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**THREE WOMEN SAINTS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY:
MENTALITIES AND ROLES**

by

Ulrike Strasser

**A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Master of Arts
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**Western Michigan University
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THREE WOMEN SAINTS IN THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY: MENTALITIES AND ROLES

Ulrike Strasser, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 1990

This case study analyzes the lives of three thirteenth-century female saints, Lutgard of Aywières, Margaret of Ypres, and Christina Mirabilis, and places them against the broader theoretical frame of quantitative studies on the subject sainthood. The focus of the study is the pursuit of holiness as well as the perception of holiness. Both, pursuit and perception, serve as the point of departure for a discussion of the mentalities and the social realities which the women's sainthood reflects.

The findings from this study indicate that female saints display numerous commonalities which can be traced back to the saints' gender and its social ramifications. Many elements of worldly womanhood metamorphose into religiously significant components of the women's sainthood. Hence, to fully understand this sainthood, one must examine it in the very light of gender, i.e., one must depart from those quantitative approaches which treat men's and women's sainthood indiscriminately.

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Ulrike Strasser

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CHAPTER I

THE PARADIGM

The twentieth century has witnessed several decisive turns in the realm of scholarly and scientific pursuit: from modern physics to comparative mythology stunning discoveries have been made. Methodologies have become more sophisticated than ever, and whole shifts in paradigms have occurred. The field of history presents a similar picture of revolutionary change. Yet, this is less a case of discoveries or methodologies than of a whole new center of historical attention.

Historians have moved away from the familiar sphere of deeds and decisions and from the study of outstanding individuals and their social settings. They have left behind the safe terrain of articulated ideas and conscious knowledge and ventured out into more ambiguous and complex regions of interest. Thus, in recent works historians have explored the territories of the masses, of the average person or even of marginalized and disenfranchised people. They furthermore have concerned themselves with the structures of social configurations rather than with their exponents. The dynamics of interests, needs, and values within these configurations have become a subject of scholarly pursuit. Finally, under the influence of modern psychology, historians have devoted time to the analysis of unconscious motivations.

This "‘centrifugal’ tendency" accounts for the development of numerous

new approaches to the past. Moreover, it has prompted the emergence of a new set of theoretical and practical questions regarding the nature of pertinent source material and the methods to be employed for a reliable and fertile analysis. One of these new ventures--including some of its methodological ramifications--has served as a guiding model for the present study, namely the history of mentality. The claim cannot be upheld to sever the theoretical knots of the history of mentality. However, it is hoped to gain further insight into both the effectiveness and limitations as well as the methodological problems and practical procedures of this approach by providing a case study.

For several reasons the study of saints' lives is an ideal point of entry. To make these reasons understandable, however, requires some groundwork. First, a brief discussion of the dimensions of meaning of the concept "mentality" is helpful. Second, some methodological issues need to be raised in order to clarify hagiography's place among the sources of the history of mentality. In the next step recent hagiographical attempts linked to the history of mentality will be discussed, with a more detailed report on works which serve as a springboard for the present study. Finally, an explanation of the purpose and approach of this study will follow.

The History of Mentalities

To trace the origin and the history of the term "mentality" one must at least go back to the seventeenth century when the term first came into its existence in connection with English philosophy. As an instrument of philosophical discourse, the term "mentality" was coined to describe the ways of

thinking, feeling, and understanding peculiar to a group of people. In this respect "mentality" was inextricably bound to the people's sense of identity as members of this very same group.² The English usage remained confined to the field of philosophy, but in France "mentality" soon advanced into the common parlance.

After a number of passing references to the term in historical works such as Voltaire's Essay sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations (1754),³ la mentalité finally became part of the verbal repertoire of public discourse in late nineteenth-century France. This occurred when the "Affaire Dreyfus" split the French nation into two implacable camps. In the context of the political climate of the time la mentalité was used polemically across the political spectrum. It functioned as a weapon to denounce the opponent's position as contradictory and damaging to the French nation. At the same time the invocation of la mentalité justified one's own position as an expression of the French ethos. Thus, the supporters of Dreyfus understood their struggle for justice and truth against the background of la mentalité française, a mentality that they saw encapsulated in the revolutionary postulate of liberalism and tolerance. On the other side of the fence, the partisans of Church, Army, and Nation viewed Dreyfus and his supporters as enemies to what they understood to be la mentalité française. Their definition of mentality centered around the common legacy of the French nation as a communion in spirit and soul. The protection of this communion, they argued, had to be the final criterion of all politics.⁴

Already in this brief discussion of the early interpretations the vague nature of the term mentality becomes apparent. Mentality is something not quite

tangible, yet seems essential for the coherence and self-definitions of groups. Although (or because) the term cannot be broken down into analytical pieces by the rational mind, it had a powerful effect in the philosophical discourse of seventeenth-century England, as well as in the political propaganda of nineteenth-century France. Immediately after the philosophical and the political dimensions of la mentalité were identified, the social and historical dimensions would be discovered. Whereas supporters and opponents of Dreyfus employed la mentalité in a mutually exclusive manner, Paul Seippel undertook the most notable attempt to reconcile these conflicting views of la mentalité française. In his Les Deux Frances et leurs origines historiques (1905) he has tried to demonstrate the existence of a common root in the French heritage for the two seemingly incompatible definitions of the French mentality. According to Seippel, la mentalité romaine was the common denominator; yet, during the course of history it had manifested itself in the differing historical forms and had shown different facets at different times. Thereby la mentalité romaine could generate such alleged dichotomies as exemplified by the "Affaire Dreyfus."⁵

Seippel's contribution to the future theoretical development of mentalité rested mainly on his discovery of the historical perspective. Transferring the polemic connotations of the term into more descriptive channels he redirected the attention from given interpretations of mentality to the origins of these respective interpretations and to their historically grown nature. The step from political propaganda to a historical view-point was taken; at least for la mentalité française.

Nonetheless, the truly scholarly application took place in another context: in the 1899/1900 issue of Emile Durkheim's L'Année sociologique. There the reader found a column pertaining to socio-cultural and ethnological studies and entitled "La mentalité des groupes."⁶ Glancing over the content of the column one can conclude that in this context mentality characterized the vague field of the invisible (and often unreflected) intellectual, psychological and moral bonds which exist between groups and which, in spite of their invisibility, express themselves in social, economical, and behavioral forms. In Durkheim's usage, the philosophical and political elements of mentality--posed by English philosophy and the public discourse during the Affaire Dreyfus--were intertwined with a historical component à la Seippel and supplemented by the social expressions of mentality. Once this sociological and ethnological platform of the L'Année was combined with a historical perspective broader than Seippel's, the foundations were laid for what we now call the history of mentality.⁷

The two pioneers of this historical branch were Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. Both concerned themselves extensively with the concept of mentality and made it a central objective of their own school: the Annales. The notion and the study of la mentalité was also a focal point for Bloch although Febvre is commonly credited with inventing the history of mentality. In this context mentality encompassed the following range of issues:

1. Collective ideas, notions, and concepts.
2. Unarticulated and often unconscious assumptions; "things taken for granted."
3. Modes of thinking, modes of believing, processes of rationalization.

4. Behavioral patterns and socio-economic organization as an expression of items one through three⁸; the socio-economic transmission of mentality.

Items one through three are historically grown and subject to change, yet they change at a very slow pace. Moreover, they are constitutive for a particular group, i.e., they lay the foundations of the self-definition of the group taken as a whole and of the individual group members.

Even though the work of both historians was grounded in these definitions, Bloch and Febvre still operated under two different premises.⁹ Bloch sought to understand a certain epoch and its social configurations via studying the collectively held ideas and assumptions which tie the parts together to a whole. Starting from political and religious concepts, Bloch included the study of collective behavioral norms in his endeavors. He viewed behavioral norms as a product and, therefore, as expressive of these concepts. Even more, for him these norms also encapsulated unarticulated and unreflected concepts. What an epoch takes for granted and does not bother to make a subject of public discourse, is, according to Bloch, still visible and traceable in its behavioral patterns. Thus, for example, in his Les rois thaumaturges Bloch analyzed attitudes towards royal power by looking at the ritualized and highly symbolic activities which surrounded the king's position.¹⁰ And in La société féodale he illuminated moral, affective and intellectual attitudes by linking them to the socio-economic setting in which they flourish.¹¹ In sum, Bloch tried to enter the mentality of an epoch through the meaning of its collective behaviors and assumptions which are frequently unreflected, but always linked to the material conditions of life.

Febvre entered through a different door. His point of departure was the individual in whom all the pervasive, collective currents coincide. For Febvre the ideas, notions, and assumptions of an epoch cross in the individual. As a result, the study of an individual's conscious modes of expression enables us to reach out to all other mental levels and ultimately even beyond them into the psychological disposition. The individual, of course, is of interest not for the sake of his uniqueness, but precisely because his "ordinariness" allows conclusions about the collective mentality from which he stems.¹² The protagonist in Lebvre's case studies, such as Luther and Rabelais, are both heroes and witnesses of a collective mentality as well as products thereof. In his Rabelais, for example, Lebvre investigated the boundaries set by the religiously grounded mentality of the sixteenth century. He argued that this mentality imposed its structures and basic presuppositions even upon a groundbreaking thinker such as Rabelais; moreover, this religiously grounded mentality precludes the notion of atheism from entering Rabelais' world view, however revolutionary this may have been.¹³ Here the individual provides the microscopic lens, the magnifying glass, so to speak, for the observation of a collectively held mentality.

The discussion about and interpretations of the concept mentalité did not end in the days of Bloch and Lebvre. Not only do the diverse approaches of other historians following in the footsteps of Bloch and Febvre fall outside the scope of this study, they also seem to move between the two poles which the two fathers of the history of mentality established. Although the mainstream of these historians has continued the work in Bloch's directions, it can still be

argued that Bloch and Febvre set up the Scylla and the Charybdis between which each historian eventually has to navigate: the individual case study on the one side and the serial history on the other. The last point leads up to some observations about the methods and sources of the history of mentality with special pertinence to hagiography.

Hagiography as a Source for the History of Mentalities

At first glance everything can serve as a source for the history of mentality.¹⁴ Although some sources are closer to the mentality of a people or an epoch, the historian can utilize such diverse sources as artistic expressions, administrative documents, architectural remnants, or wedding rituals. In any case, his or her aim is to extricate the underlying, collectively held, and long-lasting assumptions of the mentality which each of these sources encapsulates in its own way. The process involves several steps. First, the historian needs to detect the mechanical and stereotypical components of the source with methodologies appropriate to his source. For example, the recurring elements on eighteenth-century gravestones may be studied on architectural, anthropological, and symbolical terms. The discovered commonalities will already open a door to many speculations about the mentality which informs them. Second, the variations from the norm, unique and creative derivations--such as adding another symbol on an individual's tomb--will be evident. Third, moving between the stereotypical and the atypical of a given source, the historian can discover the skeleton of the underlying mentality, such as, in our example, the basic belief structure of the piety that expresses itself on the tombs and is

somewhat normative, yet also open to individual interpretations. Finally, by placing the source into a chronological line with other sources the historian will be able to trace the different developments which this mentality undergoes. For example, the historian may deduce a shift in piety from the changing symbolism on gravestones from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century.

In the process the historian has to watch out for some tempting traps. The quest for common topoi and stereotypes, for example, necessitates constructive comparison. To avoid apple-with-oranges comparisons the historian has to make several demands of his sources. For one thing, it is desirable that the sources belong to the same genre. Because a mentality is never a free-floating entity, but rather always manifests itself in a certain medium, it is also predetermined by this medium to a certain extent. Thus, the type of medium, or, in other words, the genre of the source, has impact upon the form in which the mentality surfaces. Comparisons between different types of sources are not precluded per se, but they are of limited use. Only when the sources are part of the same genre--when tombstones are compared to tombstones but not to spires--will the commonalities and dissimilarities have directly informative value.

Another possible trap lies in the establishment of a chronological line. Such a device is indispensable if one seeks to outline developments and transformations of a certain mentality. For this purpose the sources should come from an identical or at least comparable group of people that is in a communicative process or tradition, just as the stonemasons of our tombstones appear as a group linked by a tradition. The importance of mentality for a group's self-definition and coherence has been stressed before. Hence, if those

who express themselves in a source are not connected in any other way than through their selection of the same source genre, whose mentality are we tracing in the first place?¹⁵

A third danger is rooted in the seeming opposite of the neglect of group bonds, in the possible neglect of individual variations. Even more, it is easy to miss the transformations which mentalities undergo. Even though sources may belong to the same genre and stem from a comparable social group, the mentality they reflect is never a static system of set conceptions and assumptions. Rather, it is continually subject to change; a comparable group may share the same mentality, yet its individual representatives are not imprisoned by it. Transitions from one set of assumptions to another take place within the frame of the mentality as well as beyond it. This flexibility needs to be recognized. The problem of tracking down the transition from one mentality into another has yet to be solved.¹⁶

A more immediate concern is the related tendency to homogenize the sources. An overemphasis of common elements often leads to an overestimation of the extent of the mentality they hold in common.¹⁷ Far-reaching generalizations usually happen at the expense of accuracy in individual cases and the fine line of meticulous scholarship seems to run back and forth between the collective mentality and its individual expression. On the methodological level this dilemma reoccurs in the dichotomy between quantitative studies and individual case studies. Quantitative studies of broad samples lead to the discovery of numerous commonalities (topoi, speech patterns, behavioral patterns, ritualized actions, formalistic expressions) and, therefore, into the mentality

which constitutes these commonalities. Quantitative studies guarantee the high degree of the objectivity of a social science with its statistical methods. Moreover, they give a voice to the unspoken truth of a source as silent as gravestones; they make audible "the average truth of an epoch"¹⁸ rather than the one which is articulated by its protagonists. An obvious danger, however, exists in the possible levelling of evidence for the sake of this "average truth"; this becomes a problem especially because quantitative studies have a built-in tendency to generalize to a point where the homogeneity of a mentality becomes mystified.¹⁹

Individual case studies, on the other hand, permit complexity and authenticity. They convince by their qualitative depth rather than their quantitative breadth. The historian, for example, can gain a very firm handle on the story of an individual by looking at it from various perspectives and approaching it with various methods. At the same time this story exemplifies what is typical of the individual's time and place. The shepherds in Le Roy Ladurie's Montaillou are unique individuals and yet they are representative of an anti-clerical free spirit rather common in southern France of the thirteenth and fourteenth century.²⁰ In the individuals' stories one finds a reflection of a broader mentality; the microscopic universe of the case study condenses a macroscopic mentality. In addition, one can track down the individual adoption of this mentality and understand its mechanisms in a very direct way. Even when the individual seems most unique the mentality of the individual's epoch enters through the back door and sets the norms of "normality" by which the individual's uniqueness is measured.

The remaining (and most difficult) question is: how does one develop this measurement of "normality" in the first place? When does the individual case study exemplify the rule, so to speak, and when is it expressive of the exceptions? The comparison between several case studies solves this problem and helps to establish the norm by detecting the common patterns of speech and thought. Apparently, the latter leads back to the quantitative approach and demonstrates the necessity of both quantitative and qualitative studies. In sum, whereas quantitative studies emphasize commonalities and homogeneity of a certain mentality, the case study helps explore inconsistencies and derivations from this norm. Therefore, the dialectic application and interchange of quantitative and qualitative studies is a methodological must for a successful study of mentalities.²¹ Only by contrasting the collective mentality with its individual expressions can one arrive at a clear picture of the mentality's normative power as well as its limitations.

How does hagiography²² fit into all of this? For the historian of mentality every source is valuable no matter what it pretends to convey. Therefore, the vast masses of hagiographical material advance into the category of useful historical sources.²³ Aside from this obvious qualification, hagiography provides a deeper penetration into a mentality because of its specific objective, i.e., the communication of a spiritual rather than a factual truth. The historical chain of events is of little concern to the hagiographer. On the contrary, he places his main emphasis on a totally different ontological realm and depicts his heroes as agents of this realm. The hagiographer's goal is to show the ways in which the spiritual manifests itself in historical reality through its agents. He

makes no attempt to conceal his true purposes of sparking devotion and encouraging emulation; he thereby directly articulates religious notions, ideas, and assumptions that are closely associated with his world view. Needless to say, religious convictions inform a mentality to a crucial degree. Hence, hagiography has an inherent advantage: this genre of sources by virtue of its subject matter is already a step closer to the mentality than most "secular" sources. This is especially true for epochs such as the Middle Ages in which religion thoroughly permeates the social, cultural, and political sphere. As Jacques Le Goff phrased it: "Pour rester au Moyen Age, l'hagiographie met en lumiere des structures mentales de base...."²⁴

Another advantage of hagiography lies in the fact that it encapsulates several mentalities on different levels. Above all, this source genre mirrors the mentality of the author. Thus, at first glance, one encounters the hagiographer's notions and assumptions. The mentality of the hagiographer, however, is simultaneously expressive of something larger than himself: the mentality of the collective from which he stems and to which he belongs. Therefore, on a second, more remote level, hagiographical sources reflect collectively held notions and assumptions. Finally, hagiography deals with the lives of historical persons; they form the subject matter of the hagiographer. Even though historical authenticity is of secondary importance to the hagiographer, he is still bound to the historical reality which surrounds him to a certain degree. Thus, this reality provides him with the standards of behavior, emotions, and traits which he applies in his hagiographical work. The hagiographer's description of saints at times may lack historical accuracy, but it nevertheless contains elements

of historical truth, a truth reflected in the saints' behavioral patterns, emotional responses, and character traits. The latter reflect the mentality of the saints which is formed and expressed in the social sphere. In sum, it is possible to deduce this mentality from the behavioral patterns, etc., even though one has to look at the saints through the hagiographer's glasses.

The hagiographical sources furthermore meet the methodological demand for identity of genre and comparability of the producer group. All hagiographers--independently from their time, place, gender, or religious status--share a Christian²⁵ world view and the belief in the reality of sainthood. They also place themselves in a long and normative tradition. As a matter of fact, hagiography is one of the most formalistic and schematic genres.²⁶ The lives of the saints are molded after the stereotypical themes posed by the Bible or by influential Church Fathers, such as Athanasius or Gregory the Great. The result is that the individuality of the saint steps back behind an ideal of sainthood which he exemplifies and which is basically a variation on the given stereotypical themes. Naturally saints' lives are full of speech topoi, recurring themes, and narrative patterns. Because of their highly formalistic character, deviations from the stylistic and thematic norm are particularly interesting for they reflect tensions between the traditional conventions and new modes of expressions adapted to changing social realities.²⁷ Because the hagiographer is aiming at the propaganda of a notion of sainthood he has to adjust the hagiographical tradition as this notion changes. In return, the variations in the notion of sanctity mirror mentality changes.²⁸ Against the background of the highly formalistic nature of hagiographical sources these variations become

discernible.

Lastly, hagiographical sources are equally suitable for quantitative approaches as well as in-depth case studies. In the first case, their formalistic consistency allows for a successful application of statistical methods. The process of conversion, for example, is a fixed part in every saint's life and usually takes place in a societal or familial context. No matter whether this context is one of resistance or encouragement, an examination of societal or familial responses to the saint's calling yields a great deal of information about issues such as attitudes towards family members or socially expected behavior.

On the qualitative side, the core of a hagiographical source is a biography. This genre therefore has a promising potential for case studies in mentality. As Michel Vovelle has pointed out, the historian of twentieth-century mentalities benefits from modern technologies in his attempt to secure authentic and immediate testimonies of contemporary individuals; equipped with a tape-recorder he has first hand access to the mentality of the individual being interviewed. Naturally the historian of earlier times is forced to seek another avenue for the "production" of authentic and immediate expressions of mentality. Vovelle states that "the life story--'journal de vie' or 'livre de raison'--obviously offers him the source which comes closest to what he is looking for; that is the reason why people show increasing interest in these sources."²⁹ Hagiographical sources by their very nature offer a life story, quite often a very detailed one. Not only do they deal with an individual's biography, they also report the story of an exemplary individual, i.e., a story that points beyond itself towards the story of a collective. Again, in dialectic combination with quantitative studies

the in-depth studies of such individual stories are a fertile research ground for the historian of mentality.

