

Invisible Injuries:
The Salvific and Sacramental Roles
of Christina Mirabilis
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THE THIRTEENTH-CENTURY *Life of Christina Mirabilis* offers a unique vision of the mystical body. It is a text often read for its fascinating example of extraordinary somatic practices; however, Christina's miraculous body can also be understood as a commentary on two of the key theological concerns of her day: purgatory and the Eucharist. This commentary arises directly from her biographer's discussion of her ascetic body. Like a number of medieval female mystics, Christina engages in active and heroic practices of self-mortification. In contrast to many of her contemporaries, her biographer's emphasis is not on the wounds she inflicts on herself but on the fact that these wounds miraculously heal, leaving no signs of their previous existence. Typically in devotional literature, wounds are important indicators of how to read a body, at times even acting as a kind of bloody alphabet. However, the lack of markings on Christina's body suggests that there is another way to read it. This essay suggests that her unmarked body can be interpreted as a vehicle for theological commentary and argues that her biographer uses it in order to engage with contemporary debates regarding purgatory and the nature of the Eucharist. It opens with an exploration of the visibility of the wounded body before turning to the construction of Christina Mirabilis as a purgatorial intercessor and commentator on the Eucharistic miracle in relation to Mary's baking of Christ in the oven of her womb.

Visible and Invisible: The Wounded Body

In devotional, mystical, and hagiographical literature, the wounded body is often a marker of the subject's piety or sanctity, and it invites particular intellectual and emotive responses from readers. Most importantly, this is true of Christ's body. For example, when writing for an audience of male monastics, the Benedictine John Whiterig, the Monk of Farne (d. 1371), describes Christ's wounded body as an open book offering itself as an object of study:

His body, hanging on the cross, is a book, open for your perusal. The words of this book are Christ's actions, as well as his suffering and passion, for everything that he did serves for our instruction. His wounds are the letters or characters, the five chief wounds being the five vowels and the others the consonants of your book. Learn how to read the lamentations and alas! too, the reproaches, outrages, insults and humiliations which are written therein.¹

Here, Christ is explicitly positioned as a tool of edification, and the reader is directly invited to become a student of his body-text. The author calls upon the reader's intellect to rationalize and comprehend the affective imagery that is presented to it. Other famous examples of the textualized Christ include those found in the *Long Charter of Christ* and Richard Rolle's *Meditation B* where his body is allegorized as parchment written upon with scourges.²

1. Hugh Farmer, ed. and trans., *The Monk of Farne: The Meditations of a Fourteenth-Century Monk* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1961), 76; "corpus etenim eius pendens in cruce uolumen expansum est coram oculis tuis; uerba uolumina huius sunt actus Christi, dolores et passiones eius. Omnis enim Christi accio nostra est instructio, litere seu characteres uoluminis huius vulnera eius sunt, quorum quinque plage quinque sunt uocales, cetera uero consonantes libri tui: disce ergo legere lamentationes et ue contumelias, et terrores, conuicia, eciam obprobria que in eo scripta sunt!" Raymonde Foreville, Jean Leclercq, John Morson and Hugh Farmer, eds., *Meditationes cuiusdam monachi apud Farneland quondam solitarii*, in *Analecta Monastica: Textes et Études sur la vie des Moines au Moyen Age* (Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1957), 158-215, 191.

2. Mary Caroline Spalding, ed., *The Middle English Charters of Christ* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Bryn Mawr College, 1914), 58-60; *Meditation B*, in S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, ed.,

Such meditations also occur in visual culture. Vincent Gillespie reminds us of John Mirk's assertion that Crucifixion images were produced for those who found it impossible to imagine the Passion without the guidance and focus of a visual referent: "This referent could be a crucifix itself or one of the many Images of Pity widely found in Books of Hours and Primers in England in the fifteenth century as well as in churches, and, with the advent of printing, made on single printed sheets often with an indulgence attached."³ Likewise, John Lydgate's *Dolorous Pyte of Chrystes Passion* offers a clear example of the kind of responses provoked by such images ("my bloody woundis, set here in picture, / Hath hem in mynde knelyng on your kne"),⁴ while the cult of the stigmata increased in popularity in the late Middle Ages, as did the "obsession," as Caroline Walker Bynum terms it, with quantifying the number of drops of blood shed by Christ during his Passion.⁵ The visual evidence of Christ's suffering is thus central to medieval piety. Even Christ's circumcision, a wound that prefigures those he will later suffer during his Passion, was important in this respect. The author of the *Speculum sacerdotale*, for instance, stresses that "Crist was not cicumcised for eny nede but for signyficacion."⁶ Elsewhere, the wound in Christ's

Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse, Early English Text Society, orig. ser. 293 (London: Oxford University Press, 1988), 75, lines 236-37.

3. Vincent Gillespie, "Strange Images of Death: The Passion in Later Medieval English Devotional and Mystical Writing," in *Zeit, Tod und Ewigkeit in der Renaissance Literatur*, ed. James Hogg, *Analecta Cartusiana* 117, no. 3 (1987): 110-59, 113.

4. *Ibid.*, 146n10. Gillespie cites Henry N. MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, Part 1, Early English Text Society, extra ser., 107 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench and Trübner, 1911), 250, lines 5-6.

5. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 175-78. Giles Constable discusses the visual nature of stigmata in relation to *imitatio Christi* in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Martha and Mary; The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ; The Orders of Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 198-203.

6. Edward H. Weatherly, ed., *Speculum sacerdotale*, Early English Text Society, orig. ser. 200 (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 16. Cited in Virginia Langum, "The Wounded Surgeon: Devotion, Compassion and Metaphor in Medieval England," in *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture*, ed. Larissa Tracy and Kelly DeVries (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 269-90, 288.

side can be found framing *mappa mundi*, a striking visual image which figures the world as existing within the wounded body.⁷

One of the most important features of visual devotion, however, is the increased interest in the Elevation of the Host, an act which begins to privilege sight of the consecrated bread over communion itself in the later Middle Ages. Gary Macy argues that at “the moment of elevation, the people came as close to seeing Christ as possible in this life.”⁸ By the thirteenth century, devotion to the real presence through focusing the gaze on the Host was a widespread phenomenon, and one practiced enthusiastically by religious women of the Low Countries. Indeed, the elevation effectively came to replace communion in popular devotion: “The importance lay in the actual ‘seeing’ of Christ, alive and present” and “[I]ater in the Middle Ages, people would believe that the sight of the Host alone carried extraordinary graces.”⁹ What these examples demonstrate is not merely the fundamental importance of Christ’s wounded body generally but its visibility in particular. The visual evidence of Christ’s suffering is almost more important to late-medieval readers than the suffering itself; it is the basis of affective relationships with the divine.

