke's visible distress, intervened. Running up to Souke, Griete called

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[55] I have provided a full translation and transcription of the episode in 9.1. All quotations are taken from this translation.

[56] In some convents each woman would be expected or required to bring a dowry or donation at the time of her profession. This money would be used to provide material support for her during her years of enclosure. The importance of dowries for convents and convent finances is well-documented in several medieval contexts, though the most compelling argument for its importance can be found in Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 163.

[57] "Daarnaast ontving zij nog zoveel geld en goederen dat pater Joost altijd placht te zeggen dat zuster Souke Diepenveen wel drieduizend gulden had opgeleverd." Ibid.

[58] The Life of Souke van Dorsten is only present in the DV manuscript (from the convent at Diepenveen), and is not to be found in the D manuscript (copied in nearby Deventer at Meester-Geertshuis), which may indicate that the copyist of the D manuscript did not consider Souke's story particularly edifying. Scheepsma discusses the relationship of these two manuscripts in all of his publications. Essentially, the D manuscript was owned by the Sisterhouse at Deventer, while the DV manuscript belonged to the convent of Diepenveen. The DV manuscript is only available in part, through Scheepsma's modernization in Ibid., 161. Scheepsma considers it to be the better and earlier text. However, each manuscript contains different lives. The DV manuscript has a life of Johannes Brinckerinck, as well as lives of several sisters not included in D, amongst them Souke van Dorsten. For the most part, it seems as if the D copyist did not include lives she felt would not be edifying or relevant to the sisters at Meester-Geertshuis.

out "Oh bride of Christ, stride now forcefully, because God in the heavens and all His angels see your conflict. Here life lasts but briefly, but eternity endures so long! If you leave, then you please the devil and make him snigger. Stay here with us and then you will make your guardian angel happy." Griete's bold words reminded Souke of the choice she had already made, encouraging her to return to Diepenveen. Here, Griete also echoed the words of the St. Agnes rule by reminding Souke that she was being watched constantly by God and the angels. By simply entering the walls of Diepenveen and contemplating a profession, Souke had become a bride of Christ and was obliged to guard her body and behave appropriately by returning to the enclosure and formally vowing her chastity and obedience. After hearing these inspirational words, Souke "plucked up her courage," and entered the convent again, to be immediately comforted by the sisters inside.[59]

Unusual steps were taken to stave off further attempts to liberate Souke from the convent. Out of concern for Souke (and, no doubt, her dowry), the Father "wrote a letter to the prior of Windesheim, to whom he laid out the entire incident. The prior came immediately to Diepenveen, went to the chapel, and dressed Sister Souke in her habit there. On the same day she also made her profession." [60] Though the chronicler comments that after her profession Souke was industrious in her work, this particular anecdote is odd in many respects. Souke is a passive figure, not a steadfast virgin guarding her chastity. The only figure who comes off as exemplary is the kindhearted Griete, who in a moment of charity provided a young and confused woman with advice. By framing Souke's decision in terms of salvation and damnation and calling Souke a "bride of Christ" prior to her profession, Griete forces Souke to think not as a girl would but instead as a Christian woman *should*. Souke makes the decision to trample the devil, embrace Christ, and please her own guardian angel, despite overwhelming circumstances.

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[59] "Toen zij deze woorden horde, vatte zij weer moed. Zij stapte vroom terug en maakte aanstalten het slot binnen te gaan." Ibid., 163.

[60] "In de tussentijd schreef onze paterechter een brief aan de prior van Windesheim aan wie hij de hele zaak uitlegde. De prior kwam meteen naar Diepenveen, ging naar het kapittelhuis en kleedde zuster Souke daar in. Op dezelfde dag nog deed zij professie." De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, xlvii

Despite lacking clearly exemplary figures or edifying messages, the tale of Souke van Dorsten's entrance to Diepenveen was important to the community. By arranging Souke's conversion and the subsequent confrontation with her family and fiancé to resemble scenes from the lives of virgin saints—who were also often threatened with unwanted marriage—the Diepenveen chronicler found a sanctified way to describe an event which brought great wealth and prestige to the convent.

The tale of Souke van Dorsten suggests that the hagiographic models incorporated into religious biography were extremely flexible and could be applied to morally ambiguous situations. Yet the undercurrent of greed in Souke's conversion account, as well as Souke's own lack of resolve, add elements of compelling realism to a story that might easily have been forced into the virgin-saint storyline. By leaving these subtle reminders of human nature in the story, the Diepenveen chronicler gives her readers an important lesson in how the convent became a great deal wealthier. Furthermore, by using the framework of a virgin-martyr vita and including realistic details from Souke's conversion, such as the ranting pregnant relative, the Diepenveen chronicler finally provides an example which can be fully imitated. Though most young women would not find themselves in exactly the same violent and dramatic circumstance that forces Souke's decision, Griete's advice would remain relevant to young women deliberating between the cloister and the world. Of course, since the chronicle from Diepenveen presents itself as reading for already cloistered women, this makes Souke's example a rather impractical one for emulation, but it might have inspired young novices and girls studying at Diepenveen.

~6.3~

Deathbed Weddings

Souke became a bride of Christ before making her profession or making a complete religious conversion. Though she was a virgin, she had not yet become virtuous—only after professing did Souke truly dedicate herself to pious living and hard work. Yet on her deathbed, Souke is not named a bride of Christ. On the other hand, Griete ten Colke, who died during the outbreak of pestilence known as the Great Wedding at Diepenveen, did become a bride of Christ, at least in her chronicler's mind. While the women and men of the Modern Devotion strove to live like Christ and the Apostles, in death they more often became bridal souls who learned to die with Christ. Some, like the elderly sister Eefce, who wanted to take her shirt off to meet her bridegroom naked, voiced their bridal experiences, while others were described passively as brides of Christ going to an eternal embrace with the bridegroom.[61] According to de Man's rather dated interpretation, the sisters were especially eager to die:

> It was this belief in the strength of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and their trust in their own hard service and good works that caused the sisters to hope that they would receive heavenly sanctity. This fervent desire to be eternally joined with her beloved Bridegroom caused her to sometimes long deeply for the hour of death, above all in times of sickness, or when she felt her end might be near. The more pure the love for Christ was, the more she would wish for her death, not a wish to be free from the pains of a long-lasting sickness, therefore a sister made herself blameless, when she lay on her sickbed...[62]

Some sisters did indeed earnestly express a desire to die, and others described themselves as going to meet their bridegrooms. However, not all deathbed scenes combine these two themes. For instance, in one deathbed scene from Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer, sister Gese Tijtes (d. 1425) calls out to St.

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[61] Eefce is discussed in Ch. 5

[62] Het was het geloof in de kracht van het zoenoffer gebracht door den Christus, den Verlosser (12d, 102d, 134d) en het vertrouwen in de verdiensten harere goede werken (10d, 132d), dat den zusters hoop gaf tenslotte de hemelsche zaligheid te verwerven. Het vurig begeeren voor immer met haar geliefden Bruidegom vereenigd te worden, deed haar soms innig verlangen naar haar stervensuur (3b, 127c), vooral bij ziekte (1a), of wanneer zij haar einde niet ver meer waanden (3b). Het moest louter de liefde tot den Christus zijn, welke haar zoo naar den dood deed verlangen; niet de wensche bevrijd te worden van de smarten eener langdurige ziekte; daarom maakte een zuster zichzelf er een verwijt van, toen zij op haar ziekbed lag, en naar den dood verlangde, daar zij vreesde, dat haar stervensbegeerte alleen voortkwan uit den wensch van haar lichaamslijden te worden verlost (135a). De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 59.

Bernard of Clairvaux rather than Christ the Bridegroom, as if Bernard himself had appeared to escort her to heaven:

> This good sister Gese had such a marvelous devotion and spiritual fervor for St. Bernard and when she lay in her last sickness, and she was about to die, then she lay there pleasantly, and called out secretly with her mouth and said "Bernie, Bernie" and she said this with such a sweet and peaceful face, so that the sisters truly thought that Saint Bernard was next to her, and that she was calling him directly in a friendly tone of voice.[63]

While Bernard had been a bride of Christ, this is not a bridal reference. Gese described herself as a Martha rather than a Mary, and was driven by work, despite her special relationship with Bernard. Sister Gese's death demonstrates how a special devotion to one particular saint might take precedence over the standard bridal relationship—several other sisters, especially the very young virgins, were met on their deathbeds by the Virgin Mary. Another sister, Geertruijt Hoppen (d. 27/9/1484) of St. Agnes in Emmerich, met death boldly and willingly by emulating St. Francis:

> When sister Geertruijt had served our Lord devotedly for 17 years and was 34 years old, she was struck sick with the pestilence. She was attended to and received her holy office [the sacrament of the last rite] with good understanding, ardently and desiring. When she was to receive that holy sacrament, then she rose up from her bed where she was lying and got up on her knees sitting on them with folded hands, fervently with great piety. She was so brought low with ardent piety that whenever someone came up before her, then she would teach them very well indeed ...
> In the night...then she stood up and got out of the bed and sat down on her knees and called to death willingly. Just like our holy father Saint Francis also did.... But when the time came when she was to die, she gave herself over to it very willingly. And said "Dear lord, now it is your will that I should die, so I will gladly do this, how well that I up until now have lived my life as best I might." And with this good understanding and in great pleasure her holy soul was unbound, in the year of our lord 1484 on the 28th of September.[64]

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[63] Dese guede zuster Gese hadde sonderlinge devocie ende ynnicheit in sante Beernaerdus, ende doe si lach in oere lester ziecte, ende et bi oeren doode was, soe lach si vrendelick, ende calde al heymelick bijnen mondes ende segede: "Beerndeken, Beerndeken," ende dit segede sij dicwile mit enen zueten, vreedsomme aensichte, soedat di zusteren waerlike myenden, dat sancte Beernaerdus bi oer was, ende dat si daer soe vrendelike mede calde. Ibid., 53.

[64] Doe suster Geertruijt onsen lieuen Here deuoetelick hadde gedient XVII iaer ende was XXXIIII iaer alt, so wart sij sick an die pestelencie. Si wart besorget ende ontfijnt hoer heilige ampt mijt gueden verstaende, ynnichlick ende begerlick. Doe si dat heilige sacrament solde ontfangen, doe richten si hoer op in den bede daer si lach ende gijnck op hoer knijen sitten mijt geuaelden handen ynnichlick mit groeter weerdicheit. Si was soe neerstich vuerich, dat waneer

While death scenes might be quiet, like Gese's, or melodramatic like Geertruijt's, a few phrases are common to many of these lives: variants on "this holy spirit broke free of her body" and "she died and went to her beloved Bridegroom, face to face with him for all eternity" can be found in each of the edited Sisterbooks.[65] Of at least 160 recorded lives, only a handful of sisters are described as brides of Christ, and the numbers are highest from the Sisterhouse at Deventer, rather than the two convents at Diepenveen and Emmerich.[66] This may be due to the Deventer chronicler's general style, which includes longer entries that interweave biblical references and theological works. Even in the Sisterbook from Deventer, it is not until the sixteenth entry that a sister is recognized as a bride of Christ as she dies. Sister Griete van Borken (d. 1412), toiled daily in the workhouse and was an example for the other sisters. However, her entry is short and lacks any descriptive anecdotes illustrating her virtues.[67] After coming down with the pestilence (a sister-killing disease characterized by vomiting up blood and a high fever), she is described as facing death as she faced life:

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iemant van hoeren gelicken tot hoer quam, den leerden ende riet si al wat guedes. Ende seide: „Lieue suster, weest lijdsam ende wat ghi doet mormeeriert doch niet ende bi sonder op v ouersten. Noch en wonst v niet doot, want mochte ic leuen, ic wolde soe gern penitencie doen."
In der nacht doe hoer die doot vlecken wtgeslagen waren, doe stont si op van den bede ende gijnck op hoer knijen sitten ende heiten den doot willick. Gelick als die heilige vader sancte Franciscus oec dede. Och, si hadde soe bitterlicke noede gestoruen ende hoer had daer oec lange voer gegruwelt. Mer doe die tijt quam dat si steruen moeste, doe gaf si hoer alsoe guetelicke ende willich auer. Ende seide: „Lieue Her, nv et v wil is dat ic steruen sal, soe wil ic et gern doen, woe wael dat ic nv op et best van mynnen leuen bijn."
Ende mijt aldus gueden verstande in groeter vredelicheit waert hoer salige ziel ontbonden, int iaer ons Heren MCCCLXXXIII op den XXVII dach in september. Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 303.

[65] A concise description of how death scenes take place in the Diepenveen Sisterbook can be found in: Ludo Jongen and Wybren Scheepsma, "Wachten op de hemelse bruidegom. De Diepenveense. nonnenviten in literairhistorisch perspectief," in *Boeken voor de eeuwigheid. Middelnederlands geestelijk proza*, ed. Thom Mertens (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1993), 308-10.

[66] I am not counting the entries in the "Great Wedding" chapter from Diepenveen when making this statement. While she does not count the entries, Martina Klug provides a list of every woman mentioned in each of the edited Sisterbooks. Klug, *Armut und Arbeit in der Devotio moderna : Studien zum Leben der Schwestern in niederrheinischen Gemeinschaften*, 277-298. There are 68 entries for Emmerich, 69 for Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer, and at least 40 for the convent at Diepenveen, if both surviving manuscripts are included. This does not include the nuns who are listed in group entries, notably the sisters who succumbed to pestilence during the "Great Wedding" at Diepenveen. My own rough estimate is that fewer than 1 in 12 entries in the three edited Sisterbooks contain a bridal reference.
[67] De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 39-40.

> And then she went to her heavenly Bridegroom, whom she had served so industriously, doing her best to please him. She was very industrious in her work, both internally and externally. Nevertheless she was a tender person by nature and small in life, so that the sisters were ashamed and confused in themselves, when they saw that she was dead and her life's work over, and her humble loving morals, and spiritual pilgrimage come to an end. And she was as loving as she was modest and devoted as she was in her life, just as in her sickness and death.[68]

Here, Griete's sickness is a divine gift and her death is described as a journey to meet the heavenly bridegroom. However, her life was full of hard work and devotion, rather than mystical practice, and having never taken religious vows, she was not a traditional bride of Christ. Even in this closing passage, Griete's bridal status is of secondary importance to her lived virtue.

With this first mention of a heavenly Bridegroom, De Man, the Sisterbook's editor, inserted a lengthy footnote glossing the religious significance of the bride of Christ in a broadly Christian sense, though he does not fully explain the significance of this role for the women of the *Devotio Moderna*. According to De Man, the bride of Christ was primarily a mystical concept with biblical roots, which would take on wide cultural resonance by the fifteenth century. De Man cites Ruusbroec, vernacular translations of the *Song,* and then mentions an intriguing popular text from Cologne called "Van een Soudaens docther" – about a sultan's daughter who converted to Christianity and chose Christ to be her bridegroom before entering a cloister.[69] De Man makes the logical connections in this context by suggesting that Griete's bridal state reflects her religious commitment and possible mystical experiences, but as a lay woman and member of a new and popular religious movement, Griete was not a nun. Furthermore, no part of Griete's entry describes her as a mystic. Her life is characterized by toil and missionary work—she labored in the workhouse and helped found the new Sisterhouse of Mariënbrink

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[68] Ende als si dan aldus mit desen dingen becummert was, soe voerquam sie onse lieve Here ende begavede si mitter pestelenciën. Ende daer voer si mede hene tot oeren hemelschen Brudegom, dien si altoes mit alre vliticheit hadde pijnen te behagen. Seer vlitich was si in den arbeide, beide inwendich ende uutwendich. Nochtan wasset een teder mensche van natueren ende cleynlick van leden, soedat die zusteren bescheemt ende confuus worden in hemselven, doe si sie doot segen ende oren arbeit overdachten, ende oer oetmodige, mynlike zeden ende wanderinge. Ende alsoe mynlick ende zedich ende devoet als si was in oeren leven, desgeliks ws si oec in oere ziecte ende doot. Ibid., 40.

[69] Ibid., 40, n. d.

in Borken.[70] While married women mystics became brides of Christ through their mystical experiences, Griete seems to have become a bride of Christ on the basis of her lifelong commitment to the Modern Devotion, characterized by resolutions and good intentions, but never by binding religious vows. Becoming a bride of Christ was less important to a sister's identity or her capacity to teach virtue than performing good deeds, working hard, or engaging in Eucharistic devotion, because the terminology is not introduced until the sixteenth entry—and even then, only in passing.

The chronicle from St. Agnes in Emmerich introduces bridal imagery in its earliest entries, but like the chronicle from Meester-Geertshuis, the St. Agnes text mainly recognizes brides of Christ as virtuous exemplars rather than mystics. Stijne Pelsers (d. 21/9/14??), the first woman to die at St. Agnes, has a brief entry in the St. Agnes chronicle, but her deathbed scene follows a concise model for the sick and dying virtuous bride of Christ. As very little was known about her life, other than that she was pious and regularly attended mass, there are no illustrative anecdotes about Stijne, and her dying moments are described as if following a template:

> This holy soul did not live very long, but [instead] she was hastily taken out of her poor and miserable life and came then into the eternal peace and rest of heaven. She died on the 21st day of September on the day of the holy apostle St. Matthew… And she rushed desiringly towards her death with the greatest of joy, so that men might almost believe that the heavenly bridegroom Jesus was there himself with a gathering of the holy angels, when this holy soul was at last unfettered,. While she lived, it was said of her by others, that never a word went out of her mouth that was extremely loud and she never refused to do anything that she knew that people desired of her, and on account of this it might be said of her that she seemed to be more of an angelic creature than a regular person in her lifelong pilgrimage.[71]

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[70] This Sisterhouse would later be enclosed as a convent in 1400 by Hendrik Loder, prior of the Windesheim cloister at Frendeswege, but the enclosure took place after Griete left. She died as a laywoman, not a nun. Ibid., 39-40.

[71] Dese heilige ziel en leefden niet lange, mer si wart hastelick gehalt wt dit arme ellendige leuen ende quqam totter ewiger rusten ende vrouden des heimels. Si sterf ap den XXI dach in september op des heiligen apostels sancte Matheus dach, wael bewart mit den rechten der heiliger kerken..Ende schicten hoer begeerlic tot den doode mit groeter blijtscappen, soe dat men vastelick mochte ghelouen dat die heijmelsche brudegom Ihesus Christus daer seluer tegenwoerdich was mit den scharen der heiliger engelen, doe dese salighe ziele ontbonden wart, die alsoe hadde geleeft, dat men van hoer seide, dat die wijle dat si leefden nije wort en gynge wt hoeren monde dat stoer of scherpelicke lude, ende (sij) oec nije dijnck en liet te doen, dat si woste dat men van hoer begerden of dat si doen solde. Ende hier om soe seiden die geen die si hadden ghekant, dat si meer schen in hoere wanderinge een engels creatuer dan een mensche toe wesen. Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 119-20.

Sister Stijne's entry in the Emmerich Sisterbook highlights how little the author knew about some of the earliest residents of St. Agnes. In these entries, which lack years and are generally only a few short paragraphs long, stock phrases emphasize a sister's virtues in place of illustrative anecdotes. In Sister Stijne's deathbed scene—and the entirety of her brief *Life*—statements rather than examples depict her longing for death, depict her as a bride of Christ, and suggest that she met the standard behavioral expectations for a Devout woman. This type of generic phrasing is common to Sisterbooks and convent necrologies from the Low Countries and across Europe. In his introduction to Riccoboni's Chronicle and Necrology from Corpus Domini (Venice), Bornstein remarks that "Like the authors of modern obituaries, Sister Bartolomea sometimes resorts to standard phrases and clichéd expressions of appropriate sentiments," and in the death of Sister Stijne, the Emmerich chronicler has strung together several such expressions, revealing what might be described as stereotypical qualities of the good Sister and the good death.[72] Stijne is quiet, obedient, selfless, and eager for death. Her bridal status is made by implication rather than declaration—why would "the heavenly bridegroom Jesus" be present at the deathbed of a woman who was not his bride?—yet Stijne's entry supports the theory that women in the Devotio Moderna, whether nuns, lay sisters, or Sisters of the Common life, understood themselves and their sisters as brides of Christ who, through virtuous living and constant prayer, would be joined with Christ the Bridegroom after death.

Bornstien's comment about stock phrases is most apparent in the briefer entries from these three establishments, where a dearth of information or a large number of deaths required the chronicler. The most apparent case of this is found in a chapter from the Diepenveen Chronicle entitled "The sweet dream about the big wedding that was to be at Diepenveen [Die suverliken droem...van der groter bruloft, die ten Diepenveen wesen solde]" depicts a lethal outbreak of plague as a massive group

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[72]Riccoboni's chronicle is characterized by much shorter entries than those found in the Sisterbooks from the Devotio Moderna. Almost every sister at Corpus Domini is a bride of Christ in death. Riccoboni and Bornstein, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1395-1436*, 15.

wedding. Each deceased sister's life accomplishments were recorded, albeit with varying degrees of detail, and most entries close with the statement that the Sister had gone to join her beloved Bridegroom. The plague outbreak was predicted by Alijt Comhaers, a sister studying visionary techniques, who dreamed that "a very beautiful and long-lasting wedding" would soon take place at Diepenveen.[73] Based on this dream and the sisters' predisposition to viewing death as going to meet their heavenly Spouse, the Diepenveen chronicler chose to compile a group entry for the women taken by pestilence, portraying the entire event as a massive wedding. Opening with a reference to Alijt Comhaer's prognosticant dream, the chronicler frames the massive loss of life as a tender act of divine love:

> This [the dream referred to in the chapter title] was the sweet dream that sister Alijt Comhaers had before her death, the one about the big wedding that was to take place at Diepenveen. And that it was a true vision, that will manifest itself/be made clear in the following things [events]. Because Our Dear Lord had selected some portion of his beloved brides to be taken out and away with him to heaven. And so it happened that he sent a sort of sickness here [to Diepenveen] that afflicted one in the throat, the other in the side or often in the back or in the head and through all the sorrows caused by this sickness they would die. These were the exquisite, sweet, and elect brides who were very sweetly selected for their numerable virtues... [the list of departed sisters then follows][74]

In these short lines, Alijt Comhaers' dream becomes the convent's interpretive reference for a communal tragedy. The promised "Great Wedding" is recognized as a series of deaths which spanned 1443-5 allowing the sisters to interpret the epidemic as a divine gift rewarding the virtuous. Rather than victims, the deceased women were Christ's elect brides, taken away by an impatient and tender Bridegroom who, for reasons unknown, wanted to surround himself with many virtuous brides. Accordingly, every woman

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[73] I will discuss the vision itself in more detail in the second part of this chapter. Sij segede:"hijr sal alten schonen ende langen bruloft wesen" *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*, 175.

[74] Die suverliken droem die suster alijt comhaers hadde voer hore doet, als van der groter bruloft, die ten diepenveen wesen solde. Ende dattet een waerachtich vijsion was, dat apenbaert wal in desen navolgenden dingen. Want onse lieve here hadde een deel van sinen gemynden bruden wtvercaren om tot hem te halen. Ende soe gevyelt dat hij hijr eenrehande sieckte sende den enen in den hals, den anderen in der sijde oft in den rugge of int hoeft ende doer al die lede daer sie an storven. Dit weren die wtgelesene, suverlike ende wtvercarene bruyde, die seer suverlijc vercrijt weren myt mennygerhande doechden. Ibid., 281.

who succumbed to disease after Alijt Comhaer's vision was understood to be part of the same bridal group.[75] Though this framework means further bridal references should be unnecessary, several of the deceased sisters in the group entry are described as brides of Christ, either in the moment of death or for a particularly virtuous trait. Because of the overwhelming number of entries in this section, the Chronicler often resorts to standard phrasing, portraying each dying sister as eager for death and the accompanying embrace of her Bridegroom. Sister Griete from Nahuys became the second woman to succumb to pestilence in 1443. After 20 years at Diepenveen, she suffered from "an ailment in her side which made her very sick and she lay in great sorrow, and with great desire she was summoned to her future by her beloved bridegroom out of desire to be taken out of her dying body and refreshed with him for all eternity."[76] Griete van Nahuys, who had served as subprioress, may have merited a bridal reference for her life's accomplishments, but the variance in death entries throughout this chapter suggests that it might as easily have been a stylistic choice. The chronicler cycled through closing phrases so that there were rarely two sequential bridal deaths.

Sister Griete Tasten from Zutphen and Sister Griete ten Kolke, two close friends who worked together and died together, shared an entry and the same virtues and devotional practices, and both explicitly died as brides of Christ. These two Grietes shared such a strong devotion to Christ that they "wandered together [in the world as if] they were in the nine choirs of angels."[77] Their deaths are described as a divine intervention intended to separate the two at last:

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[75] Although the chronicler suggests all of the sisters died of the same disease, the dates and symptoms indicate that there was no single epidemic. Instead, it seems likely that some died of tuberculosis or another infectious disease, while others died of cancer. Only some entries support the possibility of a contagious outbreak, and due to the variety of symptoms and the two-year span of deaths, the number of deaths recorded here may be no more significant than the normal mortality rate for the convent. Perhaps coincidentally, most of the women described as brides of Christ in this chapter were named Griete. I have done my best to differentiate between them through the use of last names.

[76] Soe creech sie een gebreck in der sijt, daer sie seer sieck an lach in groter lijdsamheit. Ende myt groter begeerten ontbeyde sie die toecomst hoers gemynden brudegoms Om verloest te warden van dit sterflike licham hem te laven ende te dancken in ewicheit der ewicheit. *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*, 283.

[77] Die twie vurige herten hadden die passie ons lieven heren so geordyneert, dat sie daer mede wanderden in die ix choren der engelen. Ibid., 284-5.

> And sister Griete Tasten and she [Griete ten Kolke] were so joined in their love of Christ with good religious exercises, so that people could not differentiate between them and would have to let the good lord himself separate them. Sister Griete Tasten went to Our Dear Lord her beloved bridegroom, whom she had faithfully served in the year of our lord 1452 and sister Griete ten Kolke persisted in good works and in that cross of penitence, which the two had been doing together, another 10 weeks [Griete ten Kolke lived ten weeks longer and continued the pair's good deeds and penitential practices during the remainder of her life]. And then she was gifted with a sickness by Our Dear Lord and followed her beloved counterpart/other self [i.e. Sister Griete Tasten] and also went to her beloved bridegroom.[78]

Though the two Grietes died in separate years, and possibly of different diseases—the first was described as being crippled by "gebrecks" in her back, which caused her to cough or vomit up blood, while Griete ten Kolke had no described symptoms and continued her devotional practices in reasonably good health for several weeks—their deaths are as connected as their lives. Because the two Grietes shared the same devotional practices and were so close, their deaths were best described as the bridegroom "separating" them in death. This presentation marks death as a gift actively granted by an impressed and loving bridegroom to reward years of shared and earnest devotion. Though no human could distinguish between the two Grietes, apparently Christ the Bridegroom had determined which of the two was farther along in her devotions, taking Griete Tasten's life first and leaving Griete ten Kolke on the earth another few weeks to complete refining her soul. The joint entry for these two Grietes thus suggests that when a woman had served Christ sufficiently, cultivating virtue and penitence, she would be beckoned into heaven with the gift of death to become a bride of Christ.