Clearly, hagiography qualifies for the study of mentality. Nonetheless, only in recent years has this approach become the focus of scholarly work on hagiography. Jacques Le Goff described the central shift that occurred from the "old specialists of hagiography" to the "new ones"³⁰ as a shift in focus of attention. The former concerned themselves with the study of an individual or of several saints. To name a famous representative of this tradition, the acclaimed Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye is known for his concentration on the study of the individual saints' lives.³¹

The new specialists, on the other hand, devote their energy to the study of sainthood and to what constitutes sainthood: "the psychology of the believers and the mentality of the hagiographer."³² Overall, their studies are based on broader samples and often include quantitative methods. Despite this common orientation, however, their scholarly output can be subdivided into two efforts.³³ Whereas a first group seeks to look at the outward expressions of the mentality that generates sainthood, its social and behavioral ramifications, a second group emphasizes the conceptual dimensions of sainthood, i.e., its inherent ideas, assumptions, and value judgements.

Michael Goodich's work on behavioral patterns among thirteenth-century saints is a good example of the first group.³⁵ Katherine and Charles H. George, who have undertaken the study of social class origins of Catholic saints throughout history, also belong in this category. Their inquiries have led them to draw connections between social and spiritual elitism.³⁵ A final example is

Frantisek Graus who analyzes the social function of Merovingian saints; from this base, he makes general observations about the status and the perceptions of the kingdom, the aristocracy, and monasticism in Merovingian society.³⁶

For the second group, studies such as John Mecklin's The Passing of a Saint have been pioneering. In this work Mecklin examines the transformations of European values through the ages through the lens of Christian sainthood.³⁷ Pitrim Sorokin has made another attempt in this direction. In his Altruistic Love: A Study of American "Good Neighbors" and Christian Saints Sorokin takes a look at the entire history of Christianity, with the objective of constructing a profile of the saintly personality.³⁸ To mention one more example, Simone Roisin has laid out the altering images and ideals of Cistercian sainthood in her notable work on thirteenth-century, Cistercian hagiography.³⁹

Finally, some scholars seek a middle ground between the two groups and their objectives; instead of moving in the social direction or in the direction of ideals and values, those scholars take a turn towards a more integrated view. Donald Weinstein and Rudolf Bell, two innovators in this respect, enlist themselves with the other new specialists⁴⁰ and claim that "sainthood, not individual saints, is our primary emphasis."⁴¹ Yet, already in the chosen title of their work--Saints and Society--they indicate a twofold objective. Whereas the authors dedicate the first half of their book to the saints themselves, to their pursuit of holiness and the "inescapable social ramifications and consequences"⁴² which this pursuit causes and mirrors, in the second half the authors shift to the study of the perceptions of sainthood. The reason for this shift is their observation that "all saints, more or less, appear to be constructed in the sense

that being necessarily saints in consequence of a reputation created by others and a role that others expect of them, they are remodelled to correspond to collective mental representations."⁴³ Hence, Weinstein and Bell investigate both the pursuit and the perception of holiness to arrive at a fuller picture of the values, concerns, and social realities which holiness reflects.

In his Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century, Michael Goodich chooses a comparable path.⁴⁴ Like Weinstein and Bell, he documents the pursuit of holiness throughout the formative years of childhood and adolescence and draws conclusions about the social realities which nurtured/hindered this pursuit and about the social expressions which this pursuit found.⁴⁵ Goodich takes the additional step of looking at the perception of holiness, or the "morphology of piety" as he calls it, because he views the saint as "an ideal cultural type...whose life embodies the noble ideals of his age;" simultaneously, "the saint's development reflects the social and political conflicts which engaged his contemporaries."⁴⁶ Again, the approach is a twofold one dealing with pursuit and perceptions of the saintly pursuit while aiming at the social realities, values, and concern which underlie both.

Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich substantiate their studies with far-reaching statistical data. For instance, the work of Weinstein and Bell is based on an analysis of 864 saints' lives covering the period from 1000 to 1700. Goodich's work focuses on the thirteenth century only, yet he handles as many as 518 saints' lives. In this respect Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich are in line with many other modern hagiographical studies: a quantitative approach lies at the center of their studies. The advantage of such quantitative methodology have been

touched upon in the previous section; its disadvantages also have been mentioned. Here again, the studies of Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich impress with their far-reaching breadth and their measurable objectivity. Yet, conscious of the built-in tendency towards generalization Weinstein and Bell call for case studies: "While we have opted for a collective approach, we are aware that studies of individual cases can be rewarding, and we hope that such studies will be the more fruitful when placed against the collective patterns we have traced."⁴⁷ The present study is an attempt to look at three individual cases within the frame of collective patterns developed by Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich. As a first step the following sections will briefly summarize the patterns relevant for this study of thirteenth-century female saints.

The Findings of Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich

From Childhood Throughout Adolescence and Adulthood: The Central Role of Chastity

According to Weinstein and Bell, the pursuit of holiness can commence at any given time, from early childhood on.⁴⁸ Especially between 1200 and 1500 hagiographers increasingly stress the childhood of the saint. From their works, a picture of an affective family and an understanding of childhood as a unique developmental stage in the life of a person emerge.⁴⁹ Often, of course, the saintly child represents precisely what other children are not; he or she is pious and obedient, above the irresponsibility and sensuousness of ordinary children. The child is "quasi senex"⁵⁰ as the sources phrase it. In certain cases the saint is set apart before he is even born; propitious signs such as visions or

prophecies foretell the coming of the holy person. Usually it is the mother who receives these signs; at times she is barren and her prayers for offspring are rewarded with an extraordinary child. Encouraged by these or other signs at a later date, the mother continues to play the more important role in bringing the child on a religious path. She may intervene occasionally on the child's behalf if the father should obstruct the child's religious ambitions. The hagiographical sources contend that the main part of a child's nurture and education was the mother's responsibility.

In the majority of cases the saint's parents support his or her ultimate vocational choice.⁵¹ It may be added that especially the saints affiliated with less strict orders, such as the Benedictines or Cistercians, encounter very little resistance when articulating their vocational choice.⁵² Yet, this is only half the story. For the wealthy nobility, a wetnurse may take over the mother's role, and the saint's vocational choice may be characterized by a flight from childhood neglect or by outspoken rebellion against parental norms and values. This holds particularly true for the thirteenth century. When the reliance on wetnurses becomes more widespread, a child's conversion is often closely connected with childhood deprivation. The absence of one or two parents almost forces "adulthood" upon a child at a very young age. The child can avoid this forced adulthood and find a substitute parent by joining a religious group.⁵³ This avoidance may take on the form of overt rebellion at times. However, there also is the common practice of oblation: parents initiate the admission of children to monasteries before puberty.⁵⁴ This practice absolves many parents from their parental tasks and many children from the prospect of deprivation.

Apparently the childhood of a saint can vary according to the familial circumstances; but in most stories one theme is commonly picked out: a saintly child's innocence. The innocence accentuated encompasses sexual and moral purity and the saint will guard this twofold innocence carefully throughout his or her lifetime. If innocence and purity are a recurring issue, so is their flip side: a guilt-ridden conscience, struggles with temptations and excessive penitence.⁵⁵ Innocence is not easily won by a saint as the hagiographical narratives highlight.

Not only for childhood, but also for adolescence the hagiographical sources suggest a concept of a distinguished developmental stage. As opposed to childhood the sources describe adolescence as less bound to a certain age period than to a set of emotional and social traits. At the heart of this set lies struggle, struggle with oneself and one's environment, and particularly with one's parents.⁵⁶ Whereas a saintly path seems to have been a common concern of the future saint and his parents during the High Middle Ages, from the thirteenth century onwards familial battles over an adolescent's vocation become a more frequent parental response to their saintly child. At this stage, the father plays a key role as a supporter of or opponent to the adolescent's saintly career. The intensified religious conscience of the thirteenth century expresses itself in dramatic conversion crises.⁵⁷ Often the religious trigger for these dramatic events is the vita apostolica movement and the religious zeal which goes hand in hand with it. At the same time, unseen possibilities open up in the socio-economic arena and make parents consider secular careers for their children rather than a religious role in the contemporary poverty movement. The choice between two extreme career options often accounts for the escalation of familial

conflicts.⁵⁸ It is, moreover, logical that the father as the specialist on advancement in the outer world has a more decisive influence than the mother.

Aside from the external stimulus of a time period of intense spirituality, the adolescent's vocational choice is often precipitated by inner tensions which he or she seeks to relieve. The tensions may again be a result of external circumstances, yet the crucial point is that the adolescent reacts to these circumstances with a religious response. Mere flight from the social responsibilities of adult life is an occasional motive. Far more common, however, is the death of a close person (especially a parent) which confronts the future saint with the ephemerality of life. The latter may not only result in a sense of seriousness about one's life, but the saint also may seek a substitute parent within the Church.⁵⁹

Finally, the visitation of a supernatural guest may start the conversion process. The latter phenomenon is rooted in a view that deems adolescence as a stage extremely susceptible to visions. Along the same lines, the adolescent is regarded to be prone to the occurrence of symbolic and directive dreams which accelerate the process of conversion. For the adolescent saint--even more so than for the child saint--unresolved issues of sexuality and guilt are often causative for the crisis and are dealt with in these visionary experiences or dreams.

Whatever the ultimate trigger is, the conversion always signifies a final relief of adolescent problems. It brings about the solution of emotional and sporadically physical dilemmas. After a period of withdrawal from the community--sometimes comparable to the isolation of the Siberian shamans--

conversion takes place and the emotional turmoil ceases. Even severe mental illnesses come to an immediate halt with this advent of conversion. The cured saint is left behind with more physical and moral strength than ever. In psychological terms the "curative effect of conversion"⁶⁰ is manifest in a more clear-cut sense of identity and an awakening to one's vocation.

The conversion process is naturally most radical for an adult. The hagiographical sources portray adulthood as a static state rather than a developmental one. This "fixed quantity"⁶¹ of the adulthood personality is turned upside down through the discovery of the holy path. Thus, in the typical story of a holy adult a sudden and drastic reversal takes place from a state of worldliness to one of spirituality. In this respect the lives of adult saints testify to a medieval notion of the ultimate compatibility of seeming extremes and display a strong belief in "a divine symmetry composed of paired opposites."⁶²

The hagiographical theme of an adult's shift from a worldly state of being to a spiritual state reaches its peak in the lives of thirteenth-century saints. Again, the new religious movements can be seen as a significant factor in these adult conversions. Also, an external event of catastrophic dimensions, such as the death of a loved one or the loss of one's fortune, may conjure up concerns about the transient nature of life and lead into an emotional crisis which is then solved in a religious manner. However, unlike saintly children or adolescents the adult's crisis is less fixated on the temptations of the flesh. Furthermore, unlike saintly children or adolescents the adult saints possess considerably little supernatural grace and powers.⁶³ The reason for both of these distinctive features of adult saints--for the secondary rank of temptations and for their

reduced supernatural powers--is the possession of a single virtue, or rather, the lack of it: virginity.

Virginity is an almost imperative virtue for the saint. Once it is lost, it cannot be regained. As shown above, the battle over virginity lies at the center of many stories of children and particularly of adolescent saints. It often synchronizes with the saints' decisions to commit themselves to the life of the spirit rather than to the life of the flesh. This struggle against sexual contamination and for purity of the soul is a hagiographical expression of the familiar ancient dichotomy between spirit and flesh, a dichotomy that has informed Christianity to a great extent up to today. Hence, most of Christianity's saints eventually deal with this dualism.

A positive public reputation and the veneration by the community of believers is much more easily obtained if one succeeds in maintaining the central condition of virginity. Yet, maintaining virginity is not always compatible with the demands of the world. At times the saint's struggle to preserve virginity coincides and clashes with the parents' desire for grandchildren, i.e., the perpetuation of the family.⁶⁴ Instead of the expected marriage the saint may choose a quest for physical and spiritual purity. It is significant that the quests of male saints diverge from the quests of female saints in several respects. Such gender-specific divergences will be discussed in the following section. For now the preliminary comment must suffice that the hagiographical treatment of the issue of virginity magnifies all other gender-specific disparities and that virginity is even more vital to female saints.

Apart from the differences between men and women, the virtue of

virginity--in the physical as well as in the spiritual sense--lies at the very heart of the Christian notion of sainthood, just like the dichotomy between body and spirit is constitutive to Christianity itself. Accordingly, the saints who manage to maintain the most perfect state of virginity are endowed with powers that exceed those of their less successful holy counterparts. The virgin saint, because of his or her purity, is a preferred channel for God's supernatural powers.⁶⁵ Supernatural power, in return, is a vital attribute of sainthood. Is it dispensable? What other saintly traits score high on the scale of Christian sainthood?

The Profile of the Saint

A key factor in the canonization of a saint has been the evidence of passionate veneration by a community. Naturally a person has to appeal to the community's ideas of sanctity in order to be venerated, to attract a cult, and ultimately to achieve canonization. It is difficult to assess after the fact whether future saints conform to those communal expectations of holiness or whether the community has developed its notions of holiness through the encounter with holy people. In any case, an array of criteria emerges which establishes the saint as a saint in his or her community.

First on the list is the already mentioned evidence of supernatural power, a power which manifests itself in the form of miracles and prophetic visions.⁶⁶ Thus, God is wonder-working through the holy person and taking care of personal, familial, or communal concerns. Second, sainthood involves a certain amount of asceticism for the body needs to be subdued so that the soul can be healthy. Here again chastity comes into play as "the universally understood

symbol of rejection of the flesh and the world."⁶⁷ For the community, the penitential saint is a linking figure to the realm of the spirit. He shares voluntarily the average person's suffering and, at the same time, transcends it towards spiritual perfection. The saint, of course, goes far beyond the average suffering by self-inflicting additional physical and emotional strains.

Works of charity are the third criterion of sainthood and a safe guarantee for wide-spread popular support. Thus, saints who renounce their fortune and help the weak and disenfranchised instead of enjoying the fruits of wealth attract veneration quickly. Ministering to orphans, prostitutes, widows, and prisoners, they take social action and lend their voice to issues of social concern.

Lastly, saints are regarded as holy based on their wise use of worldly power and/or evangelical zeal. The former may be influential abbots, bishops, or even princes or kings who enjoy temporal power. They do not exploit their power base. Quite the reverse--out of their genuine humility and a sense of mission they employ their worldly gifts for God's purposes. The evangelical or missionary type of saint, on the other hand, employs his intellectual and rhetorical skills as well as his charisma for the reanimation of God's word. This saint may do so in various ways, for instance through written treatises or during preaching journeys.⁶⁸

The five described criteria--from supernatural wonder-working, asceticism and chastity, to charitable works and evangelical zeal, to the wise display of power--provide a basic measurement for the saint as an ideal cultural type. However, they represent a theoretical construct. Modifications happen on the level of social realities. Thus, not every saint resembles all five qualities to

the same degree; rather the qualities are distributed by class, place, culture, and, above all, gender.

As a rule of thumb, hagiography follows a basic geographical divide between the North and the South of Europe. If the Northern European ideal type of a saint can be called a contemplative, ascetic, and rather private visionary, the Southern ideal exhibits the more public functions of miracle-working, penitence, and charity work. In the South the countryside becomes more and more of a stage for sainthood. But the emerging towns provide unmatched fertile ground for holiness--a holiness that was innovative and yet so in tune with the social and political developments of the thirteenth century. The penitential mendicant saint, for example, who surfaces in towns all over Italy, weaves together the strands of vita apostolica piety with the social concerns of his urban fellows. These saints respond to the need to balance the newly acquired wealth with the demand for poverty by being the town's designated penitential "compensating for the pride and greed of their profane compatriots."⁶⁹ Simultaneously they put band-aids on the wounds of the victims of this greed via their charitable ministry to the poor, orphans, widows, etc.

The rural saints of the South, on the other hand, meet the needs of the country folk. In a geographical area where people are at the mercy of nature (such as the Mediterranean), nature's arbitrariness becomes a permanent focal point in their lives. The resort to miraculous forms of control is only too close at hand for powerless people. Taken as a whole, the saints who are venerated in the rural regions of Southern Europe all display an unusually high degree of supernatural power. This wonder-working power is linked to their severe

asceticism and to the purity associated with austerity. Thus, these saints are automatically rewarded supernatural power as a gift, often in spite of their own humble resistance.⁷⁰

Nature is no less arbitrary in the North, but people's responses to her vicissitudes leads them towards a sense of mastery rather than a sense of helplessness. Factors such as actual physical circumstances and social cooperation ease their confrontation with nature. Last, but not least, a plain belief in the power of human effort helps to cope with difficulties.⁷¹ The Northern European saint is less explicable against the background of a rural or an urban culture. It is the cultural setting of the monastery that fosters him or her and is the main arena for holy activities.⁷²

As a matter of fact, the vast majority of all European saints is affiliated with a religious order. However, the geographical divide has its impact on the nature of the order. The spearheads of innovative vita apostolic piety, the mendicant orders, dominate the Southern regions. Other than the already mentioned social functions of this saintly type it needs to be stressed that mendicant saints vividly engage in the battles against heresy, thus serving a main ecclesiastical concern of the period. In the North, the older and somewhat conflicting piety of ascetic and contemplative withdrawal is most prevalent. Northern saints are more likely to spend their lives in meditation, prayer, and modest public service rather than in active, outgoing ministry. There, the Cistercian order is the main preserver of this notion of spirituality. In addition, the Cistercians take the lead in the Northern battles against heretics. And the Cistercian order generates most of the monastic saints of the thirteenth century.⁷³

In sum, the majority of the thirteenth-century saints is associated with an order. Those who change within the monastic system always leave a less strict order for the sake of a more ascetic one. In the South, mendicancy dominates the religious scene, and saintly activities like charity, miracle-working, and penitence score very high among the people. The more traditional monastic orders characterize the Northern landscape. There the ideals of ascetic withdrawal from the world and a more private visionary role are regarded as most holy. As briefly described above, each geographical region corresponds to a different ideal of sainthood, an ideal which mirrors social, political, and religious trends of the time.⁷⁴

The geographical demarcation line is broken down even further by the class subdivisions. For the entire period from 1000 to 1700, a noble background is the ideal springboard for a saintly career. During the Middle Ages, the hierarchical and elitist organization and understanding of society and the built-in biases of the ecclesiastical institutions offer avenues of advancement to the upper social level that are hardly within reach of the remaining strata of social groups. Concurrently the resources of the nobility--be it in terms of finances, family relations, education, or trained self-esteem--increase the probability of a successful pursuit of holiness. It is ironic that the noble saint benefits from his or her wealth even while renouncing it: the bigger the heap of riches, the more dramatic the gesture of renunciation. This is a reversal in the most spectacular sense.⁷⁵

In the eyes of the faithful, the class origin of the saint in itself does not count too much. Ultimately it is the saint's manifestation of holy traits that

grants him or her the status of a holy person. Thus, in the thirteenth century, when worldly power moves towards the lower end of the sainthood scale and more emphasis is placed on the combination between asceticism, charity and miracle-working, an increasing number of lower, middle class and lay people can gain entrance into the ranks of sainthood.⁷⁶

The phenomenon of class origin, however, enters through the back door. The saint's class origin predetermines precisely which of the five traits of sainthood he or she will exhibit in the first place and to what degree these traits constitute the holy reputation. Every saint has a share of supernatural power; therefore, this saintly attribute is a suitable gauge for the impact of class origin. As it turns out supernatural power is by far the most prominent in the lives of peasant saints. For the royal saint, the dispensation of supernatural power is less likely to be prominent in their saintly activity. One way to explain this imbalance is to make the connection between the saintly peasant and his culture, i.e., peasant culture. Thus, it can be argued again that because of their powerlessness in the battle against nature's vicissitudes the peasants are more inclined to seek the "security" and the assistance of supernatural powers.⁷⁷ Their heroes, the peasant saints, reflect this collectively felt need for supernatural intercession.

Furthermore, there is another observation which modifies substantially the previous comments on the effects of class origins: the distinctions between saints based on social class are never as decisive as the distinctions based on gender. That is to say, a saintly peasant woman has more in common with a saintly noblewoman than with another male peasant saint.⁷⁸ Taken as a whole, women

saints seem to form their own group which cuts across common social, geographical, and cultural diversifiers. Shulamith Shahar postulates for the Middle Ages the existence of a separate, female Fourth Estate, beyond the three common estates. The members of this female estate, Shahar argues, share similar experiences, face common restrictions, and give comparable responses to their environment.⁷⁹ Her assessment proves right for the distinct group of women saints. Female saints confront similar experiences in the pursuit of holiness and the perception of female holiness is colored by assumptions about womanhood.