Those who practice bodily *imitatio Christi* must similarly exhibit the physical evidence of having suffered. Elizabeth of Spalbeek, for example, displayed “many tokens of vyolens and schewynges of iniures” on her body as a result of her self-mortification,¹⁰ and in visions of Christ, mystics frequently experience highly visual encounters with his wounded body. Julian of Norwich famously desired to have “bodely sight” of the Passion in order to achieve greater “knowinge” of Christ,

7. Several such *mappa mundi* exist in manuscripts of Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*, e.g., Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 21 and London, British Library, MS Royal 14.C.xii, reproduced in Konrad Miller, *Mappaemundi: Die ältesten Weltkarten*, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: J. Roth, 1895), plate 16.

8. Gary Macy, *The Theologies of the Eucharist in the Early Scholastic Period: A Study of the Salvific Function of the Sacrament according to the Theologians c. 1080-c.1220* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 88.

9. *Ibid.*, 91-92 and 94.

10. *The Life of Elizabeth of Spalbeek*, in Jennifer N. Brown, ed., *Three Women of Liège: The Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis and Marie d’Oignies*, *Medieval Women: Tests and Contexts*; 23 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 36, line 195.

a desire that is fulfilled in an overwhelmingly visual description of the changing colors of Christ's body and blood complemented by her growth in "gostly sight."¹¹ At times mystics even describe the extremely visual experience of entering into Christ's wounded body though the wound in his side.¹² The English translation of James of Milan's *Stimulus amoris*, *The Prickyng of Love* (ca. 1380), embraces the spiritual importance of sight in this way, asserting how "on a time as i entrid in him with myn e3en opened me thou3te þat myn e3en were filled ful of his blod & so i 3eode in gropande til i come to þe innerest of his herte."¹³ Here, the experience of heightened vision is the precursor to divine union as the eyes become flooded with the blood of Christ. Vision is therefore fundamental to spiritual encounter. It is central to the experience of the mystic who envisions Christ, to the ascetic who wounds her body in imitation of Christ and to the reader who meditates on images of Christ's suffering.

The broken bodies of Christ and his ascetic imitators are thus the stages on which the spectacles of religious devotion are played out, and the wounds that these bodies display shape the affective responses of readers and viewers. In stark contrast, however, Christina Mirabilis offers a different kind of discourse on wounding; one that is not focused on

11. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins, eds., *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 127.

12. Both Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena visualize souls entering Christ's side. See Anne Kirkham and Cordelia Warr, eds., *Wounds in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2014), 6.

13. Harold Kane, ed., *The Prickyng of Love*, Salzburg Studies in English Literature. Elizabethan and Renaissance Studies 92:10, vol. 2 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, 1983), 9, lines 15-18. Earlier writers such as Rupert of Deutz (ca. 1075-1129) also appealed to the affective nature of visions in their writings. Rupert's vision of Christ prefigures the type experienced by later visionaries: "my eyes were opened and I saw the Son of God; while awake I saw the living Son of Man on the cross. I saw not with corporeal vision, but my bodily eyes suddenly vanished so that I might see, and better ones, that is, interior eyes, were opened. . . . And what was his appearance like? Human tongue cannot grasp it with words." Ruperti Tuitiusis, *De Gloria et Honore Filii Hominis super Mattheum*, ed. Hrabamus Haacke, CCCM 29 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1979), 369, lines 242-55. Cited and trans. in Bernard McGinn, *Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century* (New York, NY: Crossroads, 1996), 329.

the visual evidence of wounds, but on bodily and spiritual processes of healing, of rendering injuries invisible. Christina's suffering is necessary in the scheme of her life but her self-torment is strikingly unique because, unlike the experiences of contemporary ascetics, it leaves no physical evidence on her body and thus offers no immediately obvious way of reading it. Indeed, her biographer notes that after provoking dogs to chase her through a wood of thorns, "when she had washed off the blood, no trace of the wounds remained" (et tamen cum sanguinem diluisset, nullum laesurae vestigium apparebat).¹⁴ Her body is portrayed as whole, self-healing, and unified.

Christina, as her name suggests, is modelled on Christ and his role in human salvation. However, her biographer frames his treatment of her miraculous body in the broader context of debates surrounding purgatory and the Eucharist. He locates Christina's unwounded body at the center of his discourse about these two defining theological concerns of the late Middle Ages, using it to advance his belief in the efficacy of purgatory, a state he felt formed a link between the living and the "beloved dead," and the true nature of the Eucharist.¹⁵ A number of critics, including Robert Sweetman, Barbara Newman, and Anke Passenier, have noted the purgatorial commentary offered by Christina's resurrected body, but the wholeness of that body also links it to the Sacrament of the Altar. Not only are they both concerned with wholeness, but the purgatorial and Eucharistic features of Christina Mirabilis's *Life* correlate with episodes where she most clearly displays Christ-like attributes. Thus her biographer uses his subject to directly model and comment on the salvific nature of Christ.

14. J. Pinius, ed., *Vita Christinae Mirabilis Virginis, Acta sanctorum*, vol. 32, 24 July, vol. 5 (1868), 637-60, 653; *The Life of Christina the Astonishing*, in Margot H. King and Barbara Newman, ed. and trans., *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints' Lives, Abbot John of Cantimpré, Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywieres*, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*; 19 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 135.

15. Robert Sweetman, "Thomas of Cantimpré, *Mulieres Religiosae*, and Purgatorial Piety: Hagiographical *Vitae* and the Beguine 'Voice'," in "*A Distinct Voice*": *Medieval Studies in Honor of Leonard E. Boyle, O.P.*, ed. Jacqueline Brown and William P. Stoneman (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 606-28, 612.