Many of the other entries in this chapter confirm the general premise that the Chronicler at Diepenveen viewed death as proof that a Sister had maximized her progress in the virtues and was being rewarded with the bridegroom's embrace. In another pair of entries, again about two Sisters named

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[78] Ende suster griete tasten ende sie weren also verenyget inder mynnen cristi myt gueder oefenynge, also dat men sie niet scheyden en mochte, eer sie onse lieve here scheyde. Suster griete tasten die voer tot onsen lieven heren horen gemynden brudegom, den sie trouwelijc gedient hadde Int iaer ons heren m cccc ende lijj (1452). Ende suster griete ten kolke die volherde in gueden werken ende in dat cruce der penytenciën, daer sie te samen in geweest hadden, noch x weke. Ende doe begavede sie onse lieve here myt eenre sieckten ende sie volgede hore gemynder geselynnen Ende voer ock tot horen gemynden brudegom. Ibid., 285.

Griete, virtuous living and service to the beloved Bridegroom was rewarded with sickness and eventual death. In the first entry, Sister Griete Koetgens was described as "burning with a great fire of love for God her sweet bridegroom which was evidenced in all her work."[79] After 31 years of service and virtuous living, her beloved bridegroom "would not let her serve any longer," and Griete at last died.[80] Again, years of service and pious living attract the bridegroom's attention, resulting in a sister's death. Illness becomes the loving touch of "Our Dear Lord" the bridegroom, and death is the reward for a good life. This Griete Koetgens death was linked to that of Griete des Vryen, "and these two performed the same spiritual exercises together.... and Our Dear Lord joined them together in sickness (or possibly "it suited Our Dear Lord to sicken them together")"[81] Though these two Grietes had separate entries, they shared the same virtues, and Griete des Vryen was also described as a bride of Christ in both life and death. As they lay together in the infirmary, Griete Koetgens would often ask Griete des Vryen if she would like to travel together to meet her heavenly bridegroom, and Griete des Vryen would always answer that she would do whatever her dear Lord decided he wanted her to. However, the two died separately and could not thus make the journey to their bridegroom together. Instead, Griete des Vryen lingered on in the infirmary a while longer, and would die on Nov. 22, 1452.[82]

Griete des Vryen's death entry is more elaborate than many of those found in the Great Wedding sequence, suggesting that the chronicler herself was present for Griete's last days, or had an eyewitness informant. According to the account, Griete asked to have a crucifix set before her three days before her death, and when she saw the crucifix she suddenly wanted a picture of the Virgin Mary as

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[79] Sie brande myt groter vuricheit inder mynnen godes hoers sueten brudegoms welck sie wal bewijsede in al hoeren werken. Ibid., 288.

[80] Doe dese hillige ziele den loep hoers levens zalichlike vollenbrachte hadde myt aldus daniger vuricheit Ende hoer schuren overvloedelike vervullet hadde myt voel gueder werken ende doe sie alle dinge trouwelick vullenbracht hadde, daer sie om wt gesant was von horen gemynden brudegom Ende hem gedient hadde xxj yaer doe en wolde hij sie hijr niet langer laten. Ibid.

[81] Doe was hijr een suster, ende hiet suster griete des vryen; ende dese twie plegen te samen in geesteliker oefenynge te wesen...Soe voegedet onse lieve here dat sij te samen sieck worden. Ibid.

[82] Ibid., 289.

well, and asked that it be brought to her, and she lay in bed making her devotions before the two images. She soon was overcome by an even more powerful sickness, and she would lay there 13 days in great peace and sorrow before she went at last "to her beloved bridegroom whom she had loved and hanged (gehangen to have hanged) with all of her heart."[83]

The pairing of these four Grietes' deaths is clearly intentional, and reveals an underlying narrative structure. The dates of their entries and deaths are not chronological. Griete Tasten, Griete des Vryen and Griete Koetgens all die in 1452, but Griete ten Kolke would die in early 1453. While the dates of Griete Tasten and Griete Koetgens deaths are uncertain, Griete Koetgens must have died several weeks before November 22, 1452, and Griete Tasten could not have died much earlier than late October of 1452. Rather than being arranged chronologically, these entries show how the Chronicler paired lives based on the four women's friendships and shared experiences. Though all four Grietes might have been in the infirmary at about the same time, and the chronicler viewed them all as brides of Christ, she joins Griete Tasten and Griete ten Kolke in a single entry, then, after several brief undated entries, all lacking bridal references, pairs the deaths of Griete Koetgens and Griete des Vryen together, again showing how two women's shared devotional experiences could lead to a sort of joint wedding in death.

The entry immediately following the death of Griete des Vryen takes another approach to depicting a sister as a bride of Christ. Eefce ten Have, a young woman from Elberch, renounced a worldly marriage to serve Christ, enraging her brothers, who threatened to burn the convent down. Like Souke van Dorsten, Eefce's decision to reject a worldly bridegroom immediately seems to have transformed her into a bride of Christ: "before she came here, she lived in Deventer with her grandmother, and this woman wanted to give her in marriage and had prepared her bridal clothing, but she wanted nothing to do with an earthly bridegroom and chose instead Our Dear Lord Jesus Christ for her bridegroom, and she went away from her friends and came to Diepenveen to serve her heavenly

[83] Sie voer van hijr tot horen gemynden brudegom, den sie gemynnet ende an gehangen hadde my talre herten Int yaer ons heren m cccc ende lij op sante cecilien avent. Ibid., 290.

bridegroom..."[84] Eefce soon became a novice and eventually a choir sister, before falling ill on November 1, 1452 with the bridal pestilence. According to the Chronicle, Eefce "anticipated with great desire the arrival of her beloved bridegroom," and knew that her sickness meant he would be coming for her soon, and that "her beloved bridegroom would desire her heartily and not postpone their union any longer, but he came for her very hastily and took her to him to contemplate him face to face in the year of our lord 1452 on the festival of St. Clement (23 November)."[85] Unlike Souke, Eefce explicitly died as a bride of Christ.

The brides of Christ in these convent chronicles were often described as ardent souls longing fervently for death. The outbreak of pestilence at Diepenveen in late 1452 left some sisters untouched. Sister Yutta Viel became extremely upset when it seemed her good health might cheat her out of death and her Bridegroom, loudly complaining about being left behind:

> Then Our Dear Lord shook his flower garden of Diepenveen and sister Yutte saw that the ardent enclosed sisters were held fast by Our Dear Lord, so she complained very loudly that she must remain here and she was worried that Our Dear Lord was not pleased with her. And as Sister Gijsele and Sister Griete Tasten had died and the grave was dug wherein they should lie, Sister Yutte then went to that grave and stood there and lamented actively to Our Dear Lord and after she made her complaint she was rapidly shot through in her side with pain, so that she had to be carried from the grave to a bed in the infirmary. And as she lay there, she was very concerned that she was suffering from her old sickness. Then Sister Elsebe Hasenbroecks came to her and she told her that she was worrying that her sickness wouldn't result in death. Then she said to her directly "Sister Yutte, let me reassure you, it is going to result in your death." When the holy soul heard that, she was entirely happy and at

[84] Suster eefce ten have van der elberch was ene devoete conversynne. Eer sie hijr quam, wonde sie toe deventer mit hoer older moder (grandmother) ende die wolde sie in der echt gegeven heben ende hoer bruyt cleder weren al riede. Mer sie en wolde genen eertschen brudegom hebben mer vercoes onsen lieven heren Ihesum cristum voer horen brudegom Ende sie ontgenc horen vrenden ende quam te diepenveen om horen gemynden brudegom te dienen. Ibid., 291.

[85] Soe sande hoer onse lieve here ene sieckte an op alre hilligen nacht daer sie iii weke lanck seer lijdelijc an lach Ende verwachte my tgroter begeerten die toecomst hoers gemynden brudegoms. In der selver sieckten waert hoer to e gesecht dattet noch wal beter myt hoer mochte warden ende dat sie noch wal weder op mocht comen. Dat was hoer alsoe swaer te horen, datment wal merckte in hoer gelaet dat sie daer seer in gedrucket waert. Mer doe hoer gesecht waert dattet hoer die doet weer doe waert sie also levendich ende blijde van ansicht als een den ene blijde baschap gebracht wort. Ende hoer gemynde brudegom en wolde hoer hertelicke begeerte niet langer vertrecken Mer hij quam seer hastelijc ende nam sie myt hem om hem te beschouwen van ansicht tot ansichte Int yaer ons heren m cccc ende lij in festo clementis. Ibid., 292-3.

> peace... because all anxiety and faintheartedness had been taken away from her and she lay there very lovingly and peacefully and expected the arrival of her loving bridegroom.[86]

Yutte's performance at the open grave emphasizes dramatically how the sisters at Diepenveen viewed death. Though she was in perfect health and should have been thankful to escape the pestilence, Yutte understood the widespread death and sickness as Christ gathering flowers—that is nuns' virtuous souls—and did not want to be left behind. According to this interpretation of events, those sisters who had best pleased the Bridegroom were rewarded with death. Fearing that she had displeased Christ, Yutte publicly and emotionally implored him to take her life as well, and apparently her prayers were heard immediately. Although Yutte suspected that she was having a relapse of her own chronic weakness, she was soon rewarded with death. Other sisters went to their deaths willingly and were frequently described as ardently longing for death, but Yutte's dramatic protest at being left behind illustrates this fervent death wish far better than the standard lines.

The women who perished at Diepenveen in 1452 and 1453 were all brides of Christ, whether because they had taken religious vows or because they had resolved to devoutly dedicate their work and service to their dear lord. Even without the narrative inspiration provided by Alijt Comhaers' vision of a great wedding, these deaths would have been recognized as souls being freed of their mortal bodies to spend an eternity with their beloved bridegroom. However, the presentation of these women's deaths as a divinely ordained group wedding, one foretold in a genuine vision, means bridal imagery replaces the usual emphasis on how deceased sisters were examples of virtuous living. The language of the *Song* is

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[86] Doe onse lieve here sinen boemgart ten diepenveen schudde ende suster yutte sach dat die vurige stichtige susteren vaste van onsen lieven here gehaelt worden Soe beclagede sij hoer alte seer dat sie hijr blijven moste ende hadde anxt dat sie onsen lieven heren niet behaechlijc en was. Ende als suster gijsele ende suster griete tasten gestorven weren ende dat graf gegraven was daer sie in solden liggen Soe genck suster yutte by dat graf staen ende clagede onsen lieven heren horen druck. Ende onder den beclagen soe quamt hoer haestelike schieten in hoer sijt, soe datmen sie van den grave opt sieckhuys te bedde most dragen. Ende als sij daer lach, soe hadde sie anxt dattet hoer hoer oelde sieckte hadde geweest.Doe quam suster elsebe hasenbroecks tot hoer der segede sie dat sie anxt hadde dattet hoer die doet niet en weer. Doe segede sij hoer weder "suster yutte, geloveds vrylike, het is u die wisse doet." Doe die hillige ziele dat hoerde, waert sie seer blijde ende vroelijc--Welck hoer quam overmyds lieften die sie hadde tot onsen lieven heren ende wt eenre gueder concienciën --Want alle anxt ende clynmodicheit was hoer of genamen ende sie lach seer mynlike ende vredelijc ende verwachte te teocomst hoers mynliken brudegoms. Ibid., 295.

prevalent in this chapter, as Diepenveen becomes Christ's vineyard and the dying sisters are both flowers and brides. While some entries do elaborate on a deceased sister's virtues, the Great Wedding at Diepenveen primarily emphasizes good deaths. Because the women at Diepenveen recognized the sickness as a reward for virtue, each of the brides in the Great Wedding was automatically categorized among the best and most pious of the community. The last bride to join in the Great Wedding, Sister Barte van der List of Zwolle, died on December 28, 1452, becoming the nineteenth woman to succumb to this sickness. This final entry contains no bridal references, but the narrator does remind the readers that each of the nineteen women were part of a "lengthy and holy wedding which was foretold by Sister Alijt Comhaers the holy widow, the like of which had never happened before since the beginning of this cloister."[87]

While the Great Wedding at Diepenveen represents the longest intentionally crafted bridal sequence in any of the convent chronicles of the *Devotio Moderna*, other women's deaths are described in similar language. These passages, like those from the Great Wedding sequence, suggest that bridal status was earned through virtuous living but also through making the very deliberate decision to dedicate one's life to "Our Dear Lord." However, in these entries, modeling virtue and emphasizing each sister's contributions and accomplishments becomes the primary literary concern, and bridal references are less frequent. The death of Liesbeth van Delft of Gelderland, a sister at Diepenveen, details Liesbeth's conversion, entrance into the convent, devotional practices, and importance in the convent—Liesbeth was the sister mentioned in chapter six who reprimanded a young sister for her wandering eyes during choir service.[88] The entry contains a rich collection of anecdotes which display Liesbeth's many accomplishments. Leisbeths' death, described in two brief paragraphs, deftly weaves together Liesbeth's virtues and a bridal death:

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[87] Hijr eyndet die zalige lange bruloft, van welken onse gemynde suster Alijt comhaers die zalige weduwe voer segede Welck ny geschiet en is van anbegyn des cloesters. Ibid., 309.

[88] Leisbeth's life was only included in the DV manuscript, and is thus only available in Scheepsma's modernization. For the reference in the other chapter see p. ??? Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 57-65.

> In the year of our Lord 1423, she went to her Bridegroom to enjoy him, face to face for all eternity. When we here in Diepenveen understood that she had gone to her heavenly Bridegroom, sister Elsebe Hasenbroecks began heartfelt wailing. Sister Anna Schulten asked her why she was weeping so much, if she might not let Sister Liesbeth have her rest?... Sister Elsebe said: "I grant very much that she has earned eternal life, but it saddens me that this world is bereft of someone who had such a great quantity of virtues.[89]

Liesbeth's death emphasizes the bride's reward—an eternity looking into the face of her beloved—but Elsebe Hasenbroecks' lament reminds the reader of how Liesbeth earned this reward. Liesbeth's virtues were more important for Elsebe and the Diepenveen chronicler than her bridal relationship with Christ.

The Chronicler of St. Agnes at Emmerich, first a Sisterhouse, before becoming an enclosed convent, uses these same techniques to emphasize each sister's virtues in bridal death sequences. The first procuratrix of St. Agnes at Emmerich, Griet van Gorchem (d. 29/10/1479) met her death eagerly:

> When the time came that Our Dear Lord would take her away and reward her for all of her good works, which she had piously and industriously brought to fruition, then she became sick with a fever, which had killed many other holy sisters. And then, not long before her death, she took the holy sacrament very desiringly and with great fervor, and prostrated herself in great longing for death, so that she might be unbound and come to her heavenly bridegroom, towards whom all of her desire and longing was directed. And thus whenever the sisters came to her and spoke, then she would teach them lessons full of goodness, and ask that we above all things hold fast to the saints, the good deeds, and customs and regulations of this house. "And on account of this," she said," I am not at all concerned at this moment, that I have faithfully and firmly done my best to teach you how to do all of these things.[90]

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[89] In het jaar des Heren 1423 voer zij op naar haar Bruidegom om Hem tot in de eeuwigheid van aangezicht tot aangezicht te genieten. Toen wij hier in Diepenveen vernamen dat zij naar haar Bruidegom was gegaan, begon zuster Elsebe Hasenbroecks hartverscheurend te huilen.Zuster Anna Schulten vroeg haar waarom zij zo schreide; of zij zuster Liesbeth mischien haar rust niet gunde?... Zuster Elsebe zei: „Het eeuwige leven gun ik haar maar al te zeer, maar het bedroeft mij dat de wereld is beroofd van zo'n grote hoeveelheid deugden. Ibid., 65.

[90] Doe dijt tijt quam, dat onse lieue Her hoer van hier wolde hallen ende lonen hoer alle der gueder werken, die si alsoe nerstelick ende vlittelicke hadde volbracht, soe is si sick gehworden aen enen sachten schage, daer mennige heilige (suster) aen getsoruen is. Ende doe et niet lange en was voer hoere doot, soe ontfijnck sij hoer heilige amt seer begeerlick mit groeter ynnicheit, ende lach doe voert in groeten verlangen nae den doot, op dat si ontbonden mocht warden ende comen bij hoeren hemelschen bruidigom, daer al hoer begeerte ende verlangen nae was. Altoes wanner die susteren tot hoer quamen ende oer aenspraken, soe leerden si hem vol godes, ende badt ons dat wij bauen alle dync vast hielden die guede gewoenten ende insettinge des huijses. "Ende hier," seide si "voele ic nv groeten vrede in, dat ic die altoes trouwelick ende vastelick heb gehalden nae mynnen besten vermoegen. Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 117.

Griet was praised by the chronicler for so piously instructing the sisters and for being a model example of all virtue, and her behavior on the deathbed was interpreted as an eager longing for death and union with the heavenly bridegroom. Griet's death minimizes her bridal status, while reminding readers of her enormous contribution to the convent as a teacher of virtue. Griet is put into the position of bride of Christ passively. In her final words, Griet eagerly begs for death, but does not describe herself as a bride of Christ. After praising her virtues one last time, the narrator turns at last to Griet's deathbed scene, where Griet's ardent desire for death and Christ's embrace becomes apparent. She lay in bed, waiting impatiently to come into the eyes of the heavenly father:

> And so lay she three days in a vexed state and called out with great desire: "Dear lord, take me! Take me! And dear Lord, don't leave me lingering here any longer, because I am so very heartily desiring to be right next to you!" With this ardent desire and good understanding this holy and worthy soul was released and taken to God in great peace, on the 29th day of October in the year 1479 and she had served god with us for 60 years and had been a noteworthy example of all virtues to us.[91]

These eager words certainly confirm the narrator's assertion that Griet fervently wanted to die and join her dear Lord, but she does not call for her Bridegroom. In this *Life*, Griet's relationship with the holy bridegroom is of less importance than how well she modeled virtues, and the mention of a heavenly bridegroom truly is an aside. Griet wants to die and enter heaven to come closer to God, but not to unite with a heavenly spouse, an important distinction. The bridal aside was added by the Chronicler, while Griet's own words depict a woman eager only for God, not for a Bridegroom. Her deathbed longing clarifies that heaven was not understood exclusively in bridal terms. Though her desire for God and death was obvious and explicit—Take me! Take me!—Griet's death, even with the bridal aside, suggests that women Devout did not cling fast to a bridal identity.

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[91] ...of vresen toe comen voer die ogen des heimelschen Vaders. Ende soe lach si drie dage in enen gallen ende riep bermelicken mit groeter begeerten: "Lieue Here, halt mij, halt mij! Och lieue Here, laet mij doch hier niet langer blijven, want mij verlanget alsoe hertelicke seer nae v!" Mit aldus vueriger begeerten ende seer gueden verstande is dese heilige weerdige ziele ontbonden ende totten Here geuaren in groeter rusten, op den XXIX dach in october jnt iaer ons Heren MCCCCLXXIX, doe si alt was LXXXVII iaer. Ende hadde God hier mit ons gedient oetmoedelick LX iaer, ende had ons geweest een stichtich exempel alre dochden. Ibid., 117-18.

Another deathbed scene from the Emmerich Sisterbook shows a nun more explicitly voicing her role as a bride of Christ, though in this case, the title itself is given by her guardian angel, rather than either the narrator or the dying woman. Sister Jutte Bollen (d. 17/8/1470) regularly "sucked the honey of godly love" when at church and had a special devotion to the Eucharist.[92] She was apparently physically frail and prone to sickness, which prevented her from taking part in physical labor, but nonetheless was described as "bashful... a lover of virtue and of maidenly virtue, the holy poverty and sobriety in eating and drinking, thankful and sufficient in all the services she did for others. She was openhearted and thorough in her confessions, so that her conscience might remain clean before the eyes of her bridegroom."[93] According to this account, Jutte must have been very much like Grieten van Nyënbeeke and the sister from Dietsz Voerz, though of weaker constitution. Jutte too would have probably eaten the coarse common meals gustily as an ascetic practice—identified again as *ontzuekelic*—and served others in the most thankless of tasks. The Emmerich chronicler even provides us with Jutte's motivation—she behaves this way because she knows that her bridegroom is watching, and she wishes to remain pure for him, just as the Emmerich Rule stipulates sisters should do when in the dormitory. Jutte is recognized as a bride by her guardian angel in a premonition of her own death:

> Then/when this holy soul had served our Lord for all of the days of her life, so she was truly worthy, that she was called to come to her Lord by his own calling, the holy angel, that she really saw and heard: "Come, come, come from Lebanon and take up the crown which is prepared for you." (*Song 4:8*) When this pious sister Jut had seen and heard this, she then went to the sister who served in the infirmary and said to her "I am going to die." The sister answered her and said "Dear sister Jut, go [away] and it shall be up to God whether you die or not," Then she said again "No, I shall die, I know that well, because my holy angel has told me so." The sister then said "Dear Jut, mother, what did he say?" Then she said "He turned me with his hand and said "Come, come, Come out of Lebanon bride and take up the crown that is prepared for you."

[92] Suckende den honich der godtelicker mynnen... Ibid., 184.

[93] Och, si was altoes sickelic ende weckelick, mer nochtant wrachte si guet, enter wtwendich of intwendich, want si was een vat vol gracien ende dochden, altoes schemel ende eenvoldich bi hoer seluen. Si was een mijnster der dochden als der jonferlicker reijnicheit, der heiliger armoeden ende der soeberheit in eten ende in drincken, dancbaer ende genochsam van allen dyngen ende in allen deinst den men hoer dede. Si was apenhertich ende ondbedect in hoere bicht, op dat hoer consciencie claer ombesmijt bleef voer den ogen hoers brudegoms. Ibid., 185.

> When the sister had heard this, then she went with her into the infirmary and was very a faithful servant to her in all matters. And sister Jut was immediately and totally sick....[94]

Jutte, who had been sick her whole life, was at first turned away from the infirmary. However, both she and the attendant sister interpreted the angel's words as a promise of approaching death. Jutte, called the bride in a reference to the *Song,* was told that her crown was at last ready for her. The bridal crown, of course, came only when a woman or mystical soul at last wed the bridegroom, and in this case, both Jutte and the nurse-nun expect that the marriage will take place in death, rather than through a mystical experience or a non-fatal illness. Jutte's vision and audition were quickly proved to be genuine by her immediate and very grave illness. Though Jutte fell sick almost immediately, her illness was prolonged, and three days before her death those caring for her noticed that she had been given a special gift of sweetness from the Lord, so that "she lay like an angelic creature with a happy and love-filled face and with battered up hands (?), her eyes thus having been looking away, where she saw sweet things..."[95] When the three days were up, and everyone was extremely concerned for her health, the convent's confessor came to visit and went to see Jutte. He had a little conversation with Jutte, presumably hearing her confession, and after giving her the last rites, Jutte "sweetly fell asleep in the Lord."[96] When later asked what Jutte had said about her experience of bliss, the father, a Peter van Gendt, told the sisters that she truly had been held up in heaven during those three days.

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[94] Doe dese heilige ziel onsen lieuen Here hadde gedient alle die dage hoers leuens, soe heuet si weerdich geweest, dat si is geroepen toe comen tot den Here der heren bi sijnen bade, den heiligen engel, den si sienlicke sach ende hoerden roepen: "Com, com, comt bruijt van Liban ende ontfanct die cron die v bereit is." Doe dit dese goeddienstichge suster Jut gesien ende gehoert hadde, soe is se ghegaen tot der suster die int sicken huijs dienden ende seide hoer: "Ic sal steruen." Doe antwoerden die sicken waster wede ende seide: "Lieue suster Hut, gi en sult of God wilt niet steruen," Doe sprack sij weder: "Neen, ic sal steruen, ic weet dat wael, wnt myn heilige engel heuet mij gesacht." Doe seide die suster: "Lieue Hut, moeder, woe seide hi?" Doe sprac si: Hi wenten mit sijnre hant ende seide: "Com, com, comt bruijt van Liban ende ontfanct die cron, die v beriet is." Doe die suster dit gehoert hadde, soe gync si mit hoer int sicken huijs ende was hoer in allen dijngen seer bedienstelick. Ende suster Hut wart otemael cranck, soe dat men hoer oer kerkelicke recht dede, welck si ontfijnck mit groeter deuocien ende ynnicheit. Ibid., 185-6.

[95] Drie daghe eer si sterf, soe wart si begaft mit alsoe groeter genochten ende sueticheit van onsen lieuen Here, dat men apelick mocht sien ende mercten dat si sienlicke godtelicke vertroestinge hadde. Want si lach als een engels creatuer mit enen blijden mijnlicken ansciht ende mit op gheheuen handen, oer ogen altoes hebbende gheweest op die steede, daer si die suete genochgelicke vertoenighe sach. Ibid., 186.

[96] Ende aldus suetelick enstliep si in den Here, int iaer ons Heren... die doe was op enen vridach. Ibid.

Jutte's life, vision, and death as described in the Sisterbook from St. Agnes in Emmerich give significant insight into how the Devout adapted the bride of Christ in their own women's communities. Jutte herself was, superficially, a likely mystic. Her poor health, ascetic practices, and constant prayer and meditation all were to be expected of a mystic. In the only vision ascribed to her, Jutte is even proclaimed a bride of Christ and urged to come claim her crown in heaven. However, this vision is a deathbed premonition, rather than a mystical experience, and Jutte's crown is recognized as a heavenly reward for her pious life. Jutte's experience confirms the pattern shown in the lives of Grieten van Nyënbeeke and the sister from Diestz—a remarkably virtuous woman would be met in the afterlife by the Lord in the guise of a bridegroom. However, prior to her death, Jutte experienced what everyone who saw her recognized as some sort of mystical gift. She physically manifested signs of being enraptured, and only emerged from this state long enough to receive the last rites and make her final confession. While the confessor, Peter van Gendt, conversed with Jutte and apparently confirmed that her soul had spent the last three days in heaven, his conversation with her was less an examination than a pastoral preparation for the afterlife. He does confirm that her death was a God-given gift, but does not inquire as to whether her visions were orthodox or heretical, genuine or demonic. Jutte's death reconfirms that being a bride of Christ was more directly associated with death than with mystical experience, at least at St. Agnes in Emmerich. However, the elements of this text which *could* be interpreted as mystical are always described as miraculous or as divine interventions. While the narrator might have included details of Jutte's visions—which she apparently told Peter van Gendt—the text instead closes with a reminder that Jutte was a good and pious woman, a model of virtue, and that her death had been a gift from God. A male hagiographer might have chosen to portray Jutte as a bride of Christ and a mystic, emphasizing her gift of sickness, and ascetic practices or elaborating on her promised heavenly crown, but the St. Agnes chronicler describes Jutte as a virtuous woman, using Jutte's model behavior as an instructive model for other women in the convent. Anne Winston-Allen characterizes the Sisterbooks of the modern devotion as "containing little in the way of mystical visions,

revelations, or the radical asceticism of the spiritual athletes in the fourteenth-century sister-books, ...[but instead] offer[ing] an ideal that is attainable by ordinary people."[97] Thus Jutte, who was extraordinary in both life and death, was presented as a woman who had led a good life and died a good death, rather than as the gifted mystic or ascetic she may have been.