The Distinct Features of Female Holiness

Already in the days of childhood a female saint shows gender-specific behavior and is confronted with gender-specific barriers. Weinstein and Bell stipulate the onset of gender-awareness and its ramifications between the age of four and seven. The crucial impact the mother has upon the life of most saintly children is almost doubled for the female child since the mother is the immediate female role model. From early age on the medieval girl is gradually introduced to her future as a wife, mother, and secondary citizen by the familial, societal, and ecclesiastical authorities. If these authorities happen to have a religious future in mind for her, the girl is usually very responsive and adopts well to a religious environment.⁸⁰

If, however, the girl enters the spiritual path without the permission and support of the authorities, her hurdling by far outdoes that of her male counterparts. Other than mastering the obstacles every would-be saint

encounters, such as publicly proving the authenticity of one's call, the girl must overcome the challenges imposed on her by virtue of her sex. In the public eye, she, as a woman, is less apt to sainthood. Instead she is supposed to assume "her place" in the private sphere of the family.⁸¹ From the skepticism and opposition of family members, saintly girls usually escape into the equally hostile environment of a community of believers that deems man to be more in God's image than woman. A girl's inner doubts are constantly reinforced and nurtured by the external questioning of her desired role. As a result, one finds many female saints wavering between crippling self-doubts and anxieties on the one hand, and religious determination and empowerment on the other. They tend to be less steady and less confident in their religious pursuit, more vulnerable to backsliding than comparable male saints. To conclude from this that women were weaker in their pursuit is a fallacy. A case can be made for the opposite conclusion: in the long-run, because they face more severe social obstacles, women have to be stronger in their determination to become saints than males. The stories of female saints are full not only of doubts, but also of mighty achievements.

Furthermore, the life stories of female saints contain numerous illnesses which befall the women at critical points during the holy quest. Pent-up guilt and a preoccupation with punishment are equally frequent themes.⁸² One last aspect is tied to the guilt-and-punishment issue: the battle over chastity. The victorious battle over chastity is crucial for the saint in the first place; nonetheless, it weighs even heavier in a girl's vocational struggle than in a boy's. Virginity, in general, is a more vital virtue for the girl. The reasons for

this inequality are numerous.

First, there is the compelling ideal of the Virgin Mary. Mary is the only semi-divine, Christian role model that is not completely male-defined, but--at least in theory--accessible to women. Moreover, women find themselves trapped between merely two potential role models to begin with, namely Mary and Eve. Needless to say, there is only one correct choice. Second, and in conflict with the first point, there is the massive social pressure towards motherhood and marriage with all their burdens and perils. Many women saints seek to escape this fate by marrying no one but Jesus Christ. A rejection of the worldly path usually corresponds to a rejection of motherhood and marriage for the sake of virginity, spiritual purity, and marital union with Christ. The latter is obviously not a necessary correlation in the life of a man.

Third, the stories of female saints substantiate other findings about the minimum degree of power which women have over their lives.⁸³ These women do not own the property to make spectacular gestures of renunciation, nor do they have enough power to throw it away heroically. Yet, what they potentially do have is a body, a body to be lost to the world or to be dedicated to the spirit.

Lastly, hagiography itself--explicitly or implicitly--makes an association between women and sexuality. A carry-over from a dualistic Platonism, this association presumes that women are closer to matter, i.e., to the body and its function, whereas men dwell in immediate proximity of the spiritual realm. From a Christian point of view a woman's alleged proneness to sexuality is reconfirmed by the figure of Eve who, as the weaker sex, was susceptible to

Satan's seduction. According to a prevalent theological notion, Eve seduced man on his behalf and continues to remain a sexual threat through her descendants, the daughters of Eve: women.⁸⁴ This thread of assumptions is woven into the hagiographical story lines in more than one way.

One detects a first indication of the association between women and sexuality in the classifications of saints. While men are found under such categories as confessors, martyrs, etc., for women their sexual status is the decisive factor. Women are ranked as either virgins or widows, and once the pure state of fleshly innocence is lost, the saintly path becomes narrower and narrower. In the stories themselves, the struggle for virginity takes a different form for men and women. Both cases convey the power of sexuality, but it is usually the woman who represents this power.⁸⁵ For instance, in a temptation scene the man's source of lure is commonly a stereotypical, wanton woman whose sexual assaults he has to ward off. The equivalent situation for the woman saint is one in which the temptations essentially arise out of her own inner depth, her own sexuality, that is to say her own lascivious nature.⁸⁶

Not only in this respect, but overall holy women are portrayed as acting differently and are more restricted in terms of socially sanctioned behavior than the men. The five universal criteria for sainthood, for example, apply only partially to female saints: evangelical activity and worldly power are a male prerogative. Penitential asceticism, on the other hand, is more pronounced in the lives of women for the reasons laid out above. Charitable works are a culturally encouraged occupation for female saints. The remaining criterion, namely supernatural power, is fundamental to female sainthood. This resort to spiritual

powers can be linked back to the social powerlessness of women in analogy to the supernatural skills of peasant saints. Just as the powerlessness of the peasants finds its expression in the numerous peasant miracle-workers, so does the social powerlessness of women express itself in the frequency with which they use supernatural powers.⁸⁷ For the female saints this supernatural power, charity, and penitential practice often go hand in hand.

But, do not male saints also practice penitence and charity? Do they not also gain a saintly reputation by employing supernatural powers? They certainly do; however, they are not confined to this triad. Moreover, in the times before the thirteenth century, when the road towards sainthood more often leads via evangelical activity and worldly power, it is not an equally viable road for men and women. In other words, the ideal saintly type of earlier times is coined after males and can be aspired by males more easily. Weinstein and Bell have identified this saintly ideal as the "masculine type."⁸⁸ Even though this "masculine type" of a saint continues to be an effective model, there emerges an alternative ideal in the thirteenth century which Weinstein and Bell have called the "androgynous type."⁸⁹ The latter incorporates the qualities of charity, asceticism, and supernatural power: overall qualities which are almost equally accessible to men and women. Thus, Weinstein and Bell explain the sharp increase of women saints in the thirteenth century against the background of an emerging new model of saint, one that honored androgynous qualities and, therefore, enabled more women to seek and attain sainthood. Over a quarter of thirteenth-century saints are female,⁹⁰ and this boom of female saints coincides and is closely connected with the rise of the vita apostolica movement, with lay

piety and mendicancy. The new movements are expressive of a model of spirituality outside the mainstream of the Church militant. Instead of an office-based, male hierarchy and a belief in power, these groups emphasize a merit-based hierarchy and concern for the powerless. They stress poverty, charity, and forgiveness, and they offer a haven for many women. In all these respects they represent a facet of Christianity that makes its way into the mainstream once in a while: the feminine side of the Church.⁹¹

The Frame of the Present Study

The main objective of the present study is the analysis of perceptions of female sainthood, how female sainthood is construed and confined by the hagiographer's mentality and the collective mentality he represents. In this light the assumptions about women saints--unreflected, hidden and encapsulated in the "spoken truth" of the hagiographical text--are of equal interest as the notions and ideas about female sainthood on which the text elaborates explicitly. In short, the hagiographical material serves as the point-of-departure for this study of a mentality. Beyond the more immediate mentality of the hagiographer and the collective which he represents, this study furthermore attempts to explore the more remote mentality of his subjects whenever it becomes apparent in their actions or traits. A special focus will be the possibilities that these women are seen to have in asserting holiness.

One of the more fundamental methodological dilemmas of the history of mentalities has surfaced repeatedly, namely the difficulty of establishing a norm of mentality against which deviations can be measured without bending the

homogeneity of the mentality too far. Because of the unique benefits of quantitative studies and of case studies a dialectic integration of both approaches has been suggested that will alleviate, if not partially solve, this dilemma. As shown in an earlier section hagiographical sources are very suitable for both approaches. The methodological goal of the present study is such an integration. While the focus of the study is an in-depth analysis of three individual cases, Weinstein and Bell, and, to some extent Goodich, supply the quantitative groundwork for it. That is to say they provide a standard of "normality" against which the case studies gain sharper contours. It is hoped that their findings can be tested and confirmed for the particular cases. Yet, an equally important objective is to determine some limitations of their theoretical frame. Due to its far-reaching applicability--Weinstein and Bell cover a period of 700 years--this frame is bound to overlook the peculiar, but essential, aspects of smaller samples of saints' lives, a fact which the authors acknowledge themselves.⁹²

For various reasons the lives of Christina Mirabilis, Lutgard of Aywières, and Margaret of Yprès are a justifiable choice for a case study. Written by the same hagiographer, Thomas de Cantimpré,⁹³ the stories of the three women are comparable both in terms of their commonalities and dissimilarities; it is the same mentality that underlies and connects their stories. This mentality coincides in Thomas, the individual, the hagiographer in a long tradition, and the channel for the collective of his time and place. In his writings, this mentality is condensed.

Furthermore, the women's stories take place in the early thirteenth century. Scholars widely agree that the turn from the twelfth to the thirteenth

century marks a decisive shift in Christian spirituality having repercussions in all cultural and societal spheres. The surge of women's religious zeal is just one among other striking phenomena of this turning point, yet it is at the very heart of the innovative developments and inseparably bound to the new religious movements and their more feminine piety.⁹⁴ Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina are among those influential religious women. They each make their own contribution to this progressive piety and represent different types of feminine spirituality. Their mentality also speaks through the hagiographical source--sometimes loud, sometimes hardly audible.

Finally, as Weinstein and Bell have documented, the new piety has ramifications for the ideal of sainthood. Overall the basis of this ideal is broadened in a way that is favorable to women and allows for the emergence of an hitherto unknown, "androgynous" type of saint. Given the centrality that this discovery of an "androgynous" type has in Weinstein's and Bell's framework, it is worthwhile to investigate precisely what this type does for the three women and how this ideal is anchored in their lives. Is the ideal type ultimately more formative than other traits these women exhibit? Or does the assumption of this type inhibit the visibility of other traits these women exhibit?

The playground of a mentality is the social sphere. It informs human interaction and societal institutions. Therefore, whenever the hagiographical material provides information about the social realm, this information can potentially be traced back to its basic presuppositions. By implication the present study will pay attention to the social reality whenever it emerges on the periphery of the three women's spiritual quest. Moreover, one always has to

keep in mind the unique social experience of women in the Christian medieval Church because mentalities are formed and expressed in the social sphere. Needless to say, this interplay between social realities and mentalities is not a one-way street, and one has to be watchful to avoid jumping to conclusions. Weinstein and Bell and Goodich have circumvented this danger by their twofold approach moving back and forth between the social component, the pursuit of holiness, and the mentality component, the perception of holiness. Although the present study differs from the work of Weinstein and Bell and Goodich in one vital aspect, i.e., it represents a case study, it, nonetheless, will follow in their footsteps and deal with the topic of sainthood on a social and a mentality level.

In practical terms the developmental line, from the onset of the saintly pursuit to its completion, is the guiding principle for the first section of the study. The second section will cover the components that constitute sainthood; based on these components the construction of an ideal type of a female saint according to our hagiographer will follow. In a final, conclusive part the attempt will be made to locate the findings in the broader frame established by Weinstein and Bell and Goodich in order to determine the scope of their framework. As an additional step, the section will look at recurring issues and themes in the stories of the three women and, whenever possible, suggest an expansion of the framework. Special emphasis will be on the five universal criteria of sainthood which Weinstein and Bell stipulate. Aside from the evident limitations of a postulated "ideal type" acknowledged by the authors, another question arises. Weinstein and Bell derive their categories from the hagiographical literature itself, a source which undoubtedly has a built-in male

bias. Hence, the question is legitimate whether the division line is truly one between a "masculine" type and an "androgynous" type. The bottom line could as well be a male-defined concept of sainthood into which both groups, the hagiographers and the historians (Weinstein and Bell), try to fit women. If this is the case, their definitions look at women through male lenses, i.e., they necessarily screen those parts of the women's stories that happen on women's own terms and are unique to the female experience. This would conflict with and sacrifice Weinstein's and Bell's central insight, namely that female saints form a group of their own cutting across all diversifiers. In other words, the question is: does a "feminine" type of saint exist, that is to say a type with characteristics resulting from the female experience?⁹⁵ The present study will look for the features of feminine sainthood even though this has to be done through the glasses of the male hagiographer.

CHAPTER II

THE ANALYSIS

Thomas de Cantimpré--a Mouthpiece for the Collective?

Thomas de Cantimpré's hagiographical works stand in a long tradition. Already Gregory the Great summarized the underlying purpose of hagiography when he noted: "The lives of the saints are often more effective than mere instruction for us to love heaven as our home."⁹⁶ Since these early times the catholic Church has never called into question that the primary goal of hagiographical works is the conveyance of a spiritual rather than an historical truth. To this day the shared assumption is that the saints embody the truth of the Christian faith and live it out in daily life with commendable perfection. Just as secular heroes and heroines exemplify the highest values of a society, so are the saints emblematic of the highest values of Christianity.

Both groups of heroic role models, secular heroes as well as spiritual heroes, exert a powerful normative influence on their environment. By virtue of their way of life they represent a canon of values and behavior to their fellow human beings. For the Middle Ages the normative influence of heroic figures is doubled, so to speak, since the distinction between secular and religious heroes is artificial. Rather than counteract the secular sphere, the pervasiveness of Christian values reinforces social values and vice versa. Religious and secular heroic figures benefit equally from an historical constellation in which the

Church identifies "with the whole of organized society."⁹⁷

Medieval heroes and heroines embody the ethos of medieval culture and society, an ethos which blends so smoothly religious and secular values. By implication those who tell the stories of these heroic figures spread and promote the values they represent. Medieval hagiographers are very apt propagandists, so to speak. Our hagiographer Thomas de Cantimpré certainly functions as a mouthpiece for collectively held and cherished values. Precisely this role designates him as a promising resource person for the mentality of his period.

On the other hand, one should note that even "propagandists" are individuals with unique experiences that filter their collectively inspired message. For a study of Thomas' works, this implies that the reader should probe the following discussion of the collective values and assumptions which his hagiographical writings favor against his own unique life journey and against his formative experiences.⁹⁸ In the context of this study it must suffice to summarize the rough outlines of Thomas de Cantimpré's life.

In 1201 Thomas was born into a noble family from Brabant. Thomas' father, desiring a sound religious education for his son, sent him to Liège at a very young age. There Thomas became acquainted with the sermons and the world of thought of Jacques de Vitry which made a long-lasting impression upon him. Also in Liège Thomas entered the order of the Regular Canons (1217) and later adopted the name of the location of his abbey, Cantimpré, as his own last name. While a member of the Regular Canons he became familiar with Classical Greek and attempted translations of Aristotle. At the same time, he completed his first major work, Liber de Natura Rerum, a scientific tract written

with meticulous accuracy.⁹⁹ For over fifteen years Thomas remained in this spiritually rich region, particularly because he was eager to maintain contact with a precious spiritual director: the Cistercian Lutgard of Aywières. In the year 1232 he converted to the Dominican Order and transferred to their convent in Louvain. During the transition period he wrote the life of Christina Mirabilis, the holy woman from Trond who had died in 1224.¹⁰⁰ Shortly afterwards he undertook a journey to Cologne in order to benefit from the teachings of Albertus Magnus. After several years of studies in Cologne, Thomas left the city in 1237 and moved on to the centre of intellectual exchange, the University of Paris. There he put the biography of the Dominican tertiary Margaret of Ypres into writing.¹⁰¹ He also deeply immersed himself in the controversies of the time before he returned to Louvain in 1246. Until his death--around the year 1270--Thomas fulfilled the tasks of subprior and a lector. His preaching journeys led him as far as France and Germany. In 1249 Thomas composed the biography of Lutgard--three years after his adored spiritual counselor had died.¹⁰² During the final years at Louvain he also wrote his principal work, Bonum universale de apibus, a record of miraculous events. This major work is of interest in our context because it documents Thomas' thoroughness in verifying the data he either obtained from witnesses or observed himself.¹⁰³

Even from this brief outline of Thomas' life some general observations on the influences that formed him are possible. No doubt, Thomas spent most of his life at the heartbeat of his times. First, as a Regular Canon he was introduced to the classical heritage. Thomas even ventured out into the realm of scientific methodology. Moreover, the association with the Canons was bound to

evoke in him a sense of responsibility for the edification and education of others, be it as a living example or in preaching.¹⁰⁴ It should also be noted that the Canons stood in close connection with Beguines and recluses.¹⁰⁵

Second, the contact with Jacques de Vitry and with the flourishing spirituality of the holy women and of the cloistered people of the different orders in the area around Liège brought Thomas in close touch with the most vital tendencies of thirteenth-century piety. Like de Vitry, Thomas actively supported the cause of the Beguines. He also followed in de Vitry's hagiographical footsteps; both viewed the piety embodied by the Northern saints as a needed exemplum and counterpart to the Southern heresies.¹⁰⁶

Third, Thomas was formed by his liaison with the Dominican order. The Friars with their ideals of mendicacy and the importance of preaching via exempla enhanced Thomas' knowledge and understanding of contemporary progressive spirituality. While a preacher he had to be able to distinguish the orthodox from the heretical. As a Dominican he also had to fight the contemporary war against heresy with rhetorical means.

In addition to his immediate experience with spirituality, Thomas spent many decades of his life studying the theological underpinnings of Christianity. As part of these endeavors Thomas preoccupied himself with scholasticism and learned to master the rules of logical discourse. He actively participated in the theological controversies of the age, such as the debates over the Talmud or the issue of accumulating ecclesiastical benefices.¹⁰⁷ Lastly, he used his thorough training to undertake painstaking projects such as his collection of "verified" miracles entitled Bonum universale de apibus.

Being exposed to a solid theological training on the one hand and to the various significant spiritual strands on the other, it seems only natural for Thomas to weave all these influences together in his hagiographical work. As shown above, Weinstein and Bell have provided the main elements of the broader frame in which one must locate the microcosm of Thomas de Cantimpré's hagiographical work. It is appropriate, therefore, to parallel the structure of the following analysis of Thomas' work with Weinstein and Bell's analysis of their quantitative studies as far as possible. This parallelism will facilitate the final comparison between the broad picture and its individual piece.

Lutgard, Christina, Margaret: The Developmental Perspective

Conversion

In the case of each woman the turn towards religion occurs at a young age and is complicated by a familial context. For example, Lutgard (1182?-1246), daughter of a noble mother and an urban, middle-class father, finds herself torn between her parents' mutually exclusive future plans. The father, a partisan of the ways of the world and the prosperity of the emerging towns, seeks a suitable marriage for Lutgard. His attempts to accumulate a generous dowry for his daughter by investing in trade are undermined by bad fortune: the money is irrevocably lost. His unbroken intention to further pave a worldly path for Lutgard finally clashes with his wife's plans for her daughter's future. The wife, raised in the spirit of the nobility and with the assertiveness of the upper class, carries out her plans with stubborn determination and questionable

methods: "the urgent insistence of the righteous mother overruled the daughter's mind, sometimes with threats, sometimes with caresses."¹⁰⁸ Supported by God's grace the mother makes Lutgard join the Benedictine monastery of St. Catherine as an oblate when she is twelve years old.

Clearly, Lutgard's mother and father represent two divergent definitions and ways of leading a successful life; a spiritual path (known among the nobility) is contrasted with a worldly one (favored by the middle class). Against the background of the soaring economic possibilities of the developing towns, the gulf between the two options is widened and Lutgard's conflict is sharpened. Then again, she enjoys at least the massive encouragement of one parent. Her vocational choice is supported, even evoked by her immediate female role model, her mother, who herself did not choose the life she proposes to her daughter.

Margaret (1216-37) has no built-in class conflict in her family of origin. She is born into a thoroughly middle-class family. There is no mention of parental disagreement on the daughter's future; rather, her father dies when Margaret reaches the tender age of four.¹⁰⁹ His death coincides chronologically with Margaret's placement in a convent so that she can be raised by nuns. After her first year under the supervision of the sisters her mother confronts her with belated opposition in form of a passive-aggressive prophecy that the daughter will relapse. As a matter of fact, Margaret temporarily falls back into a more worldly fashion. The crisis, instilled by doubts and self-doubts, comes to a culmination and finally to a halt with Margaret's tearful "vow of chastity of mind and body."¹¹⁰

But the gained peace of heart is only a preliminary one. Margaret has to fight several other battles with herself and her mother throughout her lifetime. On the surface her mother is supportive of the child's path--she initiated it after all--yet, the mother gives Margaret many ambiguous messages. As a woman preoccupied with worldly duties the mother struggles with the daughter's "extraordinary" way of life. Even though her parental opposition is subtle it still reinforces Margaret's own anxieties at crucial points in her holy quest.