Christ and Christina

Christina's *Life* was written by the Dominican friar Thomas of Cantimpré (1201–1272) in ca. 1232, and it can be found in eighteen Latin and seven vernacular manuscripts (one Middle French, one Middle English and five Middle Dutch).¹⁶ Christina was a laywoman, unaffiliated with any particular monastic order. This, notes Andrea Dickens, is particularly significant because it enables Thomas to “probe the theological significance of her apostolate free of making her conform to a particular order's model of spirituality.”¹⁷ Indeed, the *Life* “does not conform to any recognized hagiographical paradigm,” which suggests that it does not operate simply as a saintly exemplar.¹⁸ Instead, what follows is an examination of Christina's representation of the salvific and Eucharistic functions of the body of Christ in her *Life*. That Eucharistic devotion is prevalent is not surprising, for as Dyan Elliot notes, “In the wake of Lateran IV, attention to Christ's body was often translated into a focus on the Eucharist, sometimes to the point of obsession.”¹⁹ In the *Life*, Thomas paints Christina as particularly devoted to the Eucharist. He recounts that she went from priest to priest until she found one who would give her communion, at which point she fled the town by miraculously walking on water.²⁰ However, as we shall see, Christina not only

16. Suzan Folkerts, “The Transmission and Appropriation of the *Vita* of Christina Mirabilis in Carthusian Communities,” *Church History and Religious Culture* 96 (2016): 80–105, 84–85. For details of the manuscripts, see Suzan Folkerts, *Voorbeeld op schrift: Dr overlevering en toe-eigening van de vita van Christina Mirabilis in de late middeleeuwen* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2010), 241–42 and 248.

17. Andrea Janelle Dickens, *The Female Mystic: Great Women Thinkers of the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 42.

18. Dyan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 193. Elliot further argues for the misogyny of Thomas's work, suggesting that the *Life* should be read in light of his Dominican affiliation and its “progressively censorious position regarding clerical interaction with women” and that “we are confronted with the irony that Thomas of Cantimpré, one of the earliest and most important sponsors of the Beguines, was also a major force in the growing mistrust of female spirituality,” 204 and 212.

19. *Ibid.*, 177.

20. *Life of Christina*, 133; *Vita Christinae*, 652.

experiences miracles as a result of receiving the Eucharist, she is also shown to embody its properties.

Christina's similarity to Christ is established at the beginning of the *Life* where Thomas recounts what can only be termed her first resurrection. He quotes the influential cardinal and champion of the *mulieres sanctae*, James of Vitry, who makes reference to Christina in his *Life of Marie of Oignies* (1215):

I saw another [understand that he means Christina] in whom God worked so wondrously that after she had lain dead for a long time—but before her body was buried in the ground—her soul returned to her body and she lived again. She obtained from the Lord that she would endure purgatory, living in this world in her body. It was for this reason that she was afflicted for a long time by the Lord, so that sometimes she rolled herself in the fire, and sometimes in the winter she remained for lengthy periods in icy water and at other times she was driven to enter the tombs of the dead. But after she had performed penance in so many ways, she lived in peace and merited grace from the Lord and many times, rapt in spirit, she led the souls of the dead as far as purgatory, or through purgatory as far as the kingdom of heaven, without any harm to herself.²¹

(Vidi, inquit, aliam (Christinam intellige) circa quam [tam] mirabiliter operatus est Dominus, quod cum diu mortua jacuisset, antequam in terra corpus ejus sepeliretur, [anima ad corpus revertente] revixit; et a Domino obtinuit, ut in [hoc] seculo vivens in corpore, purgatorium sustineret. Unde longo tempore ita mirabiliter a Domino afflicta est; ut quandoque se volutaret in ignem; [et] quandoque in hyeme, in aqua glaciali diu moraretur; quandoque etiam sepulchra mortuorum intrare cogebatur. Tandem in tanta pace peracta poenitentia, et tantam a Domino gratiam promeruit, ut multotiens rapta in spiritu animas defunctorum usque in purgatorium vel [per] purgatorium sine aliqua sui laesione usque ad superna regna conduceret.)²²

21. *Life of Christina*, 127–28.

22. *Vita Christinae*, 650.

This passage summarizes the *Life's* foremost concerns: that Christina's resurrection from the dead and consequent bodily suffering is intended specifically to liberate souls from purgatory, without harm (although not without pain) to herself. In the process it emphasizes the parallel between Christina's salvific purpose and that of Christ. This association is especially clear because while many individuals, such as Elisabeth of Schönau, Lutgard of Aywières, Ida of Nivelles, and even Margery Kempe, famously offered their prayers and pains for those in purgatory, none shares Christina's uniquely resurrected and self-healing body. While Christina's *Life* reflects many of the concerns addressed in the lives of Low Countries women, especially Eucharistic devotion, her resurrected nature combined with her miraculous bodily healing differentiates her significantly from her contemporaries.²³

Purgatorial Piety: Christina's Salvific Role

Christina's life of purgatorial intercession begins when, as a child, she experiences the first of these "deaths." In a passage which Dyan Elliot observes "reifies mechanisms of judgment, which many heretics openly contested,"²⁴ Christina offers an orthodox description of the horrors of purgatory upon miraculously returning to her senses:

As soon as I died, angels of God, the ministers of light, received my soul and led me into a dark and terrible spot which was filled with the souls of men. The torments that I saw in that place were so many and so cruel that no tongue is adequate to tell of them.²⁵

23. Miraculous preservation of the body in the face of martyrdom (but not resurrection) is a feature of numerous saints' lives. See Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 28-44, 38. Famously, Catherine of Siena's stigmata were rendered invisible at her request. Raymond of Capua, *The Life of St Catherine of Siena*, ed. and trans. George Lamb (London: Harvill, 1960), 165-66.

24. Dyan Elliot, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitorial Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 76.

25. *Life of Christina*, 131.

(Statim, inquit, ut defuncta sum, susceperunt meam animam ministri lucis, angeli Dei, et deduxerunt me in locem quemdam tenebrosam et horridam, animabus hominum pleuum.)²⁶

This transportation ultimately leads Christina to heaven where, from the splendor of his throne, God directly presents her with two choices: “either to remain with me now or to return to the body and undergo there the punishments of an immortal soul in a mortal body without damage to it, and by these sufferings to deliver all those souls on whom you had compassion in that place of purgatory” (aut nunc scilicet permanere mecum; aut ad corpus reverti, ibique agere poenas immortalis animae per mortale corpus sine detrimento sui, omnesque illas animas, quas in illo purgatorii loco miserata es, ipsis tuis poenis eripere).²⁷ Somewhat inevitably, Christina chooses the latter option. Significantly though, it is only Christina’s soul which is taken on this celestial journey through purgatory to heaven; her body remains on earth, albeit in the church rafters where it ascends and remains until a priest summons it down, effectively performing an exorcism.²⁸ This episode is important because the soul’s return to Christina’s “mortal body” reveals that Christina’s resurrected form is not that which was thought to be attained by all saved Christians after the Last Judgement. Instead, Christina inhabits a purgatorial body.

Through its invisible injuries, Christina’s body figures the experience of disembodied souls in hell and purgatory, which were typically envisioned somatically in medieval theology, art, and literature. As Bynum notes, “preachers, hagiographers, and schoolmen saw nothing fundamentally inconsistent in depicting the bodily tortures of disembodied spirits,” yet because these bodies were essentially figurative, they were

26. *Vita Christinae*, 651.