The chronicler at Diepenveen was particularly careful to include only realistic anecdotes, though she did of course reinterpret them in hagiographic terms. Though the chronicler at Emmerich includes semi-miraculous proofs of divine contact, including describing one of the convent's first mothers as having a nimbus while praying, the extant Sisterbooks of the Modern Devotion all avoid depicting real miracles. This same technique is common in extant Books of Brothers, including the book from Emmerich. In one anecdote, the chronicler of the men's house at Emmerich describes a certain brother John who totally deflated a puffed up cleric, recasting perfectly mundane events into a semi-miraculous encounter.[98] Surviving texts from this period describe uncanny events featuring sisters from Diepenveen, including after-death visitations by sisters to women at other convents, and such stories would have been

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[97] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 204.

[98] "Indeed he used to read and memorize the writings that approved our common way of life, so that at opportune times he would have something with which to contradict those disparaging it. I remember a certain time when we went together to the diocese of Cologne on business for our house and we came to a certain prelate, a man renowned throughout Germany for his letters, who was also a canon of the churches of St. Mary's and St. Andrew's in Cologne as well as of saints Chrysantus and Dari in Munstereifel. Because he knew both our parents he began in a teasing way to say many things about our way of life, asserting that we were less than wise to get sidetracked into such a way of life when there were so many royal monasteries to be found wondrously provided with revenue, fields, buildings, and all other temporal necessities. If, he said, you wanted simply to provide your food and clothing by the work of your own hands, as it is now necessary for you daily to do, what was the point of your parents giving up so much expense and wealth to send you to school all those years? Would it not have been better for you to remain in your parents' home from childhood and there to have extended them a helping hand as they earned their bread by the sweat of their brows? And still more things along this line. To everything that popped into this canon's mind and fell from his mouth, our beloved brother John responded so rationally and effectively and with so few words that the man stood astonished, just looking at John. Though he could discover nothing with which to respond by way of counter-argument, he never totally ceased arguing while we were still present, lest the students standing around judge him vanquished. But once we went away--As I afterward heard from those there--he began in the presence of all to extol the genius of our brother, saying that he never would have thought that such things as he had now discovered lay hidden in his heart. Indeed from this discussion the man so progressed himself that our way of life, which he had formerly disparaged, he began now to extol and recommend." -From the life of John of Munstereifel, The Chronicle of the Brothers' House at Emmerich Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 139-40.

available to the chroniclers.[99] These women authors, especially the chronicler at Diepenveen, consciously excluded supernatural events from biographies while altering hagiographic models to provide new texts that could be both exemplary and marvelous simultaneously. By using examples from daily life, some so commonplace they had to be reinterpreted to fit into a religious context—as with Sticken and the cats—the authors of these Sisterbooks created edifying and amazing records of virtuous living while leaving the women in each story fully human and believable. While other religious biographies, including those written by chroniclers at Dominican Convents in Germany, adapted the hagiographic model to suit their needs, the women chroniclers of the Modern Devotion show an unusual (by medieval standards) preference for the mundane and ordinary.[100] The sisters in these chronicles are not saints, but they *are* good Christian women leading lives and dying deaths any Christian could aspire to.

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[99] One excellent article on the relationship between uncanny events and the sister books is : Mertens, "Exempelen over verschijningen te Diepenveen." Mertens looks at several cases of apparitions and ghostly visitations that are attested to in multiple manuscripts.

[100] It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in a detailed comparison of these differences, but the characteristics which inspired nineteenth-century scholars to deride these Sisterbooks as second-rate hysterical women's mysticism are generally absent from the Sisterbooks of the modern devotion. To make a general, broad, and sweeping statement, the fourteenth-century German Sisterbooks contain far more accounts of spiritual/interior experiences, while the fifteenth-century Dutch Sisterbooks prefer narratives of every-day happenings. Elsbet Stagel and Johannes Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906); Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*; Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women.* , ed. Klaus Jaitner, Urkundenbuch des Klosters Ebstorf (Hildesheim: Verlag August Lax, 1985); Stagel and Meyer, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss*; Heinrich Seuse and Elsbet Stagel, *The Sister's Guide: The Letters of Henry Suso to his Spiritual Daughters*, trans. Kathleen Goldmann (Springfield: Templegate, 1955).

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Suppressed Mysticism?

Though mystical visions and revelations were rare in comparison to descriptions of human virtue, some entries in the Sisterbooks did include mystical passages typically phrased in vague language. For instance, many sisters from Deventer, Diepenveen, and Emmerich are described as surrounded by fiery flames when praying, or gifted with tears, which could be read either as emphasizing someone's devotion or as indicating a mystical experience.[101] Visions are often described as dreams, even when clearly prophetic, as was the case with Alijt Comhaers' prediction about the pestilence at Diepenveen. The tendency to minimize mystical connotations is most apparent in the lengthy entry for Sister Stijne Zuetelincks (d. 1445), who was the niece of Florens Radewijns, an important early member of the Devotio Moderna, and co-founder of the Brothers of the Common Life. Stijne Zuetelincks has several lengthy visions which are couched in vague language, leaving it unclear whether the chronicler is recording dreams, true mystical visions, or Stijne's wisdom and teaching.[102] While it seems likely that Stijne's visions were included and detailed because of her kinship with an illustrious founder, they represent a rare glimpse into a Devout woman's theological and spiritual world. Stijne's penitence, virtues, and active life are also detailed, but the lengthy description of the things she "said" reveals that Stijne, at the very least, was aware of the wider late-medieval theological world, and most likely a mystic.

Stijne was a model of virtue who also helped other women develop themselves spiritually. In one anecdote, Stijne heard of a sister who had been assigned penance but had not done as much as she ought to have. Stijne went up to this woman and confronted her, saying "Dear sister, I would ask of you in all friendship, that you scourge me according to God's will, since I am going to have to do your penance for

[101] For instance, Sister Jde Prummers, a prioress at St. Agnes in Emmerich, was once surrounded by a nimbus while praying and could trigger the gift of tears in others: "Sister Styn van den Dam saw a clear light around her head like a star's" [Styn van den Dam sach een clear liecht op hoer hoeft gelick enre sternen.]; She said such good thins to those sisters who came to her that they would go away from her overwhelmed with profound tears [Si seide den susteren soe voel guides, als si tot hoer quamen, dat si wael van ynnicheit mit tranen van hoer gijngen auermids...] Bollmann and Staubach, *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, 90, 96.

[102] De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 165-184.

you."[103] Ashamed and confused, the sister then completed the rest of her penance. The Chronicler describes Stijne as filled with the grace of God and constantly involved in spiritual devotions. Stijne would often share wisdom with the sisters which came directly from God, but the Chronicler's careful use of passive phrasing leaves it unclear whether Stijne's wisdom came from mystical experiences, devotional meditation, or theological reading by showing Stijne as "saying" things with the same phrases that habitually introduce anecdotes of virtues in the Dutch Sisterbooks. This careful political language probably protected Stijne and the Deventer chronicler from a 1455 Windesheim condemnation of women's mystical writing.[104] Stijne's revelations were thus carefully depicted in passive language, so that neither she nor the Chronicler might be accused of translating from Latin or copying philosophical or mystical teaching.

In the first of Stijne's quasi-mystical visions, she describes the three types of people who have been called by the Lord, or elected for salvation. This break from standard anecdotes is striking, even though Stijne's teaching is introduced with typical anecdote language—"She often would say..."—it quickly becomes apparent that Stijne's discourse was far more complicated than a simple conversation or

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[103] Het gevyel op een tijt, dat eenre zuster wat penetenciën was heyten doen, die sij seer noede gedaen hadde. Endie hierom, soe wat dat si doen conde, daer sijs mede ofwesen mochte, dat dede si. Doe dat zuster Stijne hoerde, genck si totter zuster ende sprac oer doegentlike toe, ende onder ander woerden bad si oer ende segede: „Lieve zuster, ic wolde u alte vrentlike bidden, dat gijs my om Gods willen gonnen wolden , dat ic dese penetencie voer u moste doen." Doe die zuster dat hoerde, wert si merckelike confuys ende bescheemt in oerselven, omdat si sach, dat oer die guede, oelde zuster alsoe uut mijnnen veroetmodigen wolde, daer siselven alsoe hart ende wederstrubbich in geweest hadde, ende was do voertan gehorsam sonder wederseggen, ende dede als oer geheyten was. Ibid., 170.

[104] The text of the condemnation reads: "No nun or sister, no matter what her status, may, either personally or through an intermediary, copy books which contain philosophical teachings or revelations [i.e. mystical texts], whether these originate in her own mind or that of her sisters, on penalty of imprisonment; henceforth should any such be discovered, it is the responsibility of all to ensure that they are immediately burned as soon as they are found or heard tell of; nor should any dare to translate such texts from the Latin into Dutch." [Nulla monialis aut soror cuiuscunque status fuerit conscribat aliquos libros, doctrinas philosphicas aut revelationes continentes per se interpositamve personam ex sua propria mente vel aliarum sororum compositas sub poena carceris si qui inposterum reperti fuerint praecipitur omnibus quod statim illi ad quorum conspectum vel aures pervenerint eos igni tradere curent, similiter nec aliquem transferre praesumant de latino in theutonicum.] Translation in Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 25. The importance of this ban and the fate of Alijt Bake, the Devotio Moderna's best-known woman mystic, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Its significance and impact on women's writing and women's mysticism is also discussed in : Bake; Bollmann, "Alijt Bake als geesteliche reformerin."; Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self."; Lie, "Middelnederlandse literatuur vanuit Genderperspectief: een Verkenning."; Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen."; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 219-223.

pious word. Instead, Stijne frequently would tell sisters about the deep theological distinctions between three different types of religious life, implicitly reminding them all that they had taken the best path by joining a community of the Devout: "She would often say that there are three types of people who were to be called by Our Dear Lord: the first are adopted by him, the second will be nailed to him, the third will be glued to him."[105] Stijne would then apparently elaborate greatly on the qualities of these three categories of Christians, who are presented according to degree of spiritual accomplishment. Those who were adopted by Christ are described as having had no love for living a spiritual life, and instead remained fully in the world. Stijne says of them that "Our Dear Lord spoke well, when he once said "you did not choose me but I have chosen you (John 15:16)."[106] Here, Stijne suggests that Christ saves those who have lived worldly lives, and her discussion of the "adopted" incorporates scripture, observation, and orthodox medieval theology. She then moves on to the second category of people, who were "nailed to Him," and not surprisingly, are of a better spiritual degree than those adopted by Christ. Many live piously, in cloisters or in gatherings, and live from the work of their hands. According to Stijne, John 6:26 refers to this sort of Christian: "And to these people Our Dear Lord might have said in the book of the Evangelist 'You do not seek me because you have not seen signs [miracles], but because you have eaten from the bread and were sated."[107] The third category, those "glued to Our Dear Lord," are the ones who serve him "out of love," dedicating themselves of their own free will, and according to Stijne these are the most beloved by the Lord. After quoting John 8:35 (because you have on my account left

[105] Sij plach oeck te seggen, dat drie manyeren van menschen weren, die van onsen lieven Heren geroepen worden: die iersten worden van Hem angenoemen, die anderen worden an Hem genegelt, die derden worden an Hem gelymet. De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 171. De Man gives a lengthy gloss on „gelymet" which gives several parallels on being glued to or stuck to the beloved, primarily from mystical texts. An overwhelming number of his examples are drawn from Hadewijch's writing, "die bant van lime, dat is minne, daer god ende de zaleghe ziele in het gehbonden sijn" (the bond of glue, that is love, with which god and the holy soul are bound together as one). Further exploration is needed to see whether Stijne came across this phrasing and these three categories on her own, wove them together from her religious study, or if the categories came directly from a single source. The idea of being "nailed" to Christ was discussed in the context of Heinrich Suese and *CMS* in chapter 5. De Man also deals with it briefly in his gloss to this passage.

[106] Ende tot desen menschen mach onse lieve Here wal spreken, dat Hi in den aventmaele secht: "Ghi en hebbet My niet uutvercoren, mer Ic hebbe u uutvercoren." Ibid., 171-2.

[107] Ende tot desen menschen mochte onse lieve Here wal seggen, dat Hi spreket inden ewangelio: ‚Ghi en zueket My niet, omdat gi teykene gesien hebt, mer want gi vanden broede gegeten hebt ende versaedet sijt.' Ibid., 172.

behind your father, mother, sister and brother...you shall have eternal life), Stijne suggests that this refers to the calling of the Sisters at Meester-Geertshuijs in Deventer who are learning and studying the virtues.[108] Stijne's description of the three categories of saved souls differentiates between those in the world, those committed to religious life by external circumstance, and those who willingly and lovingly pursued a virtuous life. Being nailed to Christ might have the same effect as being glued to Christ, but Stijne recognizes that nailing is painful, brutal, and coercive. Those pursuing a religious life by choice are more gently affixed to the cross with the glue of love. The mixture of scriptural quotations, degrees of spiritual progression, and especially the imagery of being nailed to and glued to Christ suggest that Stijne was drawing on theological texts to interpret a vision. Moreover, the organization and careful progression, complete with appropriate biblical references, indicate that Stijne was not speaking extemporaneously, or casually "saying" something, but instead presenting the other women in the community through a well-crafted discourse on the various paths to salvation. The Deventer chronicler remains silent as to whether Stijne's insight came from a mystical experience or from careful study of theological texts, and cautiously introduces this passage as an innocent anecdote, presumably to avoid breaking the 1455 ban.

Stijne's devotional practices are given extraordinary detail and attention by the Deventer Chronicler in a series of spiritual examples which play on the difference between fantasy and meditation (*fantasiën, meditatie*), but probably reveal some of Stijne's mystical experiences and teachings. Stijne went to the "holy Sacrament" of the Eucharist with great ardor and devotion, taking great care that she should not be even slightly tempted by a fantasy when receiving the sacrament. She taught others the

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[108] Die derde maenyere van menschen—die an onsen lieven Heren gelymet weren—dat were diegene,die onsen lieven Heren uut mijnnen dienen ende daer van nyement toe gedwongen en worden—mer si verkiesent uut oerselves vrye wille, ende nochtan wal hadden, daer si inder werlt bequamelike van leven mochten. Dese, die aldus sijn, die sijn onsen lieven Heren die alreliefsten. Ende tott desen sal Hi spreken: Want ghi om my hebt gelaten vader, moder, zuster, ende bruder ende daer gi in der werlt genuechte in gehad mochtet hebben siet, soe sal Ic u hondervolt geven in deser werlt, ende hiernae suldi dat ewge leven besitten." Aldusdanyge punten ende godienstige callinge hadde si dicwile mitten zusteren daer si mede leerde ende onderwees in den doechden. Want si was selven merckelike besocht ende ondervonden, beide in geestliken dijngen die an die consciencie droegen, ende oec in uutwendigen dyngen. Ende hierom soe wat dat si enen anderen leerde of segede, dat dede si uut enen ondervonden ende beleefden gronde. Ibid.

importance of keeping a clear and pure mind during this sacrament, often speaking about the appropriate attitude.[109] Stijne elaborated on her own meditative practices during the Sacrament in conversations with her "Spreekzusteren."[110] Possibly through conversations with these Spreekzusters, the Chronicler learned that Stijne had a special devotion to Christ's passion, and "with all her heart" she desired to suffer his sorrows and passion, using the memory of his death as a weapon against all fantasies and evil thoughts.[111]

In what may have been a mystical experience, a lengthy meditation or a dream, Stijne details Christ's passion, describing the stations of the Cross, the details of Caiaphas' clothing, and the nine sorrows Christ suffered on Calvary, all described "as if she was nailed on that cross of obedience."[112] Stijne's experience suggests that she practiced the same sort of passion mysticism as Alijt Bake, Heinrich Seuse, and the readers of *Christus und die Minnende Seele*. For Stijne, meditating on Christ's passion and positioning herself with him on the cross was truly transformative, bringing her into paradise and proclaiming her a bride of Christ. This practice "anchored her heart entirely in Our Dear Lord, and in love neither of the world nor of things,... and on account of this Our Dear Lord planted and prepared a garden in her heart, where she could amuse herself with him every day."[113] When describing Stijne's

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[109] Stijne's comment on how people should go to the holy sacraments again a long and theologically developed piece which interweaves biblical passages and her own personal experiences. She emphasizes the importance of taking the sacrament with a clean conscious and good heart, and remembering that it is the most important testament of the passion of the lord. Ibid., 173.

[110] Spreeksusteren (spelling varied according to regional dialect) were women who took on the role of spiritual coach for another sister. They would hear confession of faults and dispense wisdom and advice. Mathilde Van Dijk, *Een rij van spiegels: de Heilige Barbara van Nicomedia als voorbeeld voor vrouwelijke religieuzen* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij VerLoren, 2000), 70.

[111] Mit al oeren herten kiered si oer totten lijden ende passie ons lieven Heren, ende plach oer daermede te wapenen tegen alle fantesiën ende quade gedachten, die oer inquemen. De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 174.

[112] "Want alsoe gehelike negelde si oer an dat cruce der gehorsomheit... Ibid., 177. Stijne's detailed descriptions drew the attention of Art Historian James Marrow, who calls her a "simple sister," and uses one of her 'dreams' to argue that the imagery of Christ's passion had permeated the late medieval Dutch imagination at all social levels. James Marrow, "Circumdederunt me canes multi: Christ's Tormentors in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance," *The Art Bulletin* 59, no. 2 (1977): 180.

[113] Ende want si dan aldus mit al oeren herten altemaele an onsen lieven Heren geanckert ende gevestet was, ende en mynde niet die werlt noch die dijnge, die daerynne sijn, soe pijnde si altoes, waer dat si mochte, oerselven onsen lievenHeren tegenwoerdich te bieden ende was al meestelick indwendelik mig Gode becummert, als gescreven is, dat die

internal garden, the chronicler weaves together the imagery of the *Song* and the *hortus conclusus* in a fashion nearly identical to that found in the *Speculum Virginum*. Stijne herself is the garden, and her virtues are flowers planted by her "beloved Bridegroom," which drew him to reside in her heart.[114] Lilies of chastity flourished in this soil, as did roses of "verduldicheit" and violets of humility.[115] Inside this garden, or vineyard of peace, every desire was met, and it quickly becomes apparent that the Bridegroom has created a miniature version of paradise within Stijne's heart. Four rivers flow through the garden, which represent "the four wounds of our Dear Lord Jesus Christ that were made in his holy hands and feet, and the fountain was his Holy gaping side."[116] Stijne is referred to as "this dear bride of God, [dese lieve Godsbruyt]" throughout the passage.[117] Stijne's interior garden is highly allegorical and draws on familiar mystical imagery. Though it is described with rich detail, Stijne's garden remains a vague concept, pinned up with scriptural references. Is this a vision Stijne herself had, a meditation technique she followed, or a posthumous description of her virtues using traditional bridal and mystical language? The text itself gives only a few hints. The transition from Stijne's position on Christ's cross to the garden suggests that Stijne's garden was built out of her devotional practices and especially her detailed meditation on Christ's passion. This may indicate that Stijne was involved in mystical meditation techniques and transformed into a living bride of Christ through passion mysticism. The passages I have alluded to all use mystical language and imagery, but might as easily have been taken from Stijne's devotional reading.

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wijse wandert in breetheit of wijtheit sijns herten. Ende hierom hadde si onsen lieven Heren bijnnen in oeren herten ene hof geplantet ende bereidet, daer si oer dagelix mit Hem in vermaken mochte, als si vermoey was overmids tribulacie ende becoringe, ende daer si oer oec in verbargen mochte voer dien myddagesduvel, die daer comet in die gelikenisse des engels des lichtes. De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 177-8.

[114] In desen hof hadde si mennigerhande bloemen ende walrukende crude, dat weren mennigerhande doechden, daer si oer in offende, ende daer si oeren gemynden Brudegom mede vermaken mochte ende trecken totter woeninge oers herten Ibid., 178.

[115] Ibid., 178-9.

[116] De Man struggles to find a gloss for this depiction of rivers through a garden, suggesting that Stijne may be referring to Ruusbroec. Ende dese vier revyeren weren die vier wonden ons lieven Heren Jhesu Cristi in Synen hiligen handen ende voeten, ende die fonteyne was Syne hilige, opgelakene zijde. Ibid., 180.

[117] The description of Stijne's interior garden can be found in Ibid., 177-184.

The more conclusive hint that Stijne's religious practices and experiences could have been described as mystical in other contexts—by authors not constrained by the Windesheim ban on women writing about mysticism and philosophy—comes in the entry's concluding paragraphs. Wrapping up the elaborate description of Stijne's garden, the chronicler comments that "because this garden was truly well taken care of and all the plants (herbs) of virtue had been brought to their full development, she was always considerate and attentive" and she constantly tried to teach others how to develop these same virtues "because she had known and tasted how enjoyable it is to have peace with Jesus."[118] Marveling over the gifts this "holy soul" was granted by Our Dear Lord, the chronicler suggests that Stijne's experiences surpassed those of other sisters at Meester-Geertshuis. Stijne also must have actively been teaching others not just how to live virtuously, but how to understand theology and possibly how to achieve mystical experiences. Of Stijne's death, the Chronicler says nothing. The reader is left to imagine how she faced her death, whether this woman died of plague, sickness, or old age, and what wonders or wise words may have accompanied her last moments. Instead, the account of Stijne's life and teachings closes with a sentence that suggests Stijne was indeed a bit of a mystic, and that the Sisters at Deventer envied her these experiences, but greatly valued her teachings:

> A small portion of her virtues and [spiritual] journey [lit. pilgrimages] is written about here, which we have seen and also been astonished by, and we often tried to figure out possible causes for these experiences so that we might have them too, since we were called with the same call and have the same collection of virtues, yet nevertheless we have had slower and more leisurely journeys.[119]

These closing words suggest that the long descriptions of Stijne's "sayings" were in fact her accounts of mystical experiences. Though Stijne performed the same mild ascetic practices as other sisters, read the

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[118] Want om desen hof wal te bewaeren ende alle die crude derdoechden tot oeren vollen wasdoem te brengen, was si altoes besorcht ende toesiende. Ende soe wat oer daer een hynder an wesen mochte, dat pijnde sij mit alre vlijticheit te schuwen; want si haddet gesmaket ende wistet, hoe genuechlik het is mit Ihesu vrede te hebben. Ibid., 183.

[119] Dit is een weynich van oeren doechden ende wanderinghe geschreven, die wi dicke gesien ende oeck verwondert hebben, ende daer wij oeck dickwile oerzaeke uut hadden moegen nemen ons tevermodigen, dat wi, die mitten selven roepe geroepen weren ende dieselve rietschap der doechden hebben, nochtan aldus traechlick ende versumelike wanderen. Ibid., 184.

same religious works, and toiled daily in the Sisterhouse, she nevertheless experienced an accelerated journey, meeting her beloved Bridegroom in visionary experiences well before death. Because Stijne's spiritual accomplishments were so astonishing, her virtuous behavior is minimized. Yet, rather than proclaiming Stijne a mystic openly, or praising her unusual experiences as divine revelations, the Deventer chronicler couches Stijne's experiences in vague and passive language, mentioning at most "dreams," battles against fantasies. Her mystical teachings were presented with the same phrasing that introduced anecdotes of behavioral virtue in other entries: "It happened once that... [Het gevyel op een tijt]," or "she would often say... [sij plach oeck te seggen]," or "she also performed [sij plach oec]..." introduce descriptions of what must have been Stijne's teachings and descriptions of her revelations. Only in the closing lines, when the Chronicler openly admits that Stijne's experiences were extraordinary, does the wording change from passive and ambiguous to suggest that Stijne was gifted with mystical experiences.

Stijne's mysticism was public, envied, tolerated, and even approved of, and because of her mystical experiences, she was recognized as a bride of God. Her entry in the Deventer book was one of the longest and by far the most theologically complex. Despite the ban on women's mystical writing, the Deventer chronicler insisted on including Stijne's experiences, and may have intentionally disguised them in vague language to leave the mystical aspects of Stijne's spiritual journey clouded in uncertainty. Later generations of women were, presumably, meant to read Stijne's experiences, perhaps following her path. From textual clues, it is probable that Stijne attempted to teach women at Deventer how to achieve visions of their own, and it is apparent that she shared the wisdom she received in revelations. Other women in convents and Sisterhouses of the Devout also were guided by their mystical experiences, and some actively taught mystical techniques to fellow sisters.[120] For instance, the vision which predicted the

[120] For a discussion of a mystical-inspired reform at the convent of Facons, see Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 171-196. The most important example of a mystic reforming and educating Devout women is that of Alijt Bake at Galilea in Ghent. There is a growing body of literature on Bake, who was a mystic, prolific author, translator of sermons, and failed reformer: Bollmann, "Alijt Bake als geesteliche reformerin," 113-14, 181, 228-30; Bake; Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen."; Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-

"Great Wedding" at Diepenveen was dreamed by Alijt Comhaers when she was training in having revelatory dreams:

> Once she dreamed a dream that was unpleasant to her and this was always a great concern for her, and she complained to another sister, called Salome van den Wiel who was nearby her... and was one of our oldest sisters. This sister said to her: she would teach her, how she could have sweet dreams of the sort she desired to have. Then she said to her that as she was falling asleep, she would show her how to lie on the chest of our dear lord and suckle [from] his bottomless love and mercy: from this [suckling] she should be able to have a sweet dream. She did as she had been taught and she soon had a very sweet dream indeed. When she woke up she said to Sister Salome: "Oh, I have had a very high and sweet dream." Then the sister said "What was the dream?" she said "there shall be a very beautiful and long-lasting wedding here," and it came to pass, as you shall hear soon.[121]

Salome apparently used some sort of physical technique—whispering prayers, perhaps, as Alijt fell asleep—to help the other woman have prophetic or mystical dreams. The idea of lying on Christ's breast and suckling is a common theme in women's mystical writing, but Salome seems to be actively guiding Alijt to control her dreams and have mystical dreams at her convenience.[122] Regrettably, the Diepenveen

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1455) as reformer of the inner self."; Lie, "Middelnederlandse literatuur vanuit Genderperspectief: een Verkenning."; B Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse passiemystiek, II. De vier Kruiswegen van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40, no. 1 (1966); B. Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse passiemystiek: V. De kloosteronderrichtingen van Alijt Bake.," *Ons geestelijk erf* 42 (1968); B. Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," *Ons geestelijk erf* 41 (1967); B Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek V. De Kloosteronderrichtingen van Alijt Bake: 4. De weg der Victorie," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 43, no. 3 (1969); Wybren Scheepsma, "Twee onuitgegeven traktaatjes van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 66, no. 2 (1992); Wybren Scheepsma, "*Van die memorie der passien ons Heren* van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 68, no. 1 (1994); Wybren Scheepsma, "De trechter en de spin: Metaforen voor mystiek leiderschap van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 69, no. 2 (1995); Hans Van Dijk, "De Mystieke Weg van Alijt Bake (1415-1455)," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 66, no. 1 (1992); Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, especially 197-223; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.