Open violence is the familial response in the story of Christina (1150-1224). Her very modest class origins do not favor a saintly career in the first place. When both her parents die unexpectedly she is left in charge of the herds while her oldest sister devotes herself to prayers and the second oldest runs the household. Christina withdraws into the solitary existence of a shepherdess, her only visitor being Christ. Her occupation undergoes a rapid change when, after a sudden illness, she falls dead. She awakens during her own funeral mass. To the astonished bystanders she reports that God called her back from purgatory so that she would do penance for the souls of others and for her own soul. In fulfillment of this task Christina engages in all kinds of bizarre behavior that is meant to reenact the pains of purgatory in everyday life. Her extreme behavior leads to painful confrontation with her family and friends who feel deeply embarrassed and disturbed by her "madness." Repeatedly Christina feels the need to flee from civilization only to be captured time and again by her persecutors. The degree of familial "concern" is shown in one episode when her opponents hire a man who breaks Christina's leg so that her sisters can chain her in a dungeon.¹¹¹

Although Christina's behavior does not harm anybody, does not even involve anybody but herself, it seems unbearable to her family who attempt to force her into a tolerable mold of existence. This violent familial reaction has a milder counterpart in the public sphere: the citizens and the clergy of Trond are disturbed by the holy woman's action. Clearly, Christina has to overcome many perilous obstacles before she can establish the authenticity of her call.

What do these conversion stories have in common? Obviously, family bonds are closely knit: parents (and siblings in the absence of parents) do claim a say in a child's life and do show concern about the child's choices. In the case of the three women, the form of familial involvement has negative effects. It is, however, an involvement and as such no less intense than parental support. In contrast to the majority of saints, Margaret, Lutgard, and Christina face familial opposition ranging from subtle psychological pressure to massive physical threats.

In two stories, Lutgard's and Margaret's, the opposition goes hand in hand with encouragement. For both women the encouragement comes from the mothers who play a decisive role in their children's pursuit of holiness. Moreover, even in Christina's quest the female relatives take the lead, although this happens with the destructive goal to undermine their sister's actions. It seems that the care of the three future saints lies in the hand of these influential female family members. When, as in Lutgard's case, the father is part of the conversion process, he represents the options of the world whose ways he--as a man and merchant--knows well.

It should also be noted that the portrayal of Lutgard's and Margaret's

childhood characterizes them as different from other children. Of course, the perception of a difference rests on the hagiographer's and his culture's assumption that all children usually behave in a certain way by virtue of being children. That adulthood is a more advanced stage than childhood and thus more appropriate for a holy person is illustrated by Thomas' description of the two saints. Thus, even as a child, Margaret displays an abhorrence for any mortal sin.¹¹² After her first communion (at the age of five) she is said to "despise all childish things."¹¹³ And Lutgard, even though she has to go through the motions of her father's household and dress appropriately, nevertheless distinguishes herself by avoiding uncouth jokes and "unseemly girlish love talk."¹¹⁴ Those attributes reveal that the hagiographer's notion of childhood differs from his perception of the two special children, Lutgard and Margaret: both seem to score on the adult scale of seriousness, responsibility, and horror of sin. They appear to have moved quickly through or skipped entirely the developmental stage of normal childhood.

Christina also, if not by choice or by nature, is forced to move swiftly into adulthood by the sudden deaths of her parents. At least the emergence of her religious desires coincides with the parental loss. Thus, her new role as an orphan shepherdess results from the three sisters' desire "to order their life in the manner of religious life."¹¹⁵ As in Margaret's case--in which the loss of the father is linked to the oblation--the almost simultaneous occurrence of death and a conversion seems to point beyond a mere chronological coincidence. Rather a Grenzsituation seems to trigger a turn towards the religious realm. The implicit hagiographical connection between the vanity of the world and the reliability of

the religious realm is a fairly common one as has been pointed out in previous discussions.

An additional important aspect of the early days of the holy pursuit deserves attention: the possibility of worldly love with its prospect of marriage. This option precipitates Margaret's final conversion and it lies at the root of Lutgard's struggle with the religious life. Lutgard, for example, resists her father's worldly wishes in spite of her own yearnings for marriage.¹¹⁶ But the battle against heterosexual bonding is far from being won. The continued wooing of a young man has to be averted by Christ himself. Lutgard's commitment to purity is not definite at that point: "in wondrous ways the devil zealously urged that she bend her inclination to girlish consent--but in vain."¹¹⁷ Thomas views even Lutgard as innately capable of fleshly sin. Only the appearance of Christ in his humanity can redirect Lutgard's misguided desires towards the right lover. Now, Lutgard rejects the youth with determination: "Depart from me, fodder of death, nourishment of villainy, for I have been overtaken by another lover."¹¹⁸ No doubt, the love for Christ and the love for a human male are mutually exclusive.

Margaret, on the other hand, is not pushed towards marriage by any paternal pressure. Rather she herself is not completely ready to renounce the chance of heterosexual love. Her commitment to pure spiritual love evolves gradually and through the "manful"¹¹⁹--as Thomas puts it so pointedly--mastery of temptations. Thus, she cherishes strong feelings for a young man which she initially counteracts with her vow of chastity as described above. In this fashion a worldly lover is again abandoned for the heavenly one. Thomas leaves no

doubt that her choice is advantageous. As a reward for her renouncement Margaret is "espoused to Christ and [has] escaped the nuptials of the world."¹²⁰ Whether this statement is intended as a comment on the actual perils of married life or whether Thomas simply wants to express the superiority of a religious way of life is almost impossible to determine.

Shortly after the described rescue, Christ saves Margaret a second time. When she falls ill a doctor diagnoses her refusal to marry as the reason for her sickness. Obviously, Margaret's environment has difficulties with her decision not to meet the societal expectation of marriage, an expectation of which she seems to be aware at a very young age--just as Lutgard. Again Christ helps Margaret to persevere. She bears the bodily pain of her sickness in order to rise from bed even "more fully espoused to Christ by this."¹²¹

In the subsequent third temptation Margaret reestablishes contact with the mentioned young man for the purpose of having a broken goblet repaired. Christ reacts to this move like a husband--with intense jealousy and withdrawal. The question remains whether Thomas modelled the heavenly spouse's mode of behavior after actual social behavior. It is clear, however, that only with the assistance of Margaret's spiritual father--a desexualized and therefore non-threatening figure--and through the intervention of the Virgin Mary, is the holy woman finally able to soothe her angry spouse.¹²² Thomas contends again that dedication to spiritual marriage is simply incompatible with worldly love affairs.

It holds true for Margaret, as well as for Lutgard, that her conversion is not fully complete until the spiritual marriage is performed and observed. As opposed to the gradual developments in the stories of Margaret and Lutgard,

Christina's union with Christ takes place in a radical fashion. Immediately after her first death she encounters the Lord face to face and the pact between the two is established: "Certainly, my dearest, you will be with me."¹²³ Temptations do not trouble Christina and the issue of preserving her virginity for an other-worldly spouse surfaces only on the periphery of her quest. But like Lutgard and Margaret, Christina also needs to abandon the possibility of a worldly marriage and to establish a spiritual union between Christ and herself in order to enter the painful process of spiritual growth.

Growth

The growth process of the three future saints is not open-ended; nor does it lead to the crystallization of three distinct individuals. Rather, Thomas de Cantimpré describes the development of Margaret, Lutgard, and Christina as moving towards three respective ideals that have been defined before them. They emerge as "individuals" by conforming more and more to a pre-formulated set of saintly qualities. Lutgard, for example, grows into the epitome of her order¹²⁴ while Margaret aspires to the perfect embodiment of a Dominican tertiary. Christina, finally, becomes the exemplum¹²⁵ of an orthodox holy woman living in the world. Before analyzing the ideals which the three embody and the mentality which fostered those ideals, it is beneficial to direct attention to the dynamics of reaching out for the aspired ideal state.

In Lutgard's case the mold is made from previous and contemporary Cistercian hagiography and from the concepts of influential Cistercian theologians. Especially William of Saint Thierry and, to a lesser degree,

Bernard of Clairvaux left their marks on Thomas' work.¹²⁶ Thus, Thomas imposed William's concept of the threefold ascent of the soul upon the story of Lutgard's spiritual journey. Thomas creates three divisions in his Life of Lutgard "according to the three stages of the soul: the state of those who are beginning, of those who are progressing, and of the perfect ones."¹²⁷

Judging from a close reading of the text these divisions seem artificial. The ultimate goal is spiritual perfection in the Cistercian sense, and Lutgard's starting point is the familiar monastic one: contemplative prayer and asceticism. Already during her early days at the Benedictine nunnery Lutgard distinguishes herself by her intense self-inflicted asceticism; her equally intense self-doubts provide the necessary motivation and endurance. That her heavy fasts earn her the envy of her sisters indicates both her tendency towards extraordinary--saintly--behavior and the initial skepticism of the community towards this behavior. Her pursuit of sainthood happens in a communal setting. Therefore, it eventually needs the approval and recognition of the community. At this early stage her extreme penitence meets with irritation but already serves as the merit base for the first miracles occurring to Lutgard.¹²⁸

The time immediately following is one of spiritual nurture for which Lutgard herself appears to be ready. Through her penitence she has become a purified vessel for God's grace. Yet, simultaneously, she is still an empty vessel. Only after several instances of spiritual feeding, such as Christ nursing her from his wounds, does Lutgard advance to a point of spiritual drunkenness from which she can "feed" others. The latter "feeding" is symbolized by oil that drips miraculously from Lutgard's fingers:¹²⁹ she is overflowing with grace.

Lutgard's imitation of Christ is now set in motion. Her environment promptly responds to this newly acquired spiritual authority by selecting her for the office of the monastery's prioress. Although Thomas assures the reader that "it was not fitting that such a lamp be concealed under a bushel,"¹³⁰ Lutgard herself violently rejects the offer. Her self-doubts occasionally blend with her sincere humility leaving the reader confused as to her ultimate motivations. In this incident she plans to abandon the Benedictines. Her plan finds support among spiritual authorities, namely the master John of Lierre and the well-known Christina Mirabilis. Against her own inner resistance and fears, and under pressure from her spiritual advisors, Lutgard makes a radical break: without any knowledge of French she joins the Cistercians in Aywières. Like the majority of saints who, at some time in their lives, make a move within the monastic system, Lutgard selects a stricter second order. Thomas approves this choice of "a more perfect life,"¹³¹ making no attempts whatsoever to cover up his bias towards the Cistercian order. Lutgard, at least, seems to have mixed feelings about her abandonment of the Benedictines and ensures the spiritual and temporal prosperity of the nunnery St. Catherine by her intercessory prayers ever after.

Lutgard's decision to join the Cistercian order at the age of twenty-four opens the door to the larger world. Of course, Lutgard is and remains a Northern contemplative ascetic. However, her ascetic actions clearly aim at involvement in the events of her environment and time. Her first seven-year fast, for example, is a designated spiritual combat against the Albigensian heretics. Taken as a whole the fight against heresy was a major concern of the

Cistercian order; for Lutgard personally it marks her first step towards the role of a public figure who acts from within the walls of a monastery. Along the same line she endows Jacques de Vitry with the gift of preaching, an activity from which she herself is prohibited because of her womanhood.

By the time when she endows de Vitry and frees him from the threat of a temptation, the reader encounters the high degree of power which her prayers have reached. She is said to pray "violently," and her requests are fulfilled with "absolutely no delay between her pleading and the results."¹³² The spiritual power she can claim and the public repercussions of this power are also reflected in the apparitions of religious key persons, such as Innocent III. It is significant that this wide radius of action and her far-reaching spiritual power still do not erase her inner doubts. She is harder on herself than ever.¹³³

Within the monastery Lutgard functions in a comparably powerful fashion. Among other miracles, she performs acts of healing, and her intercessory prayers deliver the monastery from the presence of demons. In spite of the obvious positive effects which Lutgard has on the communal life, the reader catches a glimpse of an ongoing friction within the community: Lutgard is temporarily excluded from the weekly communion. Finally, Christ takes sides and intervenes "with the worthy zeal of the Bridegroom towards those who unwisely disturb His bride."¹³⁴ The unusual disciplinary means of denying the eucharist indicates again a struggle between an extraordinary individual and the community members. It also points beyond that struggle, namely to the special devotion to the eucharist by Lutgard.

As a matter of fact, her connection with Christ has deepened considerably

(his obedience to her prayers is emphasized several times¹³⁵) and seems to prompt an ever-deepening retreat into her interior world. In addition to her other gifts she is now rewarded with prophetic vision. Combined with the power of her prayers her second sight aids her in snatching souls from the perils of temptation or the pains of purgatory. Our hagiographer shares his own experience. As a young man Lutgard helped him overcome the pressure of temptations. This action earns her the title of a "most special mother."¹³⁶ She who renounced worldly marriage and motherhood has now achieved the status of a spiritual bride and mother. With her divine groom she "parents" the sinners, dead and alive. For example, her second seven-year fast is dedicated to "sinners everywhere."¹³⁷ Overall, her contact with Christ, the spouse, intensifies as does the "parental" concern for sinners which they both hold in common. Lutgard is heading towards a state of perfection.

In several respects Margaret's growth process takes turns different from Lutgard's religious path. The main reason for those divergences is the different religious vocation which Margaret pursues, namely the role of a Dominican tertiary. On the other hand, many aspects of their journeys show striking similarities. Just as Lutgard, Margaret suffers from doubts and guilt in spite of her religious zeal. As discussed above, Margaret's inner conflict about her relationship to the opposite sex lead her into a crisis with the jealous, heavenly spouse. When the controversial issue itself is resolved, Margaret still is in need of a supernatural helper, the Virgin Mary, to ease her pent-up guilt before she can truly begin to mature spiritually. With Mary's aid Margaret is said to be "always ready to endure bodily mortifications."¹³⁸ What has been observed in

Lutgard's case holds true in this story: asceticism and self-doubts accompany the spiritual search. Furthermore, the reception of "spiritual food" stands in close connection with her resolution to take on and overcome physical burdens.¹³⁹ From this point on she will receive the eucharist in regular intervals.

From early on Margaret seems to be torn between her vocation and the demands of the world. This tension lasts throughout her lifetime and is intensified by the fact that she lives in the world instead of within the safe walls of a religious community. While a young woman, her physical beauty puts additional strain on Margaret. People feel compelled to look at her, whereas she feels extremely terrified by human contact; she even asks her mother to remove a twelve year old boy from the house.¹⁴⁰ Her fear of human and particularly heterosexual interaction is essentially a horror of arousing again the jealousy of her heavenly bridegroom. Love for a male is out of the question. Love for the world must be balanced with the primary commitment to love Christ.

Margaret's attempts to achieve such a balance frequently happen at the expense of the world. Thus, her desire to be united with Christ leads her into progressive silence and withdrawal. It appears that she does not entertain any closeness with human beings other than her spiritual father, a Friar. Rather she cuts most of her familial ties, despite the ongoing resistance of her mother. Thomas reports several fights within the family and gives an idea how burdensome a holy child can be. Not only are Margaret's helping hands missed, her solitary existence and austerity deeply disturb family members.¹⁴¹

Margaret reduces her sleep and food intake considerably. In spite of--or because of--her penitential way of life, her bodily and spiritual strength begins to

increase. Thomas labels her as a "woman, powerful in everything"¹⁴² and takes the strengthening effect of her asceticism as the living proof for Augustinian doctrines. Margaret begins to display the features of a true exemplum. Her harshness towards herself, however, and her own doubts do not cease.¹⁴³

Gradually Margaret exercises power through her prayers. However, she neither attempts nor performs as many successful intercessions as Lutgard performs within and beyond the wall of her monastery. Margaret's prayers are very private conversations with Christ which she conducts in a hidden spot on the family's balcony. In this seclusion a more intimate union with Christ evolves that leads her into frequent ecstasy and lasting joy,¹⁴⁴ a state comparable to Lutgard's spiritual inebriation.

Her phase of seclusion is ended by an urge to go out into the world and live a life of poverty and charity. This wish meets with familial resistance and Margaret has to escape in order to beg for herself and the poor. The move towards the outer world and its concerns reinforces her reputation as a spiritual authority: people begin seeking her advice more often. But Margaret's feelings about human contact remain ambiguous. When, for example, a woman prophesies to Margaret that she cannot always be in meditative embrace with Christ, Margaret is horrified and laments heavily.¹⁴⁵ The friction between vita activa, involvement in the world, and vita contemplativa, the meditative union with Christ, is painful for her. She appears to view staying in the world as part of her ministry, and yet she nonetheless perceives human contact as endangering her closeness to Christ.

There is a sole exception: the aforementioned Friar enjoys her love and

obedience. "Because her spiritual father had called her back from the world, she loved him more than anybody or anything she had in the world,"¹⁴⁶ the reader is told. The Friar obviously does represent the realm of the spiritual rather than worldly desires. He is a linking figure who assists her with her decision to remain part of the secular world but also connects her with the Church. In addition, the Friar appears as a rather generic spiritual director throughout the story: no individual traits, no sexual connotations, no threat. When Margaret still cherishes fears about their friendship "because mutual love and frequent conversation between a man and a woman seem suspicious to our superiors,"¹⁴⁷ she asks Christ for his approval. Christ willingly gives permission in this particular case: "There will be no death for you in body or in spirit, no matter what he recommends."¹⁴⁸ Even more, the Friar and Christ, work hand in hand for Margaret's sake. Thus, Christ hands out his own body to Margaret when the Friar is not available and reveals to her the activities of her missing spiritual director.¹⁴⁹

In general, as Margaret's burning love for Christ and her penitential power increase so does her ability to have visionary insights. Apparitions of the Virgin become more frequent and Christ makes more revelations to her. Margaret's anxieties and doubts still linger, but she also acts with spiritual authority. Her claim to power surfaces clearly in her reaction to "a certain prominent lady from the principalities"¹⁵⁰ who repeatedly asks for intercession. After a while Margaret refuses the noblewoman's request because the Lord showed her that the lady's hands were stained with blood. According to Margaret the Lord claims: "every day she plunders my poor by her taxes."¹⁵¹

When her Friar insinuates that she may not have heard the word "taxes," Margaret is truly upset and rejects this notion with assertiveness. She has begun to assume authority in the name of God. From this powerful base Margaret can reach out for a perfect state.

Christina's journey towards perfection is full of bizarre elements. She is named Mirabilis for her outrageous behavior, and the extreme actions described in her story have shed much negative light on the credibility of Thomas de Cantimpré.¹⁵² The concern of this study is the nature of Christina's exemplum rather than the question of ultimate truth. As in the vita of Lutgard, Thomas parallels Christina's story with William of Saint Thierry's threefold concept of the soul's ascent.¹⁵³ But this time the spiritual destination is not the embodiment of an order's ideals. It is the vocation of a devout religious woman without any formal affiliation, yet within the boundaries of orthodox faith. In other words, crucial parts of Christina's journey must be understood against the need to balance her call with the demands of society and Church and to make her a role model of a desirable (and acceptable) religious woman.

As mentioned above, after her first death Christina returns to the world for the purpose of delivering other souls from purgatory by suffering their sufferings in her own body. Before Christina can fulfill her share of penitential activities, she flees from her task and from her society into the desert while being persecuted by the people who believe that she is possessed. This flight-capture pattern is characteristic for the early stages of Christina's conversion and her familial conflict over it. It also reflects the tension which underlies the saintly pursuit: the tension between communal concerns and the needs of an

extraordinary individual.

In terms of Christina's growth the early episodes of flight are central because, as in Lutgard's and Margaret's cases, a "feeding" takes place. Although Christina does not want to return to society, she is still lacking food and drink to an unbearable degree. In response to her need the Lord causes an unusual miracle: Christina's virginal breasts begin to drip with "sweet milk" and she can nourish herself for many weeks.¹⁵⁴ In this fashion her self-sufficiency in Christ is proven; nevertheless, she must return to society and fulfill her task.