27. *Life of Christina*, 131; *Vita Christinae*, 652.

28. For a discussion of Christina’s possession see King and Newman, *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 34–35, and Barbara Newman, “Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs, and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century,” *Speculum* 73, no. 3 (1998): 733–70, doi: 10.2307/2887496. Dickens argues that possession is the only rationale for Christina’s behavior. *The Female Mystic*, 39 and 50.

also indestructible.²⁹ Indeed, both Hugh of St Victor and Peter Lombard stress the “perpetual torture-ability” of the incorruptible body.³⁰ Christina’s resurrected body serves specifically to exemplify the continual suffering of the indestructible purgatorial body, thereby “dramatizing and visualizing the future of every sinner” and acting as a “living sermon” for Thomas’s audience.³¹ Indeed, numerous visual images of tormented souls depict horrific tortures but leave the body itself unmarked. In one example, found in the fifteenth-century Dutch Missal of Eberhard von Greiffenklau, tongues of fire lick a group of unfortunate souls in purgatory, but render no apparent harm to their pristine bodies (Baltimore, Walters Art Museum, MS W.174, fol. 168v). Just as the somatic representation of suffering souls offers a commentary on the indestructible body, the promotion of the reality of purgatory is also facilitated by the portrayal of Christina’s imperceptible bodily suffering in resurrected form. Suffering is central to her *Life*, and the fact that it is essentially invisible, if not inaudible, is directly linked to her resurrected state. Indeed, the fact that she suffers physical pain is much more significant than any outward manifestation of it. As Esther Cohen argues, in the late Middle Ages, pain was increasingly understood as an “interior sensation, rather than an exterior trauma.”³² The locus of pain in Christina’s *Life* is specifically interior, as is its spiritual significance. Therefore, as Barbara Newman suggests, *The Life of Christina* can be read in two ways. On one level it appeals to a broad audience interested in the depiction of wondrous events, and on another level, “more theologically educated readers could understand it as a sophisticated treatise on purgatory.”³³

This second way of reading the *Life* arises from the fact that Christina’s body remains unchanged from its original form, despite having

29. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1995), 281.

30. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, NY: Zone Books, 1991), 131.

31. Anke E. Passenier, “The Life of Christina Mirabilis: Miracles and the Construction of Marginality,” in *Women and Miracle Stories: A Multidisciplinary Exploration*, ed. Anne-Marie Korte (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 145-78, 163 and 161.

32. Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 258.

33. King and Newman, *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 37.

died and her soul having reached heaven. Newman echoes Sweetman's argument that because Christina "has already died and returned to life she possesses a glorified body like those that, according to Thomas Aquinas and other schoolmen, the blessed could enjoy after the general resurrection."³⁴ An important stress, however, should be placed on the word "like." Christina's incorruptible body only resembles the ultimate resurrected body; because she remains "an immortal soul in a mortal body" she signifies what is to come but does not yet inhabit that state, just as her body will go on to signify, but not become, the Eucharist.³⁵ Christina's body is therefore not the resurrected body of saved Christians. Having died and been resurrected but not having attained her heavenly body, Christina occupies a unique and liminal space in between the earthly and the heavenly. As Amy Hollywood emphasizes, Christina's resurrected body is "one still subject to death yet of a spiritual nature unknown to those who have not died before."³⁶ She belongs to two worlds, but is not wholly of either.

The fact that Christina is still subject to death, despite having already died, is reinforced by the point at which she is literally reincorporated back into earthly society, during the *Agnus Dei* of her requiem Mass:

At the same time that the *Agnus Dei* was being said for the first time while mass was being celebrated for me, my soul was standing before the throne of Divine Majesty, but by the time they said the *Agnus Dei* for the third time, I had been restored to my body by those swift angels.³⁷

(Ea etenim hora, qua dicebatur in Missa pro me celebrata primo *Agnus Dei*, qui tollis peccata mundi, amina mea throno divinae majestatis astabat. Ubi vero *Agnus Dei* tertio dicebatur, ab angelis velocibus restituta sum corpori.)³⁸

34. King and Newman, *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 36; Sweetman, "Thomas of Cantimpré," 619 and 627n64.

35. *Life of Christina*, 131; *Vita Christinae*, 652.

36. Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 45.

37. *Life of Christina*, 131.

38. *Vita Christinae*, 652.

Not only does this passage indicate the rapidity with which Christina is restored to her body, it again evokes Christ's sacrificial and salvific purpose. The *Agnus Dei*, which precedes the consecration of the Eucharist, indicates her intercessory role in the scheme of salvation, which, as instructed by God, she embraces through self-inflicted purgatorial mortification. Thus, like Christ, Christina enables suffering souls to be freed from their sins. Her salvific mortification includes sitting in ovens, in scalding cauldrons, and in freezing water, hitting herself, scratching her limbs with thorns, and provoking dogs to chase her. More important than the torments, however, is the fact that no evidence of them remains visible afterwards. For example, despite standing on a rotating water wheel in the middle of winter "no hurt appeared on her body" (*nec ulla laesura tamen apparebat in membris*); although she sat in boiling cauldrons and cried in agony as if in labor, "when she climbed out again she was quite unharmed" (*nec tamen egrediens habebat laesuram*); and after she was tortured on a rack "no fracture appeared in her limbs" (*non apparebat fractura in membris suis*).³⁹ These phenomena are directly related to the resurrected state of her body. Christina's body is literally in the world but not of it. This means that she is as susceptible to wounding as any other human being, yet unlike others, she can be healed miraculously because her body has already been reanimated.