[121] Op een tijt droemde hoer wat, dat hoer niet genoechlic en was dat was hoer alte swaer, ende clagedet eenre suster, geheyten salomee van den wiel Welck dat by hoer was ende verwaerde sie, ende was ene van onsen oeldesten susteren. Dese suster segede tot hoer: sie wolde hoer leren, hoe dat sie suverlike drome solde crijgen daer sei seer begeerich toe was. Doe segede sij hoer als sie slapen wolde, soe solde siehoer hovet leggen op die boerst ons lieven heren Ende suyken sine grondelose mynne ende barmherticheit: daer wt soe solde sie suete drome crijgen. Sie dede als hoer geleert was, ende creech doe te hant enen alten suverliken droem. Doe sie ontwakende was geworden segede sie tot suster salomee: "Och, ic hebbe alten suverliken droem gehad." Doe segede die suster: "wat is dat?" sij segede:"hijr sal alten schonen ende langen bruloft wesen," alst ock geschiede na hore doet, als men noch wal horen sal. *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*, 275. Salome van den Wiel has a long entry of her own, and also had her daughter enter Diepenveen. Interestingly, neither is described as remotely mystically gifted. *Stichtiger Susteren van Diepen Veen*, 313-27. Both women are discussed briefly in Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*.

[122] To say Bynum has written on this subject is an understatement. See especially Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Caroline

chronicler does not elaborate on Salome's technique, but it clearly was effective, suggesting that even at Diepenveen there was some informal training in mysticism.

Unfortunately, even with training, not all women could successfully become mystics, and failure caused frustration and envy. This is alluded to in the closing lines of Stijne Zuetelinck's *Life,* and stated explicitly by another successful woman mystic of the Devout, Mechthilt van Rieviren. One of Mechthilt's close friends, a sister Janneke was incapable of achieving a mystical conversation with Christ. Though Mechthilt often conveyed Janneke's requests and problems to Christ during her own mystical experiences, Janneke was frustrated by her mystical failure and implored Mechthilt to ask God directly to grant Janneke a mystical experience:

> [Janneke said] "My dear sister, whenever our Most Beloved comes to you next ask him on my account, unworthy though I am, to give just a little crumb of what he has poured copiously onto you, because I have received nothing but sorrow and grief from God and from humankind, not any consolation at all."[123]

Janneke's frustration is painfully apparent in this short plea. Like the sisters who marveled at Stijne's rapid journey, Janneke feels as if she is doing everything required of her and yet cannot get the Bridegroom's attention. Though Mechthilt comforts Janneke by describing a vision that promises Janneke will receive far greater rewards after death than Mechthilt has known in life, the frustration of failed mysticism must have been especially painful for women who already thought of themselves as brides of Christ.

Mysticism within religious communities created a sense of inequality and successful mystics might encourage other women against leaving the sure path of obedience. Janneke described God as "our Most Beloved," not "your Most Beloved," and she clearly felt that she and Mechthilt were in similar

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Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982).

[123] "Mijn beminde suster, asl onsen Alderliefsten wederom bij u comt, bidt toch dat eens voor mij dat Hij mij, onweerdige, toch ook een cruijmken geve vant gene daer Hij u soo overvloedich mede voet, want ick niet en crijgen dan lijden en verdriet van Godt en van de menschen, sonder enige consolatie." Quoted in Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," 131. An alternate translation with some analysis is available in Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 194.

relationships with the divine, even if Janneke's own prayer and hard work were apparently being ignored by their divine Love. While only some of the women in the Sisterhouses and Convents of the Modern Devotion could become mystics, they were all capable of becoming brides of Christ. In the next chapter I shall examine the tension between mysticism and communal living, which was compounded by the Devout's emphasis on training in virtues. The broken career of Alijt Bake suggests that among the Devout, mysticism was not always bridal. Even though Bake was a nun and a mystic, she never describes herself as a bride of Christ or refers to the women in her convent as brides. Because she advocated the mystical path to salvation, Bake was humiliated and removed from power, but other mystic prioresses—notably Mechthilt van Rieviren and Jacomijne Costers—reformed their convents without running into administrative condemnation, possibly because they were obedient to the Order, humble in their approach, and, like Stijne Zuetelincks, used the familiar language of bridal mysticism.[124]

The Sisterbooks from the convents at Emmerich and Diepenveen and the Sisterhouse at Deventer all contain bridal references. However, these bridal descriptions are rare, and associated primarily with the deaths of important women, or sisters about whom almost nothing was known. Bridal references also accompanied descriptions of exceptional virtue and possible mystical passages. However, these Sisterbooks use "bride of Christ" with seeming caution. They suggest that both nuns and lay women could become brides of Christ through religious conversion, rather than monastic profession, and that bridal transformations could take place without death or mystical union. Several of the brides of Christ in these Sisterbooks, such as Sweene Holtijncs and the Sister from Diest Voersz were elevated to bridal status because of their exceptional virtue. Describing virtuous women as brides of Christ was, however, a rare stylistic move. Unlike Riccoboni's chronicle of Corpus Domini, the Devout Sisterbooks

[124]Mertens comments that the success of Jacomijne Costers and Mechtild van Rieviren, who were called to reform their own convents' virtues shows that "mysticism was welcome, so long as it supported convent reform." [mystiek is welkom zolang zij de kloosterhervorming ondersteunt.] Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," 131. The mystical reform at Facons is discussed in greater detail in Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 177-196. As an interesting irony, Alijt Bake was probably exiled to Facons in 1455, just before her death, and her brief presence may have created the environment which allowed Costers and van Rieviren to pursue a mystical reform in the 1480s.

do not identify each dying sister as a bride of Christ. The women chroniclers of the Modern Devotion either found bridal imagery less meaningful than other symbolic language, or were hesitant to employ it because of its mystical associations.

Mothers, Brides, and Mystics: Salomé Sticken and Alijt Bake

Middle Dutch religious literature is dominated by mystical texts, yet in the fifteenth century, mysticism seems almost entirely to vanish from the Low Countries. Between Ruusbroec (d.1381) and the sixteenth century (when women mystics such as Maria van Hout flourished) there is a noticeable absence of intentional mystical literature—although mystical language and ideals linger on, a continued presence.[1] The relative paucity of mystical Dutch literature in the fifteenth century is traditionally connected to the Modern Devotion's dominance of Dutch spirituality during this period. The Devout have been characterized as at most, mystically "tinted," and were historically skeptical of mystical exercises, advocating the "common way [gewone weg]" of devotion, meditation, and cultivation of virtue as the surest and most broadly effective path to salvation. Following the 1455 Ban on women's mystical writing, superficially at least, the Devout became openly opposed to women's mysticism and mysticism in general. Yet what Thom Mertens calls "mystical culture" dominates Devout literature and practice even in the latter half of the fifteenth century. As I showed in chapter 6, the Devout sometimes embraced bridal imagery in their pursuit of the "communal life," using the language of the bridal soul to represent their own religious resolutions in both convents and less formal gatherings. Although bridal language was less common in the Dutch Sisterbooks, and virtuous hard work took primacy over interior experiences and mystical accomplishments, the Sisterbooks preserve several mystical accounts. Except in a few instances, like the life of Stijne Zuetelincks, mysticism and bridal imagery are kept separate, and

[1] An excellent overview of the state of mysticism in the fifteenth century Netherlands can be found in : Gerhard Rehm, *Die Schwestern vom Gemeinsamen Leben im nordwestlichen Deutschland: Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der Devotio Moderna und des weiblichen Religiosentums* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1985), 204-211; Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The 'Modern Devotion', the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, trans. David F. Johnson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004), chapter 2.

even in Stijne's life, mystical accomplishments were carefully depicted so that they might easily be mistaken for dreams or theological conversation. Though bridal imagery continued to be an important part of mystical language in the fifteenth century, the Devout were hesitant to encourage mystics, especially female mystics, to write or teach. Consequently the connection between the bride of Christ and the female mystic is almost entirely broken within this religious circle.

In this final part of my investigation into brides of Christ in the Modern Devotion, I shall compare the successes and failures of two prioresses, or "Mothers." Both were mystics, authors, and brides of Christ, but each earned a very different reputation. Salomé Sticken and Alijt Bake were accomplished authors who wrote primarily for the spiritual benefit of women in their care and were involved in reforming convents. Sticken wrote a brief "A way of Life for Sisters...," intended for distribution to new Devout convents, and Alijt Bake composed several sermons, a spiritual autobiography, and a mystical-devotional text on Christ's passion to help the women in her own convent begin down the mystical or "higher" path.[2] However, they met very different fates, one dying in shameful exile, the other praised as a founding Mother of a new religious movement. Salomé Sticken, first prioress of the convent at Diepenveen, itself the first women's house of the Devotio Moderna, was almost certainly a mystic, but the semi-hagiographic account of her life in the Diepenveen Sisterbook emphasizes her authority and harsh-but-tender efforts to help other women develop themselves spiritually while downplaying her mystical experiences much as was done in the *Life* of Stijne Zuetelincks. According to surviving records from the Modern Devotion, Bake was exiled from her convent because of her mystical teaching and writing, while Sticken was a model bride of Christ whose mystical experiences were given less importance than her many virtues.

Women, even amongst the Devout, were meant to serve and obey, but prioresses were also figures of authority expected to model virtue and guide the women in their care towards salvation. While Bake taught "letting go" through mystical exercises, Sticken trained her daughters in strict obedience and

[2] This is available in English in John H. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna: Basic Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988).

humility. Both women worked tirelessly to help their communities reach salvation, thoughonly Sticken's lessons in pious obedience were considered safe and efficacious by the male hierarchy of the Windesheim congregation. Though they died ten years apart, and shared many qualities, Salomé Sticken and Alijt Bake were handled entirely differently by their male superiors. Why was Bake exiled for her mystical experiences even though they did not hinder her governance? Why does Bake avoid describing Christ as a bridegroom when addressing other women and in her own mystical accounts? Why are Sticken's mystical experiences downplayed in the extant records (and in contemporary scholarship), and why does the Diepenveen chronicler repeatedly describe her as a bride of Christ? Most of the devotional, prescriptive, and mystical literature mentioned in previous chapters was known to and translated by members of the Modern Devout, yet in Devout women's communities, the role of bride of Christ changed radically. She was no longer a mystic overwhelmed by love, or a nun whose vows or death transformed a sinful woman into Christ's bride. Furthermore, mystics claiming bridal experiences were silenced, rather than sainted. Now, any woman who resolved to lead a good Christian life could become a bride of Christ, but in their own writing, Devout women rarely used the phrase.

This chapter aims to contextualize the divergence between mysticism, monasticism, and brides of Christ in the late medieval Netherlands. In the first section, I summarize the relationship between mysticism and the Modern Devotion to provide some necessary context for the 1455 Ban and Bake's exile. In the second section, I focus on the two accounts of Salomé Sticken's life preserved in the Diepenveen Sisterbook and the book from Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer. Sticken was a model for female authority who wrote the rulebook—literally—on how a Devout prioress should govern her convent, but she also was a mystic and was described, at least in the Diepenveen chronicle, as an ardent bride of Christ. The third section of this chapter looks at Alijt Bake's experiences as a mystic and convent Mother. Because we only have Bake's own writing, there is less evidence of how she governed her convent of Gallilea in Ghent. In her surviving works, Bake refrains from using bridal language. She is devoted primarily to Christ's passion, and though Bake claims to have reached the highest levels of

mystical experience in her *Four Ways of the Cross,* she does not describe her experiences of union with intimate, erotic, or bridal language. Salomé Sticken's recorded experiences are entirely external, consisting of what others saw and heard, while all that can be known of Alijt Bake is the portion of her own interior world she chooses to share with the women in her care. However, both Mothers were obviously gifted leaders with mystical inclinations, and in the final section of this chapter I will look at some possible explanations for Alijt Bake's unfortunate fate.

~ 7.1 ~

The Absence of Mysticism

Geert Grote, the founder of the Modern Devotion, was himself mystically inclined, or, perhaps more accurately, intrigued by mysticism.[3] During the period of his religious conversion, Grote experimented with anchoritic life and conversed with the great Dutch mystic Jan van Ruusbroec, before finally selecting a religious vocation which was fully active, work-oriented, and entirely in the world. Grote would found a religious movement and program of self-development that any Christian could follow. He advocated a religious life for the common person, which would include members of all social classes, married or virginal, without the obligation of making binding religious vows. Though Grote's followers spent their lives in prayer and work, attending Church and even practicing lay ministry when licensed to do so, they were neither monastics nor clerics. John van Engen characterizes their spirituality as falling between two earlier medieval paths of imitating Christ, "their emphasis fell neither on imitation in a strict sense, as in works of mercy, nor on 'mystic union,' ... but rather on an individual and affective identification with particular moments in Christ's life, chiefly his passion, the result or purpose of which was ideally fourfold: to 'relive' with Christ his virtuous life and saving passion, to have him ever present before one's eyes, to manifest his presence to others, and to orchestrate, as it were, all of one's mental and emotional faculties around devotion to him."[4] Above all, this spiritual renewal was populist. Grote himself translated Latin texts into Middle Dutch and opened his house to the first Sisters of the Common Life, and his own writing guided the layfolk towards a third path, somewhere between the cloister and the world. The "sure path of obedience" alluded to in chapter 6 was a part of this program, but the overwhelming genius of Grote's new devotion was its utility. While the mendicant orders had their tertiaries, and the Low Countries overflowed with beguines and beghards, the Modern Devotion

[3] The information presented in this paragraph is drawn from the introduction to Ibid.

[4] Ibid., 31.

provided an organized, semi-institutional venue with a user-friendly program for self-development, which focused primarily on cultivating personal virtues.

Though Grote, Brinckerink, Radewijns, and Zerbolt van Zutphen would all translate mystical texts for use by the Devout, these translations were meant to assist personal study and meditation rather than bring about mystical experiences.[5] Rather than being a mystical movement, the Modern Devotion was part of a broader mystical culture. Devout authors used the language of mysticism without necessarily being mystics, and Devout leaders were openly concerned about the inequality and frustration successful mystics might evoke in their brothers and sisters.[6] Though their spirituality was devotional and guided by meditations on Christ's passion, the Devout turned inward to find the necessary tools to perfect themselves internally. If, during meditation, they bumped into God in a mystical sense, that was probably an added bonus.[7]

Though the Sisterbooks stress action over contemplation, the books themselves were composed to teach others how to train themselves in virtues, and were thus, in a sense, prescriptive and contemplative as well. Many of these non-mystical texts do use mystical language, just as the Sisterbooks describe women as brides of Christ, or gifted with tears, surrounded by flames or halos, and visiting

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[5] Ibid., 50.

[6] Thom Mertens argues that the Devout incorporated mystical language into their convent literature but read it primarily devotionally. He introduces the term "mystical culture" to describe the fifteenth-century Low Countries because there is so much mystically "tinted" literature from this period, and so many mystical experiences which are never converted into mystical treatises, but remain undeveloped and undiscovered in rapiara or anecdotes in convent histories. Mertens' main premise is that the mysticism of the fourteenth century did not disappear in the fifteenth, only to reappear out of nothing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but that it was instead transformed into devotional and popular texts, primarily in the convents of the Modern Devotion. Thomas Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," in *Grote lijnen: syntheses over Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. F. P. van Oostrom and W. van Anrooij, *Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1995), 118.

[7] Van Engen summarizes their spirituality eloquently: Every aspect of the brothers' and Sisters' religious lives, from their Christocentrism to their private reading and moral progress, turned finally on a deepened "inwardness" or "interiority." ... Yet they were themselves people who had not taken vows and still lived partially in the world. The interiority toward which they strove was not so much that of the late medieval mystics or related groups, for the Modern Devout said almost nothing about mystical union. The proper point of reference or comparison was rather the perfunctory practice that apparently characterized so much of late medieval religious life: days of obligation, holy days become holidays, pilgrimages become travel tours, shrines become scenes of bedlam, churches become social meeting places, and so on. Without casting all that many aspersions on their fellow townsmen, as so many contemporary reformers did, the New Devout quietly returned to their "houses" and "cells" to develop the inner man, an affectionate devotion to Christ, the subduing of the old nature and all carnal impulses, together with the training of the "heart" in all the virtues. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 24. Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 24.

heaven on their deathbeds. The anonymous "On the Life and Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ," which was originally written in Middle Dutch for "Sisters" and later translated into Latin for use in the male canon-houses of the Modern Devotion, provides an excellent example of how interior meditation on Christ's passion was used to teach progress in the virtues, and how this type of work incorporated mystical language and imagery.[8] This devotional text gives a day-by-day schedule for meditating on Christ's Passion for those "short of time due to many labors," breaking the devotion into three easy steps a day.[9] On Friday, the Sisters were to remember how Christ was offered to his heavenly father at the temple altar like other infants, how his grandparents Simeon and Anna recognized him, and then turn to think of Christ's death on the cross:

> ...the way your most beloved Creator and Redeemer was whipped, crowned, weighed down with the cross and led away to death like a robber, stripped of all his clothing before all those men on the mount of Calvary, fixed to and stretched out over the holy cross, and abandoned by all men, how bitterly for your sake he died on that cross, he the immortal and almighty God from whom everything that lives receives and preserves its life, who is alone in the beginning and end of all of the creatures and the cause of all causes, and of whose death you are the cause. Think and see what you owe to this holy death, how much voluntary suffering and mortification of all the delights of your nature, how much humility, obedience, and patience, how much love and voluntary poverty and virtue and perfection. Consider then all the other things that took place on the cross, beneath the cross and around it, and with all your strength think diligently upon them, as if you stood beneath the cross, gazing upon and seeing each particular. Incline your ears and hear what he cries out to you from the cross. "You have wounded my heart, my Sister and spouse" (Sg 4:9) Respond to him with enflamed desire. "Draw me after you," O most beautiful among the sons of men (Sg 1:3). Look into the face of your Christ and see his whole body livid, covered with blood and his five open wounds. Enter them in your heart and have your sins washed in the blood flowing from them. Join your heart to his and be kindled with the fire of his love; taste how sweet is your lord, your spouse and lover. Hear and chew upon his

[8] Although van Engen translates the Latin version of this, I refer to the reader as feminine, both because the original audience was apparently female, and because the Latin translator does not remove all references to female readers. Though he refers to "brothers" he also mentions Sisters, and the meditative soul moves between male and female pronouns from chapter to chapter.

[9] Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 195.

> seven words from the cross drawing out their inner kernel, most worthy of all sweetness, imitation and mystery
>
> Betake yourself next to all the holy confessors. Examine their many and difficult labors. See how perfectly they offered to God friends, acquaintances, and possessions, temporal goods and worldly honors, how they left all the delights of their own nature for God and followed him in great poverty. Implore them with great diligence that they by their holy intercession deign to grant you perseverance in the holy cross of penance which you undertook in love of him. [10]

Like Stijne Zuetelincks, the meditator moves from the crucifix to the bridal garden, bound to Christ with a love/lust aroused by his suffering. The imagery is graphic, and the penitent reader is to imagine herself thrusting a weapon, wounding his heart, weeping at the sound of his pained voice. By stepping into the crucifixion—just as Katharina Tucher, Margery Kempe, Stijne Zuetelinks and Alijt Bake had—the meditator joins her heart with the divine, her bridegroom, and becomes close enough to draw out the deepest mysteries of his dying words. These images are mystical. The joined hearts, the kindled fire of love, a bridal soul tasting the bloody love of her spouse and lover, the humble creator and redeemer, all echo the visions of the most eloquent medieval mystics, but the words themselves are not meant to inspire or describe a mystical experience. Instead, the devout soul should step out of this fervent meditation on Christ's death and remember her own resolution to pick up the cross of penance, which included mild ascetic practices, daily meditation, and active pursuit of virtue.

The imagery accompanying the "Friday" section of *On the life and Passion* seems to be exactly what Thom Mertens has in mind when he speaks of a mystical culture that used mystical language and imagery for non-mystical devotional purposes. The Devout also read and translated Seuse's two devotional works. In particular, the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom*, with its detailed description of Seuse's meditative practices, was widely disseminated, though the Devout read it devotionally, rather than mystically.[11] The language of "letting go," the German Gelassenheit or Dutch gelatenheid, also was embraced by the Devout. This term, which initially entered Dutch spirituality through Eckhart, had monastic and secular

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[10] Ibid., 194-5.
[11] Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," 127.

resonances which were conveyed through the double-meaning of "loslaten" [release/letting go] and "toelaten" [accepting/tolerating].[12] Alijt Bake would allude to this in her *Four Ways of the Cross,* with the ideas of *laten* and *lijden,* letting go and suffering. Without fully taking up the mystical sense of Eckhart's "gelassenheit," the Devout used the same imagery in an ascetic and moral sense, broadening a core mystical theme to serve the needs of a more inclusive spirituality.[13]

The Devout used mystical texts, mystical language, and mystical concepts, practicing meditative techniques that brought about mystical experiences for some, yet Van Engen, Mertens, Scheepsma, Bollmann, and others all insist that the movement had a weak and cautious tolerance for mystics. Part of the problem was that mystics often refused to obey. Christ had a higher authority than any human superior, and just as Dorothea von Montau would ask Christ if she needed to break out of a mystical conversation to attend to her wifely obligations, Alijt Bake sought permission to skip the religious office the evening she received the second and more exalted pair of "ways of the cross." However, disobedience was not just a problem with mystics. Gertrut ten Kolke's total detachment from the material world openly led her to disobey her Mother's assignment of garments, and many other Sisters were disobedient to pursue a greater virtue. The more serious problem with mystics in a communal setting was that mysticism did not offer a reliable path for the masses. Janneke's frustration and the closing lines of Stijne's life both attest to how frustrating and difficult mystical practice could be. Mystics were "high-flyers [hoog-vliegers]" who leapt ahead spiritually in dramatic and spectacular fashion, achieving in life what others expected to receive only after death—meaningful and lasting conversations with and attention from God.[14] Even the Devout's mystics, or would-be mystics, including Hendrik Mande and Alijt Bake, were fully aware that a mystical program could never be universal, or effectively

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[12] Ibid., 126-7.

[13] Ibid., 127.

[14] Mertens uses the term „high flyer", drawing it from the writing of Hendrik Mande Ibid., 121-3.

introduced to an entire community.[15] Having a mystic in the community could cause trouble, but having a mystic in charge of a community was an even more problematic proposition. While Jacomijne Costers and Mechthilt van Rivierin successfully reformed Facons according to a mystical agenda, and Salomé Sticken led the women at Diepenveen through strength of will rather than mystical insight, Alijt Bake's reform attempt at Gallilea was both mystically inspired and mystically oriented. According to her autobiography and the letter she wrote from Exile, Bake wanted to teach the women in her care how to find a better and sweeter path to God, and she openly scorned the strategies deployed by her predecessor (who was trained by Salomé Sticken) as ineffective and asinine.[16] Though Bake had a network of supporters, her actions threatened the stability of the broader religious movement, and her mystical revolution would be brought to an inglorious end ten years after it began, probably because she had begun disseminating her thoughts and writing outside the confines of her own cloister. The Modern Devotion was not hostile to mysticism, but their leaders remained certain, almost a century after Grote's death, that their program for spiritual progress provided the most certain and reliable path to salvation. Mystics were tolerated, so long as they did not shanghai others from the community to pursue what they called "the highest way." The leaders of the Devout advocated, instead, the "common way, [gewone weg]," and though Mertens identifies this as becoming increasingly mystical after Bake's condemnation, the common way remained, at most, "colored with mysticism."[17]

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[15] Mande warned of the dangers and frustrations in an allegory, describing a "jealous hound" who lounged on top of a heap of hay, refusing to let the horses and cows eat the hay even though they could benefit from it and he could not. Mande felt that the mystical path was the highest and best approach, but he realized that mystics could prevent others in the community from pursuing a more reliable path to salvation. Ibid., 121-2.

[16] For a brief summary, see Alijt Bake, ed. R. Th.M. van Dijk and M.K.A. van den Berg, Tot in de peilloze Diepte van God: de Vrouw die moest zwijgen over haar mystieke Weg (Kok: Kampen, 1997), 19-21.

[17] De affaire Bake zal praktisch het einde betekend hebben van de ene pool van het spanningsveld rond de mystiek maar niet van de hele mystieke cultuur. de andere pool is namelijk steeds meer deel uit gaan maken van de mystieke cultuur: de 'gewone weg' kreeg hoe langer hoe meer een mystieke kleuring. Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," 126.