Once Christina returns to civilization she first seeks contact with a priest and pleads for the eucharist. This spiritual nourishment requires the mediation of the Church and of the male clergy. The priest gives in to the demands of the odd woman. After Christina is spiritually strengthened she can undertake her purgatorial pains. She does it to an outrageous degree by suffering extreme heat and cold, tormenting herself with torture instruments, and twisting her body in prayer to a point beyond recognition. However, Christina survives all atrocious pain without any bodily injury.¹⁵⁵

Even though Christina's behavior does not cause any direct harm, her friends and family are too embarrassed to let it happen, and they continue with their attempts to control her. After repeated capture Christina is placed under a yoke, treated like a dog, and comes close to starvation. The Lord intercedes, and one more time the miracle consists of feeding: Christina's virginal breasts flow with a wondrous oil that heals her wounds and serves as a spread for her bread. Again she is shown to be somebody whose only need is Christ. But this time the healing has effects beyond herself as an individual: the split with her family

and friends is healed. Thus, her captors take the flowing as a sign of flowing grace and finally accept Christina's vocation.¹⁵⁶

This event signifies the beginning of Christina's reconciliation with society. People begin to assemble around her. Yet, her friends and family still pray for moderation in her actions--a certain degree of adjustment that the holy person should make to the standards of the average person. Only after Christina immerses herself in a baptismal font does she achieve a balance with society. Newly born she is finally able to behave "more calmly" and to "endure the smell of men and to live among them."¹⁵⁷ From now on Christina takes great pleasure in poverty and penitence among her people. She especially engages herself in begging because she views urgent begging as a means by which sinners are turned towards mercy and their own guilt. If the respective sinner does not agree with her on the higher theological purpose of the action, Christina is said to take what she wants anyway. Thomas does not condemn this religiously motivated theft, but rather approves of it as a sign of Christina's determination.¹⁵⁸ Even though the holy woman has become part of society, she still stands outside many rules of regular human conduct.

Christina's compassion with others extends beyond the issue of begging. Thus, she experiences in her body the degree of punishment which a soul undergoes. Her behavioral reactions reflect the prospective damnation or salvation of the people whom she encounters. Christina's actions have become prophetic. In this context Christina also begins to take care of the dying townspeople; she appears as a borderline person, so to speak, linking this world to the next.¹⁵⁹

Taken as a whole, Christina acquires a powerful spirit of prophecy. It extends from predictions of personal salvation to predictions about historical events. She foretells the capture of Jerusalem or a devastating famine.¹⁶⁰ This prophetic gift opens a door to the world for the holy woman. Through her prophecies she becomes part of something larger than herself and her immediate environment, as did Lutgard and--to a lesser degree--Margaret. Finally, Christina's increasing ecstasy and spiritual drunkenness remind one of Lutgard's and Margaret's moments of rapture.

Other than common spiritual inebriation Christina displays another sign of miraculous election. At times of rapture a marvelous sound begins to ring between her throat and her breast, a sound without any meaning or familiarity to mortal ears, yet an "angelic voice" as Thomas assures.¹⁶¹ Only after she reaches a state of soberness can Christina speak in a normal fashion, and upon hearing tales about her previous behavior feels ashamed and like a fool.¹⁶² This sequence of events--like several others in Christina's story; for example, the motif of death and restitution--resembles the spiritual journeys undergone by the shamans across the globe and reported to us by scholars such as Joseph Campbell.¹⁶³ With this hagiographical narrative Thomas strikes a universally understood chord. He plays upon the cross-cultural theme of the ingenious and scary madperson, of the mystical and powerful eccentric.

In the manner of the shamans, Christina repeatedly goes into exile. At the time immediately following the above events she shares her solitude and seeks the company of a female recluse on the border to Germany. The two women live together for the next nine years. The details of the shared times are

missing. Some initiation into higher mysteries, however, occurs. Thomas tells us that during their communal living, "the Lord wrought wonders through her [Christina]."¹⁶⁴ Christina can move towards a state of perfection.

Overall, the growth process of the three women has led them into three different directions and across different obstacles. But in the course of their journey the three spiritual travellers also passed through comparable territories. This dialectic of commonalities and dissimilarities characterizes the final phase of the holy quest as well.

Perfection

Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina all reach spiritual perfection during late stages of their lives. With this spiritual flawlessness comes saintly prestige. Moreover, the three women acquire the immortality of a heroic figure among their people and the eternal life of a saint. At first, however, mortality takes its toll.

Lutgard, for example, loses her eyesight, a loss which marks the last decade before her death. Even though she mourns her inability to see her friends Lutgard is consoled quickly by Christ's promise to spare her purgatory and have her be reunited with her friends in heaven.¹⁶⁵ Also her outward blindness indicates an increased participation in the inner, heavenly light. In a series of apparitions she sees the important churchman Jordan of Saxony, the Master of the Dominicans, with her inner eye.¹⁶⁶ Jordan obviously has known Lutgard for some time and rather well because he is said to have "confided in her above all women." As a result of his devotion he elevates her to the rank

of a "mother and nourisher of the whole Order of Preachers."¹⁶⁷ Once again, Lutgard, who has forsaken worldly motherhood and nurturing and who has no permission to preach within the Church, assumes an influential position which allows for her feminine traits--mothering and nurturing--and at the same time gains her authority in a male-dominated institution. Needless to say, her authority has to be grounded in something other than an office in the institution.

This authority reaches out into the course of world events. Thus, during this period Lutgard begins her last seven-year fast. It is aimed at thwarting "an evil...looming upon the Church of Christ through a certain enemy."¹⁶⁸ The person in question is very likely the Emperor Frederick II whose conflict with the Pope is reaching its final height at the time. Lutgard feels compelled to intervene between the two in her own contemplative way. Along the same lines Lutgard's prayers supposedly deter the Tartars from invading the German borders. This instance reveals how immensely Lutgard's power has grown; even before she begins with her prayer intervention she knows the danger to be over. Brother Bernard, a confessor to the Pope who hears her words of confidence, is said to receive them as if they had "divinely sounded from heaven."¹⁶⁹

Both the Cardinal Jacques de Vitry and Lutgard herself predict her death.¹⁷⁰ The prospect of dying seems very desirable to Lutgard since her closeness with Christ has entered into unknown depth--has become almost unbearable. Thomas characterizes Lutgard's spiritual experience as the living proof for the soul's melting sensation as it is depicted in the Song of Songs.¹⁷¹ In this episode as well as in the following--in which Lutgard experiences are brought into agreement with Augustinian ideas¹⁷²--the person of Lutgard retreats

behind theological concepts. Rather than an individual Lutgard has become a living example of the doctrines.

As the event is coming closer Christ himself predicts Lutgard's death and thereby announces the end of the painful separation between the two lovers: "I do not wish you to be separated from me much longer."¹⁷³ When, during Easter, Christ appears again and repeats his announcement, this time together with the Virgin Mary, Lutgard cannot restrain her joy and shares the good news with a spiritual friend. Finally, fifteen days before her death, the prediction is made a third time. John the Baptist and the Virgin Mary inform her: "your consummation is at hand."¹⁷⁴ Death is announced with the joyfulness of a wedding announcement. In fact, death is described as the final completion of the marital union with the heavenly spouse. Therefore, it does not have to be feared; it has to be hailed.

Before her death Lutgard performs one miracle which deserves attention because it anticipates the intercessory role Lutgard will play after her death. A spiritual friend of Lutgard whose serious sins have not been forgiven to him seeks the holy woman just like "his own mother."¹⁷⁵ Lutgard lets her prayers work--three times, yet in vain. Finally, she exerts some pressure upon the Lord by asking him for either her death or the sinner's absolution. The Lord gives in and even extends the favors to "all who have their hope in you and are loved by you."¹⁷⁶ Lutgard has truly acquired the power of intercession for all sinners.

When Lutgard dies Thomas reports her joy and the mourning of her spiritual friends. He evokes the mother imagery one more time by calling himself a pitiable orphan.¹⁷⁷ Her death itself occurs in the midst of close

spiritual companions and with all the signs indicating that the death is special. Her body, for example, retains a color of virginal white and her eyes remain open in the direction into which her soul escapes. Even in her death she reminds Thomas of holy words, namely of the "milk of purity"¹⁷⁸ elaborated in the Song of Songs.

The last section of Thomas' vita deals with Lutgard's burial, her relics, and the miracles that surround and follow her death. That Lutgard is buried on the side of the choir is more than a commemoration of the site of many contemplations. It also fulfills a communal function. Lutgard herself predicted that she would be equally present in her death as she was in her life. The choice of burial site reflects the view that a saintly person belongs to the community as a whole.¹⁷⁹ Along the same lines the dead Lutgard takes a stand for the community and frees it from the threats of a plague.¹⁸⁰

Lutgard's followers hold claims not only to her presence but also to her relics. The parts seem to replace the whole. Thomas himself confesses that he has attempted to obtain the rights for Lutgard's hand even before her death. His plot fails because the Abbess--"since it is in the nature of woman not to be able to conceal"¹⁸¹--passes the word to Lutgard. Thomas must suffice himself with a finger only and writes Lutgard's vita as a thanks for this precious gift.¹⁸² Thomas proves the miraculous effects of this finger and Lutgard's other relics in several episodes. They do not have to be dealt with further. Only the healing scene in which Lutgard's belt helps a woman suffering the pains of childbirth deserves mention: even today women in Flanders still ask Lutgard's relics for a safe delivery.¹⁸³

Margaret enters her final phase in life with a powerful spiritual experience that mirrors the depth of spirituality she has reached. During a mass on Good Friday she perceives Christ on the cross during a vision. Completely absorbed in this image, she experiences Christ's death with him. The event anticipates her own destination. Yet, it also shows clearly that death is not the end: Margaret experiences resurrection with Christ on the following Easter Sunday after receiving the eucharist.¹⁸⁴ From then on--after her symbolic death and resurrection--Margaret's second sight is immensely enhanced. Along with prophetic revelations, she is now blessed with repeated spiritual ecstasy and visions of heaven. The Virgin Mary, Mary Magdalene, Saint Catherine, and numerous other saints begin to connect with Margaret: obviously she herself is on her way into the communion of saints.¹⁸⁵

But Margaret's death is preceded by a long, tormenting sickness. Thomas interprets her hellish pains as "her purgation in this life" and goes into great details about her suffering, including the odor which the dying saint emits.¹⁸⁶ He also makes a point to let the reader know that the presence of the Friars Preachers has a positive impact on the holy woman: they strengthen Margaret in body and spirit. Margaret furthermore remains close and obedient to her spiritual father during this time of being doomed to die. Even in her last days the holy woman does not leave the spiritual frame provided by the orthodox community.

At the same time, her ultimate strength rests in Christ alone. As he did at the beginning of the journey the Lord comes to her now that the end is near and feeds his child. This time he offers her a drink from a crystal vessel that

contains numerous little crowns. Margaret is strengthened. She even enjoys the torments of her illness because they parallel the suffering of Christ to a certain degree.¹⁸⁷ Because of Christ the prospect of death is as pleasant to her as the prospect of release is to a caged bird.¹⁸⁸

Margaret's condition deteriorates progressively. Nevertheless, she encourages the Lord to punish her body even more since she deems it the seat of sin.¹⁸⁹ She also shows considerable determination in showing her spiritual father his limits. When he admonishes her to display more patience she rebukes him with the firmness of the tax issue described in the previous section. He has to acknowledge her immense physical endurance and her ultimate authority in her own spiritual matters.

In a last interpersonal action, Margaret turns towards the human being who has closely followed her spiritual quest, sometimes with encouragement, more often with criticism: her mother. Margaret prophesies to her mother that the daughter's death will cause joy rather than sorrow. The mother's doubtful response--"I do not rejoice, daughter, but rather will I die with you from my sorrow"¹⁹⁰--indicates that at the bottom of her previous critical interventions lies maternal love and concern. Again, it seems justifiable to assume the existence of close family bonds.

Margaret's final hours are not focused on this world any longer. She cannot even take water; all she is able to digest is Christ's body. Her own body is losing the attributes of its corporeality, so to speak. Finally, the Lord appears to his "most beloved spouse and daughter"¹⁹¹ and announces the end of her purgatory and the coming of death. Raising her hands towards heaven

Margaret gives thanks for her life. Still, after a life of religious devotion she describes herself as "a most unworthy little woman."¹⁹² After her evocation she gradually leaves the human sphere: facing only Christ she raises her arms for another hour until darkness clouds her vision and she dies.¹⁹³ The frequently mentioned joy of dying which the saint experiences culminates in this highly dramatized, climactic death scene.

No doubt, Margaret has become holy. Already Margaret's ascent into heaven is marked by a miracle. A ladder is let down from heaven and via this ladder she is transported upwards by two virgins. Mary, the Virgin, expects and welcomes Margaret at the top. Finally, after Margaret enters into heaven she joins all the other holy virgins. One can only conclude that the hagiographer considers her state of virginity a decisive criterion not only in her holy quest but especially in her heavenly placement.¹⁹⁴

On earth further miracles occur after her parting. As Margaret predicted, and against "the custom of worldly people,"¹⁹⁵ her family and followers do not shed tears about her death. Obviously, the close ties of family and friendship last beyond death, only that in Margaret's case these bonds are expressed in a cheerful manner. People rejoice over her funeral. The burial itself attracts throngs of people. Even in her death the saint has a communal effect: Margaret is the center of people's newly found joy.

Moreover, she serves the community beyond her death by performing healing miracles.¹⁹⁶ As in Lutgard's case Margaret's former belongings immediately take on special significance and cause healing effects. Thus, her spiritual father unearths a blood-stained, rotten hairdress from the time of

Margaret's sickness and finds it preserved in virginal white and emitting the most pleasant fragrance. Furthermore, the desired piece of cloth is endowed with healing powers. Over the course of the following years the religious man has to fight off an influential lady's demands for the hairdress.¹⁹⁷

To finally assure the reader that Margaret has reached her heavenly destination Thomas reports two events. First, Margaret herself appears with one of her breast stained with the color red and a body of crystal--symbols of her love and of her virginity.¹⁹⁸ In a second scene, a spiritual friend has a vision of her place in paradise. He also catches sight of two empty spots next to Margaret. This perception of two vacant places is meant to remind the reader of the saint's role model function: "we hope that they will be inhabited by faithful souls."¹⁹⁹

Other than as a normative exemplum Margaret's power lives on through others. In a significant miracle with which Thomas brings his vita to a close Margaret appears before a Friar during his sermon. She holds an open book towards him "as if showing the preacher what he should say. Furthermore, after the friar had preached, the book was seen to shut."²⁰⁰ Margaret, who is excluded from preaching throughout her lifetime, and who is guided by Friars until death, is now shown in a position from which she is empowered to spread God's word through the mouths of others--even those others who used to guide her.

For Christina, her stay with the female recluse opens the last chapter in her life. Christina speaks in wondrous voices and her throat continues to resound. Thomas marvels at the Latin which comes forth. He also marvels at her newly acquired understanding of the Bible; the more so since he contrasts

both Christina's wise speech and her spiritual insights with her illiteracy. At the same time, however, he makes a point of stressing how Christina hesitates to use her gifts for the explanation of scriptural questions. Thus, he tells the reader that she regards scriptural exegesis as the privilege of the clergy.²⁰¹ The existing distribution of religious authority must not be questioned.

Average folk as well as noblemen, however, continue to seek Christina's spiritual counsel. Because of her counseling Christina is compared to a mother, a comparison repeatedly encountered in the three women's stories. Christina's capacity for compassion and her ability for firm admonitions earn her the title of mother. Thus, she counsels a count with various means and rewards the count's obedience with her services. She even reveals an impending treachery to him, and the traitor gives up "fearing the voice of the woman."²⁰² Christina's power, the power of a "spiritual mother," can be a factor in public life.

When the mentioned count dies, Thomas gives another example of Christina's authority and her simultaneous respect for the authority of the Church. The count feels compelled to reveal all his sins to Christina even though she cannot (and does not attempt to) give him absolution. Rather, her compassion with the sinner leads her to take up a share of his purgatory. For a considerable time Christina engages in penitential behavior to make up for half of the count's sins.²⁰³ Hence, in a higher sense but without threatening the position of the clergy, she still plays a role in his absolution.

During her own last year on earth Christina again feels the urge to retreat into the desert, the setting of her earlier religious quest. Rarely does she return and only if forced by lack of food. At that time her body begins to undergo

changes and, much like Margaret's body, it loses its corporeality step by step: "the spirit so controlled almost all the parts of her corporeal body that scarcely could either human minds or eyes look at the shadow her body cast without horror or a trembling of the spirit."²⁰⁴ As the end comes closer, she returns to her hometown.

Back in Trond, Christina is dissatisfied with the speed of decay, and one day she scourges herself in front of the altar uttering heavy complaints about her body: "When will you abandon me so that my soul can return freely to its Creator?"²⁰⁵ It becomes clear from this line that Christina perceives the body as a hindrance for the soul, echoing the platonic notion of the body as the soul's prison. Thomas takes her behavior as a "very meritorious thing"²⁰⁶, i.e., a sign of her holiness.

But this is only half of the picture. Christina's feelings--and maybe Thomas' as well--about the relationship between her spiritual self and her bodily self are more complex. Thus, immediately afterwards she turns against the soul and blames the soul for her pain. Taking the side of the body she now exclaims: "Why do you not allow me to return to the earth from where I was taken and why do you not let me be at rest until the Last Day of Judgement?"²⁰⁷ Her ambiguity over both components of herself finds an end in her affectionate treatment of her body: placing kisses all over her body she encourages herself. And she heals the split she experiences between body and soul by reminding herself of the promised resurrection of both body and soul "joined in eternal happiness."²⁰⁸ A Christian doctrine alleviates, at least in theory, a lived conflict.²⁰⁹

Christina's bodily decay goes hand in hand with her withdrawal from interpersonal contact and deep grief over the amorality of the world. Death is also for her an event to look forward to. Moreover, it is an event which occurs in a communal setting. Towards the end of her days, Christina requests a bed at St. Catherine's nunnery. There she suffers through her final sickness in the presence of the nuns. One sister, Beatrice, begs Christina for revelations. She becomes truly upset after Christina dies while she and the sisters are absent, thereby leaving them without predictions. She blames Christina's corpse loudly and emphasizes that the sisters did not give her permission to leave. Her harsh words and arguments convey the notion that the community of believers has some right over the holy woman. When Beatrice finally demands obedience from Christina, the reader perceives the seriousness of the community's claims, as well as the extent of the holy woman's power: "that you now obey me because you are powerful and through Him with whom you are now joined, you can do what you want...."²¹⁰ Christina promptly responds to this request: she is resurrected a second time. But she immediately bursts into anger because she had just been brought to see Christ. Nevertheless, Christina provides the demanded revelations in order to then die a third and final time.²¹¹

As in Lutgard's and Margaret's case the funeral of the holy woman is a communal event. The clergy and the secular people of Trond unite in their devotion to her--"with one mind and one voice"²¹² as Thomas puts it. St. Catherine is chosen as a burial site; this selection is expressive of the community's concern for the holy person's presence. Christina herself fulfills her obligation towards the community. She begins to perform healing miracles

from her tomb.²¹³

In contrast with the two other vitae, Thomas has added a concluding section to the life of Christina. In these final lines he recalls her penitential sufferings and calls the reader's attention to the universal necessity for expiation. Christina's life, he argues, is precisely that: a reminder for penance. Christina herself is the exemplum and through her whole being conveys the word of God more effectively than anybody else,²¹⁴ be it a doctor of the Church or a preacher. In sum, in a fashion very similar to Lutgard and Margaret, Christina functions as a "living sermon."²¹⁵

The Status of the Present Study

The previous section has described Christina's, Lutgard's, and Margaret's pursuit of holiness from a developmental point of view. Tracing the three stories from the experience of conversion to the state of spiritual perfection, one finds differences in experience between the three women. Yet, one also encounters several themes that surface in all three stories and deserve closer attention because they constitute the notion of female sainthood which is reflected in the works of Thomas de Cantimpré.

As noted before, the hagiographer lets his heroines grow into three respective ideals of sainthood that have been defined before them. In the course of their growth he shows them gradually acquiring the various components of the aspired model. Their path is not always smooth. There are inner fears and outer obstacles, such as familial resistance. There are relapses and temptations, such as worldly love. But the women also encounter divine support and

spiritual empowerment. To name only the most important "roadsigns" which the women pass one can list the following: asceticism and penitence, visions and miracles, intercessory prayer and spiritual "motherhood."

Obviously, these landmarks of the holy quest resemble three out of the five criteria of sainthood established by Weinstein and Bell, namely supernatural grace, good deeds, and asceticism. But the three women do not meet the remaining requirements of worldly power and evangelical activity. Given this resemblance, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that Lutgard, Christina, and Margaret belong under the category which Weinstein and Bell have labelled the "androgynous type" of saint. As outlined above, this type does not demand evangelical activity and worldly power which are not accessible to women. Rather it promotes an ideal of sainthood that is open to both men and women. Once again, this ideal encompasses the following triad: penitential asceticism, supernatural grace, and good deeds. Is not this triad a suitable summary for the stories of Lutgard, Christina, and Margaret?