Moreover, Christina's miraculous self-healing and repeated suffering without leaving visible scars or disfigurement offers a direct commentary on the nature of purgatorial suffering. As noted above, it echoes the physical punishments of those in hell and purgatory, where the body is endlessly tortured but never completely destroyed. In this Christina effects the reincorporation of other souls into life with Christ through her own literal reincorporation into a physical, suffering body, denying herself heaven in order that others might achieve it. This not only reflects Christina's choice but also Thomas of Cantimpré's concerns with presenting an orthodox meditation on the nature of purgatory, in which he had an overarching interest, seen elsewhere in his *Life of Lutgard of Aywieres*, *Supplement to the Life of Marie of Oignies*, and *Book*

39. *Life of Christina*, 134-35; *Vita Christinae*, 652.

of *Bees*.⁴⁰ Dickens even suggests that Christina's hearing of Louis II of Loon's deathbed confession corresponds to viaticum, the ministering of the Sacrament to the sick, and despite her inability to offer him absolution, her function is to provide "quasi-sacramental moments for her devotees."⁴¹ However, while the sermons of James of Vitry support the efficacy of Christina's actions, suggesting that suffrages may speak to God on behalf of the soul, the example of Christina hearing Louis's confession yet withholding absolution serves to demonstrate the limitations of lay roles within the church and assert the need for clerical involvement in the administering of the sacraments.⁴²

Freeing souls from purgatory through suffrage is an important factor in the spirituality of many female mystics (including Catherine of Siena, Catherine of Genoa, Mechthild of Magdeburg, Alice of Schaerbeek, and Margery Kempe), and, unlike confession, it does not require clerical involvement. In fact, Ellen Ross asserts that this salvific suffering is "critical to understanding the manner in which holy women participate in Jesus Christ's work in the world."⁴³ Indeed, Christina suffered for numerous individuals, including the aforementioned Count Louis of Loon (d. 1218), whose pains she shared and eased after seeing his "soul being carried to purgatory to be tormented with the most bitter punishments" (*Et vidit illa animam ejus tradi ad purgatorium, poenis acerrimis cruciandam*).⁴⁴ Thomas uses Christina's *Life* to boldly assert the efficacy of purgatorial intercession, affirming Bernard of Clairvaux's statement

40. King and Newman, *Thomas of Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 23.

41. Dickens, *Female Mystic*, 49-50.

42. Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 80. Both the Cathars and Waldensians, and later the Lollards, denied the necessity of confession to a priest. The consecration of the Host could also be performed by non-clergy according to these traditions. Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 57.

43. Ellen M. Ross, *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 125. Bynum notes that this was also the chief reason for Catherine of Siena's miraculous "resurrection." Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 171.

44. *Life of Christina*, 150; *Vita Christinae*, 658.

that “the dead shall profit by the prayers and sacrifices of the living.”⁴⁵ Thomas of Cantimpré and James of Vitry both preached the Albigensian Crusade against those who denied orthodox teachings on purgatory. Its opponents, including Waldensians, Cathars, and Apostolics, held that an individual’s fate is based entirely on personal merit and God’s will, so that after death the soul goes directly either to heaven or to hell, and therefore it is fruitless to pray for the dead.⁴⁶ In response, the works of numerous ecclesiastical authors writing at the turn of the thirteenth century, including the *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, which commanded audiences beyond the clerical, seek to affirm orthodox opinion by clearly demonstrating that the living can and do play a vital role in the fate of souls post-mortem.⁴⁷ Thomas specifically uses his *Life of Christina* for this purpose. Christina’s function is to deliver those souls for which she had compassion in purgatory, and by emphasizing this, Thomas reinforces the newly defined and highly debated doctrine, skilfully taking a figure who might traditionally be perceived as susceptible to heresy and promoting her as a model of orthodox belief.

Eucharistic Piety: Christina’s Sacramental Role

The doctrines of purgatory and the Eucharist are fundamentally intertwined in Christina’s *Life* because of its production in the context of thirteenth-century Dominican anti-Cathar sentiment in a period which produced many tracts on the nature of the Eucharist in response to popular religious movements.⁴⁸ Indeed, Newman specifically observes that “[b]y their eucharistic visions and ecstasies, holy women proved how wrong the heretics were to deny such grace.”⁴⁹ However, before turning to the importance of the Eucharist in Christina’s life, it is important to

45. Kilian Walsh and Emero Stiegman, trans., *On the Song of Songs III*, Cistercian Fathers; no. 31 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 4.10, 202.

46. Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (London: Scholar, 1984), 169.

47. King and Newman, *Thomas de Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 17–18; see 16–17 in the same volume for Thomas of Cantimpré’s involvement in anti-Catharism.

48. Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 53–54.

49. King and Newman, *Thomas de Cantimpré: The Collected Saints Lives*, 12.

note that although her lack of wounds means that she appears inviolate, other features of Christina's body are distinctly porous and changeable. For example, Thomas declares that the miracle of Christina sustaining herself on her own breast milk is comparable only to the Virgin birth.⁵⁰ Later her breasts bring forth a cleansing oil in which she dipped her bread and anointed "the wounds of her festering limbs as an ointment" (*liniebatque ex eo vulnera membrorum suorum putrescentium*).⁵¹ Here the boundaries of Christina's body are certainly permeable, even to the point of temporarily exhibiting wounds. Indeed, the reference to "festering limbs" seems to contradict Thomas's insistence elsewhere that she displayed no marks of her suffering on her body. However, in this instance the presence of wounds serves a very specific purpose. The emphasis lies not on Christina's wounding but on her wounds' healing. While painful injury is a precondition of her salvific purpose, her body must be restored in order to suffer again.

This restoration is effected by Christina's own body, something that Dickens views as Eucharistic: her body offers "sustaining food through which God's grace is present to help her persevere against her enemies. Normally these would be the functions that the Eucharistic host would provide." Indeed, these images "manifest sacramental grace" in Christina, "as opposed to in the sacraments themselves."⁵² She thus comes to serve a sacramental as well as a salvific purpose in her self-sustaining nature, and just as the transformations associated with the Eucharist are invisible, Christina's body does not undergo perceptible change.⁵³ Augustine asserts that invisibility is central to the power of the Eucharist and those who consume it are invisibly nourished and invisibly reborn.⁵⁴ Later the

50. *Life of Christina*, 132-33; *Vita Christinae*, 652. For other holy women who are sustained by Christ in the form of food, see Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, 186-87.

51. *Life of Christina*, 138; *Vita Christinae*, 654.

52. Dickens, *Female Mystic*, 49.

53. Pertinent to this is the association of medieval women's bodies with food outlined by Bynum. The image of Christ as mother "feeding humankind with his own blood in the eucharist" associates Christ's body with the nursing female body. *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 269-76; 270 and 274.

54. *In Iohannis evangelium tractatus CXXIV*, CCSL 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954), tract. 26, ch. 1, 260, cited in Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 20.

Eucharist was inadvertently defined in Berengar of Tours's confession of 1079 as the visible form of an invisible grace, terminology which went on to profoundly influence subsequent debates.⁵⁵ The *Life's* only image of Christina's injuries is therefore painted purely in order that they might be healed.⁵⁶ Elsewhere, her wounds' invisibility is continually stressed. This self-healing and self-feeding body corresponds to the unblemished body of Christ, not in its human form, which can be broken, but in its Eucharistic form, which cannot.⁵⁷ An example of the Eucharistic body's indestructible nature can be seen in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*. When the Host is tortured in a fiery oven, it is in fact the oven, not its contents, that breaks: "And than thay putt Hym [the Host] to a new turmentry: / In a hooote ovyn speryd Hym fast. / There He appyred with woundys bloody; / The ovyn rofe asondre and all to-brast."⁵⁸ This exemplifies the impossibility of damaging the Eucharistic body beyond the suffering already inflicted on the incarnate body of Christ, just as suffering inflicted on Christina Mirabilis after her resurrection is imperceptible.