~7.2~

Mothers and Brides

The Sisterbooks of the Modern Devotion preserve a broad range of religious experiences, though each was selected to serve a didactic or exemplary purpose. The lives I examined in the last chapter were taken piecemeal, focusing primarily on death scenes, to determine how women chroniclers imagined themselves and their fellow-Sisters as brides of Christ. The overwhelming majority of examples suggested that the bridal state was achieved through a life of good works and virtuous living, and could be entered either at the moment of death or after perfecting virtue during life. Women who exemplified apostolic virtues central to the Modern Devotion were presented by chroniclers as examples to admire but not fully imitate. Instead, Sisters were meant to read these stories and be reminded to strive harder in their own lives, so that one day they might achieve a similar degree of progress in the virtues. In these lives, every day events are reworked to seem semi-miraculous, displaying a Sister's edifying progress in a particular example. However, in the lives of women in positions of authority, including Salomé Sticken and other women in leadership roles (including Jde Prummers and Geertruijt Clovers from St. Agnes, both discussed in the previous chapter), convent chroniclers had to stress virtues that could not be imitated by the fellow Sisters. As the very first Prioress of the Modern Devotion, Salomé Sticken was an especially important exemplary figure, and every aspect of her life provided some example of what a good Mother should be, though most of these anecdotes focus on how Sisters should behave before the convent's leader, rather than encouraging other women to emulate their authority figure. Sticken's *Life* depicts her as a loving but strict leader who had a special relationship with Christ, and an almost supernatural authority over humans and animals.[18] She first came to live at Meister-Geertshuis in Deventer before traveling with Johannes Brinckerinck to Diepenveen and becoming involved with the foundation of the first of thirteen canoness houses of the Windesheim congregation. Sticken was a

[18] For a discussion of offices see Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 32-6.

figurehead for the Modern Devotion—not just for the women's branch of the movement.[19] Her life is recorded briefly in the Sisterbook from Deventer and at greater length in the convent chronicle from Diepenveen, as well as in excerpted form in several other vernacular manuscripts from the fifteenth century. In her Rule for living, Sticken describes the crucial duty of obedience for Sisters and, in a separate note to the Prioress, stresses the obligation each Mother holds to be an authoritarian, exacting strict discipline even if it goes against her nature and preference.[20] Sticken's experiences and *Rule* show the crucial role each convent's Mother played in correcting faults with fair and loving guidance. In Sticken's understanding, a Prioress's most important duty was to guide and form the spiritual lives of the women in her convent, and she took this duty very seriously. In her own writing and the two biographies, Sticken is described primarily as a model of virtue, a strong and gifted leader, and a stern but loving prioress.

Though she was pious, chaste, industrious in her work, and well-respected, Salomé Sticken's ability to teach others obedience and other important virtues is especially noteworthy for the Diepenveen chronicler. A few brief examples of Sticken's authority, illustrated through her interactions with the convent cats, and a brief anecdote about a woman from the Sisterhouse at Deventer are included to give a fair sense of the flavor of many of these *Sisterbook* lives. At the end of a set of recollections about Sticken's strict correction of the Sisters at the communal confession of sins—the *schuldkappitel* or Chapel of Faults—which the chronicler describes as being done "out of her great love for the Sisters," Sticken's absolute authority is reinforced with two short anecdotes about cats.[21] In each, what must have been real incidents become mundane miracles which simultaneously demonstrate Sticken's religious authority and provide the Sisters with a model of virtue to imitate—though they would be imitating the obedient cats, not authoritative and commanding Salomé Sticken. These short episodes are a good representation of

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[19]For analysis of Sticken's importance see especially Ibid., 113-121.

[20] Ibid., 115-17; Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 184-186.

[21] "vanuit haar grote liefde de zusters" D A Brinkerink, *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen :('handschrift D')* (Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff, 1904), 15.

the way authority and virtuous behavior dominate Sticken's biographies. The Chronicler's presentation of Sticken as a gifted and authoritative leader in these two short stories about convent cats gives a better sense of Sticken's *Life* than the mystical and bridal experiences I discuss in the remainder of this chapter.

These two anecdotes are introduced with the comment "not only people were obedient to our honorable Mother, but also animals like cats."[22] This simple transition frames the story by suggesting that Sticken's commanding presence was unusual—not only could she command men and women, but also unthinking animals, reasserting the authority God granted Adam over animals in the Garden of Eden. In the first anecdote, Sticken becomes aware of a problem in her convent: one of the cats is vomiting all over despite living on a diet of "perfectly normal" rats. Sticken intervenes, commanding the cat to no longer eat rats, just kill them. The chronicler comments that "the cat was obedient to her and ate them [rats] no longer. But she brought them inside and lay them down in the place where the Mother always sat. And she brought in not only rats but also moles." Here, two perfectly normal feline behaviors are combined with one startling one, to create a not-quite miraculous narrative which reinforces claims of Sticken's authority. While cats often vomit up in the corners of a house or convent and also bring dead rodents to their humans, cats generally do *not* obey direct commands. However, the most striking part of this passage from the perspective of illustrating Sticken's authority is her approach to the problem itself. Sticken first diagnoses the cat's illness as diet-related, even though no one else would have thought such a thing. After making her diagnosis, Sticken then manages to convince a cat to change its preferred diet. By commanding the cat to only kill rodents, not eat them, Sticken ensures that this particular feline will continue doing its necessary work of pest-control while removing the messy problem of cat vomit. As an added benefit, Sticken's solution is so successful that the cat now has become an all-purpose

[22] Hoer en weren niet allene gehoersam die menschen, me rock die onredelike dieren, als die katte. Want hoer wart eens gesecht dat die katte die rotten plege op te eten ende dat sie daer siek van waert. Doe verboet siet der katten dat sieder niet meer eten en solde, mer dat sie sij hoer solde brengen. Die katte was hoer gehoersam ende en atter niet meer. Mer sie brachte sie int reventer ende legede sie op maters steede daer sie te sytten plach. Ende niet allene en worden daer rotten gebracht, mer ock mollen. Ibid.

exterminator, killing not only rats in the convent proper, but also garden moles. In this short passage, the chronicler shows that Sticken possesses not only great authority, but also a keen and perceptive mind.

The second anecdote follows seamlessly, still connected to the general rubric of "animals too are obedient to our Mother."[23] In this example, a cat brazenly walks into the convent's chapel mewing very loudly and disrupts group confession. Salomé Sticken, who exerted absolute authority when presiding over this group ritual, demands that the attending Sisters take away "that foul cat." However, before any of the Sisters try to catch the beast or scare her away, "the cat came near to her and went languidly to lay on the mat before her, as if she too would like to confess her guilt and sins." Here, the cat is doing something very feline—stretching out on a comfortable rug—but the action is interpreted within the environment of group confession. As if she were a confessing Sister, the cat lays herself down at the feet of Salomé Sticken, and in this moment the cat becomes fully obedient. The chronicler recounts that rather than hearing the cat's confessions, "The Mother ordered this animal to leave. And the cat immediately stood up and went obediently away." What became of this cat is uncertain, but Sticken herself recognized the incident as a teaching opportunity. As the Sisters looked on amazed, she turned to them and said "Look, this cat has taught you all a lesson. She gives you an example of humble obedience." Sticken's words emphasize who is to be emulated in these two examples: the obedient cat, rather than the authoritative and commanding woman, is teaching a lesson in Christian virtue.

Even the modern world recognizes cats as particularly self-willed and free-spirited, but during the fifteenth century cats were also potentially diabolic. As Anne Winston-Allen shows in *Convent Chronicles*, by the fifteenth century the convent cat had also become a satirical figure used to lambaste unchaste and unreligious nuns.[24] The presentation of a cat as obedient, in this context, may even be

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[23] Op een ander tijt doe quam ene katte int cappitelhuys, doe men cappitel hielt, ende was luytruchtich myt meven. Doe segede mater eersamlijc „hoe laet die vuyle katten, yaghet sie wt!" Doe quam die katte ende genck langes op die matte voer mater liggen, recht of sie hoer schuldich gaf. Doe hiet sie mater wt gaen doe stont sie op ende genck wt ende was gehoersam, waer van dat hem die susteren seer verwonderden. Doe segede mater totten susteren: „siet, dese katte gevet u een exempel der oetmodiger gehoersamheit," ende dergelijken woerde. Brinkerink, *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen :('handschrift D')*, 15.

[24] Winston-Allen uses the caricature of the nun as cloister cat as part of her argument that texts authored by women provide an alternative narrative which directly contradicts male-authored texts which describe women religious as silly,

arguing against the portrayal of nuns as worldly cloister cats: Sticken's canonesses are obedient, and even the cats at Diepenveen can be commanded into quiet, dignified behavior. If cats are obedient to Salomé Sticken, she must truly be the personification of authority in a Christian woman. Scheepsma comments briefly on this episode, writing that "Sticken from Diepenveen... found grist for her mill in everyday situations. She once pointed out to the convent the exemplary obedience of the priory's cat, who contritely left the hall when she was admonished for her loud mewing."[25] Scheepsma's account, which mentions only in passing Sticken's authority over cats, does not fully develop the chronicler's creative incorporation of mundane events into a semi-hagiographic work, or the possible importance of cat-nun relations in other narratives. For instance, Sister Nyese van Mekeren (d. 1449), a Sister at Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer, earned a shameful penance from a visiting confessor because she pet a cat:

> And because she was such a merciful, friendly person, and was overflowing internally with charity, she once came up to confession and confessed that she had just petted a cat a little while ago out of the loving benevolence which she had for all the little animals [beesteken]. And because her confessor was free with her, he wanted to mortify her a little bit, and he bade her to crawl to the foot of the kitchen counter (or bench?), where the cat usually ate, and instructed that she should also sit and eat there for one meal. And she should also set her dish by the cat's dish, and if the cat came over and wanted to eat out of her dish, she should not forbid this. This good Sister Nyese, who had truly planted and established virtues in her heart, fulfilled this instruction as faithfully as if Our Dear Lord himself had given it to her, without any grumbling or crying, at least not any that anyone else could hear. And she went all humbly and crawled under the kitchen counter, and sat there a whole meal, and also ate off the floor.[26]

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corrupt, worldly, or sexual. Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 20-21.

[25] Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 50.

[26] Ende wanttet aldus guedertiernen, vrendeliken mensche was, ende was van bijnnen mit barmherticheiden vervullet, soe quam si eens te bichte, ende bichtede, dat si die katte een wynich gestreyket hadde uut mynliker guedertierenheit, die si tot allen biestekens hadde. Ende want oer bichter vry tot oer was, soe wolde hi sie wat veroetmodigen, ende hiete oer doen, dat sij solde crupen onder die richtebanck, daer die katte oer stede hadde te eten; ende daer solde si alsoe ene maeltijt sitten eten. Ende si solde oer schottele setten bi der katten schottele, ende weert, dat die katte dan tot oer queme ende wolde mit oer uuter schottelen eten, soe en solde sijs oer niet verbieden. Dese guede zuster Nyese, die de warachtige doechden in oeren herten geplantet ende gevestet hadde, vervulde dit oetmodige gebot alsoe eerweerdelike, alsoft oer onse lieve Here selven geboden hadde, sonder enyghe mormeracie of croeninge, die men van buten mercken mochte. Ende genck aldus oetmodelike ende croep onder die richtebanck, ende sat daer ene hele maeltijt, ende aat alsoe vander eerden. Dirk De Man, *Hier beginnen sommige stichtige Punten van onsen oelden Zusteren : naar het te Arnhem berustende Handschrift met Inleiding en Aanteekeningen uitgegeven* ('s-Gravenhage: M. Nijhoff, 1919), 215.

Nyese's obedience in this situation is remarkable. The chronicler indicates that the visiting confessor was newly arrived, and perhaps out of line in exacting such a humiliating penance for showing affection to an animal, but Nyese takes the penance even farther, eating directly off the floor. Though this is potentially disobedient and subversive behavior (Nyese does not share her dish with the cat, or even use a dish, and might be read as "showing up" the haughty visiting confessor), the narrator marvels at Nyese's humility and obedience. In this anecdote, cats are again associated with foulness and impurity, and affection towards animals is understood as a weakness.[27] While someone as affectionate towards animals as Nyese might not have minded sharing her meal with a cat, eating off the floor in the kitchen would surely have been a degrading and possibly dirty action, and the story itself is recounted with a mixture of amazement and revulsion. Sticken's two encounters with cats in the convent probably highlighted these cultural sentiments about animals, and cats in particular. Though the cats were clearly part of the convent community, and nuns were sometimes ordered to act like cats, or cats like nuns, felines were also somewhat tainted. These three anecdotes about cats demonstrate how skillfully the authors of Sisterbooks could turn everyday events into stories of virtue, and also stress the importance of obedience. Nyese's humble submission and Sticken's surprising authority both play out in a world of cats and mice, where normal women achieved supernormal piety through obedience.

Though Sticken's biographies depict her as a hard worker and a strict authoritarian, she also was mystically gifted, though her interior experiences are not divulged with the same detail as those of Stijne Zuetelincks.[28] Sticken had a particularly overwhelming mystical experience one Easter. The chronicler notes that "Our Dear Lord often would converse with her both internally and externally, but he never

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[27] Scheepsma describes how a young nun at Diepenveen was ordered to drown her two puppies in a demonstration of obedience and to force her to break away from the world. Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 148.

[28] Scheepsma, who discusses Sticken's spiritual experiences infrequently, considers these passages to show "devotion" but not mysticism. Although phrases like "fiery love [vurige mine]" are common techniques to show devotion in the Sisterbooks, Sticken's mystical experiences are numerous, and confirmed by other Sisters' visions. There is no reason to interpret Sticken "spending her days before the face of God" as a devotional reference when the description is coming from a disembodied voice describing a disembodied head in a pillar of flames. Although the language is careful and ambiguous, every piece of evidence I present is, I think, a clear mystical experience. Scheepsma's reluctance to recognize them as such is puzzling.

had spoken to her as sweetly as he did that Easter day."[29] Although she had always had a special relationship with Christ, this experience would make her all the more devoted to him and ardent in her devotions: "She was always ardent to take many people and to win their souls for Christ, but after this she became even more ardent."[30] She was inspired to increase her conversion efforts, and the Lord sent her both rich and poor to win over, and she taught them with all humility.[31] Though the details of Sticken's conversation with the Lord are uncertain, this experience was almost certainly mystical. It is described as "Our Dear Lord" speaking "openly to her with a sweet voice very lovingly" to tell her that she would soon have peace, and that he would truly deliver her. Though the passage might be interpreted as a premonition of death, Sticken is inspired to increase her spiritual work. Because the conversation occurred during Easter, it is highly likely that Sticken was engaged in passion meditation or some other Christ-focused devotion, which may have triggered the experience, but her own interpretation and behavior confirm that this was some sort of mystical experience which triggered a new religious effort, implicitly making Sticken a mystical reformer, in the same way Alijt Bake would be.

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[29] --Op een tijt was sie merckelike wat becommert myt wtwendigen dingen, als sie neit vaeke en plach. Doe sprack hoer onse lieve here Ihesus apelike toe myt eenre sueter stemmen seer mynlijc Ende segede hoer dat sie wal te vreden solde wasen: hij solde sie wal besorgen. Doe bleef sie te vreden ende was seer wal gemodet.
--Onse lieven here plach vaeke medesprake my hoer te hebben beyde inwendelijk ende wtwendich Mer ny en hadde hij hoer voer der tijt so rechte suetelike toe gespraken als hij op dat pas dede. Brinkerink, *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen :('handschrift D')*, 17.

[30] Sie hadde alle wege een groet betrouwen op hem, mer doe waert sie noch meer gestercket ende gevestiget in hem te betrouwen. Sie was altoes vurich vele personen an te nemen om dat gewyn der zielen, mer doe waert sie noch vuriger. Ibid.

[31] Ende al dat hoer onse lieve here toe sande, sie weren arm of rijke: daer sie onsen lieven heren in voelde te wesen, die nam sie in Mer sie placht hem wal al doer suer laten te warden ende segede hem seer swaer dinge voer te doen, die nader naturen niet genoechlijc en weren. Ende die daer toe bereyt weren ende niet of en lieten te cloppen ende te bidden die cregen hoer begeerte. Hijr in proefde sie sij iersten, oft hem ock ernst weer. Ende als si daer gecamen weren, so infermeerde men sie tot alre oetmodichheit ande cleynheit. Ende te staen ende te ringen na den oetmodischten ende snoetsen werken ende hem tot swijgen te geven ende tot allen gueden Goddienstigen werken Die noet weren tot een guet fondament te leggen eens geesteliken tymmers.(a term of devotion)" Ibid., 17-18.

Another passage in the Diepenveen book describes Sticken's face as glowing with the fires of love during choir service, "like a Seraphim burning with the fire of godly love."[32] The Mother's piety is subsequently confirmed in a Sister's vision:

> Our Dear Lord once showed this to a Sister who was a bit mad at Salomé Sticken. This Sister saw a high and pleasant field, that was amazingly beautiful and filled with innumerable flowers and in the middle of that field was an enormous glowing fire and out of that fire shot a huge flame that went directly to heaven and under that [shooting pillar of flame] there was a most beautiful face [in the main part of the fire]. And then the Sister was asked if she knew the face she saw but she said "No." ... Then she was asked again if she really could not recognize that face and then she answered "It is not our Mother so I don't know who it is." The response to this was immediate: "It is her, and this is the state she is in when she spends her days before the face of God, her sweet and obedient soul is in just this sort of flames of godly love."[33]

Here, Sticken's own mysticism is emphatically confirmed—by the vision of another woman in her convent. The field of flowers might be interpreted either as the convent or a paradisiacal garden, and the reference to looking into the face of God could be interpreted as Sticken after her death, but the rest of the passage is explicitly in the present, and the vision itself was provided to explain Sticken's enraptured expression during choir service, reaffirming that Sticken's soul was truly enflamed when her face glowed with God's love. The vision itself is openly mystical, while Sticken *in* the vision is obviously having a mystical experience. While the language in this passage is vague enough to support alternate readings, the best interpretation is that Sticken had mystical experiences during choir practice, and that these

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[32] Seer vlijtelike hielt sie hoer choer nachtes ende dages ende dede horen dienst seer ersamelijc ende Goddienstelijc in allent dat hoer toe behoerde, also lange als siet vermochte Iae vaeke baven hoer naturlike crachten, dattet ons te verwondern plach. Mer dat wrachte in hoer die indrift derGodliker mynnen dier sie vol was Want die vander mynnen God's gereygeert woert, die vercrijget cracht ende wijsheit baven naturen, als in hoer te merken was. Sie was inden Godliken dienste als een seraphijn, onsteken mytten brande der Godliker mynnen. Dat wy hoer ansichte segen ontsteken als ene vurige vlamme Want sie en condes vaeke niet wal verbergen, wy en wordens gewaer. Sie was in der waerheit ene vurige vlamme; want waer dat sie was, hoer gemynde brudegom was hoer altoes tegenwordich in horen herten Welken sie lief hadde ende mynde baven al dat is ende ummer warden mach. Ibid., 20.

[33] Als onse lieve here op een tijt vertoende eenre suster, dat wat op heor gepassineert was. Dese suster sach een alten genoechliken schonen velt, dat wonderlike schone vercryt was myt mennigerhande blomen Ende mydden in dat velt was een groet gloyende vuer ende daer genc ene grote vlamme wt hent totten hemel toe Ende baven in der vlammen daer was een alten schonen ansichte in. Doe waert der suster gevraget, of sie dat ansichte niet en kende doe segede sie: "Neen." Doe waert hoer gesecht dat sie noch bet solde toe sien; doe sach sie noch bet toe. Doe waert hoer echter gevraget, of siet noch niet en kende doe antwaerde sie ende segede: "Ist onse mater niet, soe en weet ic niet wie dattet is." Doe waert hoer weder geantwaerdet: "sie ist, ende aldus staet sie sovenwerf des dages voer dat ansischte Godes In alsulker vlammen der Godliker mynne omme zalicheit der zielen Daer omme soe hoet u op alsulken persoen passiën te hebben. Ibid.

experiences were accompanied by visible signs, including her facial expression and an aura of some sort.[34]

If Sticken recorded her mystical experiences, the texts are either lost or survive anonymously, but the women in her convent were certainly aware of Sticken's experiences. Another woman, a novice by the name of Anna Schulten, also had a vision which confirmed Sticken's piety and ardent love for God: "She saw the Mother getting up from her stool and had a burning wax candle in her hand, and it burned like a torch. That was to show with what a great and burning desire and with what fiery love she went to the holy sacrament."[35] The explanation of this vision apparently was written in the margin of the passage, suggesting that Schulten's vision was initially self-explanatory to the copyist or author, but upon further reflection needed further interpretation. The vision itself introduces a series of anecdotes describing Sticken's passionate Eucharistic devotion, introduced with a suggestion that Sticken's behavior was recognized by women at Diepenveen as stemming from her ecstatic union with the Bridegroom:

> And when she had received that which she desired (the Eucharist) she stood up and went with her beloved lord and bridegroom in peace. Here it is important to note how greatly our dear Lord desired to rest in her soul... and she often begged that this should be her last meal... And with these prayers she would kneel before Our dear Lord whenever she came into the choir on the day of the Holy sacrament and say : "Oh dearest love, I kneel to you and desire you with all my heart The holy trinity, preserve me! The holy ghost strike me and make me ardent and light me up and unite with me! Oh dearest love I ask this of you!"[36]

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[34] This is no different than Jde Prummers of Emmerich being surrounded by a star's halo during prayer.

[35] Soe sach sie dat mater wt horen stoel genck ende hadde ene barnende waskerse in hoer hant, ende die brande als ene fackele. Daerwt te merken is, myt hoe groter barnender begeerten ende vuriger mynnen dat sie totten hilligen sacramente genc (in the margin!) " Brinkerink, *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen :('handschrift D')*, 22.

[36] Ende als sie hadde dat sie begeerde, stont sie op ende genck myt horen gemynden heren ende brudegom in vreden. Hijr wt is te merken,hoe grote begerte onse lieve here hadde te rusten in hore zielen. Ende wtermate grote begeerte hadde sie onsen lieven heren te ontfangen in den hilligen sacramente. Ende als sij dat ontfangen solde, soe en conde sij na metten niet geslapen, eer sie dat ontfangen hadde Mit also hongeriger begeerten verlangede hoer dat sie der tijt nauwe verbeyden en conde Op een tijt griep sie suster swenen ter poerten in den arm, die doe costersche was, myt overvlodigen tranen ende en conden die woerde nauwe wt brengen wt driftiger begeerten, die sij op die tijt hadde Dat hillige sacramente te ontfangen: also was sij ontsteken in sijnre mynnen. Als sie dat hillige sacramente ontfangen solde, so ontfenck siet myt also vuriger mynnen ende begeerten Ende myt soe overvlodigen tranen ende myt so groter devociën. Ende sie plach hem to bidden dat hij hoer leste spijse wolde sijn Dat sie ock vercreech in horen lesten, als sie te bidden ende te begeren plach.
-Mit dit gebedeken plach sie onsen lieven heren te neygen, als sie int choer quam in der tegenwordicheit des hilligen sacraments: "O hertelike lief, ic neyghe dy van al mijnre herten begeer ic dy. Die hillige drievoldicheit beware my! Die hillige geest onsteke my ende maeke my vureich ende verlichte my ende vernyghe my mitti! O hertelike lief, des bidde ic dy. Ibid., 22-23.

In the first line, "bridegroom" is added in the margin of the text, transforming Sticken's devotional performance. Sticken becomes a bride urgently craving her lover's presence, where before she might have passed for a Christian eagerly desiring the Eucharist. Sticken would grab the Eucharist from Father Joost's hand so quickly he wondered if he had dropped it, and was once transfixed by the host and incapable of moving on account of her burning love.[37] The rest of the passage describes her weeping in open hunger for the sacrament, and how her eager desire for the Eucharist kept her awake at night. While Eucharistic devotion was a trademark of female piety, mystical and otherwise, Sticken's behavior was excessive and astonishing. Readers might hope to emulate the holy Mother's devotion, but only after years of prayer and special grace. Sticken's eager fervor represented an ideal behavior which women (and men) were only rarely capable of.

While other women at Diepenveen were devoted to the Eucharist, Sticken's exuberant desire must have been remarkably disruptive. When shouting out in Choir to be set on fire by the Holy Spirit, Sticken was boisterous and dramatic, but at other times, she was quiet and obedient, a model of patience and suffering. During an illness, she tried to get out of her duties as prioress, but the other women at Diepenveen insisted she continue to serve year after year. Sticken resigned herself at last: "then she saw that it should not and might not be, so she let herself go humbly (released/resigned herself)... because she was so unified with the will of God that she wanted nothing but what God wanted. It was her highest wish to strive to do what her dearest wanted in everything she did."[38] Here, Sticken's resignation

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[37] Ende ock soe segede onse weerdige pater van hoer, als si comunyseerde dat hijdat sacrament quijt waert wt sijnre hant, dat hij niet en wiste waer dattet bleef. Dat hij seer begaen waert ende anxt hadde dattet hem ontvallen weer. Ibid., 22.

[38]Soven of viij iaer voer dat sie of quam, plach sie vaeke al doer sieck te wesen, so dat si begeerde verloest te warden van hore officie. Ende bad onsen vaders den visyteres daer omme myt overvlodigen tranen. Wattan al plach siet alle weghe te begeren, mer sunderlinge begeerde siet seer hertelijc op dat pas Ende segede dat sie daer niet nutte toe en weer ende dat dit huys onder hoer vergenge ende verslapte. Sie dede hoer beste daer toe dat ene iaer voer ende dat ander na, mer die susteren en wolden sie niet over geven. Doe sij sach dattet niet wesen en mochte, so leet sie hoer oetmodelik, al hoe swaer dattet hoer was Want sie was also verenyget mytten willen Godes, dat si e anders niet en wolde dan God wolde. Want sie bad hem alle weghe dat sijn liefste wille ende walbehagen altoes moste geschien, want dat was hoer hogeste begeerte. Ibid., 23.

models the lesson Christus spent so long teaching the Soul in *Christus und die Minnende Seele*—letting go of self, so that her only desire, her highest desire, is God's will. This explicitly mystical concept is, as Mertens predicted, reworked for a convent environment. Sticken's patient acceptance of her duty and obligation becomes a model for how Sisters should approach obedience when charged with unwanted tasks, even though this sentiment is expressed in familiar mystical language and imagery.

Sticken's mystical fits were not just triggered by the Eucharist and Choir. Once, when presiding over the Chapter of Faults, Sticken was harshly accused by the other Sisters and was so overwhelmed by the experience that she could barely move her limbs and had to be carried away.[39] The chronicler explains Sticken's behavior, saying that "she was having such a peaceful and religious confidence in her beloved bridegroom who was her helper, that when the high and glorious bridegroom adorned his bride gloriously, he would then take her to his house with much pageantry." There, the Bridegroom wanted to enjoy her for all eternity, as a reward for her short life of sorrows, and soon after this collapse Sticken would die of "either the sickness of the red water or of dropsy, [most likely swelling due to a kidney infection]." Though Sticken's death is not recorded here, the Chronicler closes the paragraph by saying that "when the Bridegroom had gone away with her soul… she was greatly mourned." [40] Though it seems as if Sticken was struck with a fatal illness during the Chapter of Faults, the narrator describes her situation in mystical language. Sticken is a bride of Christ experiencing spiritual bliss, not a mortal woman suffering from a crippling and painful illness. Sticken's entry continues on, describing even more

[39] Ende in den tijden, als men den susteren hoer gebreke plach te seggen, so waert sie vaeke also glorioes gemaket van den anderen susteren, dat sie baven alle die anderen geenck. Soe datter niemant van hem allen en was, die also vele keech als sie. Soe waert sie dan so suetelike getagen in onsen lieven heren, dat sie hore lede niet mechtich en was, so datmen sie daer heen dragen moste. Ibid., 25. Scheepsma discusses this briefly, but does not fully examine Sticken's experience, instead suggesting that with the collapse "Sister Salome demonstrated to others how one should bear the accusations" Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 61.