The conclusion is not so simple. Thomas makes mention of several saintly experiences and attributes that are central to the women's stories yet are not contained in the five criteria; saintly experiences and attributes that appear inextricably bound to the saints' womanhood. For example, the extent of familial and societal resistance and the forms which this resistance takes may have something to do with the gender of the heroines. Also, the women's alternatives to the spiritual life are different from the alternatives a man would have. They can be summed up in one word: marriage. How central the renunciation of worldly marriage and the consummation of a spiritual marriage

are from the very onset of the saintly life has been demonstrated.

Thomas furthermore describes three women who are powerful in their unique way and have considerable impact upon their environment. Yet, this authority cannot be explained in terms of "worldly power." Rather, as soon as one considers the unique experience of women in the medieval Church, it becomes apparent that worldly or institutionalized power is the great divide between holy men and the three female saints. Men can choose or reject worldly power; that is to say, they can choose to emulate the "masculine type" of saint rather than the "androgynous type." The women, however, face the issue of authority from a totally different angle. The official structure excludes them from worldly power in the first place. Hence, they have fewer roles available in asserting holiness. In terms of authority their only option is to establish an authority that is rooted outside the institutional frame and non-threatening to the guardians of this frame. In sum, in a paradoxical way, the issue of authority lies at the very core of the three women's efforts to become powerful saints. The criterion of "worldly power" does play a central role--even though ex negativo.

The same train of thought applies to the criterion of evangelical activity, particularly because of its close association with the activity of preaching. While men have a choice between a path of sainthood that incorporates evangelical activity (the "masculine type") and one that precludes it (the "androgynous type"), the women face a different set of alternatives. All they can do is pursue their own version of evangelical activity outside the given institutional frame; that is to say, the women can practice a form of evangelism

which is empowering for them yet tolerable for the institution. Hence, evangelical activity plays an important role in the life of every female saint precisely because it is an obstacle she has to face by virtue of her womanhood. In sum, both criteria, worldly power as well as evangelical activity, apply to women in a unique way. The question arises whether the same holds true for the remaining criteria, i.e., the "androgynous type." Do not asceticism, supernatural grace, and good deeds play a unique role in the women's lives because of their unique social experiences?

Furthermore, it is worthwhile investigating how the female saints respond to limitations imposed upon them because of their gender. Do Lutgard, Margaret and Christina simply resign themselves to the available options of holiness, or do they strive for alternate ways that circumvent the limitations of the existing model? The question therefore is whether one can catch a glimpse of a "feminine model" of sainthood in the stories of the three women even though the hagiographer attempts to portray them in terms acceptable to an orthodox mentality. Thomas may superimpose upon them a type of saint which is comparable to the "androgynous type" as defined by Weinstein and Bell, yet, his subjects are more than a mere hagiographical creation. Repeatedly their subjective experiences emerge and their own mentality surfaces: it seems larger than the "androgynous model" could capture.

In addition to the mentioned facets of feminine sainthood, Thomas also reports three other aspects that may be central and peculiar to the three female saints but do not always seem to be important in Thomas' eyes. First, the frequently described miracles of "feeding" should be explored. The close

connection between women and food has been established for many cultures all over the globe. Recent studies on eating disorders have emphasized the correlation between food intake and issues of power. In our context, the relationship between food and power may be significant, especially in combination with the women's heavy fasts and their intense devotion to the eucharist. Again, one has to be aware of the social reality in which the women form and express their religious practices: culturally women are in charge of food preparation; ecclesiastically they are excluded from the celebration of the eucharist and limited to the role of a recipient.

Second, it is worthwhile to look at the "networking" between the religious women themselves and other female spiritual friends. Thomas indicates several life-long spiritual friendships, mutual counseling, and close female bonds. Whether this tendency to cluster and connect is somehow related to the gender issue is a question for further exploration. Therefore, the next chapter will examine how female networking could fit in with the other issues of power, authority, and evangelical activity.

Third--and without any obvious link to the two previously listed aspects--Thomas reports how purgatorial pains affect each of the holy women one way or another. Is the phenomenon of purgatorial pains on earth an expression of the women's penitential asceticism, or is it merely a loose end of Thomas' notion of female sainthood? Is it possible to determine what such "purgatory" stands for and what, if any, significance it has in relation to other unique traits of female saints?

After the various parts of the journey have been examined and the most

crucial roadsigns have been named, it is now time to turn towards the final destination. The next chapter will analyze the saintly ideal which Christina, Lutgard, and Margaret embody. The analysis will proceed along the guidelines of Weinstein's and Bell's criteria for the "androgynous type" of saint: asceticism, supernatural grace, and good deeds. Special emphasis will be placed on the gender factor. The central questions are: how do these criteria of sainthood manifest themselves in the lives of the three women? Are they sufficient to explain the women's holiness? Finally, is there reason to assume a "feminine type"?

Three Female Saints: The Morphological Perspective

Asceticism

Asceticism is a steady undercurrent in the spiritual development of holy men as well as of holy women. Whenever this undercurrent emerges in the lives of Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina, it manifests itself in a twofold fashion. First, the women are described as being engaged in excessive prayer and passionate contemplation. Second, self-inflicted sufferings, heavy fasts in particular, constitute another pillar of the women's ascetic activity.

It is only natural for a religious person to practice devotion such as contemplation and prayer. The three women, however, are remarkable because of the degree and the intensity of their devotion. Christina's first death is triggered "by virtue of the exercise of inward contemplation,"²¹⁶ and about Margaret it is reported that she "had perfectly abandoned the world" and

"remembered God whether sleeping or waking."²¹⁷ Lutgard, finally, is driven to die because she has exhausted the possibilities of contemplation in this life.²¹⁸

The women's prayer life seems comparably fervent. Christina wanders all over Trond praying and mourning for the contemptible world.²¹⁹ Before Lutgard's death wish can be fulfilled, Christ requires from her that, in a final effort, she pour herself "forth entirely in prayers to the Father for My sinners."²²⁰ Margaret is no exception. Thomas stresses the centrality of prayer in her life by telling the reader how Margaret was miserably tormented by anything but her "holy conversations with Christ."²²¹

In spite of the obvious importance and intensity of contemplation and prayer, the second expression of the women's asceticism, namely extreme fasting, outdoes the devotional practice. One does not have to completely agree with Rudolph Bell's hypotheses on "Holy Anorexia" in order to value the author's insights into the centrality and the special dimension of fasting in the lives of Italian female saints.²²² Caroline Bynum has also given ample proof of the universal importance of the theme of food in women's religious lives.²²³ For Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina the ascetic practice of heavy fasts is crucial from the very beginning. It is inextricably bound to their decision for a life on their own, i.e., religious, terms. Thus, the onset of Christina's fasts coincides with the girl's first movements on the religious path, that is to say with her first flight into the desert. The connection between her turn towards religion, the issue of food, and her first steps in taking control over her own life can be summarized in Thomas' own words: "despite the extreme sensitivity of her body, she could not live without food and was tortured by a most grievous hunger, by

no means did she wish to return home but she desired to remain alone with God in her hiding place in the desert."²²⁴

The refusal to eat is tied to the refusal of the world and its pleasures. It may also be linked with rebellion against the family as a representative of the worldly life.²²⁵ Such is the case for Margaret. Their eating irritates Margaret. She pretends not to notice food on the table and refuses to pass it.²²⁶ The attitude towards food seems to divide the worldly-oriented from the future saint. Just as their eating irritates Margaret, her non-eating seems to be equally disturbing to her family members. As can be shown for Christina and Lutgard, the holy woman lives on very little sustenance. "A child of three could barely have lived on the food she ate,"²²⁷ Thomas says about Margaret. For her, food seems to symbolize the world and its contaminated state; it stands in the way of the truly meaningful which deserves full attention. Hence, Margaret counters her mother's admonitions regarding her table manners with the following line: "I have many things to think about which distract me from other things."²²⁸

Christina also hardly eats, and only after fasting for several days.²²⁹ Not only are her meals scarce but she perceives food as filth and as an impediment. Christina blames herself for not being able to totally let go of it: "O miserable soul! What do you want? Why do you desire these foul things? Why do you eat this filth?"²³⁰ While she still needs worldly nourishment to a certain extent, Christina's stomach and intestines are revolted by the smallest intake. Her physical reactions towards food mirror her religious convictions about the contaminated state of the world.

Scarcity of meals also characterizes Lutgard's eating pattern. Thomas

goes as far as to claim that her fasts surpassed the fasts of every other contemporary man and woman. He places this statement in context with Lutgard's ability to follow in Christ's footsteps and to move towards incorruption with all "her virginal armies in attendance."²³¹ Again, the connection between the rejection of food, the embrace of Christ, and the horror against the contaminated world surfaces. It appears necessary to cleanse oneself, one's body in particular, from the filth of this world in order to become worthy for Christ.²³²

Just as Margaret's family, Lutgard's environment seems to react towards the fasting with a certain degree of skepticism. Why else would Thomas feel compelled to tell the reader, after her second seven-year fast, that Lutgard does not intend to weaken her body but is reasonable in contrast to those who "crush their bodies cruelly as if they were enemies to themselves...destroying their body which was given for the help of the spirit"?²³³ Thomas' assessment conflicts with other facts which he provides about Lutgard. How serious her fasts really are is clearly illustrated by physical effects, such as the sudden cessation of her menstruations, "the nuisance with which God has tamed the pride in the sex of Eve."²³⁴ Although Thomas does not associate this phenomenon with Lutgard's extreme fasting it has been established by modern medicine that the so-called amenorrhea is directly linked to the eating disorder of anorexia nervosa, i.e., self-starvation.²³⁵

Despite their lives of austerity the three saints are not satisfied with the degree of asceticism they have achieved; rather they seem ever watchful and ever hard upon themselves. One cannot help wondering whether the saints'

chronic self-criticism is a carry-over from their previous and present exposure to a misogynistic culture. The self-doubts certainly do not cease with a holy reputation. A wide gap exists between the saints' self-image and the perceptions that others have of them. While Thomas describes them as exempla of ascetic mastery, they view themselves as "the worst and most wicked sinner[s]"²³⁶ to use Margaret's phrase. The feeling of unworthiness lasts throughout the pursuit of holiness. To quote Margaret again, she continues to be "gravely tormented by scruples."²³⁷

The women seem vulnerable to external stimuli. But rather than regard the stimulus as an external temptation, they deem themselves the seat of potential relapse into sin. When Lutgard's sisters doubt that she will be able to carry through with her austere life-style she is not questioning their ability to judge but rather her own ability to live austere: "she began to fear within herself lest perhaps those things might happen in the future which the older ones were saying about her and she sighed in terror."²³⁸

Along the same lines, the women are terrified by the prospect of a public reputation since it could result in a lack of humility and a loss of austere control. Christina, for example, "fled recognition and praise most energetically" because she believed that those who know Christ and still accept "honours like these" will be "the most tormented in hell."²³⁹ The same Christina supports Lutgard in her decision to leave the Benedictines who want her as prioress.²⁴⁰ And Lutgard herself experiences a state of horror every time she is confronted with the possibility of assuming an office within a monastery.²⁴¹

The self-doubts and the fear of losing control over oneself can be

paralyzing for the women. An episode in Lutgard's life illustrates this point very clearly. Out of her deep-rooted fear Lutgard pleads daily with Christ for certainty about the state of her soul. Christ responds to her prayers and tears with the consolation, "Be now secure, dearest one, because your life is pleasing to the Lord." She is satisfied for the moment "but nevertheless she began to tremble with fear again."²⁴² Even Christ's assurance does not remove Lutgard's anxiety on the long run.

Thomas seems aware of the three female saints' unusual harshness upon themselves. So do other people in their environment. Margaret's spiritual father, for example, is eager to avoid advising other religious women because he knows how much Margaret needs his assistance to fight off her inner doubts. Thomas assesses the nature of the Friar's support for Margaret with strong words: "her soul depended on his soul since she was often tormented by scruples of conscience."²⁴³ It is the Friar's task to free Margaret from those unnecessary apprehensions.

Thomas also dares to make a statement about the scruples of his own spiritual director, Lutgard, in which he shows his concern about the woman's efforts to reach the impossible and the frustrations that go along with this vain attempt. When Lutgard cannot totally banish all thoughts from herself--including the good ones--while she is saying the Hours, she becomes deeply disturbed and repeats her prayers again and again. Thomas mentions the concern of her friends regarding the matter. Moreover, he expresses his skepticism about her action by stating that she aspires to "a feat which is impossible in this condition of mortal life."²⁴⁴ He does not question Lutgard's holiness, but rather wonders

whether she is setting herself up for spiritual frustration.

Taken as a whole, Thomas shows more trust in his saints than they do in themselves. Throughout the stories he praises their austerity, their virtues, their good deeds; in short: their holiness. But he also shares the notion that the potential for relapse is rooted in the women themselves, maybe in women generally. Margaret, for example, has a goblet repaired by the young man who reciprocated her feelings of love. Because she initiates contact with her admirer and has him take care of the goblet, she is rejected by God and admonished by her spiritual father. While the young man is portrayed as an innocent male without any negative traits, Margaret is rebuked for the confusion she causes in him. One cannot help wondering in what terms a comparable temptation scene of a man would be described. Thomas goes as far as to summarize Margaret's lesson as "Having learned the cunning of the serpent."²⁴⁵ The allusion to Eve and the association between Eve and her sinful daughters, i. e., women, is close at hand.

As a matter of fact, Lutgard, Christina, and Margaret become saints in Thomas' eyes because they reject the path of Eve and of other women. It has been discussed in the previous chapter how central the renunciation of worldly marriage is for the women's pursuit of holiness. In this context, one can add that the rejection of worldly love does not only signal the beginning of the religious quest it also concurs with the first act of asceticism: the flesh is subdued for the spirit's sake. In more than a symbolical sense the rejection of food stands for the rejection of the world. As Bynum has shown in her brilliant study women do not have much else they could give up but their bodies and the

nourishment thereof.²⁴⁶ The following feats of heavy fasting and contemplative prayer are only natural consequences of the initial decision for Christ and against the world. Through contemplation and prayer the women seek union with the heavenly spouse. Via purging fasts they can cleanse their bodies for the reception of the Body of Christ: they embrace the flesh of Christ and, therefore, their own physicality on a spiritual level.

When Thomas categorizes and characterizes the three women as virgins--an attribute which he points out from the beginning of their stories to the very end--he puts them in the mold of Mary; in other words, Thomas calls them holy precisely because they have avoided the fate of the daughters of Eve, of the average women. They have to reject worldly womanhood for sainthood. What do they gain in return?

Supernatural Grace

For the renunciation of the worldly path Christ rewards his spiritual brides. He dispenses numerous favors upon the holy women some of which are again to be understood in the light of the saints' gender. Among the favors are several miracles which he performs. These miraculous acts fall under three main categories. First, Christ miraculously supports each woman in the process of abandoning the world. When hunger almost forces Christina to return into the arms of her persecutors, Christ opens her virginal breast so that she can exist in self-sufficiency.²⁴⁷ For Margaret, whose severe illness the doctor wants to cure with marriage, he performs an act of miraculous healing: "Contrary to the diagnosis of the doctor and contrary to nature, God soon cured her."²⁴⁸

Lastly, Lutgard escapes the knight who woos her in vain with the guidance of an angel. In his frustration the young man finally decides to seize her and would rape her would it not be for the miraculous intervention from heaven.²⁴⁹ In all three cases Christ's miraculous assistance frees the women from the perils of the world, helps them to avoid gender-specific traps such as a marriage or a rape, and gives them the strength to continue the spiritual quest.

A second group of miracles is meant to demonstrate the elect status of the saint to the eyes of the world. This intention is obvious in Lutgard's case. While in the choir she is lifted up in the air by miraculous power in front of the whole community. This literally elevated status mirrors the specialness of her vocation. Her soul is reaching for heaven and so does her body.²⁵⁰ To cite a second incident, a witness observes a miracle during Lutgard's consecration. Whereas the bishop places the commonly used wreaths upon the nuns' heads, he appears to place a huge golden crown upon Lutgard--"thus honouring her individually above all the others."²⁵¹ Although more examples could be given for this type of miracle both from Lutgard's life and the lives of Christina and Margaret, they would not provide any additional insights. As the quoted miraculous incidents document the whole point of the heavenly intervention is to help in establishing a special saintly status before witnesses. Christ assists in achieving communal recognition for his future saints--a recognition which is not easily won by the women in a male-dominated culture.

Acceptance is also gained by miracles that the women themselves perform. The women can bring about the unaccountable, both in and for the less than marvelous world. Christina's miraculous undertakings fulfill this

function. While witnessed by her fellow human beings, she defeats the laws of nature again and again. Commonly fatal actions such as jumping into a fiery oven or immersing oneself into boiling water cause Christina much pain but leave her without any bodily harm:²⁵² a true miracle in the eyes of the world. Yet, although Christina is exempt from a normal human fate under such tortures, she nonetheless remains subject to the human experience of excruciating pain. To undergo this pain again and again but not to perish from it is precisely the task which God ordered her to perform: "by the example of your suffering and your way of life to convert living men to me and to turn aside from their sins."²⁵³ Thus, Christina is endowed with the ability to perform miracles so that the desolate world can perceive what is divine and good--and a similar assessment is possible for Lutgard and Margaret. At the same time, these miracles cement the spiritual authority and the communal recognition of the holy women. Even beyond their deaths the women remind their fellow human beings of the divine presence and of their own spiritual power by means of miraculous acts of healing which surround their tombs and relics.

In addition to the types of miracles described Christ bestows prophetic gifts upon the holy women. These charismatic powers prove essential in establishing the women's spiritual authority. All three saints are able to predict the spiritual fate of other people. Lutgard foretells spiritually decisive events such as a murder with devastating consequences²⁵⁴ or, on a more positive note, she predicts an apostate's return to his former order.²⁵⁵ Christina knows whether a dying person can expect to reach heaven, hell, or purgatory and expresses this knowledge in her behavior.²⁵⁶ About Margaret, Thomas reports that the "Lord

frequently revealed to he many things about the condition [i.e., the spiritual condition] of other men."²⁵⁷ Clearly, the three women receive a share of divine knowledge which separates them from the average person. The women are again portrayed as outstanding and powerful individuals. Their privileges, however, are not merely gifts. Rather, they carry obligations and the potential for power, as will be shown later.

For now, one should note the nature of the women's prophetic gifts. The women's ability to perceive the commonly invisible extends far beyond the fate of human souls: into the otherworldly realm. Because the saints are blessed with unusual perceptive faculties visions of this realm and apparitions of dead people and heavenly figures are possible. The visions and apparitions are very well timed. Thus, the Virgin Mary and various (deceased) female saints appear to both Lutgard and Margaret at crucial points of their spiritual journeys. When Lutgard abandons the Benedictine for the Cistercian order the Virgin appears to her. The purpose of the visitation is to support Lutgard's decision for the stricter Cistercians and to express the Virgin's delight about Lutgard "having entered a house and an Order especially dedicated to her."²⁵⁸ Saint Catherine appears to Margaret to reveal a joyful secret: her burdened existence does not have to bother Margaret anymore for her final union with the heavenly spouse is very close at hand.²⁵⁹ These as well as other apparitions are more than spiritual honors. The heavenly visitors provide spiritual guidance and spiritual support in dealing with life's challenges.

The visions function in a comparable fashion. They introduce the female saints to the divine reality, a reality which the women attempt to make known

to this world by their very existence. Christina's first death, for example, culminates in a vision of purgatory, hell, and heaven. Through this visionary experience Christina gains insight into the sinfulness of humanity and the need for repentance. Based on the deep impression that this vision makes upon her, Christina decides to return to the world and to embrace a vocation of liberating the souls of the living and the dead.²⁶⁰ When--after all her initial trials--Christina finally undertakes her task of public atonement and concerns herself with the dying in Trond, she seems to have a second opportunity to investigate the place called purgatory. This time her description of the otherworldly site includes more details about purgatorial torments.²⁶¹ Aside from those minor differences between her two visions of purgatory, they seem to serve the same purpose of clarifying Christina's divinely ordered task in this world--both to herself and to her fellow human beings.