This imagery of the Host in an oven also has direct links with one of Christina's self-punishments. In this her role as a figure of the resurrected Christ through whom humanity is sustained sacramentally is made clear. Christina's witness to the power of the Sacrament of the Altar is directly related to her purgatorial suffering by her self-baking in a bread oven, both a clear indicator of the importance of the Eucharist and a point of personal transformation in her *Life*. Bynum has cautioned against the attribution of Eucharistic imagery and symbolism too readily to meditations on Christ's blood as wine;⁵⁹ however, the imagery of body as bread has not been subject to the same scholarly enthusiasm. Indeed, while blood is a prevalent image in medieval devotion, the body

55. Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 40.

56. Dickens draws a connection between Christina's self-anointing and the healing of the sick. *Female Mystic*, 49.

57. Even after desecration, the Host can be revived. For example, see Marilyn Aronberg Lavin, "The Altar of Corpus Domini in Urbino: Paulo Uccello, Joos van Ghent, Piero della Francesca," *The Art Bulletin* 49, no. 1 (1967): 1-24, 2-3, doi:10.2307/3048425.

58. John T. Sebastian, ed., *Croxton Play of the Sacrament* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), 216, lines 45-48.

59. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 13.

as bread is less frequent. Yet Christina's *Life* offers a clear meditation on the Eucharistic miracle through the symbolism of the body as bread, the form under which both the clergy and laity would receive the Eucharist at least once a year. The parallel between salvation and baking bread can be seen in the Latin text:

She crept into fiery ovens where bread was baking and was tormented by fires—just like any of us mortals—so that her howls were terrible to hear. Nevertheless, when she emerged, no mutilation of any sort appeared in her body.⁶⁰

(Ingrediebaturque clibanos ignivomos, ad coquendum panes paratos, cruciabaturque incendiis velut aliquis nostrum, ita ut horrifice clamaret prae angustia; nec tamen in egredientis corpore laesura forinsecus apparebat.)⁶¹

This has distinct similarities with the lack of damage to the Host seen in the English Croxton play, and Christina's miraculous self-baking is actually even more evident in the fifteenth-century English translation:

And she wente into hoot brennyngue ouenes, redy to bake brede in, and she was turmentyd with brennynges and heet—as oon of vs—so that sche cryed hidously for angwysche. Netheles, whan she come oute, there was no soor nor hurt seen outwarde in hire body.⁶²

In the Latin text, Christina adds her body to the loaves of bread that are already baking; in the English translation, she usurps the place of the bread that should go into the prepared oven by placing herself in it instead. The events that occur after this episode are also vitally important to the development of Eucharistic imagery in the *Life*. After her self-baking, Christina undertakes a particularly intense period of prayer in which she is reduced to a round ball, an appearance directly corresponding to that of the Host. In the Latin version this ball is one of wax (*cera*):

60. *Life of Christina*, 133–34.

61. *Vita Christinae*, 652.

62. *The Middle English Life of Christina Mirabilis*, in Brown, ed., *Three Women*, 59, lines 149–52.

And again when she prayed and the divine grace of contemplation descended upon her, all her limbs were gathered together into a ball as if they were hot wax, and all that could be perceived of her was a round mass.⁶³

(Iterum cum oraret, et contemplationis in ea gratia divina descenderet, velut calefacta cera, omnia membra ejus in unum globum concluderentur, nec poterat in eis nisi tantum corpus sphaericum deprehendi.)⁶⁴

In the Middle English translation, however, the reference to wax is omitted (as is a subsequent comparison with a hedgehog, a creature which also forms itself into a ball):

And efte sone whan she prayed and Goddes grace of contemplacyone come to hir, euen as she were made hote and chaufed, alle hir membrys were closed togedir on a lumpe, nor there myghte nothinge be perceyued of hir but allonly a rownde gobet.⁶⁵

Now Christina has specifically taken the form of a round piece of flesh. Therefore, while her initial self-baking followed the same pattern as her other torments, the first passage quoted above transforms those torments into a suffering of universal significance by directly invoking the Eucharistic miracle. This is apparent in both the Latin and English versions. The second passage then confirms Christina as a representation of the Eucharist, emphatically so for her English readers.

In the English translation the reference to wax is omitted and instead the imagery of heating and reshaping (“hote and chaufed”) is emphasized. Moreover, the round mass (“globum”) is translated as both “lumpe” and “rownde gobet,” “gobet” being a term often associated with pieces of flesh and sometimes bread. In this context, the Wycliffite Bible translates “vestra nescitis quia modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit” (1. Cor. 5:6) as “a litil sour-do3 corumpiþ al the gobet.”⁶⁶

63. *Life of Christina*, 136.

64. *Vita Christinae*, 653.

65. Brown, *Middle English Life of Christina*, 61, lines 199–202.

66. Conrad Lindberg, ed., *The Earlier Version of the Wycliffite Bible*, vol. 8: *The Epistles etc. Edited from MS Christ Church 145*, Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis.

Here “gobet” has the meaning of lump or loaf, while in *The Mirror of Salvation* it is Christ’s body that is “made al in gobets.”⁶⁷ Both bread and flesh are evoked by this term, just as they are in the Eucharist. What is bread becomes flesh (or in Christina’s case what is flesh becomes bread), a miracle sometimes demonstrated literally to doubters, such as the woman attending Mass celebrated by Gregory the Great to whom the bread appears as a bloody finger.⁶⁸ The English translation of Christina’s *Life* therefore takes an association, which is evident in the Latin text, between Christina’s body and the bread-flesh of the Eucharistic host, and emphasizes it further still. This is particularly relevant for the English text as its translation most likely occurred soon after the formulation of the doctrine of transubstantiation at the Council of Constance in 1415.⁶⁹ In the Host it is the bread which is transformed into the body of Christ. In Christina’s case, it is the body which is transformed into bread. Finke writes of this reverse Eucharistic symbolism:

The central act of Christianity is Christ’s assumption of a body that can be—and is—wounded, opened up by torture. Christina is transformed in the oven from body to “bread,” she escapes her body into the monumentality of a cultural symbol. She cannot be wounded.⁷⁰

The oven is a liminal space, and in it Christina is transformed into a uniquely embodied image of Christ, for Christ’s human body can be broken, but the Eucharist cannot.