[40] Sie hadde hoer daer soe stille ende Goddienstich in overmyds horen gemynden brudegom, die hoer hulper was. Doe die hoege gloriose brudegom sine bruyt aldus glorioeslijc hadde laten vercijren, soe haelde hij sie myt groter weerdicheit te huys Op dat sie hem stedelike in der ewicheit gebruken solde ende in sijnre genoechliker tegenwordicheit hoer inder ewicheit verblijden myt groter eren ende overvloediger vrouden Voer dat corte lijden dat sij om sinen willen geleden hadde myt groter verduldicheit. Ende sie starf an dat roede water; want dat genck hoer of, doe die brudegom mytter zielen heen was. Ende sie liet hem te testamente die groete Goddienstige lijdsamheit. Doe waert sie seer beclaget, ende hoer doechden, die God in hoer gestort hadde, worden doe te rechte becant ende voert geset. Brinkerink, *Van den doechden der vuriger ende stichtiger susteren van Diepen Veen :('handschrift D')*, 25-6.

of her virtues and religious experiences, which suggests that this episode at the Chapter of Faults was positioned to serve a structural purpose by illustrating how often Sticken was overwhelmed and taken to her spiritual bridegroom. Rather than positioning this collapse with Sticken's death, where it should belong chronologically, the Diepenveen chronicler has used it to reiterate how Sticken would have mystical experiences while performing her office.

Even though Sticken was a model prioress, her mystical inclinations were a disciplinary issue. The passage is positioned at the end of a long string of these incidents, and transitions to describe Sticken's relationship with the convents' founder, Johan Brinckerinck. According to the narrator, Brinckerinck had instructed Sticken to ask "Our Dear Lord, whenever she saw him next to her, to go away so that she would be unable to see him," and though Sticken obediently tried to make the Lord go away, "he did not go away any earlier than He wanted to."[41] From this passage, it seems that Sticken's mystical raptures were obviously a problem, at least in the eyes of her male superior. A convent Mother prone to rapture during the performance of any and all religious offices must have seemed disruptive and a hindrance to the smooth running of the convent from an administrative perspective. Even though Sticken was a model prioress, and did get along very well with Johan Brinckerinck, her mystical inclinations clearly hindered the performance of her duties. Brinckerinck recognized her as a holy soul and proclaimed Sticken to surpass all others in devotion and virtue, selecting her to serve as prioress despite her youth.[42] Perhaps because she had already achieved so much, and truly was a model of authority and virtue, Sticken's mysticism never became a full-fledged disciplinary problem. Her humility, obedience, and commitment to the religious agenda of the Modern Devotion protected Sticken from the harsh fate that Alijt Bake would encounter. In this particular instance, Brinckerinck presumably realized

[41] Ende onse weerdige vader here Iohan Brinckerinck hadde hoer doen hieten: wanneer dat sie onsen lieven heren also by hoer seghe gaen, soe solde sie hem seggen dat hij hen genge: sie en mostes also neit sien. Ende sie was gehoersam ende dede als hoer geheyten was mer hij en genck niet eer heen dan alss hij wolde. Ibid., 25.

[42] Ende rechtvoert segede hije mede wt vuricheit sijns herten ; Suster salome sal u moder wesen," –die doe suppriorynne was—„spreket hoer toe ende weest hoer apenhertich. Ic en kenne geen alsulken verlichten persoen in alsulken vurigen voertganck als sie is. Gevet u tot hoer ende doet na horen raede, het sal u daer wal mede gaen. Sie is ene inwendige verlichte schouster, in onse lieven heren" Ibid., 26-7.

that commanding God to disappear was not a practical solution, and that he could not expect Sticken to successfully obey his instruction. Consequently, he allowed Sticken to continue in her office despite her continued mystical outbursts.

In 1446 Sticken was finally removed from office due to her advanced age.[43] After her retirement, Sticken resumed the life of a regular nun, spending her days in needlework and conversation with the younger Sisters. She spoke only if asked to share her opinion, and even then she mainly talked about how much she "desired to be unbound from her body and united with her beloved bridegroom, in an embrace of the most affectionate love, without any hindrance, for unending eternity, this was her heartfelt desire and hope"[44] Sticken's longing for death, though characteristic of the Sisterbooks, is drawn out and more eloquent than in any other account. Fifteen weeks before her death, she fell into a stupor after receiving the Eucharist, beginning the final death sequence in Sticken's Diepenveen *Life*. According to the Chronicler, Sticken had realized that if she lived another fifteen years she would turn one hundred, and even though Sticken was resigned to God's will, she desperately wanted to be joined with her bridegroom. After taking the Eucharist, she was found "with folded hands and closed eyes and all fiery red of face as if one were looking at a seraphim" but she was entirely unresponsive.[45]

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[43] Ibid., 28.

[44] Want sie begeerde ende haepte nu ontbonden te warden vanden licham ende nhoren gemynden brudegom vereniget ende toe gevoeget te warden in omhelsinge der herteliker mynnen, sonder allen hinder, ewelick sonder eynde dit was al hoer hape ende begeerte. Ibid., 30.

[45] xv weke voer horen verscheyden krech sie hoer hillich amt op sante martijns dach (11 nov) myt groter devociën ende begeerten. Want sie begeerde ende haepte nu ontbonden te warden vanden licham ende horen gemynden brudegom vereniget ende toe gevoeget te warden In omhelsinge der herteliker mynnen, sonder allen hinder, ewelick sonder eynde dit was al hoer hape ende begeerte. Niet lange hijr na het en waert beter, soe dat dat zalige eynde vretagen waert. Doe waert sie al wat bestoten in hoer selven ende begeerde der pryoerynnen ende der susteren gebet Want sie hadde anxt dat sie hondert iaer oelt solde warden hoer gebrack noch xv iaer. Nochtans en wolde sie anders niet dan als onse lieve here wolde--also was sie vreenygt myt horen brudegom--Mer hoer ynnerste begeerte was by hem te wesen. Hoe sieck ofte weeckelick dat sie was als men hoer vragede hoet myt hoer weer ende hoe dattet hoer genge So segede sie suetelike "alsoe wal ; het is guet wat onse lieve here doet." --seer vlijtich was sie hoer te becummeren ende te verenygen myt onse lieven heren, der wijlen dat sie soe wekelick was ende by horen bedde sat. Ende is vaeke gevunden dat sie sat myt gevoelden handen ende myt beslaten ogen ende was van groter vuericheit al roet in hoer ansischte Also dat sie an te sien was als een saraphijn ende sie en wiste van ons niet, die by hoer stonden Also dat sie niet en scheen te wesen daer sie sat mer dat sie by horen gemynden was. Het was lichte achte daghe voer horen verscheyden dat ic sie ock also vant sytten myt soe vurigen ansichte Want hoer aldus te becummeren myt onsen lieven heren was hoer wal dat genoechlicste dat sie hadde in deser tijt. Ibid., 31-32.

Sticken was taken to the infirmary, and the women of the convent gathered around her. Reviving a bit, Sticken announced that it was finally time for her to die, and offered to mention the other Sisters to God upon her arrival in heaven. The new prioress, Conde, thanked her and warned Sticken to "prepare yourself quickly, [because] your holy bridegroom is coming to you." These words excited Salomé greatly, and her lips turned purple and she prepared herself very desiringly to join her beloved bridegroom."[46] Sticken lingered on a few more nights in the infirmary, and the Sisters caring for her apparently no longer felt her death was imminent. Around midnight, on the 17th of October, 1446 a patient sleeping at the infirmary was woken up by a bright light. She jumped out of bed in her nightshirt and ran to Sticken's bedside to see if she had died. Finding Sticken yet alive, the Sister was heading back to bed when she heard a voice say "Do not go, the Mother is dying now." However, the attendant Sisters at the infirmary ordered her to go back to bed, and obediently she left Sticken's bedside. However, before she had managed to fall asleep again, "[Sticken's] sweet end came and the Sisters were awakened." Everyone gathered around Sticken's bed to behold "the glorious wedding where the beloved bride was joined with her beloved bridegroom." While the Sisters prayed, Sticken died sweetly as if she were falling asleep and into the best of dreams and "the bridegroom took his beloved bride… and guided her along the path to the city of Jerusalem, where she would contemplate him face to face for all eternity.[47]

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[46] Suster salome en liet niet of, alst onse lieve here hebben wolde, ende segede: "Ist dat sie hem hebben sal, soe ist laete genoech; ic wil sie mytter hulpen Godes weder in der memoriën brengen." Doe segede mater: conde sie dat doen, so wolde sie onsen lieven heren laten comen. Doe sprack hoer suster salomee hertelike toe ende segede: "Mater, bereyt u haestelik, u ghemynde brudegom comet tot u." Doe sie dat hoerde, doe waert sie recht of sie wt den slape ontwecket weer Ende waert so levendich ende wiesch horen mont ende bereyde hoer seer begeerlick horen lieven brudegom te ontfangen Ende liet also starck dat sommyge niet vermoet en hadden dattet soe haestelic myt hoer gedaen solde hebben geweest... Ibid., 33.

[47] Daer lach een suster ende sliep int sieckhuys niet veer van daer mater lach. Ende ommetrynt een vierdel van eenre uren eer die hillige ziele ontbonden waert, so waert sie ontwakende ende sach een groete licht. Ende sie voer geringe op, also als sie lach, in hoer slaep rock Ende genck haestelike tot mater ende hadde anxt dat sie storve ende vragede den susteren of mater storve. Doe segeden die susteren dat sie noch liet, als sie des avendes gelaten hadde ende wesen hoer weder te bedde te gaen. Ende doe sie onder wegen was ende wolde weder te bedde gaen waert hoer in gespraken: "Gaet niet, mater stervet." Mer hoet was, sie genck te bedde omme der susteren willen. Mer eer sie sliep, quam dat zalige eynde ende die susteren worden gewecket ende sie quemen alle totter glorioser bruloft Daer die gemynde bruyt horen gemynden brudegom verenyget ende toegevoeget solde warden om hem te schouwen in ewicheit der ewicheit. Ende sie began te halen die doet snucken ende dat genck also saetelike toe, als of sie gelegen hadde in enen seer sueten slape. Ende als die susteren wat gebeden hadden, mer niet lange soe nam die brudegom sinee gemynde bruyt des nachtes toe

In this death sequence, Sticken's bridal relationship is elaborately drawn out and emphasized through repeated narrative references and quotations of Sticken's exclamations. This is the longest and most elaborate deathbed wedding in any of the Sisterbooks I have read (including the German Dominican Sisterbooks and Riccoboni's Chronicle from Corpus Domini). The events building up to Sticken's death are broken apart, scattered through the larger text to illustrate different virtues, adding to the overwhelming amount of evidence that Sticken was a bride of Christ in her own estimation and that of the women in her community. As a mystic, a convent leader, a vowed nun, a model of virtue, and a dying woman, Sticken enjoyed a full range of bridal identities. Sticken's elevated status allowed the narrator to describe her in semi-hagiographic language, incorporating even disruptive mystical outbursts, because she expected readers would wonder at Sticken's accomplishments and experiences, but be too humble to try to fully imitate her.

Though Sticken's *Life* was not produced as a piece of hagiography, the reverent treatment of Diepenveen's "first Mother" as a spiritually gifted woman was probably intended to amaze all who knew her. As the founding mother of a new convent, and a prominent figure in a new order, Salomé Sticken would have merited a longer and more reverent entry than other women at Diepenveen. Consequently, Sticken was more virtuous and more mystically gifted than any woman could hope to be. However, the much shorter entry on Sticken in the Sisterbook from Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer, where she lived as a lay sister before going to help found the convent at Diepenveen, suggests that an alternative view of Sticken was in circulation. Here, Sticken is described without detailed or colorful anecdotes; instead of commanding authority and loving chastisement, her main virtue is industrious dedication to work. In this version of Sticken's life, a single brief anecdote describes her unusual industriousness. The chronicler recounts that "once the Sisters had to go do the laundry, and then one said to the other Sister that was by her [i.e. to Sticken] 'Oh do we really have to wash all of these clothes alone!' [but] she [Sticken] had the

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xij uren Ende brachte sie opten wech totter hoger stat van iherusalem, daer sie hem in ewicheit sal beschouwen van ansichte tot ansichte." Ibid., 34-5.

Scheepsma's modernization shows some variation through this passage, but these may be editorial decisions rather than signs of a manuscript variant.

grace from our Lord from the very beginning that allowed her to do every kind of work."[48] Though Sticken's ability to do "every kind of work" is ascribed to God's grace, the chronicler does not provide lengthy edifying tales to show Sticken's divinely granted industry. In the chronicle from Meester-Geertshuis, Sticken is given a far shorter entry than many of the other Sisters. At Diepenveen Sticken was recognized as an astonishingly virtuous woman and figure of authority who had a special relationship with the divine Bridegroom. However, in the Diepenveen chronicle other aspects of Sticken's personality were downplayed or entirely omitted, including her gift for manual labor. This indicates that the authorial agenda of the Diepenveen chronicler was to portray Sticken as a founding Mother and figure of authority, a gifted bride of Christ to admire rather than emulate, while in contrast, the Sisters in Deventer could take examples of Sticken's early years of industrious labor and leave it unstated that her hard work and piety directly contributed to later successes.[49] In Diepenveen, they marveled at Sticken, while in Deventer they thought it better to emulate her.

[48] Though Sticken first lived at Meester-Geertshuis before joining the Sisters at Diepenveen, the chronicler from Meester-Geertshuis provides a much shorter entry that recognizes Sticken as an "honorable Mother" but deals primarily with her short time at the house in Deventer. "Op een tijt solden die zusteren gaen wasschen ; doe segede si totter zuster, die bi oer genck: "och of wi dese cleder nu allene mochten wasschen!" Sij hadde die gracie von onsen lieven Heren ontfangen, dat si alle wreck seer gerijnge conde gedoen" De Man, *Sommige stichtige Punten*, 210-11.
[49] For a discussion of Sticken's importance in the Diepenveen chronicle, see Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 58-62, 136-8.

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An Exiled Mystic

The overall impression of Salomé Sticken, based on the Diepenveen and Deventer Sisterbooks, is that she was a hard worker who flowered into a gifted mystic and convent administrator, yet Sticken's mystical side has been serially overlooked in recent scholarship on the women Devout. For instance, Scheepsma describes Sticken as "an important support for Johannes Brinckerinck [who] ruled the convent of Diepenveen from 1407 to 1446 with great severity and brought the spiritual life there to great heights," noting that Sticken was asked to compose a religious handbook for women who wanted to join the Modern Devotion.[50] For Scheepsma, Sticken's life and surviving writing offers a fascinating window into the daily life of the Diepenveen convent. He describes her as a "model Sister who understood the deeper sense of correption like no other," who helped define roles for women in the Devout community.[51] Even though Scheepsma is aware of Sticken's bridal identity and her mystical experiences—he knows these texts more intimately than any living scholar, or at least has published more on them—he does not show any interest in Sticken's mysticism, or how her bridal experiences may have limited her governing abilities. Similarly, Van Engen characterizes Sticken as "probably the best known of all the Sisters of the New Devotion, a model of discipline and piety," and finds a "certain firmness, one of her trademarks" in the *Modus Vivendi*.[52] In Sticken's only surviving written work, bridal language and mysticism are entirely absent even though these are prominent themes in her Diepenveen biography.[53] Instead, Sticken describes the way women should behave in each moment of a religious day, for instance, to "pour out to our most beloved lord Jesus your every wish and whole heart in ardent

[50] Ibid., 24.

[51] Ibid., 61.

[52] Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 49.

[53] Ibid., 49, 176-188.

desire and great gratitude, giving thanks to him with all your strength."[54] In these passages, Sticken is presumably describing her own approach to the religious day and reveals how constantly her thoughts were on Jesus. Yet even if these practices resulted in mystical experiences for Sticken, she offers no advice on how Sisters and prioresses should deal with that possibility. Sticken's advice comes from her own years of experience running a convent, rather than mystical insight. In her separate address to prioresses, Sticken suggests that free time would be "better spent in recollection of yourself and in pleading with the dear Lord so to be united with him as not to become occupied with external things and thus to separate yourself from Him," which suggests that Sticken herself saw the daily duties as a distraction from her spiritual development.[55] However, even here, Sticken is not advocating mystical practice, but warning prioresses to remember their devotional practices even when overwhelmed with worldly duties. It would be impossible to call Salomé Sticken a mystic or a bride of Christ based on her own words or the account from Meester-Geertshuis in Deventer. Sticken presented herself as a strict but loving model of virtue, and while the Diepenveen Chronicler emphasized these virtues, it shows that Sticken is also mystically inclined and a self-proclaimed bride of Christ. Bridal elements in Sticken's Diepenveen biography may originate in hagiographic tropes, but it is extremely unlikely that so many events were fabricated or reworked to fit a bridal model. Perhaps the most interesting piece of evidence is Brinkerinck's insistence that Sticken send Christ away whenever he appeared to her. This suggests that Sticken's mysticism and bridal status should be understood in comparison to the surviving evidence about mysticism and administrative discipline amongst the Devout. Even though Sticken failed to obey Brinckerinck, she remained an important exemplary figure for the Devout. Her mysticism was downplayed, overlooked, possibly even ignored, because Sticken was such an effective leader and because she was obviously committed to the ideals of the movement. Alijt Bake, on the other hand,

[54] Ibid., 177.

[55] Ibid., 186.

openly belittled and criticized the basic principles of the Modern Devotion, insisting that mystical techniques offered a more effective and satisfying path to salvation.

Born in Utrecht on December 13, 1415, Alijt Bake devoted herself to Christ's passion as a young girl, even at crowded feasts. [56] She presumably came from an upper-class family because she rose so quickly through the monastic ranks and was well educated, but almost nothing is known of Bake's family or childhood, as the first part of her spiritual autobiography is now lost.[57] As a young woman, she formed two important spiritual friendships, one with an anchoress, and the other with a nun serving at a hospital in Utrecht.[58] During these years, Bake studied mystical contemplation with her anchoress-friend, but in 1440 Bake chose to leave the world and sought entrance at the convent of Galilea in Ghent at the advanced age of twenty-five. Bake was, in her own estimation, too old and too well-read to make a good novice, and she was enormously frustrated with the religious life at Galilea. Bake's spiritual autobiography, *Mijn beghin ende voortganck* (My beginning and progress) picks up as she struggles with life in a Windesheim cloister.[59] Here, Bake voices frustrations with superiors who, she felt, knew too little

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[56] The details of Bake's life are increasingly available, though the only English accounts are in Scheepsma and Bollmann's recent publications. A detailed timeline of Bake's life, as well as a layman's introduction to convent life, mysticism, and the Modern Devotion can be found in Tot der Pelloze Deipte Because I am primarily concerned with Bake's spiritual writing and self-presentation, I have provided a simple summary of her life. These facts are all available in: Bake, timeline 30-31; Anne Bollmann, "Een vrauwe te sijn op mijn selfs handt: Alijt Bake (1415-1455) als geistliche Reformerin des innerlichen Lebens," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 76, no. 1-3 (2002); Anne Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," in *Seeing and Knowing: Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 75; Wybren Scheepsma, "*Van die memorie der passien ons Heren* van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 68, no. 1 (1994); Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, esp. 197-223; B. Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," *Ons geestelijk erf* 41 (1967); Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 228-30.

[57] The lost first volume was called "dat boeck der tribulatien" (the book of tribulations) Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," 210.

[58] There has been some hopeful speculation that Bake's anchoress-friend might be the famous Sister Bertken (1426-1514), who lived in Utrecht's Buurkerk from 1457 until her death. However, the dates do not line up at all. Lie discusses Bertken and Bake in : Orlanda S.H. Lie, "Middelnederlandse literatuur vanuit Genderperspectief: een Verkenning," *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 117, no. 3 (2001). Anneke Mulder-Bakkers' recent publication on Anchoresses argues convincingly that these enclosed women became important town figures, and based on her research, it is very likely that Alijt Bake's own anchoress-friend was a prominent figure in Utrecht's spiritual world. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005).

[59] Though it only survives in a third-hand redaction, with Bake's name removed and the voice changed to third person, this text still preserves Bake's voice and theology, sometimes slipping into first person. Scheepsma's *Van die Memorie...* and his chapter on Bake in *Medieval religious women* both give useful background

and valued external forms of piety—the progress in virtues—over personal revelations. Bake openly confronted her prioress and was extremely resentful of her treatment. She contemplated leaving Galilea to join Colette of Corbie's new congregation of Poor Clares at Ghent, but in the end, Bake decided to remain at Galilea, making her profession in 1441 and was even promoted as the new prioress in 1445. In retrospect, this probably was a poor choice, as Alijt began composing mystically inspired and mystically tinged works for the spiritual instruction of the Sisters at Galilea and initiated a campaign to teach mystical meditation techniques there. Bake was successful, gaining the support of the convent's confessor, until, during a visitation in 1455, Bake's mystical reform was brought to a crashing halt. Bake was deposed and banished to Facons, a new prioress immediately returned Galilea to the standard Windesheim program, and, within a few short months, the Windeshiem congregation had issued their condemnation of women's mystical writing at the same council meeting which would have heard Bake's protests. A few months after her shameful exile, Bake died, possibly due to her own harsh ascetic practices.[60] Though there is no mention whatsoever of Bake, either in the text of the ban or in records describing the meeting, scholarly consensus and circumstantial evidence suggest that this was a direct response to Alijt Bake and mysticism's perceived threat to order and obedience.[61]

To protest her treatment, Bake composed a letter, known as the "*Brief uit de Ballingschap* [Letter written from Exile]" which she composed to help the Rector from Galilea prepare her defense. Unfortunately, whatever defense he prepared has since been lost, but the letter reveals a great deal about

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and analysis on Bake's spiritual autobiography. Scheepsma, "*Van die memorie der passien ons Heren* van Alijt Bake."; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*.

[60] Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 220.

[61] The connection was first drawn by Spaapen and has since been confirmed by Scheepsma, Lie, Mertens, Bollmann, and Anne Winston-Allen. Bollmann says of the ban that ""In its blunt harshness, this ban on writing sounds like a helpless attempt to silence people like Alijt Bake on the matter of her inner spiritual experiences, for she certainly did not stand alone. Her inner strength threatened to unleash an almost charismatic self-sufficiency and independence of the female Devout as they pursued their spiritual path, an attitude for which Alijt Bake had fought her uncompromising battle: "being a woman on my own." Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," 94-5; Lie, "Middelnederlandse literatuur vanuit Genderperspectief: een Verkenning."; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*; Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.."; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.

Bake's last days at Galilea.[62] She remains defiant even in exile, demanding that she be returned to power. Though Bake is at times contrite, she refuses to accept that her mystical reform was in any way dangerous or contrary to the values of the Devout. Like many other women who subverted the male hierarchy, Bake justified her actions through mysticism, and while her confessor supported her, neither his letter nor the insistence that her reform was divinely inspired could sufficiently compensate for her disobedience and disregard for rules. Anne Bollmann, who also edited the Emmerich convent chronicle, wryly comments that:

> Alijt's life story in a way is a familiar tale: a precocious, spiritually gifted nun encounters hostility from her congregation that deeply resents her superior airs and general nonconformity. We all recognize this pattern from earlier centuries. Perhaps Alijt's tragedy was that she thought that in the late medieval reform movement of the Modern Devotion it would be possible for religious women to follow their own path of faith. However, within the hierarchical monastic world of the Windesheim congregation women still were predestined to obedience and subservience.[63]

In life and in death, Bake refused to conform to established models of obedient nun or prioress. If she had used her mystical gifts to reform her convent according to the Windesheim program, it is very likely that Bake would have never been deposed. After all, other prioresses had mystical experiences without incurring the wrath of their male superiors. Much younger than Salomé Sticken, Bake entered the Devout world already educated by a mystic, and saw no value in the slow training of virtues Sticken taught so patiently. Alijt Bake read, translated, and reworked Tauler and Jordanes' sermons, knew Ruusbroec intimately, read Catherine of Siena and Eckhardt, and saw Mechthild of Magdeburg and Colette of Corbie in visions.[64] Her own mystical writing merged scholastic and mystical theology. Through intimate and honest autobiography, Bake described her own successes and failings, not as a

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[62] A summary and introduction can be found in: Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," 351-2.

[63] Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," 96.
[64] Bake, 12, 21-26,142-145.

model nun, but as a humble Christian woman beginning a spiritual journey.[65] Although Bake would achieve the highest levels of mystical revelation, her mystical writing was openly instructional, inviting the reader to follow along on these spiritual wanderings.

Although Bake's writing was banned and much of it may have been burned, several treatises survive, mainly anonymously. In addition to her spiritual autobiography, her major mystical work, "The Four ways of the Cross," has been edited, along with several shorter sermons and treatises.[66] The autobiography is by far the longest of these works, and has been described as more of an internal dialogue than a spiritual treatise.[67] Bake's mysticism is overwhelmingly christocentric, focusing almost exclusively on Christ's passion and death. Even when describing mystical union, Bake avoids mystical love language, and considering her obvious familiarity with some of the best-known bridal mystics, this was not a choice made out of ignorance. Instead, Bake's surviving works suggest that she had no affinity for love mysticism, and she almost never writes about brides of Christ. There are a few notable exceptions. In one passage from her spiritual autobiography, the Virgin Mary becomes a bride of Christ. Mary as the bride of Christ is, of course, a longstanding interpretation of the *Song of Songs*, but Bake's description of Christ's birth and conception uses a surprising simile: "And there she learned how God became a man and was born from a Maiden and how he came into her and was made flesh, and how he went out of her like a bridegroom out of his bedroom and like a fox going out of its hole. And how this

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[65] Ibid., 28; Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.."

[66] All of the edited works have been published in *Ons geestelijk erf*. Wybren Scheepsma, "Twee onuitgegeven traktaatjes van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 66, no. 2 (1992); Scheepsma, "*Van die memorie der passien ons Heren* van Alijt Bake."; Wybren Scheepsma, "De trechter en de spin: Metaforen voor mystiek leiderschap van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 69, no. 2 (1995); B Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse passiemystiek, II. De vier Kruiswegen van Alijt Bake," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 40, no. 1 (1966); Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.."; B. Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse passiemystiek: V. De kloosteronderrichtingen van Alijt Bake.," *Ons geestelijk erf* 42 (1968); B Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek V. De Kloosteronderrichtingen van Alijt Bake: 4. De weg der Victorie," *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 43, no. 3 (1969).