Not only in Christina's case but in general the task of the holy women seems to entail praying and suffering for the sake of humanity; their lives parallel the life of Christ. This radical notion of the imitatio Dei is explicable as one of the leading contemporary religious paroles.²⁶² But a closer look also reveals that the degree of imitation achieved by the three women is special: it is the result of divine gifts. Christ lets the women partake in his experiences. He pulls them close to himself in his most human condition: suffering. Christina's penitential escapades, for example, leave her with full awareness of human sinfulness and pain but without any bodily harm. She experiences death and resurrection twice. As described in the previous chapter, a comparable event takes place in Margaret's life when she dies with Christ on Good Friday and is

resurrected with him the following Easter Sunday.²⁶⁵ Also, Lutgard feels an intense longing for martyrdom since Christ "had sustained such tribulations from sinners." Even though the time of public martyrdom has passed, Christ satisfies her desire "through a bodily martyrdom."²⁶⁴ One night, swelling with unbearable desire, her veins burst.²⁶⁵ It becomes clear from these examples that Christ rewards the women's efforts to follow in his footsteps by sharing his suffering with them. He responds to their imitatio by drawing the women closer towards him. To go one step further, imitatio Dei ultimately leads into union with Christ. Bynum even argues that all thirteenth-century religious women experienced the suffering Christ and attempted to use this experience as a springboard towards union "not just patterning themselves after or expanding compassion toward, but fusing with, the body on the cross."²⁶⁶

It is the prospect of union with the spouse in heaven which helps the women to abandon potential worldly spouses. The same prospect causes them to experience joy over their suffering. Moreover, the women can face death with an ardent desire, for it marks the threshold to the realm of the heavenly spouse and the final union with him: the "consummation is at hand."²⁶⁷ In short, the prospect of union sets the women free from a worldly path, and it makes them transcend the conditions of average human beings. Everybody suffers, everybody dies, but only a few elected ones receive Christ in suffering and death.

The women's transcendence of worldly existence manifests itself in several ways. Two crucial manifestations deserve closer attention. First, the women have the privilege of circumventing the average sinner's destination:

purgatory. Thus, Christ repays Lutgard's blindness and the sadness she feels about the loss of worldly vision by sparing her purgatory.²⁶⁸ The suffering she experiences in this life and the penitence she practices excuse her from other purgatorial pains. The same holds true for Margaret and Christina. Margaret's sickness before her death is cruel and tormenting for the very reason that it is a substitute for purgatory. Christ lets her anticipate the pains so that she will be able to fly to heaven "free like a bird."²⁶⁹ Christina, finally, undergoes purgatorial pains throughout her life on behalf of others. Thomas does not directly indicate whether she is liberated from purgatory because of this life-long penitence. However, after both her first and her second death she is led to face Christ without having to spend any time in purgatorial pains.²⁷⁰ One can justifiably conclude that her third death results in the same immediate--but now permanent--encounter. Just as Margaret and Lutgard, Christina escapes the fate of the majority of human beings. The further significance of this privilege needs to be examined in the context of the women's power to deliver souls from purgatory.

Second, the women's need for food is reduced to the minimum and taken care of by Christ. How the renunciation of food is linked with the renunciation of the world and how liberating it can be for the women has been documented in the preceding section. In the thematic context of "divine gifts" one can add that the renunciation of worldly food is enabled and rewarded by the blessings of spiritual nourishment and especially by the Body of Christ.²⁷¹ Margaret's ability to engage in heavy fasts is firmly rooted in her reception of the eucharist. After she begins to take the Body of Christ in regular intervals she attains

exterior and interior healing and develops a previously unknown strength.²⁷² In other words, the fasts are not experienced as weakening; rather the eucharist gives the women enough physical stamina to bear their penitential affliction. The less worldly food they eat, the stronger they grow.²⁷³ More than that: the body of Christ fills the women with a spirit of enthusiasm and happiness. Christina, for example, takes communion "with holy devotion on almost every Sunday, and she said that she received strength of the body and a greatest joy of spirit from it."²⁷⁴ For Lutgard, it is a habit "to be refreshed with the sacrament."²⁷⁵ Her superior's attempts to punish Lutgard by withholding the desired spiritual food are brought to a halt by Christ himself.²⁷⁶ And in times of emotional crisis--such as a period during which her urgent death wish remains unfulfilled--Lutgard can resort to the Body of Christ for consolation.²⁷⁷ Generally speaking, the three women are set free by their fasts, free from the demands of their environment, and free from bodily desires. The fasts have a strengthening effect upon them; the more so since they go hand in hand with an intense devotion to the eucharist. All three women exhibit a high degree of activity. The body of Christ, heavenly food, so to speak, sufficiently nourishes them. Just as the renunciation of worldly food leads them away from the world, so it moves them towards the body of the heavenly spouse. As they progress on their spiritual path the world loses more and more of its power over them: they can literally live on Christ alone.²⁷⁸ And they live for Christ alone. Their actions reflect this clearly.

Good Deeds

The three women's ability to perform good deeds rests in their spiritual gifts. They use and expand this power base for the betterment of the world and in order to serve as active agents of the divine. Their primary function is mediation between this world and the otherworldly realm, and their role demands some qualities that are culturally assigned to women. Of course, this does not preclude the possibility that a male saint would exhibit such feminine qualities. However, whereas for a man the exhibition of feminine qualities means a reversal in values, for the women it simply means that culturally expected qualities are positively reinforced.²⁷⁹ Thus, the women can add religious significance to their femininity.

Already by their mere existence the saints remind of the presence of the divine and of the obligations towards it; being who they are they convey a spiritual message to the people. Margaret's impact upon others is so impressive that hardly "anyone was so perverse and stubborn that the sight of her countenance and disciplined bearing would not influence him for the better."²⁸⁰ The feelings evoked by the women are not always that positive. Quite the reverse--often the women call attention to unpleasant facts. They are mourners in the most general sense: expressing their sorrow over the sinfulness of the world and reminding their communities of the need for this sorrow and for repentance. A sinful man's encounter with Lutgard, for example, results in his immediate remorse even though the saint does not speak a single word. The mere feeling of her look upon himself makes the man realize the dangerous burden of his sins. He repents and promises never to relapse into his old

ways.²⁸¹ Christina's effects are even more drastic. She exhibits her disgust over the state of humanity in public and has widespread success with her display: "All those who saw her found her sorrow so intolerable that hard men could not endure it without the greatest contrition and compassion."²⁸² At any rate, the women take care of and initiate much needed mourning. Because of their charismatic powers they are an influential presence in their respective communities and affect others by directing them towards contrition.

The women's actions reinforce this initial impact upon their fellow human beings. They are "assiduously mindful of the poverty of Christ"²⁸³ and attempt to live it in their respective environments. As women the three saints do not possess much in the first place. But they can turn their lack of possessions into a virtue by disposing of the little they have--decent clothing and food. While Lutgard's life of poverty is confined within the walls of the monastery, Christina and Margaret can even engage in the public expression of poverty: begging. The issue of begging is particularly controversial during the lifetime of the three women. At that point in history, mendicity arouses the suspicion of the Church, and holy women certainly are not supposed to pursue it.²⁸⁴ Thomas, who is convinced of his heroines' orthodoxy, has to explain their begging ventures in acceptable terms. Thus, he reports that Margaret does not undertake begging for her own sake. Rather, compassion stirs her towards it and she begs for the sake of those even poorer than her: the alms she receives are distributed out of charity.²⁸⁵ Christina begs for the improvement of those who give. She communicates this intention clearly when she states "that she was driven by the Spirit of God to beg the alms of sinful men because they might thereby be

called to a horror of their sins and to a penitent life."²⁸⁶

The women's presence and actions do not only affect the souls of human beings; they even influence the Godhead. Christina's second rationale for her begging is exactly the effect it has upon God: "she said that nothing made God weep more with mercy for sinners than when sinners are moved by mercy towards their neighbours."²⁸⁷ In sum, the women seem to channel spiritual energy in both ways--from heaven to earth and from earth to heaven. By converting sinners and stirring God's mercy they function as links between the worldly and the otherworldly realm. Their capacity for compassion--a quality often associated with women--aids them well in this task. It is significant that they appeal to the same feminine quality in the Godhead: God's compassion is God's mercy.

It seems only natural that such linking figures are prone to take care of those in transition between heaven and earth, i.e., the dying. Women at different places all over the globe and at different times have been caretakers of the sick and dying. Christina and Lutgard fulfill this task frequently with much enthusiasm and compassion. They make use of all their power to have the dying repent and confess so that they may achieve "everlasting joy"²⁸⁸ and "glory."²⁸⁹ It is obvious that the women regard their role in calling the dying souls to penitence a very serious occupation. So does Thomas: "Thus it is holy and devout to assist the dying and to aid them with prayers against the demons who always lie in ambush at the heel of our end."²⁹⁰ The potential to relapse and die in a state of sin is perceived as a constant threat. As a result, the women's seriousness about the state of the souls extends to every other human being. In

a sense everybody is already in transition from this world to the next, is dying from the moment of his or her birth, so to speak. The women respond to the universal need of overcoming human sinfulness before death with admonitions and warnings. Out of their compassion with their fellow human beings they try to call the sinners on the right path in time. Because the women are blessed with prophetic gifts they are able to intervene before it is too late; their gifts have become obligations to intervene. Margaret, for example, uses her premonitions for the betterment of others: "she would call back from evil those whom she had warned with loving-kindness or if she saw other men doing good, she would urge them to a better state."²⁹¹

In addition to admonitions, the three holy women pursue the improvement of other souls with the following spiritual means: prayer and acts of penance. Christina supports a believer's pilgrimage to the Holy Land with her prayers. It is due to her spiritual labors that the believer, a knight, returns safely.²⁹² Lutgard delivers several people from the perils of temptations by the persistence and power of her prayers. For example, Lutgard puts all her efforts into helping Jacques de Vitry deal with the "deceit of the devil."²⁹³ Because he gets so carried away by his adoration for a certain religious woman he has begun to neglect his preaching. Under tears and with patient prayers Lutgard appeals to the Lord that he may free de Vitry from this menacing situation. When all these means are exhausted but de Vitry is still endangered by the temptation, she does not hesitate to blackmail the Lord: "'What is it,' she said, 'that you are doing, O most courteous and just Lord? Either separate me from Yourself or liberate that man on whose behalf I am entreating, even if he is not willing.'"²⁹⁴

Her request is promptly taken care of. Both the Lord and the sinner ultimately submit to her notion of the right solution for this spiritual problem.

When words fail the women employ their actions for the spiritual liberation of others. Lutgard's three seven-year fasts, for example, are tailored to world events and as such aim at evil of a proportion which cannot be alleviated by prayer alone. The targets of her fasts are the "Albigensian epidemic,"²⁹⁵ the universal sinfulness,²⁹⁶ and the threat of "a certain enemy."²⁹⁷ Precisely because of the higher effectiveness of fasting these penitential acts are demanded from her. The Virgin Mary asks Lutgard to undertake her first fast because of the seriousness of the situation: "once again my Son is being crucified...once again He is being spat upon. Therefore adopt for yourself a lamentation and fast so that the anger of my Son may be appeased which is now threatening everywhere on the face of the earth."²⁹⁸ Lutgard's fast is the appropriate response to the serious circumstances. In a similar fashion, Christ compares Lutgard's second fast to his own willingness to suffer for all sinners with his whole being. "Therefore do I wish that you offer yourself up totally for my sinners."²⁹⁹ As in previous examples the saint's effort leads souls towards spiritual betterment and improves the state of the world. However, the stakes are higher this time and the penitential measures more serious. Independently from their outcome the penitential actions themselves already fulfill a heavenly demand and satisfy God to a certain degree--the actions appease God's anger and again aim at God's feminine side: merciful understanding and forgiveness. Moreover, the acts of penitence let the holy women partake in God's suffering and in his humanity. Hence, once again the women's actions have a twofold

spiritual impact: an impact upon sinners and upon God, upon this world and upon the heavenly realm. Furthermore, once again one notes how the women achieve closeness with God through suffering with the human Christ.

The women's powerful influence culminates in intercession for sinners and in the liberation of their souls from purgatory. Purgatory is the final stage of the human transition from heaven to earth. It represents "the fact of suffering."³⁰⁰ No wonder that the women extend their mediating function to this place. It is above all strongly felt compassion that stirs them into action on behalf of the sinners. It is God's compassion to which the women appeal. Lutgard and Christina are the eminent authorities in this respect and recognized as such by their fellow human beings. Mary d'Oignies--the contemporary saint whose story was written by Jacques de Vitry³⁰¹--acknowledges Lutgard's special spiritual power when she states: "Under heaven the world has no more faithful or more efficacious intercessor in prayers for the liberation of souls from purgatory and for sinner than the lady Lutgard."³⁰² Thomas reports numerous instances in which dead sinners contact Lutgard and request her intercession or in which Lutgard cannot help snatching a soul from purgatorial pains. Even when God permits the dead Lutgard to skip purgatory herself she--passing the site of pain on her way to paradise--is moved by compassion and simply sweeps along many suffering souls.³⁰³ During her own transition into the otherworldly realm Lutgard still facilitates the transition of others, her impact upon sinners and God remains mighty beyond death. Her compassion is her source of strength.

The centrality of intercession and of the liberation from purgatory is even more obvious in Christina's life. Her very vocation, the reason for her first resurrection, is to suffer on earth for sinners--for those who are in purgatory as well as for those still living in this world. Previous sections have dealt with the many facets of her outrageous penitential behavior on behalf of other souls. In this context, one can highlight two final aspects. First, one encounters again an intense compassion with others that lies at the root of Christina's voluntary suffering. Repeatedly she appears as a deeply empathetic being; Christina seems to be more connected to her fellow human beings and to this world than her recurrent flights from civilization would suggest. This same connection motivates and enables her to fulfill her mediating task between God and sinners. Second, Christina's successful mediation is based on a contract with the Lord. Her obligations are the return to the miserable world and the experience of purgatorial pains in this life--both of which aim at the betterment of the world and its sinful inhabitants.³⁰⁴ The Lord's share consists of easing the penitential burden of the sinners and of rewarding Christina after death. The redemption of sinners is by far the most important objective of this pact. To name one example, Christina and the Lord negotiate that she can assume half the purgatorial pain assigned to a dead count whose spiritual counselor Christina had been in life. Before she fulfills her part of the contract, Christina informs the third party, namely the count, about the arrangement.³⁰⁵ This episode illustrates the key role Christina plays in the reconciliation between God and sinners. Her whole being is tied up in mediation, leading the Lord towards mercy and leading sinners towards penance, be it in this life or in purgatory. As Thomas sums it

up so well: "What else did Christina cry out during her entire life except that we do penance and be men who are ready at every hour?"³⁰⁶

Reflecting on the women's supernatural gifts and the use they make of these gifts in form of good deeds, one can conclude that Christina, Lutgard, and Margaret make the divine visible in this sinful world. Through their being and their actions God becomes transparent to humanity and humanity is stirred towards betterment. At the same time, the women seem to make humanity more acceptable in the eyes of God. It is in particular God's feminine side of compassion and mercy which the women understand to evoke. Their own capacity for compassion motivates their actions and serves them well when appealing to God. Not only these feminine qualities but other feminine roles such as mourning, caring for the sick and dying, and mediation are reinforced in the three saints as part of their holiness.

The women's spiritual credibility and their actions rest on supernatural graces. These gifts help the women to fulfill their role as linking figures between heaven and earth. First of all, the gifts earn the women the respect of their environment. Second, graces such as prophetic gifts and intercessory effects of prayer enable the women to intervene successfully on behalf of sinners. Being connected to both heaven and earth by love and compassion, the women undertake a process of mediation. They begin by renouncing the world and applying themselves to the spiritual life. They then move on to doing penance on the world's behalf and attempt to reconcile it with God by their actions and by their being. During this process of mediation the women acquire both actual holiness and a public reputation for this. With holiness also comes

spiritual power, a power which affects the women themselves, the world, and even God. In short, the women's spiritual empowerment is essential for their sainthood.

Worldly Power Versus Spiritual Empowerment

The point of departure for the women's empowerment is one of actual powerlessness. They share the condition of the majority of medieval women: others are in charge of the women's lives while they themselves lack any worldly power. At the beginning of the quest, Christina is an involuntary shepherdess, Lutgard is between the battle lines of her parents, and Margaret is placed in a convent without her conscious consent. The future saints have neither the position nor the authority or the education to take control over their own destiny. Only gradually and with the aid of their religious faith do they achieve influence on their own lives and the lives of others. But by the very end of their spiritual journeys they still have not acquired the status symbols of the world. They have, however, become powerful in the world only that the nature of their power base and its expressions remain a response to their initial social powerlessness.

While the world withholds power from the women, God endows them with it. It is the heavenly spouse who frees them from the perils of a worldly love affair and supports their decision to refuse the food of the world in order to live in penitence. It is again Christ who dispenses supernatural graces so that the women can establish a holy reputation for themselves. In the name of the Lord the female saints are able to circumvent societal limitations and to

transcend gender barriers. For example, in front of the entire community, Lutgard denies a visiting abbot and spiritual father of her monastery the right to place a kiss on her as he had done to the other sisters. Preserving her chastity is too important to her to let this contact happen.³⁰⁷ Thomas praises Lutgard's stubbornness as normative: "You, therefore, o virgin, who are, to be sure, a bride of Christ and a lover of chastity like Lutgard, flee such things." If it is too late for flight, Thomas advises an obstinate response à la Lutgard. Should anyone attempt physical contact "give him back spittle instead of a kiss and a direct blow for the touching."³⁰⁸ The heavenly marriage with its obligation of chastity reverses the power structures between men and women.

Other than freedom from worldly norms, the women gain educational privileges as a result of their closeness to Christ. Thus, the intimate knowledge of the heavenly spouse and the visionary experiences with which he blesses his spouses helps the women to make up for their lack of a formal education. "Although she had been completely illiterate from birth, yet she understood all Latin and fully knew the meaning of Holy Scriptures,"³⁰⁹ says Thomas about Christina. Again and again the well-educated hagiographer expresses his admiration for the holy women's spiritual insights. For example, even though he describes Lutgard as illiterate and her speech as clumsy, Thomas states that her deep spiritual understanding repeatedly impressed him so much "so that, when I listened to her words, I very often accounted myself to be completely uncultivated and dull in my understanding."³¹⁰ Thomas, the knowledgeable churchman, feels ignorant in comparison to the uneducated holy women. He describes the women's knowledge as superior to the knowledge taught in the

world and never questions its authenticity because the source of knowledge is Christ himself.

Just as a formal education goes hand in hand with the authority to speak, so does the spiritual education of the women obtain a voice for them. People seek and follow their advisory words. Thomas tells about Margaret that customarily "religious women came to her that she might say something to them about Christ."³¹¹ Not only do average folk consult the saints but also public figures from their communities and from abroad. Occasionally figures of high caliber request the women's advice. Lutgard in particular extends her services to the affairs of the larger world. To cite one example, the confessor of the pope asks for her assistance in the face of the Tartars.³¹² This episode and her fasts against the Albigensian heretics and the Emperor Frederick II give ample evidence for Lutgard's claim to authority as well as the recognition of this authority by her contemporaries--at least by Thomas. If somebody should question the women's authenticity the hagiographer is ready to fiercely defend his saints and his own craft: "May that most vile slanderer blush for shame who said and wrote that those who record the fantastic visions of insignificant women ought to be considered profane."³¹³ The women have something to say and somebody needs to record it.

It seems as if the women's designated role is that of a critical voice in the broadest sense. By their very existence they remind others of the divine and the need for penance; by their actions they reinforce the impact of their being and by their words they stress their message even more. The women are very capable of addressing unpleasant truths. Margaret clearly voices a social concern

when she confronts the noble lady on her oppressive tax policies.³¹⁴ Christina's mission is "the improvement of men"³¹⁵ and she does not hesitate to use hard words in the pursuit of her goal.³¹⁶ Finally, Lutgard goes as far as to criticize priests who--once again--hold an office from which she is excluded because of her womanhood. In spite of the power differential between a priest and a religious woman, Thomas approves of Lutgard's criticism: "The righteous Lutgard was solicitous above all measure in admonishing well-known priests very frequently with a wondrous grace of speech."³¹⁷

Thomas' attitude towards the women's rights within the body of the Church is not always so tolerant. Frequently he makes a point of telling the reader that the women know their limits. The bottom line is that the hagiographer wants to portray his saints as models of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy, however, requires the acceptance of the Church hierarchy with its assigned competencies. Thus, the hagiographer points out Margaret's refusal to answer people's questions about Christ: "What can I say about Christ, your Servant?"³¹⁸ For the same purpose, Thomas repeatedly stresses how Margaret would reveal her deepest insights to nobody but her spiritual father, i.e., the representative of the Church hierarchy. According to Thomas, this virtuous practice stands in sharp contrast to the illegitimate actions of other religious women. "And for this she rightly has been lauded with much praise, for many religious women in our day follow the pernicious conduct of the hen: as soon as they produce an egg, they begin to cackle."³¹⁹ In a comparable way, Thomas describes and lauds Christina's ability to draw the lines between her ministry and the ministry of ordained priests. Just as Margaret, Christina is very hesitant to share her

spiritual knowledge. For example, she avoids answering questions about the Bible because she deems exegesis a priestly prerogative. She also avoids open criticism of the clergy, but rather restrains herself to critical remarks made in privacy and with the appropriate deference. Thomas states that her respect and veneration for the clergy, particularly for the priests, is a direct implication of her love for Christ. It is all the more admirable since "on her part she had suffered many injuries from them."³²⁰ Obviously, the reverence between holy women and clergy is not always mutual. Yet, it is the women's task to step back. Christina is endowed with the knowledge and the spiritual authority that would enable her to pursue a ministry similar to the clergy. However, under the influence of the heavenly spouse she herself decides to reject this option as illegitimate. At least that is how Thomas portrays her: a model of orthodoxy and, simultaneously, an alternate model of spiritual authority.