Stockholm Studies in English; 87 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 100.

67. Avril Henry, ed., *The Mirour of Mans Saluacioun: A Middle English Translation of Speculum Humanae Salvationis* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1986), 38, line 182.

68. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 308-9.

69. Sarah Beckwith, *Christ’s Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London: Routledge, 1993), 3. The extant Middle English manuscript of Christina’s life (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114) dates from the second quarter of the fifteenth century. For this dating see Brown, *Three Women*, 15.

70. Finke, “Mystical Bodies,” 39. The association of medieval holy women with purgatorial burning and freezing is further discussed by Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 120-21.

Not only does Christina resemble the Eucharist in her actions, but the language in which those actions are described has theological overtones. Specifically, she has become a rounded lump of flesh (“in unum globum concluderentur”),⁷¹ in which no distinct characteristic other than its material form can be “perceived,” an attribute corresponding with the nature of the Host, which is itself flesh under the appearance of bread. Moreover, the *Life* goes on to describe Christina’s subsequent return to her normal shape, saying that she “strekyd oute the mem-brys that were firste stoken vnder an vnlikly mater and forme.”⁷² The theology of the Eucharist is particularly important here. Reflecting the Aristotelian philosophy of matter, the concept developed that bodies were formed of two metaphysical principles: matter and form. A body is extended from matter in a form which governs its appearance. The substance exists within these two principles. Thus the substance of Christ’s body in the Eucharist exists under the appearance of bread as an extension of the substance of Christ’s body in heaven.⁷³ Thomas Aquinas states that “the whole substance of bread is changed into the whole substance of Christ’s body. . . . Hence this is not a formal, but a substantial conversion.”⁷⁴ Therefore, the choice of the phrase “matter and form” (*corpus* and *formam*) and the retention, indeed the enhancement, of its meaning in the English translation indicates that Christina’s *Life* (originally written less than twenty years after the Fourth Lateran Council’s institution of compulsory yearly reception of the Eucharist,

71. *Life of Christina*, 136; *Vita Christinae*, 653. See also *Middle English Life of Christina*, 62, lines 205-6. *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “globule,” n. (from the Latin *globulus*, round lump, little ball, pill) as “A round drop (of water or other liquid); a small round particle of a substance.”

72. “After her spiritual inebriation was finished and her active physical senses had restored her limbs to their proper place, like a hedgehog her rolled-up body returned to its proper shape and the limbs that had been bent formlessly were once again spread out.” *Life of Christina*, 136. (Cumquae spiritali ebrietate digesta actualis sensus propria membrorum loca reciperent, instar ericei conglobatum corpus redibat ad formam, et extendebantur membra, quae sub informi prius materia clauderentur.) *Vita Christinae*, 653.

73. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 30.

74. *The “Summa theologica” of St Thomas Aquinas*, Part 3, vol.17, trans. the Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Washbourne, 1914), q.75, a.4, 273.

at the height of its denial by the Cathars, and translated into English in the wake of Lollardy) reflects a particular understanding of the Eucharistic miracle. Christina's *Life* echoes contemporary theological debates pertinent to both its thirteenth-century Low Countries and fifteenth-century English audiences.⁷⁵

In fifteenth-century England, while the Lollard William Thorpe directly opposes the *Aquinian* view of transubstantiation in his *Testimony*, accusing Aquinas of misleading the Church and misinterpreting the nature of the Eucharist, Nicholas Love, in turn, condemns Wycliffites who claim that actual bread remains alongside Christ after the consecration: “for þei seene not Jesus bodily byside þat sacrament as he dide, and þerfore it is lihtene to hem fort byleue, & more to hir dampnacioun if þei byleue not as god himself & holi chirch haþ tauht.”⁷⁶ Christina herself is not transformed substantially, but her *Life* does reflect early thirteenth-century notions of human embodiment in which the body and soul are of equal merit. As noted, Aquinas views the human being as a hylomorphic (form/matter) union of body and soul.⁷⁷ Human bodies are made from the same substance that Christ assumed in his incarnation and retains in his resurrection. Christina's embodiment is a model by which her readers can broaden and deepen their own means of relating to the divine, not just spiritually but also physically. Christina demonstrates both how humanity's identity ideally echoes that of Christ and how that identity can be formed through orthodox understanding, adoration, and reception of the Eucharist. In the fifteenth-century English *Life of Christina*, the translator's choice of the phrase “mater and forme” to describe the appearance “under” which the mystic is transformed signifies the continued, perhaps even enhanced, relevance of the Eucharistic miracle to its new audience.

75. Brian Vander Veen discusses the anti-heretical characteristics of Christina's English *Life*, “The Vitae of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 114” (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2007), 167-68.

76. Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2004), 151, lines 23-26. See also David Aers, *Sanctifying Signs: Making Christian Tradition in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 18 and 93.

77. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 255.

Baking the Sacramental Body

The notion of matter and form so central to Eucharistic theology is further related to embryology. Aristotelian physiological theory maintained that the mother provided the matter (the fetus) and the father provided the form (the spirit or life). Galen modified this theory of conception but retained the association of the mother with the material; she is the oven in which the fetus is cooked. The embryo is fed by its mother's blood and subsequently by her milk into which that blood is transformed after birth.⁷⁸ Thus the oven in which Christina bakes herself is itself a symbol of change, transformation, and new life. The oven is a well-established image in Eucharistic theology. While the burnt sacrifices of the Old Law prefigure that of Christ (the Lamb), and sacramental bread foreshadows the Eucharist, the altar of burnt offerings was itself sometimes depicted in medieval art either as a grill or an oven. For example, the moralization of Leviticus 2:4 in a fourteenth-century *Bible moralisée* very clearly depicts the relationship between the baking of sacramental bread and Christ's presence in the womb. The illustration shows a group of Jews putting sacrificial loaves into an altar-oven. This is set directly above an Annunciation scene for which the adjacent commentary states that the "Jews placing unleavened bread into the oven to bake in the fire signifies God placing his son in the virginal womb."⁷⁹ Aquinas also speaks clearly of the baking of Christ:

the bread signifies Christ who is the living bread. . . . He was like perfect bread after he had taken human nature; baked in the fire, i.e., formed by the Holy Ghost in the oven of the virginal womb; baked again in a pan by the toils which He suffered in the world; and consumed by fire on the cross as on a gridiron.⁸⁰

78. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 100.

79. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 270b, fol. 59r; see Carra Ferguson O'Meera, "In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb': The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art," *The Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 75-88, 79, doi: 10.2307/3050087. See also Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa on the ancient origins of the concept of the womb as a "mystic oven." "Symbolic Grain and Symbolic Bread: Relationships between the Ancient Grain Goddess and the Virgin Mary in the Late Middle Ages," *Magistra* 3, no. 1 (1997): 108-41, 112 and 130.

80. *The "Summa theologiae" of St Thomas Aquinas*, Part 2, vol. 8, trans. Fathers of

The image further occurs in the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, where “[t]oday the living bread which gives life to the world is cooked in the virginal womb.”⁸¹ Elsewhere, in the Matins readings from the office of St Anne, the mother of Mary (at one remove from Christ) is portrayed as the “home of the eternal and celestial bread.”⁸² The image also appears in patristic and other late-medieval writings.⁸³

This oven-womb comparison can also be seen in Middle English. Miri Rubin notes the direct association of Mary as the maternal bread oven and the Eucharist in John Ryman’s late-fifteenth-century carol:

This brede geveth eternall lyfe,
Bothe vnto man, to chielde, and wyfe, . . .
In virgyne Mary this brede was bake
Whenne Criste of her manhoode did take,
Fre of alle synne mankyende to make;
Ete ye it so ye be [not dede].⁸⁴

This lyric directly links the oven as a symbol of transformation—Mary’s womb in which Christ grows—to the bread of the Eucharist, which is

the English Dominican Province (London: Washbourne, 1915), q.102, a.3, 173.

81. Cited in Beryl Rowland, “The Oven in Popular Metaphor from Hosea to the Present Day,” *American Speech* 45, no. 3/4 (1970): 215–22, 218, doi: 10.2307/454836.

82. Charity Scott-Stokes, ed. and trans., *Women’s Books of Hours in Medieval England: Selected Texts* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), 110. For the image of Mary’s womb as oven in sculpture, see Elina Gertsman “Performing Birth, Enacting Death: Unstable Bodies in Late Medieval Devotion,” in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 83–104, especially 92 and 96.

83. See, for example, Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought*, trans. Thomas Buffer (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1999), 363; Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the Development of its Interpretation*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 182; John Seward, *Redeemer in the Womb: Jesus Living in Mary* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1993), 49. In the *Revelations* of St. Bridget of Sweden, Mary is portrayed as the vessel of the bread of life; see Claire L. Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell, 2001), 99–100.

84. R. L. Greene, ed., *The Early English Carols* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), no. 318, 219–20. See also Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 145–47.

transformed into Christ's body on the altar. Readers are encouraged to consume this body-bread for the sake of their souls. Christina Mirabilis's *Life* points its reader in the same direction, encouraging bodily union with Christ in sacramental communion. Christina herself "toke in holy deuocyon the sacramente of the auter often . . . and in that she receyued strengthe of body, as she sayde, and most gladnesse of spirite."⁸⁵ Through her resurrected body and its figuring of the transformation of the Eucharist, Christina communicates the need for her readers to receive Christ's body, to communicate in the sacramental sense.

Christina's association with the maternal oven is further strengthened if we recall the passages in which she feeds herself on milk and oil from her own breasts. She produces milk not to feed a child but to nurture and strengthen herself. She is both mother and child. She does not create new life in the way that Mary created Christ/the Eucharist, but she transforms herself as the child in the maternal oven to become a figure of the Eucharist and the new life it offers.⁸⁶ The Eucharist is more than it outwardly appears. Bread is substantially transformed into flesh, and Christina's body persistently alludes to this transformation. Her broken body is continually renewed and made whole. Just as accounts of Eucharistic miracles through which its sacramental meaning was taught never allow the Host to be truly damaged, so too is Christina never damaged. Numerous stories of the Host suffering all manner of torture leave it bleeding but always intact.⁸⁷ And even though the Eucharist itself is broken on the altar and chewed by the faithful, Robert Pullen (d. 1146) and Peter Lombard (d. 1160) claim that only the accidents are actually

85. *Middle English Life of Christina*, 65, lines 278-80; *Life of Christina*, 133; *Vita Christinae*, 652.

86. Thomas Izbicki comments on the significance of using unleavened bread for the Host so that the words of the consecration would bring about only the body of Christ not that of the Virgin Mary (the growth of Christ in the womb being symbolized by yeast) as argued by Fantinus de Vallaresso, *The Eucharist in Medieval Canon Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 93.

87. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 126. Similarly, a story in a collection of tales from the late fourteenth century tells how a pet monkey strayed into church and ate the Host. After the monkey's death its owner found the Host unblemished in its stomach. London, British Library, MS Harley 2316, fol. 12r. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 113. For the nature of Eucharistic visions, see also Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, chs. 3-4, especially 88.

broken; Christ's body itself remains whole.⁸⁸ As Bynum asserts (in the context of Host desecration), "Christ as he is in the eucharist is not 'tangible, or passable or harm-able.' . . . God is immutable."⁸⁹ Likewise Christina suffers and bleeds, but her body cannot be broken.

One of the most important features of medieval Christianity is Christ's ability to participate fully in human suffering. Medieval Christians were able to partake in this humanity through the adoration and reception of the unblemished Sacrament of the Altar. Christina's sacrificial and salvific Christ-like roles (in which, like the immutable Host, she displays no evidence of physical pain on her body) affirm both the doctrines of purgatory and of transubstantiation for her thirteenth- and fifteenth-century audiences alike. Indeed, purgatory and the Eucharist are formally and theologically linked. For example, John Lydgate asserts that "A Messe uys egall to Crystes passion, / To helpe sowlys out of purgatory,"⁹⁰ while the *Fasciculus Morum* compares the Mass, in which Eucharistic consecration is central, to a candle shedding its light: "through its power a Mass lightens and decreases the purgatorial pains of a soul for which it is said in particular, and because of it the other souls in purgatory find a lightening of their pains . . . the more Masses one celebrates for the souls in purgatory the more one increases their light."⁹¹ Christina's unmarked body emphasises the importance of changes that cannot be externally perceived but which are nevertheless completely transformative for the souls she aids through purgatory. Thus through an emphasis on what is unseen, the *Life* not only offers an orthodox commentary on the doctrines of purgatory and the Eucharist but ultimately prompts its readers to undertake personal earthly and interior purification through participation in the rituals of the sacramental Church.

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88. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 24 cites Macy, *Theologies of the Eucharist*, 30-31.

89. Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 42.

90. "The Interpretation and Virtues of the Mass," in MacCracken, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, part 1, 114, lines 643-44.

91. *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. and trans. Siegfried Wenzel (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 410.