[67] Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," 209, 218.

beautiful, aristocratic Maiden caught the noble strong, wild, and wise unicorn…"[68] Here, Bake has been describing a long vision of Christ's life and death, most of it entirely orthodox and biblically faithful. Though *most* of this birth sequence is fairly orthodox—even Mary taming a unicorn was a familiar allegory for the incarnation—describing the birth itself as a fox bolting out of its foxhole raises some potentially irreverent associations.[69] However puzzling the fox reference is, this passage demonstrates that Bake took the most conservative biblical meaning of bride of Christ.

In another passage of the autobiography, Bake seems to have a vision of the sacred heart, using the language of heart in heart found in Hadewijch, *CMS*, and other mystical texts. However, her presentation of this material is somewhat unique, replacing a sense of erotic intimacy with wonder and amazement:

> And she felt herself to be so amazingly well that she was calling out in her heart with enjoyment and happiness both interiorly and exteriorly: 'Oh Lord God, what have you made! Oh what have you made and what have you done! I only know what you have made and what you have done that you have shown already. I am really wondering, because I find my heart is always strolling through your heart as your heart strolls through mine. And they (the two hearts) are about to be equal so that I can't tell the difference and don't know which heart is yours and which is mine. Oh lord, you have really outmaneuvered me, because you want that I should choose [between the two hearts] and I have no idea what to do. They are now so much alike that there is no difference to see between, nor any way to set them apart. Therefore you should give me just what you want to. I am [gepaeyt ende ghesaijt]. (??)" And from that time it felt as if she were always journeying on a higher plane/degree than before.[70]

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[68] Och daer leerde sij hoe dat Godt mensche wort ende gheboren sonder die Maghet iet te quetsen. Hoe Hij in haer quam ende dat woort vleesch wiert. Ende hoe Hij wder wtghinck als eenen Bruijdgom wt sijn slaepcamer ende als eenen vos wt sijn hol. Ende hoe die schoone, edel Maghet dien edelen, stercken, wilde, wijsen eenhooren <vanck> ende waermede, opdat sij dar oock saude weeten alssij oock dede.Och, och, wat hoogher afgrondigher wonder leerde sij daer seer dikwils. Och, dat en waer niet te verclaren.... Ibid.: 281.

[69] I have scoured databases for any reference to Jesus and foxes. While it seems possible that this was a Dutch idiomatic expression, I have not been able to find any confirmation. Jen Welsh suggested that this could be referring to the fact that he did it without impairing her virginity, and that a certain degree of sneakiness was required, but there is no textual evidence to support this interpretation either. A Google phrase-search indicates that this could be an idiomatic expression for a rapid and startling action, but there is no evidence that it was in use in the 15th century.

[70] Ende sij ghevoelde haer soo wonderlijck wel, soo dat sij met seer groote ghenoechte en blijtschap. haers herten wiert roepende van binnen ende oock van buijten: "O Heere Godt, wat hebt ghij ghemaeckt! Och, wat hebt ghij ghemaeckt ende wat hebt ghij ghedaen! Ick en weet niet wat ghij ghedaen ende ghemaeckt hebt, of hoe dat geschiet is. Mij verwondert seer, want ick vinde mijn herte altemael verwandelt in u herte ende u herte int mijne. Ende sij sijn nu soo ghelijck gheworden, dat ick daer gheen ondersceijt af en can ghekennen welck dat u herte oft dat mijne is. Oh Heere,

Bake's description shows a joyful but confused woman, who has come so close to God that she cannot find her own heart. While Hadewijch delights in the special intimacy of the experience, Bake is both excited and bewildered. She recognizes that this experience marked a new level of spiritual ascent, but also seems somewhat ambivalent about her changed relationship with God.

Spaapen, in a note to this passage, ponders whether this is actually Bake's own vision or if she is knowingly or unknowingly remembering another mystic's vision of the sacred heart. The differences between Bake's description and those discussed in chapter four are significant, and because Bake's spontaneity and originality make this passage seem authentic. Bake does not use the language of love, she seems more bewildered than ecstatic, she describes only hearts, not mouths, hands, or other body parts, and most importantly, in her outcry, Bake describes only her own situation and confusion, rather than exploring the sensation of heart-in-heart. While the bride in *CMS* delights in a kiss and makes asides about lust and pleasure, and Hadewijch alludes to a wonderful sweetness, Bake's joy is slightly distanced. She wants to call out and demand an explanation from God because she is feeling such overwhelming joy and cannot fathom what has happened to her. Bake's experience is more introspective than Hadewijch's, focusing on a soul's reaction to a mystical transformation, rather than describing the sensation itself.

Though she never moves into the language of erotic love, Bake approaches the bridal idiom towards the end of her spiritual autobiography. Even at the end, passion devotion still dominates the text. In one passage, Bake mentions the bridal raiment, but only to compare it to the filth of a human soul. Here, Bake focuses primarily on how much humans owe Jesus for his love and death:

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ghij hebt mij nu al te <seer> verschal<c>t, want ghij wilt dat ick sal kiesen ende ick en weet wat doen. Sij sijn nu soo ghelijck, dat daer gheen cuere aen te sien en is, noch te setten. Daerom soo sult ghij mij gheven dwelck ghij wilt. Ick ben gepaeyt ende ghesaijt." Ende van dier tijt voort soo ghevoelde sij haer al verwandelt in eenen anderen graet dan sijte vooren was. Ende haer dochte doen dat sij met verwonderlijcke gracien ghebenedijt was, alsoo dat ick nemmermeer anders en soude doen dan naer den liefsten wille Godts en nit dat Hem contrarie waere, ende dat sij nemmermeer van hem ghescheijden en mochte, noch vallen in dootsonden, noch in gheen ghebreeck dat Hem contrarie ware, wetens ende willens. Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," 272.

> Because of this we should say "Oh Lord, I don't want your glory without love and pain. Oh how I should like to stand there ashamed, as if I had not touched or possessed the bridal robe of love in painfulness. Oh, I might go away again because of this great shame. If someone could reach out to us in great harshness and say "Go out, go and don't come back, you have no place here in this town. See that you are dressed in some other clothing than ones people wear here, yea, than the King himself wears! Go out, man of the devil, go out, go and never come back." Oh, how should we then stand there ashamed? For this reason, do not let us grieve over our sorrows, but with all heartfelt desire embracing and desiring to gladden and delight our dear Lord Jesus Christ[71].

Although Bake describes herself as wearing the bridal robe of love, this passage is obviously not a standard example of bridal mysticism. Instead, Bake is teaching her core message of love and knowledge, acquiescence and suffering [minne ende kinnise, laten ende lijden].[72] The soul is not a fallen bride of Christ, or even Bake contemplating setting aside her habit and leaving the convent. Instead, Bake emphasizes the importance of suffering, but also of letting go of suffering to amuse and please the beloved Jesus.

Bake's love for Christ and her passion devotion dominate *Mijn beghin ende voortghanck*. In one passage, she begs to be nailed to the earth: "let me love you and serve you in the highest and most noble degree of your loving. My desire is for your loving heart and I ask that you will give me what you yourself desire, and I will not step away from this station [the position you give me], even if I should die here. Lord, nail me down here on the earth… the earth I am laying down on and let me lie down here to die"[73] Bake submits her will to Christ's, letting go of her own desire, yet still begging for death and love.

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[71] Hiersoo sullen wij segghen: "O Heere, sonder minne ende pijne soo en wil ick u glorie niet. Och, hoe soude ick daer staen beschaemt, als ick dat bruijloftcleet der ghewarigher minnen in de pijnelichheijt niet aenghedaen en hadde. Och, ick mochte van groote schaemte wel weder wtgaen. Of men mochte ons wtsteken met groote onweerde ende segghen: "Gaet wt, ghij en hoort hier niet toe. Ghij en hebt hier gheen stadt. Siet ghij niet dat sij alle met ander cleeden ghecleet sijn die hier wonnen, jae, den Coninck selve! Gaet wt, duijvels man, gaet wt, ghij en behoort hier niet." Och, hoe souden wij dan beschaemt staen. Hierom, soo en laet ons niet verdrieten le lijden, maer met allen herelijkcken begheerten omhelsen ende begheerende om daermede te verblijden in de ghelijckheijt ons liefs Heeren Jesus Christus Ibid.: 288.

[72] These terms are introduced as characterizing Bake's spirituality in: Bollmann, "'Being a woman on my own': Alijt Bake (1415-1455) as reformer of the inner self," 67.

Although she begs for death, Bake's desire for death is entirely different from the aged Salomé Sticken's. She is not eagerly yearning for union with her bridegroom, but passively relinquishing her own will to live and to move freely about the world. If she were to die, it would be God's will, and thus her own, but Bake is not begging for death so much as announcing that she is "letting go."

Bake learns the connection between passion devotion and "letting go" of the world, relishing in suffering and sorrow, and love through a series of visions. Though she entered Galilea knowing what she called the first two ways of the cross, her full spiritual awakening would occur one night during a vision. That evening, Bake received special permission from Christ to continue her spiritual studies in bed, where she would learn the third and fourth ways of the cross. The passage describing this spiritual revelation emphasizes Bake's intimacy with Christ, but even though she lies in bed with Christ, there is no sense of eroticism or bridal imagery. Even though Bake experiences her own highest mystical stage while in bed *with* Jesus, she never uses bridal or erotic language, which is a significant shift from earlier medieval women mystics.

Christ is speaking to her just before Choir, explaining a deep mystery: "… and all your strength shall go out of you, spiritual and bodily, that they are a little drop of all that you are and you don't need them anymore, interiorly or exteriorly…. And thus I shall desiringly enter you completely (fulfill your most ardent desire?)…"[74] After this, Bake will be able to heal the sick and work many other wonders, "to do all things with me in this fashion, and I will do them through you."[75] The lesson continued during

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[73] o heere behoet mij emmer voirts ende gheeft mij dat ick U minnen en dienen mach inden hoochsten ende edelsten graet die U minnende herte van mij begheerende is. Ende dit biddick U dat ghij mij wilt gheven, oft ick en sal niet opstaen van dese stede, al soude ick heir sterven. Heere, naghelt mij hier inde aerde of in de berderen, daer ick op ligge ende laet mij hier ligghen sterven, Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse Passiemystiek. III: De autobiografie van Alijt Bake (vervolg); IV: De brief uit de ballingschap.," 266.

[74] Ende alle uwe crachten sullen alsoo seer wtghespannen werde, gheestelijck ende naturelijck, dat ghij een druppel van al dat u selfs is niet behauden en sult, inwendich en wtwendich. Ende uwe nature sal soo seer gequetst worden, dat ghij somtijts iet ende somtijts niet meer vermoghen en sult. En aldus soo sal ick daerin uwe begheerte volcommen Ibid.: 297.

[75] Voirt, soo sult ghij weten dat alle die aermoede ende strangheheijt die ick de anture voldede, die sult ghij van binnen en in den gheest voldoen die ick dede van buijten. Ghij sult die siecken ghesont maken van haar ghebreken; die melaetsche sijn van eygenschap reijnighen; die crupelen die hun selven soecken ende niet recht en gaen, die sult ghij doen recht gaen in mijnen wech; die blende, die de waerheijt niet en bekennen, die sult ghij siende maken; die stomme, die mijnen lof niet en vercondighen, die sult ghij doen sprecken, de ongheleerde sult ghij leeren; die dooven, die mijn

service, but unfortunately, Choir came to an end while Bake was still wrapped up in divine mercy. Though she was obliged to retire to the dormitory with the rest of the Sisters, Bake was reluctant to get up and move. She asked "Oh Lord, now I have to go. What should I do now? Am I going to have to separate from you?" The lord replied "No… I shall lead you to your bed." This response pleased her, and once they were in bed, Bake asked the lord what she should do next:

> Who should I now obey, I would like to stay with you and have more of you, but the people of this Order force me to be obedient to them. Then the Lord said to her "look, I am here with you now, and what you ask of me, I shall do that thing." Just after that, he wanted to say: "… on account of this, take as much from me now as you are able to." In this she understood that he wanted to stay with her and continue. Then, she defied communal obedience and stayed with him.[76]

That night in bed, Bake learned the third and fourth ways of the cross, and by morning, she had attained the highest level of divine revelation. In her autobiography, Bake's description of her night in bed with Christ is matter of fact and relatively straightforward, for a mystical text. Though the scene itself is intimate, Bake limits herself to describing conversations, again avoiding emotional language or allegory. Even though she is in the most intimate of locations, Bake does not use the language of love mysticism. She is simply a woman who was led to bed by God, a curious soul but not a lover. Like Salomé Sticken, Bake experienced divine revelation during Choir, but unlike Sticken, Bake felt that pursuing her mystical experiences was more important than obeying the convent's regulations.

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weghen niet en verstaen, die sult ghij doen hooren; den dooden, die in haer sonden ende verkeerden wille doodt sijn ende ligghen en stincken inden grave, sult ghij verwecken. Aldus sult ghij alle dinghen doen met mij in desen wech ende ick met u. Daerom soo weest vroom ende verwacht de voolheit des tijts dat ick u wtroepen sal, en weest mij dan ghehoorsaem in alle dinghen voorseijt. Ibid.

[76] Doen sij dit vande ghenade Godts aldus ontfanghen hadde, soo cloopte wt ter choor dat sij moeste gaen naer haer bedde. Doen was sij seer belaen dat sij dit werck saude moeten laeten eert al voldaen was, want sij hadde gheeren dei ander twee weghen oock gheleert. Doen soo seyde sij tot onsen lieven Heere:"Och Heere, nu moet ick gaen. Wat sal ick nu doen? Sal ick aldus van ue moeten scheijden? " "Neen," seijde Hij, "ick sal met u gaen voor u bedde." Doen was sij seer blijde ende ghinck. Doen sij daer quam soo wiert sij wederom bedroeft, sprack en seijde aldus: "O lieven Heere, wat ghelieft U dat ick nu doen sal? Wien sal ick nu ghehoorsaem sijn? Ich saude gheeren met U waken ende wat meer van U hebben, ende d'ordinantie der oorden dwinct mij ghehoorsaem te sijne. Wat sal ick doen?" Doen sejde den Heere: "Siet, ick ben nu hier bij u, ende wat ghij mij bidt, dat sal ick doen." Recht of Hij segghen wilde: "Altoos en hebt ghij mij niet, daerom soo neemp nu van mij al dat u ghebueren mach." In dit soo verstont sij dat Hij wilde dat sij bij Hem blijven saude ende voirtgaen. Doen, soo tardt sij over die ghemeijne ghehoorsaemheit en bleef bij Hem. Ibid.: 298-9.

Years after this experience, Bake would describe the four paths Christ taught her that night in the most widely disseminated of her extant writings.[77] Bake's "Four Ways of the Cross" is a penitential passion meditation, but Bake also describes a "lighter way," or easier path that others might take if they found the one she described too filled with darkness.[78] In this text, Bake voices passion mysticism, focusing on suffering and sorrow, letting go and accepting pain. However, Bake was a careful and creative teacher who realized that not all of her students would be able to follow the four ways of the cross. Bake's other instructional works and sermons also are openly concerned with teaching the women in her care. Her "The way of the Donkey [de weg van de ezel]" encourages readers to imagine the donkey Christ rode into Jerusalem as a "simple, fat, slandered little animal, which people would regularly slander by saying "what sort of fat plump rude donkey is that?!"[79] Though she opens with a comic image, Bake quickly transitions to a description of Jerusalem and the places Christ visited and suffered through the eyes of Christ's faithful mount. The short text offered readers an amusing and effective way to bring the life of Christ into their own mental worlds.

Like Salomé Sticken, Bake never describes herself as a bride of Christ, but as no convent chronicle from Galilea survives, it is impossible to know how other women viewed her. Despite her mystical experiences, Bake remained fully in the world and took special care to use her own experiences to help others develop their own spirituality. She viewed herself as a funnel, through which divine knowledge poured out of heaven to reach the women of Galilea.[80] Even though Bake was ejected from her convent, her extant mystical texts are strong examples of what Mertens describes as the mystically

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[77] The third way taught "knowledge and love" and the fourth taught "letting go and suffering." There were an additional four ways of incarnation, described as the path of light or easier path, which focused on Christ's life rather than his death. Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 219, 224-26; Spaapen, "Vier Kruiswegen "; Bake, 26-28.
[78] Bake's four ways would lead a soul to darkness. Spaapen, "Vier Kruiswegen ": 58.

[79] Ten eersten so <es de esel> een simpel, plomp, versmaedt beestken gheheeten, want als men confuselijc van yeman spreken wille, so seit man: "wat groeter plomper ende ruder esel es dat." Spaapen, "Middeleeuwse passiemystiek: V. De kloosteronderrichtingen van Alijt Bake.," 11.

[80] Scheepsma, "De trechter en de spin: Metaforen voor mystiek leiderschap van Alijt Bake," 214-15; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*.

inclined devotional literature produced by Devout congregations. Her autobiography is a personal conversation with God, not a carefully crafted piece of mystical theology, and her sermons and treatises are primarily composed for devotional and instructional purposes. Bake's behavior and agenda were condemned, not her writings. Thom Mertens described Alijt Bake as a "rising star," the best example of mysticism within the circle of the Modern Devotion, and the anonymous transmission of her mystical writing suggests that the Devout recognized and valued her contributions, despite the taint of her name.[81] However, Bake's mystically authorized reform campaign at Galilea posed a real threat to the monastic hierarchy. Just as she defied convent regulations to stay awake with Jesus and haughtily rejected Windesheim's mild ascetic program, Bake defied the spiritual program of the Modern Devotion by authoring new, mystically oriented devotional texts for convent use.[82] Bake instantly introduced the women at Galilea to the "higher path," even though she realized many would be unable to follow it, and by doing so, she imperiled the convent's progress.

If Bake's life had been recorded in a Sisterbook, or if Salomé Sticken had written a mystical treatise perhaps a better comparison might be drawn between these two prioresses. Unfortunately, almost every account of Sticken's mysticism and her bridal identity come from the Diepenveen chronicler, and thus lack the intimacy and immediacy of Bake's own writings. Salomé Sticken avoids bridal language in her Rule, just as Alijt Bake refrains from describing herself or her readers as brides of Christ. The Devout's spiritual focus on Christ's body, life, and death comes through especially clearly in Bake's writing, but is also present in Salomé Sticken's Rule and her life. Yet in the Sisterbooks prioresses, nuns, lay Sisters, and Sisters of the common life all assume bridal roles, many without having taken religious vows or experienced a mystical transformation. Bridal language was sprinkled throughout all of the extant convent chronicles, as well as devotional texts and sermons addressed to the female Devout. Why then do these two mystics and nuns—doubly brides of Christ by virtue of their vows and spiritual

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[81] Mertens, "Mystieke cultuur en literatuur in de late Middeleeuwen," 117.

[82] A concise summary of Bake's attitude and conscious defiance can be found in : Bake, 132-136.

encounters—avoid bridal language in their own writing? Both were devoted to Christ's passion and death, and to the spiritual care of the women in their convents. Sticken's bridal experiences could truly be an external addition, resulting from the Diepenveen chronicler's dependence on hagiographic language and her obvious high regard for Sticken, and this seems to be the case for a third Devout mystic, Mechthild van Rivieren of Facons. Van Rivieren wrote using bridal language, and in her preserved biography is also described as a bride of Christ.[83] However, the spiritual life was written in the late seventeenth century, and many of the bridal references may have been added in to explain Mechtild's revelations by a chronicler who had no useful records or memories to incorporate into the life.[84]

The bridal appellation seems to have been largely divorced from mystical experiences in the circles of the Modern Devotion, and mysticism was downplayed in the three extant Sisterbooks. Salomé Sticken was described primarily as a bride of Christ and an authoritative prioress, despite several anecdotes that demonstrated how her powerful spiritual life sometimes distracted her from convent duties. Alijt Bake, on the other hand, openly admits that she found spiritual contemplation more valuable than convent duties and would defy the vows of obedience if Christ was with her. Stijne Zuetelincks, the probable mystic at Meester-Geertshuijs in Deventer, seems to have maintained a state of obedience, and to have been a bride of Christ, but she never held office. It seems likely that mysticism was tolerated among *medezusteren,* fellow Sisters, but became problematic for women in positions of authority, who were supposed to care for, chastise, organize, and instruct entire communities. Sticken's reputation at Diepenveen was that of a strong leader, not a gifted mystic, while Bake's failure at Galilea resulted from rebellious reform attempt. While both women were technically brides of Christ due to their monastic vows, they saw *themselves* as leaders, teachers, and writers who were charged with shaping the souls of other women. Bridal mysticism and bridal identities truly were of minimal importance to the Devout. Although the evidence presented in these two chapters might suggest otherwise, the anecdotes I have

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[83] Unfortunately, Mechtild's writing remains unedited and the only real discussion of her life and writing is in : Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries*, 189-95.

[84] Ibid., 190.

drawn from these women's writing represent only one small part of their spiritual world. Though neither woman viewed *herself* as a bride of Christ, Salomé Sticken conformed and obeyed, earning the title of bride of Christ. Alijt Bake's rebelliousness and her insistence that she was acting on divine authority, marked her as a dangerous woman, and, much like the reckless bridal mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Bake was rapidly silenced. There are striking similarities between Bake's exile and Hadewijch's, and more between Bake's condemnation and the trial of Marguerite Porete. Mysticism was a dangerous form of female authority, and all the more dangerous when the mystic was a woman in a position of authority. Because so many women mystics described themselves as brides of Christ, the title itself may have conferred additional authority. Though women of the Devout continued to use and value the idea of marrying Jesus, and the Sisterbooks actively suggest that virtuous women would be rewarded with a bridal crown and Christ's embrace, there is almost no mention of the possibility that mystics could also become brides—even if they were less virtuous. The women and men of the Modern Devotion apparently almost entirely separated the bride of Christ from mysticism, just as they advocated "the common way" over the mystic's shortcut to salvation. Although it is impossible to prove based on surviving evidence, this trend towards recognizing brides of Christ because of their worldly virtues, rather than their mystical experiences, probably originates as a response to two main threats: divinely authorized female reformers, and mystical "high-flyers" whose startling success caused others to break from a known path to salvation (through obedience). The underlying threat in each case was disobedience.

Though both Sticken and Bake appear to have been gifted mystics and authoritative leaders who genuinely cared for the women in their convents, there is one crucial difference between them: Salomé Sticken was humble and obedient before her superiors and the women of Diepenveen, while Alijt Bake was openly defiant. Perhaps, then, amongst the Devout, humility and obedience—the ultimate virtues—should be recognized as the primary attributes of a bride of Christ.

Mr. and Mrs. Jesus Christ?

The medieval bride of Christ was not singled out for one easily recognizable quality. She was and is not a stereotype. The phrase has been used inconsistently by both modern and medieval authors who ambiguously apply it in haphazard fashion to religiously affiliated women, but the women's writings of the Modern Devotion show that recognizing brides of Christ could be politically motivated. As a passive phrase, bride of Christ identifies a woman or women on the basis of a relationship, rather than her name, accomplishments, or personal identity. Leaving this phrase unquestioned risks allowing a collective identity to overshadow each woman's personal experiences. Margery Kempe, Bridget of Sweden, Marie d'Oignies, Dorothea von Montau, Katharina Tucher, Salomé Sticken and the Sisters of the Modern Devotion, and the fictional brides of the *Speculum Virginum* and *Christus und die minnende Seele* each had unique and important experiences, but grouping them together as brides of Christ risks obscuring their identities. Just as modern wives are sometimes addressed by their husbands' names—*Dear Mr. and Mrs. Devon Gregory, please consider donating money to our charity!*—medieval women risked losing their identity by taking on the title *bride of Christ*. Though they shared certain experiences and were recognized by onlookers as somehow embodying a Christian ideal, brides of Christ were not homogeneous.

Throughout, I have argued that the bride of Christ was a title granted to those who met some special standard, whether for their mystical experiences or their exemplary behavior. Yet the qualities associated with this bridal state were never simple or constant. In the first centuries of Christianity, the bride was the Church, or a veiled and vowed virgin, but the same arguments discouraged pious widows

from remarrying.[1] She was every Christian soul in Baptism, every martyr in death, and every consecrated woman. Church Fathers like Ambrose of Milan urged virgins to guard their chastity by reminding them that they were already wed to a sweeter bridegroom, Jesus—and thus the nun became a bride of Christ. Of the subsequent centuries, little is known.[2] By the twelfth century, courtly love and allegorical commentaries on the *Song of Songs* had firmly established the feminized human soul as an erotic bride of Christ. Through prayer and contemplation, a cleansed soul could step into the female voice of the *Song of Songs* and become Christ's special beloved. Both mystical and virtuous brides were exemplary, teaching those who read or heard about them how to begin a self-transformation, and perhaps, one day, marry Jesus themselves. These hopeful models set out clear paths for others to follow, and in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries women and men dedicated their lives to new religious movements, becoming beguines/beghards or engaging in other forms of popular religion such as pilgrimage or public poverty and penance. The phrase became increasingly problematic as brides of Christ like Margery Kempe defied common expectations about chastity and submissive obedience. By the fifteenth century, there were too many brides of Christ, too many dangerous mystics, and too many religious women.[3] Most spectacular of all was Joan of Arc, a divinely authorized maiden who proved so dangerous she was executed in 1431. Her behavior and experiences were recognized as pious and sanctified, but also condemned as heretical, subversive, and outrageous.[4] In contrast, Collette of Corbie (d. 1447) successfully reformed the Poor Clares with mystically inspired authority. Neither is remembered as a

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[1] See chapter 1 for a more detailed history, or Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Religion and Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 3-14.

[2] Hagiographic accounts such as the death of Ursula and the 11,000 virgins suggest that this model continued on, developing a closer association with union through death Ursula and her 11,000 virgins were probably legendary, but the tale was prominent and popular by the 9th or 10th Century, and was mentioned in the *Speculum Virginum*. The Cologne inscription which summarizes their story and death is of uncertain date.

[3] For instance, the Windesheim condemnation of women's writing, the restrictions and criticisms made at the council of Constance, but also changes in legal and economic freedom, such as the trends presented in Judith M. Bennett, *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England: Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Merry E. Wiesner, *Working Women in Renaissance Germany* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986).

[4] Peter Dinzeblacher provides astute analysis of this potential duality. He examines the fine line between saint and heretic, suggesting essentially that one man's saint was another's heretic. Peter Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?: Shicksale auffalliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Fruhneuzeit* (Zurich: Artemis & winkler 1995).

bride of Christ, though both women had qualities that might have earned such a title. On a local scale, the mixed fates of Salomé Sticken, Alijt Bake, Margery Kempe, and Katharina Tucher, who all were forgotten soon after their deaths, suggest that by the fifteenth century the bridal model was only introduced cautiously, and no longer conferred international sanctity.

The bride of Christ's increasingly problematic associations are also recorded at a textual level. Using the *Speculum Virginum's* familiar techniques of mixed-media presentation, dialogue between engaging characters, and the promise of learning how to marry Jesus, late medieval devotional texts like *Christus und die minnende Seele* taught a new set of virtues (submitting, letting go). By the fourteenth century, the bride of Christ had become primarily a mystical figure, and *Christus und die minnende Seele* taught brides to submit to divine will. At the same time, Geert Grote and his followers were reviving an alternate path to finding God by advocating virtuous living rather than mystical transformation. The Devout used mystical language and imagery to serve their own devotional and communal needs. The bride of Christ became a less important figure for the virtue-oriented women's communities of the Modern Devotion, just as the "common" path of obedience was advocated over the "higher" mystical path. Though the Dutch Sisterbooks suggested that Christ would come take women away into death, marrying them as a reward for virtuous living, they also removed any sense of eroticism from the bridal state and minimized mystical experiences. The Devout tolerated mysticism so long as it was accompanied by humble obedience.

The women and men who became brides of Christ, either during their lives or in the moment of death, survive in medieval literature because they conformed to cultural expectations about piety and virtuous behavior. Devotional treatises like the *Speculum Virginum* and *Christus und die minnende Seele* survive in numerous copies, while the writing of women like Margery Kempe, Katharina Tucher, and Alijt Bake, and the late medieval convent chroniclers exist in only a few copies. That they survived at all means *someone* felt these texts gave realistic, pious, and orthodox accounts of how Christian souls should comport themselves, and what forms divine love might take. Customarily, the bride of Christ was a nun

or a mystical soul. Yet the phrase should not be used unquestioned, without consideration. Through my presentation of alternate bridal models, I hope I have shown that not all nuns and mystics were brides of Christ—and that not all brides of Christ were nuns or mystics. As early as the twelfth century, the *Speculum Virginum* accepted that not all nuns and virgins would become brides of Christ and also suggested that married women and widows could pursue a bridal crown if they maintained *spiritual* chastity. Embracing this concept, beguines like Marie d'Oignies pursued religious lives in the world, and some were recognized as brides of Christ, even though they were neither nuns nor virgins. Brides of Christ offered other Christians a potential self-transformation. Their lives, experiences, accomplishments, and literary works became prescriptive guides, showing other Christians how they too might draw God's love and special attention. Medieval religious literature was often didactic, modeling ideal types of Christian behavior through exemplary figures. Surviving texts about brides of Christ, whether mystical, autobiographical, hagiographic, or formational, all offer step-by-step guides on how to refine the soul, win divine love, and eventually marry Jesus. Even the most mystical and inaccessible of bridal texts survived because they offered the hopeful reader some clues about attracting and keeping divine attention. Other works, like the *Speculum Virginum,* more explicitly described the necessary behavioral changes that would transform a tarnished and sinful soul into a pure and gleaming beauty and attract God's loving interest. Hagiography, which described astonishing saintly virtues and gruesome martyrdoms, also suggests that humans are capable of programmatic transformation. Though regular Christians might never achieve the same level of virtue as saints, they too could maintain strong faith, protect their chastity, be kind to the poor, perform works of mercy, and, by cultivating these virtues, improve the state of their own souls. Margery Kempe experienced a sweet dream of heaven, heard of Bridget of Sweden and Marie d'Oignies, and imitated them by becoming a bride of Christ, just as the chroniclers of Sisterbooks hoped readers would learn to emulate the described virtues of bridal "elder sisters." Though any Christian soul could effect bridal transformation, successful brides of Christ also had to conform to social expectations.

Mystic saints, such as Bridget of Sweden and Dorothea von Montau were successful because they conformed to societal expectations for female piety. Though they spoke of their mystical experiences, they maintained an air of obedience and silence, transmitting their experiences through their confessors' pens. Other mystics, like Margery Kempe and Alijt Bake, experienced spiritual transformation but their disobedience and nonconformity drew condemnation and persecution. Though Bake's mystical treatises continued to circulate after her exile and disgrace, Bake herself never gained recognition as an exemplary virtuous woman. She was chaste, pious, and loved by God, but Bake was also outspoken, willful, and disobedient. Her mystical gifts could not compensate for diverging from the feminine ideal. Yet Bake never thought of herself as a bride of Christ. Margery Kempe performed piety, imitating saints like Bridget of Sweden and Elizabeth of Hungary, fasting, praying, traveling on pilgrimage, but her unconventional marriage, perceived lack of chastity, and disregard for authority meant that those who knew Margery had trouble believing she was a holy and good woman. Though Margery wore Christ's wedding ring, she needed constant reassurance that she was worthy to be a bride of Christ, and to call Jesus her dear husband. Margery Kempe's *Book* shows how important chastity was to the bridal identity, while Alijt Bake's treatises emphatically demonstrate that some women—even virginal mystic nuns—did not identify with, and were not identified by, the bridal model.

Late medieval piety, with its emphasis on Christ's body and especially Christ's passion and death, produced numerous works that taught spiritual transformation without bridal metaphors—including Alijt Bake's *Four Ways of the Cross.*. However, the bride of Christ, a sometimes erotic metaphor for human spiritual progress, is assumed to be "almost omnipresent" in women's religious literature by the late middle ages.[5] In the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, just as the Modern Devotion was converting Christians to a life of active piety, self-proclaimed mystical brides of Christ became more common in the Swiss and South German convents. Mysticism was a threat, not just to convent

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[5] Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 20.

environments, but also to the whole of the late medieval Church.[6] God himself spoke through mystics, and this undercut the church hierarchy as well as all social structures, as I showed in chapter 7. By the mid-fifteenth century, however, mysticism had become almost egalitarian, simultaneously separating from bridal imagery. Though it took natural talent to become a mystic, increased literacy and lay religious renewal supported the production of large numbers of devotional and mystical texts in vernacular languages. Women like Katharina Tucher and Alijt Bake were quietly purchasing, consuming, and copying books that taught meditation and mysticism.[7] Katharina Tucher lived a long life and died in peace while Alijt Bake's religious career crashed into shameful exile and resulted in a broad condemnation of women's religious writing. Though both were bookish mystics, their writings defy traditional expectations about brides of Christ. Katharina Tucher kept her mystical experiences relatively private. Her behavior was ambiguous—though she became a lay sister, she also refused to conform to social expectations that holy women should be quiet, chaste, and sober. In contrast, Alijt Bake conformed to social expectations by entering a convent and guarding her chastity and becoming a nun, but she publicized her mystical insights and willfully refused to submit to the religious hierarchy. Though she was a nun and mystic, Alijt Bake refused to be a bride of Christ, but Katharina Tucher became a bride of Christ and a mystic despite her sexuality, drunkenness, arrogance, and short temper.

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[6] The fine line between mysticism and heresy was not always decided by doctrinal orthodoxy. Both Dinzelbacher and Grundmann have demonstrated that obedience, conformity, and the whims of local politics could make all the difference, while Hildegard Keller points out that brides of Christ and brides of Satan (saints and witches) were two sides of the same coin, and differentiated primarily based on external behavior, rather than quality of experience. Dinzelbacher, *Heilige oder Hexen?: Shicksale auffalliger Frauen in Mittelalter und Fruhneuzeit*; Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism*, trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995); Keller, *My Secret is Mine*.

[7] Like Tucher, Bake was an avid reader, and both women's mystical productivity was connected to what they had read and learned through private study. Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The 'Modern Devotion', the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings*, trans. David F. Johnson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2004); Katharina Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, ed. Ulla Williams and Werner Williams-Krapp (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer Verlag, 1998); Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004).

What is truly interesting about both Bake and Tucher, who died within seven years of each other, is that neither of them made any significant historical impact.[8] Alijt Bake's writing survived only because copyists erased her name. Even Bake's role in the crucial 1455 condemnation of women's writing was forgotten, edited out of chapter proceedings only to be proposed speculatively in the early twentieth century. In the last forty years, scholars have painstakingly reclaimed and reconstructed Bake's life and writing, but the strong-willed and intelligent woman who diligently wrote formative and mystical treatises for the convent of Galilea may never entirely resurface. Katharina Tucher, who admittedly made minimal impact even in 15th century Nuremburg, also vanished from all but the most perfunctory of records. Her identity survives through the books she owned and donated to St. Katharina's in Nuremberg, records of her legal transactions, and her scribal work. Even Katharina's vision-diary is anonymous, and can only be identified because Christ sometimes called her "Katharina" or "Tucherin" in visions.[9] Though only Katharina became a bride of Christ, both women seem to have been part of a broad late-medieval mystical culture.

Factoring in the experiences of Margery Kempe (d. 1438), Salomé Sticken (d.1446), and the other possible Diepenveen mystics, it seems as if, by the mid-fifteenth century, mysticism itself was no longer that remarkable, and had very little to do with bridal status or historical success. Though Salomé Sticken became an exemplary figure, a model of virtue, and a bride of Christ in the Diepenveen Sisterbook, Sticken's mystical experiences were minimized, suggesting, as I argued in chapter seven, that humble obedience was the most important quality of an exemplary bride of Christ. Margery Kempe, Alijt Bake, and even Katharina Tucher failed to meet this requirement, and thus faded into archival anonymity until feminist scholars rediscovered them, while Salomé Sticken, Bridget of Sweden, Dorothea von Montau, Angela of Folignio, and the *Speculum Virginum's* Theodora continued to model female piety through the Reformation and into the modern era.

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[8] Alijt Bake died in late 1455, Katharina Tucher sometime in 1448

[9] Tucher, *Die "Offenbarungen" der Katharina Tucher*, 1.

The bride of Christ was supposed to be an ideal Christian woman who could model virtues and had earned divine love through years of faithful service. However, some women had these qualities without becoming brides of Christ—for instance many of the women in the Dutch Sisterbooks—while others, like Katharina Tucher and Margery Kempe, became brides of Christ despite being unfit to model virtues. The proliferation of mystical, devotional, and hagiographic texts modeling marrying Jesus gave the sense that anyone could become a bride of Christ if s/he simply did certain things. As the model began to expand, encompassing married women like Bridget of Sweden, as well as lay beguines like Mechthild of Magdeburg, more Christians tried to follow the bridal program, either by joining a lay movement such as the Modern Devotion, or through individual study, reading books, visiting and conversing with anchoresses. By practicing virtue or training the self and soul to let go, Christians strove to transform their own souls. The increase in non-traditional brides of Christ, especially mystical brides of Christ, in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggests that the bridal model was extremely popular. However, the same period saw a decrease in bridal and mystical saints, and, at least in the circle of the Modern Devotion, a very intentional separation between mysticism and bridal transformation. For medieval Christians, this phrase had a vivid variety of uses, and must not be used or read casually. Unlike the cover of *Hemels Verlangen,* which suggested all the women at Diepenveen were models of virtue and brides of Christ, modern scholars must use this term carefully, always considering context, nuance, and, above all, paying attention to which voice identifies a bride of Christ. Is it the bride herself? Christ in a vision? A hagiographer or chronicler? Or, was the attribution made by a later artist or historian, transposing this catch-all phrase for female piety onto a woman who never was or wanted to be a bride of Christ?

The bride of Christ is still a multivalent image in this modern era. Though she remains associated primarily with Roman Catholic nuns, a cursory internet search will turn up numerous other references. Some are lascivious, others commercialized. Some describe young girls who died tragically, others gloss the *Song of Songs* or record new mystical experiences. Today, this phrase continues to have a prominent

association with women and virgins who have devoted themselves to religion, but it retains multivalent meanings. The history of the bride of Christ extends across Christian history, beginning with the Gnostic sects and continuing on in modern popular culture. My own research spans the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, focusing on lesser-known Dutch and German brides, but medieval art, music, hagiography, secular literature, Latin theological treatises, and the proceedings of church counsels must also be examined, to further sharpen and clarify our understanding of medieval brides of Christ.

The good and virtuous Christian woman was (and in some churches, still *is*), above all, expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient. Whether a nun, a laywoman, a virgin, a widow, a married mother, a prostitute, or a heretic, a woman's behavior and the quality of her life were judged according to these three ideals. Through a series of cultural and linguistic coincidences, prescriptive Christian ideals for women created the medieval bride of Christ. She[10] was an amalgamation of the Virgin Mary, the blessed saints, Mary and Martha, the *Song of Songs*' female voice, adulterous pre-exilic Israel, the Hebrew bible's matriarchs, and honorable Roman matrons and virgins. She was also the Church, the human soul, *each* human's soul, and the hopeful story of her tumultuous courtship could parallel the transformation of the sinful into the saved. Because she was *loved by* the beloved, identified as the passive recipient of Christ's love, her own actions, thoughts, writing, and experiences were overshadowed. If this state of *being-loved* happened to draw outside attention and recognition, to be written about, chronicled, approved of, repeated with a sense of amazement, then she (the bride) became a public bride of Christ, and every woman (and man) I have written about in this insufficient history became a bride of Christ because someone *else* believed that she was. Though she was the bride of the *Song of Songs,* beloved and love-crazed, transformed by her beloved's glances-touches-kisses, the medieval bride of Christ was something

[10] She, because even in uninflected English, bride is imagined female. Only in the last few years has our language, our western imagination, attempted to accommodate a masculine bride, a feminine bridegroom. Though medieval men became brides of Christ, they first became feminized. Bernard of Clairvaux had a man's body, but God loved his soul as a woman. Seuse, the autobiographic mystic, loved feminized Wisdom as a man and Christ as a woman. Gender roles were so firmly established for marriage that men first had to become women before marrying Christ. "Bride" is a woman about to be married, and as Keller points, the medieval gender roles continue on in our own modern cultural expectations: "our own spontaneous identification of the bride of Christ [is] with a religious woman – or does anyone involuntarily think of a monk when he or she hears the expression 'bride of Christ?'" Keller, *My Secret is Mine*, 32.

any woman, any soul, could hope to become. There is no quota, no limit, to how many brides Christ might take. These women were presumed to be blessed with every virtue *because* they were adored and adorned by the Divine. It is vital to remember that each bride was different, a unique individual, and that there is no single model for the bride of Christ. These women's names and voices deserve to be differentiated from their shared status as Jesus' wives. Even though the phrase "bride of Christ" remains fixed, the women it signifies are multiple, and cannot be represented by one umbrella-concept. The phrase itself has a history almost as long as Christianity and it remains popular because it describes a special kind of personal and intimate love Christians hope to experience, either in life or in heaven, but Christ has taken many brides. This dissertation has, perhaps for the first time, offered a more rigorous examination of medieval Brides of Christ. Though I have not exhaustively answered the questions of who married Jesus, who tried to marry Jesus, how they did it, and why they wanted to, I hope I have at least demonstrated that the phrase "bride of Christ" must be used and treated with cautious suspicion. Women and men who married Jesus were never just "Mrs. Jesus Christ."

Poems from Niederländische Geistliche Lieder des XV. Jahrhunderts

Nr. 50
Dit is die wise:
Truren moet ic nacht ende dach
Ende hebben swear verlanghen
Om en ….

Ellendich is dat herte mijn
Ellende moet mijn leven sijn
Ellende heft mi doorschoten.
Ellende is in mi so groot,
Si castiet mi boven maten.

Veel beter waert ellendich te sijn
Dan ic verghete die liefste mijn
Die van niet mi heft gheschapen,
Mit sinen heilighen bloede verlost,
Die en wil ic nimmermeer laten.

Mit recht sal hi die liefste sijn,
Daer ic om doghe so grote pijn
Van buten ende van binnen,
Ende daer ic ooc om derven wil
Ghenoechte mijnre sinnren.

Hem bevel ic mi gheheel
Die waerlic is dat beste deel,
Dat iemant mach vercrighen.
Al soudet mi costen mijn leven al,
Ic wil him ghestadich bliven.

Och ic en mach rusten nacht noch dach
Tot dat ic hem beschowen mach
Al in der hoochster minnen
Ende soetelic ghebruken mach
In alle mine sinnen.

Dan is mijn droefheit al ghedaen
Ende mijn ellende temael vergaen,
Als ic hem mach beschowen
Al in dat hemelsche vaderlant,
Dat vol is alre vrouden.

Troost mi, mijn soete life, allein:
Al ander troost is mi te clein,

Nr. 50
This is the way (tune to which the song is set):
I must sorrow night and day and have such strong longings for him...

Miserable is that heart of mine
Miserable must my life be
Misery has shot me through
Misery is so great in me,
It chastises me before Matins

It is much better to be miserable
Than that I should forget my most loved
Who created me out of nothingness
By shedding his holy blood
I will nevermore be allowed to be with him.

With richteousness shall he be the dearest,
There I out of virtuousness so great a pain
From outside and from inside
And there it also will come from
Enough of all of my sins.

It befell him I myself entirely
Who truly is the best part
That anyone may discover
If it should cost me my entire life
I will stay with him continually.

And I may rest night after day
Until that I may fall into his consideration
Al in the highest love
And the sweetest may take or use
In all my senses.

Then is my misery all over
And my sorrows entirely gone away
If I may fall into his consideration
Everything in the spiritual kingdom
That is filled with every woman.

Console me, my sweet love, comfort only me:
Every other consolation is insufficient for me

Ontsteket mijn herte van binnen Mit uwer ewigher soeticheit Ende laet mi niet allein!	With your eternal sweetness (comfort me) And don't leave me alone!
Mijn herte dat doghet so grote pijn Dat ic dus moet verscheiden sijn Van minen lieven heren. Hier om wil ic dat cruce omvaen Ende mit Cristus sterven leren.	My heart suffers so great a pain That I must depart this life From my loving lord Here I will take up the cross And with Christ learn to die.
Mit cristus aen den cruce te staen Ende hem mit minnen omtevaen In sterven alre dinghen: Dat make tons sinen beelde ghelijc Die voor ons starf van minnen.	To stand with Christ on the cross And topple him with my love In dying all things That make then his picture likeness They before us die from love.
In deser tijt en vindic niet, Ten is al liden ende verdriet, Dan god alleen te minnen. Dat sterven is so menichfout Van buten ende van binnen.	In this time I find him not at all Then it is all sorrow and grief Then god is only to love. That death is so many times From outside and from inside.
O cruce, o doot, o hertenpijn, Waneer sal ic verledighet sijn Van uwer bitterheiden? Als ic ten salighen leven gac, So suldi vanmi scheiden.	Oh cross, oh death, oh heartache (or strong pain?), When shall I be taken up and out Of your bitterness? If I am to live a life of holiness Then this suffering should depart from me.
O leven alre soeticheit, Mijn herte moet worden uutverbreit Om u gheheel te ontfanghen. Die mi alleen vernoeghen mach, Nae di state mijn verlanghen.	Oh life of all sweetness My heart wants to be widened To entirely surround you Who only makes me something After they something my longing.

Souke van Dorstens' choice between two bridegrooms[1]

Sister Souke from Dorsten came from Sneek in Friesland. Her parents were good and honorable burgers and very rich. Souke was their only daughter. When her parents were still alive she was engaged to a respectable young man. He and Souke were very fond of each other and walked together in faith and friendship. Then his family very much wanted that he should travel for a short time to see the world. After that (journey) a glittering would be celebrated.

While her future bridegroom was away the Holy Spirit breathed a thought into Souke's mind, [suggesting] that she would rather live spiritually and leave the world and everything in it behind. At this time both of her parents died. She didn't think about them for very long, and traveled to Diepenveen. There she was well-received. After they had been informed of her background and way of life (namely that she was of a rich Friesan family and escaping a marriage) they were happy to offer her a place to

[1] From the life of Souke van Dorsten (d. Oct. 14, 1480) Scheepsma, *Hemels verlangen*, 161-3.

live. When her family learned that Souke had entered the convent, they brought the news as fast as they could to her pleasant young fiancé. He took a great show of power to Diepenveen to take her away from the convent, coming there with his entire family. They spoke with the Father and immediately demanded Souke's release. Our father behaved as becomes a good shepherd. If Souke herself wanted to go out of the convent, so he said, then she was entirely free to do so, and he would himself guarantee her safety while she made her decision. But he would not permit her to be kidnapped violently although it might cost him his life. Also, Souke gave no indication that she wanted to leave the convent. Her future bridegroom was so shocked at this that the grief on his face was plain to read, for Souke had caused him much suffering. The relatives ranted and raved like lions and lionesses, above all a certain woman who was pregnant, a malicious person indeed. (rant/rave like lions is idiomatic phrase for ranting like madmen/raising a ruckus/pandemonium)

Souke went to dress herself in her worldly clothes. Then the father realized that there was no other possibility, and he went out to the church with all the worldly people and opened the door between the church and the cloister. On that spot Souke would have to appear and choose between two things: to return to the world or remain in the convent. Souke had much difficulty with this choice because of the distance from her land (homesickness) but her rich possessions hardly mattered to her. She was dressed in a costly Friesian costume. When she trod on the threshold to the cloister the father stood in the doorway, and next to him was her promised bridegroom. Souke became so terrified that there is no way to describe her state in writing. No one could assist her; she had to fight out this battle entirely alone. The aforementioned woman was ranting so much that men had to restrain her, otherwise she would have violently dragged Souke out of the convent.

Sister Souke paced back and forth across the convent's threshold, heavily conflicted. Sister Griete ten Colken, a sister with a great heart, saw these steps from a short distance. She ran to sister Souke and said to her: "Oh bride of Christ, stride now forcefully, because God in the heavens and all His angels see your conflict. Here life lasts but briefly, but eternity endures so long! If you leave, then you please the devil and make him snigger. Stay here with us and then you will make your guardian angel happy." When she heard these words, she plucked up her courage. She stepped piously away and made to go inside the enclosure. Then the young man realized that his efforts had been unfruitful, he beat against the ground in despair, so hard that everyone feared that he would soon be dead. Souke went away shyly and the father closed the door. The sisters rushed to her and comforted her.

The party left furiously. They still tried to get authorization to take Sister Souke out of the convent. In the interim our father wrote a letter to the prior of Windesheim, to whom he laid out the entire incident. The prior came immediately to Diepenveen, went to the chapel, and dressed Sister Souke in her habit there. On the same day she also made her profession. After that she progressed in all virtues and humble work, day and night. She was a tall, distinguished Choirly Woman (choir sister). Whatever work she took up, it was as if the work simply flew through her hands.... At night, Stine Groten and sister Souke would stay up all night and do all of the work for the following day.

[Zuster Souke van Dorsten was afkomstig uit Sneek in Friesland. Haar ouders waren geode en eerbare burgers en zeer rijk. Souke was hun enige dochter. Toen haar ouders nog leefden was zij aan een eerzame jongeman uitgehuwelijkt. Hij en sSouke hielden veel van elkaar en gingen in vriendschap en vertrouwen met elkaar om. Toen wilde zijn familie graag dat hij een tijdje weg zou gaan om iets van de wereld te zien. Daarna zou ere en schitterende bruiloft worden gevierd.

Terwijl haar toekomstige bruidegom weg was blies de Heilige Geest Souke de gedachte in dat zij geestelijk zou moeten gaan leven en de wereld en al wat daarin was achter zich laten. In deze tijd stierven ahar beide ouders. Zij bedacht zich niet lan en reisde naar Diepenveen. Dar werd zij vriendelijk ontvangen. Nadat men naar haar levenswijze en haar afkomst had geïnformeerd, werd haar welwillend een plaats geboden.

Toen haar familie erachter kwan dat Souke in het klooster was getreden, brachtt men het nieuws zo snel mogelijk aan de aanstaande bruidegom over. Hij trok met groot machtsvertoon naar Diepenveen om haar uit het klooster te halen, samen met zijn hele familie. Ze spraken met de pater en eisten Souke

terug.Onze pater gedroeg zich zoals he teen geode herder betaamt. Wilde Souke zelf weer naar buiten gaan, zo zei hij, dan was zij daarin geheel vrij, al zou hij zelf verantwoording voor een dergelijke beslissing niet willen dragen. Maar hij stond niet toe dat men haar met geweld ontvoerde, ook al zou het hem zijn leven kosten. Ook Souke gav te kennen het klooster niet te willen verlaten. Haar toekomstige bruidegom was hierdoor zo geschokt dat het verdriet van zijn gezicht was aft e lezen, hetgeen Souke veel leed deed. Zijn verwanten gingen als leeuwen en leeuwinnen tekeer, vooral een zekere vrouw die zwanger was, een boosaardig mens. Die eiste zelfs dat men de deur naar het kloosterslot zou openen.

Souke ging nog gekleed in haar wereldse kledij. Toen de pater inzag date r geen andere mogelijkheid meer was, ging hij met al de wereldlijke mensen naar de kerk en opened de deur tussen kerk en besloten klooster. Op die plek moest ook Souke verschijnen om te kiezen voor een van tweeën.: terugkeren naar de wereld of in het klooster blijven. Souke had zoveel moeite met deze keuze dat het afstand doen van haar land en haar rijke bezit er voor haar nauwelijks nog iets toe deed. Zijw as gekleed in een kostabar Fries kostuum. Toen zij de kloosteromgang betrad, stond de pater in de deuropening, met naast zich haar toekomstige bruidegom. Souke werd zo bang dat het met geen pen te beschrijven is. Niemand kon haar bijstaan; zij moest deze strijd helemaal alleen uitvechten. De al eerder genoemde vrouw ging zo tekeer dat men haar tegen moest houden, anders had zij Souke met geweld uit het klooster besleurd.

Zuster Souke liep in zware tweestrjde heen en weer over de kloostergang. Zuster Griete ten Colken, een zuster met een groot hart, zag deze strijd van een afstandje aan. Zij liep naar zuster Souke toe en sprak: "O bruid van Christus, strijd nu krachtig, want God in de hemel en al Zijn engelen zien uw tweestrijd aan. Hier duurt het leven kort, maar eeuwig duurt so lang! Gaat u weg, dan maakt u de duivel blij en laat u hem grinniken. Blift u hier bij ons, dan maakt u uw heilige beschermengel blij!" Toen zij deze woorden horde, vatte zij weer moed. Zij stapte vroom terug en maakte aanstalten het slot binnen te gaan. Toen de jongeman inzag dat zijn inspanningen vergeefs waren geweest, sloeg hij bewustloos tegen de grond, zo hard dat men vreesde dat hij dood zou blijven. Souke ging shcielijk weg en de parter sloot de deur. De zusters snelden naar haar toe en trooostten haar. Woedend vertrokken de belagers. Zij probeerden nog toestemming te krijgen om zuster Souke met geweld uit het klooster te halen. In de tussentijd schreef onze paterechter een brief aan de prior van Windesheim aan wie hij de hele zaak uitlegde. De De prior kwam meteen naar Diepenveen, ging naar het kapittelhuis en kleedde zuster Souke daar in. Op dezelfde dag nog deed zij professie. Daarna vorderde zij in alle deugden en nederige werken, dag en nacht. Zij was een rijzige, voorname en bekoorlijke vrouw. Welk karwei zij ook aanvatte, het leek alsof het werk haar door de handen vlóóg.

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