It can be argued that the women do not simply resign themselves to the limitations imposed upon them by the Church hierarchy even though the hagiographer would like it to appear this way to the reader. Quite the reverse--in several respects they try to bypass these barriers. For example, the women seem to ignore the church's suspicions towards religious congregations beyond hierarchical control. Thus, on various occasions, the women link up with other religious people, usually other religious women. Beneath the hagiographer's low-key comments about these interpersonal connections there lingers evidence of a network and spiritual support system between like-minded women. In spite of their solitary orientation the women display a tendency to cluster, to influence, and to be influenced by the religious paths of others, in short, to

empower one another. It is Christina, for example, who gives Lutgard the final push to leave the Benedictines and take up the tougher life at the Cistercian nunnery in Aywières.³²¹ Thomas tells the reader about Lutgard and Christina that they both seek the company of a recluse named Jutta. Lutgard escapes the convent life for two weeks and shares the solitude of her "very close friend"³²² Jutta. Christina's stay lasts considerably longer. She spends nine years with Jutta, years which denote a crucial phase in her spiritual development. How close Jutta must have been to Christina is revealed by the fact that she is one of Thomas' main resource persons for his *vita* of the holy woman.³²³

It seems justifiable to assume that the women shared more than encouragement and contemplation with one another; their close contact is likely to also imply an exchange of thoughts. In fact, Thomas makes mention of such religious dialogue. Even Christina who shunned human company so much "used to sit and talk with her sisters and the nuns."³²⁴ Margaret's withdrawal from her environment and her difficult mother is interrupted by times when she talks to the same mother and her aunt about God,³²⁵ not to mention Margaret's contact with the religious women who regularly ask for her opinion on spiritual matters. As indicated above, Thomas states that she refuses to answer. Yet, the regularity (stubbornness?) with which the women come back and pursue her conveys the impression that Margaret may have revealed some of her insight at least occasionally.³²⁶ Thomas' ambiguity about the contacts between religious women surfaces clearly in his description of Lutgard's relationship with another nun, Sybille de Ganges. On the one hand, Thomas tries to present their relationship as a companionship planned by the hierarchy. Lutgard, he says, is

placed into the charge of Sybille since Sybille is "a more lettered nun than she."³²⁷ A second time he puts it even stronger: Sybille's counsel governs Lutgard because of her better education.³²⁸ In short, Thomas gives an educational rationale for their friendship. However, other observations by Thomas about the relationship between Sybille and Lutgard point beyond such a merely functional contact. Sybille does not only counsel Lutgard but rather is said "to serve her most devoutly ever since her [Lutgard's] entrance."³²⁹ Furthermore, Thomas emphasizes the intimacy between the two women; for Lutgard there is "no one dearer to her in all things...no one closer to her in all things."³³⁰ She even goes as far as to reveal to Sybille prophetic and spiritual insights,³³¹ revelations which, by Church standards, may be more appropriately made to a male confessor. Finally, it is the same Sybille who guards Lutgard's deathbed and, later on, writes a eulogizing epitaph for her deceased friend.³³² Their friendship was certainly more than a demand of hierarchy and necessity. Rather, it represents another example for the holy women's endeavors to connect with one another and provide mutual spiritual support and empowerment.³³³ Thomas may downplay these connections--struggling again for an orthodox portrayal of his saints. Nevertheless, at the same time, he supplies evidence which leads one to infer the existence of close contacts and maybe even of a spiritual network between religious women. Because of their secondary role in Church and society women's mutual empowerment has special significance.

Yet, the spiritual empowerment of oneself and others is hemmed in by a most central obstacle, namely the women's exclusion from evangelical activity in the form of preaching. Once again, Thomas' initial portrayal of the women's

self-limiting acceptance of the Church hierarchy is not sufficient. While stressing their consciousness of hierarchical barriers, Thomas, if he is aware of it or not, simultaneously describes the women as circumventing those very same barriers. Thus, the women's response to their exclusion from preaching is twofold. In a first step, they simply influence those who have the credentials to preach and use them as mediators. The women preach through officially designated preachers, so to speak. To get the picture, one need only recall the miracle at the very end of Margaret's life which condenses the process symbolically: the saint is seen next to a preaching Dominican holding an open book and pointing out what he should say in his sermon.³³⁴ In an analogous fashion, Lutgard can assume the role of the "mother and nourisher of the whole Order of Preachers" and support them in the fulfillment of their task with her daily prayers.³³⁵ Moreover, Thomas states that Lutgard is able to dispense the ability of preaching on others; those whom she authorizes to preach acknowledge that they owe their ability to her: "Master Jacques de Vitry received the grace of preaching through the prayers of this venerable woman (as he himself recounts in his book of the life of Blessed Marie d'Oignies)."³³⁶

Although they cannot make it into the visible ranks of preachers, the women seem to pull many strings behind the scenes. In addition to this mediated preaching, so to speak, they use a second avenue for their message: the women preach without words but by their deeds and their being. Much has been said about both their actions and their powerful presence. What needs to be added is Thomas' interpretation of the women's impact as a form of preaching. Many times he uses the women's "real" life experience as an

illustration for theological doctrines or for Bible passages; he presents them as exempla or as "living sermons."³³⁷ Occasionally he even makes an explicit connection between the women's way of life and the activity of preaching. Thus, he characterizes Christ as "He whom the righteous Lutgard preached."³³⁸ By labelling Lutgard as a "dove"³³⁹ Thomas is playing upon the same theme since in contemporary bestiaries the dove is associated with preachers.³⁴⁰ Thomas presents a much more evident picture of the underlying link between the women's normative lives and their unique way of preaching at the end of Christina's vita. There he summarizes the purpose of Christina's life with the following words: "By the example of her life and with many words, with tears, lamentations and boundless cries she taught more and shouted louder than anyone we have known either before or since...about the praise and glory of Christ."³⁴¹ The women may not be able to directly challenge institutionalized forms of power but they circumvent them by the commanding power of their personalities.

In conclusion, one can say that throughout the process of empowerment the women gain considerable religious authority and a voice among their people. Yet, they never achieve a position of institutionalized status, a fact which Thomas interprets as their own choice. Whether they turned necessity into a virtue one can only speculate. It certainly remains evident that the women's empowerment is inextricably bound to their gender. From the renunciation of the average woman's fate to the union with the heavenly spouse, from the asceticism of heavy fasts to the role of compassionate mediators and "living sermons," the women's spiritual journeys run along gender-specific routes. Even

though they have abandoned worldly womanhood, the three female saints embrace their womanhood again and again on spiritual terms.

CHAPTER III

THE CONCLUSION

The Validity of the Theoretical Frame Provided by Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich

In exploring the lives of Margaret, Lutgard, and Christina, the present study has touched upon many of the hagiographical themes discovered and analyzed by Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich. Most of their findings seem accurate and helpful for an understanding of the three vitae. It is now time to summarize the correspondences as well as the divergences between the case studies and the broad patterns in a closing argument.

As the historians have pointed out, the pursuit of sainthood can begin in early childhood; Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina go on the journey towards holiness at a very young age. The stories of their childhood conversions contain elements which frequently occur in hagiographical literature. For example, the causative factor for the religious vocation may be the death of a loved one. Immediately after Margaret's father dies her mother places her under the supervision of nuns. It is not totally clear whether this turn towards religion results from an insight into the transitory nature of life but the synchronization of events suggests at least an implicit connection. Christina's conversion also seems precipitated by death; both her parents die and adulthood is forced upon the orphan. Like many other saints, she can escape from her adult

responsibilities, i.e., her role as a shepherdess, by embracing a religious life. Lastly, Lutgard's vocational choice is a typical thirteenth-century example for both parental concern and parental conflict about a child's future. The parents' disagreement mirrors class differences between them. Their divergent definitions of a successful life are magnified by the fact that the thirteenth century offers new worldly opportunities because of the developing towns and concurrently appeals to religious sentiments with the vita apostolica movement. While the mother wants to be in charge of the religious affairs and appears responsible for the child's nurturing, the father represents the ways of the world and it seems his task to take the necessary steps towards a suitable marriage for his daughter.

Overall, the female family members assume power over and responsibility for the children's lives. Their influence is doubled by virtue of the fact that they are the girls' immediate female role models. When they are supportive of a religious lifestyle--such as Lutgard's mother and occasionally Margaret's mother--their involvement does not create any major friction. Rather their daughters are very willing to go along with the religious plan. However, when the female family members oppose the girl's religious ambition, this opposition leads to confrontations or even escalates into physical violence. The wider social community may be equally skeptical about the girl's vocation and, therefore, may not provide a haven. A woman like Christina may find herself caught between severe familial conflict and disapproval of her community.

Although the familial involvement in the three conversion stories ranges from well-meant encouragement to massive threats, whatever form it takes one finds closely knit bonds between family members. Hence, the assumption made

by Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich that hagiography contends the existence of a medieval notion of an affective family can be supported. The same holds true for their postulate of a medieval notion of childhood as a distinct developmental stage. In two stories, Lutgard's and Margaret's, one encounters an awareness of the differences between children and adults. The hagiographer describes both girls as "quasi senex" children which presupposes a notion of childhood as a phase very distinct from adulthood and not necessarily holy in itself. Rather the future saints have to leave behind all "childish things." The hagiographer also describes the children as being conscious of gender-specific expectations at an early age which again confirms a hypothesis of Weinstein and Bell. The women even seem to have internalized such gender-specific expectations, for example the prospect of marriage. Thus the abandonment of "childish things" culminates in letting go of all yearnings for a worldly lover. It is mandatory for the child to preserve her virginity for Christ, hence only the rejection of a worldly lover makes the spiritual marriage possible. As is the case for the majority of female saints, their virginity is a central attribute of their holiness: they are classified and praised as "virgins."

The battles over virginity are not always easily won. Rather they require the active intervention of the heavenly spouse. Also illnesses and visitations by supernatural guests can be essential components of the struggle which is a recurring motif in the stories of numerous saints according to Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich. Margaret and Lutgard, in particular, are portrayed as potentially vulnerable to the onslaught of a temptation. The pursuing men are not the only problem; it is the women's own sexuality that needs to be tamed. Thus,

Thomas--in line with most other hagiographers--locates the seat of sin within the women. In Margaret's case he even makes the explicit connection between her temptation and Eve's temptation: the association of woman, sexuality, and sin is lurking underneath the hagiographer's descriptions. Surely, the women perceive themselves as most unworthy sinners. Crippling self-doubts accompany them throughout their lifetime, some of which, at least, one can attribute to the impact of a misogynistic culture as Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich have done. On the other hand, the saints are filled with religious zeal and accomplish feats of asceticism, good works, and intimacy with God. Their accomplishments are the more astounding since the three women undertake the quest for holiness without any worldly power.

Upon an analysis of their achievements and their holy qualities, the women seem to fit Weinstein's, Bell's, and Goodich's mold of the Northern saint: visionary, ascetic, and contemplative. Yet, their holiness is larger than this mold. As most Northern saints, Lutgard and Margaret are affiliated with an order. They aspire to the "older piety" of prayer and withdrawal. Especially Lutgard follows "the norm": she seeks and performs holiness in a monastic setting. She also takes the typical route moving from a less strict order to a more rigid one. She even selects the most influential Northern order: the Cistercians. However, to explain her holiness merely in terms of the Northern contemplative and ascetic visionary does not suffice. Her means may distinguish her from a Southern counterpart, but her impact is certainly not confined to the cloister. As shown above, her influence reaches far beyond the walls of the monastery, and she attempts to play an active role in world events. A

comparable train of thought applies to Margaret. As a Northern Dominican tertiary, she spends most of her time with contemplative prayer and by practicing penitence. But there is more to her holiness than withdrawal. Thus, she also engages in public begging and takes a stand on social concerns such as the issue of oppressive taxes. Lastly, one finds that Christina does not belong under the category of a Northern contemplative monastic in the first place. Contemplation and asceticism, of course, play an important role in her life. However, she remains in the world and enters the arena of her community again and again: her penitential activities are by nature aimed at the public.

In sum, the three women represent three different types of female saints, types much more varied than the label "Northern contemplative" could capture. To be concrete, Lutgard represents the embodiment of a holy Cistercian engaged in the perfectionism of prayer and penitence; as such she comes closest to the "Northern contemplative." Margaret, on the other hand, develops into the epitome of a Dominican tertiary. Hence, one of the major tensions in her story is the attempt to balance her contemplative life and her affiliation with an order with the demands and needs of the world. By contrast, Christina lives without any monastic frame and her vocation as an orthodox religious woman in the world forces her to be outgoing and find a place within her community. A result of the nature of her ministry are her severe problems in gaining a holy reputation in the eyes of the people without the support of the Church hierarchy. Furthermore, her story contains many elements which are found in the lives of shamans from various parts of the globe. This cross-cultural dimension of her vita gets lost easily when reading it as a product of a specific geographical

region.

Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina stem from three different social levels. It is difficult to assess to what degree their class origin determines their pursuit of sainthood and their sainthood itself. Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich have found that nobility is the common springboard for sainthood. Only Lutgard's family has roots in the nobility: her mother is noble. But Lutgard's path towards sainthood is not necessarily smooth, at least not in the beginning. Since Lutgard's father belongs to the middle class and cherishes the values of his social level, her family has a built-in class conflict which initially interferes with Lutgard's saintly career. Her mother's decision of placing the daughter into a convent, however, can be traced back to a common practice among the nobility. Margaret is also given to a nunnery even though her family is thoroughly middle-class. According to the hagiographer, it is feasible for a thirteenth-century middle class family to consider this former "noble path" for their daughter. Weinstein and Bell stipulate such a broadening of the class base among saints for the thirteenth century. Surely, in Margaret's story the economic situation of her family is described as secure enough to do without Margaret's contribution to the family income but rather have her live a religious life at home for free. The class factor may be most decisive in Christina's case; as an orphan shepherdess the affiliation with an order seems out of the question. Rather her connection with the Church hierarchy remains loose throughout her lifetime. Furthermore, she is the one saint who has to fight the longest and hardest before she is established as a holy person in her social environment. At the same time, one can conclude that--according to the hagiographer and in

agreement with Weinstein, Bell, and Goodich--there exists at least a remote possibility for a lower class lay person of the early thirteenth century to achieve sainthood.

To a certain degree, the differences in class origin are causative for the three women's different vocations. Their respective vocations, in return, account for the many dissimilarities in their holy quest which the second chapter has detailed. Certainly, it is necessary to go beyond Weinstein's and Bell's general observations to discover the dissimilarities between the three vitae and to let the stories bring us in touch with a variety of religious lifestyles open to thirteenth-century female saints. Just as the frame of Weinstein and Bell is too broad for those differences to surface, it also fails to capture the features which the saints' lives hold in common. Thus, to Weinstein's and Bell's central insight, namely that women saints form a group of their own cutting across geographical, cultural, and social diversifiers, one can add another dimension: in spite of the differences resulting from their respective vocations, the women's piety is essentially alike³⁴² and their sainthood rests upon the same foundations.

Furthermore, one has to depart from Weinstein and Bell in one major respect. They have identified the foundations of feminine sainthood in the triad of asceticism, supernatural grace, and good deeds. In connection with their efforts to postulate an ideal type of saint, the historians have suggested to put women's sainthood into the category "androgynous type" of sainthood, a type which did not presuppose saintly attributes inaccessible to women but was equally attainable for men and women and aspired to by both sexes, especially from the thirteenth century onwards. It is certainly true that Lutgard, Margaret,

and Christina earned a holy reputation by engaging in asceticism, receiving supernatural graces, and performing good deeds. Yet, to categorize their sainthood as representing the "androgynous type" is deceptive. It creates the illusion of a gender-neutral concept of holiness. As the previous sections have shown women's adoption of the "androgynous type" cannot be separated from the legacy of their gender. Rather their womanhood--including women's initial powerlessness and their culturally assigned roles--seems to determine the ways in which they become and are saints. Hence, feminine sainthood cannot be fit into the androgynous mold without sacrificing its uniqueness. Quite the reverse--one has to place feminine sainthood in the very light of gender and interpret it as a "spiritual womanhood" in order to fully understand it.

Spiritual Womanhood: Mentalities and Roles
Reflected in the Hagiographical Work
of Thomas de Cantimpré

In a paradoxical way, the story of Lutgard, Margaret, and Christina, is a story of continuation. The women overcome many obstacles moving from social powerlessness to a position of spiritual authority, they grow gradually into a state of perfection moving from worldly womanhood to female sainthood. Yet, at the heart of their stories there remain the inseparable issues of power and gender. Social realities inform their religious roles and the mentalities which the hagiographical text mirrors.

Thomas' portrayal of the three female saints presents a holy womanhood which, on the surface, seems so opposed to worldly womanhood. However, the ways in which the women can assert their holiness correspond to their social and

cultural status as women. The holy womanhood Thomas describes even contains many elements of its worldly counterpart, except that these elements have metamorphosed into religiously significant components: components of sainthood.

Instead of a worldly husband, the women marry Christ. They cannot have children, but they become nurturers and mothers in a spiritual sense. Furthermore, feminine qualities such as compassion and feminine roles such as caring for the sick and the dying are demanded and reinforced by the spiritual quest. Lastly, the cultural association between food and women is reiterated on religious terms in the female saints' stories: the women's feats of fasting, their devotion to the eucharist, feeding and being fed are crucial to their spiritual development. Fasting enables the women to take control over their own bodies by embracing a religious life. Their asceticism consists mainly of fasting. Thus, worldly food is rejected for the sake of spiritual nourishment and, ultimately, for the literal union with the body of Christ. The women may not be able to celebrate the eucharist but they can surround their reception of the body of Christ with spiritual splendor.³⁴³ Their food practices are more than the mere result of a dualistic notion of body and spirit: they also convey an intense physicality, a longing for Christ in his humanity.³⁴⁴ The women reclaim the physicality which their culture stereotypes as a female domain and commonly labels as sinful on a higher, religious level.

Combined with the women's other supernatural gifts, their food practices furthermore are important for their spiritual authority. It has become apparent that the question of authority is a key issue for the women even though the hagiographer, eager to show his subject in an orthodox light, may downplay this

issue at times. In spite of their lack of worldly power and of a formal education, the women advance in their communities: they gain a critical voice, spiritual authority, and autonomy among their people. However, the women represent an alternate model of authority--they are empowered by God alone, they despise office, wealth, and fame.³⁴⁵ And the women have no need of them. Rather, the divine empowerment helps them in bypassing socio-cultural limitations. They circumvent the exclusion from priesthood, for example, by preaching through those who have the credentials and by transforming their very lives into "living sermons."³⁴⁶

The women's spiritual authority leads not only to autonomy but also into a deep connectedness with other human beings and with God. This connectedness surfaces repeatedly. To name an example, the women themselves tend to form clusters with other religious women and to support each other. Given the secondary role women play in Church and society female networking causes both reason for suspicion as well as much needed empowerment. The women are furthermore connected to their fellow human beings in a most radical fashion: through compassion. It is their compassion which stirs them into action. Thus, they assist other souls in their spiritual improvement and they mediate between God and sinners. The women's mediating function culminates in their willingness to share the suffering of the world. Purgatory is the peak of suffering. At the same time, in the women's stories purgatory becomes a symbol of compassion--their own compassion as well as God's compassion. The women are particularly apt to evoke God's mercy, that is to say, God's feminine side. Even more purgatory symbolizes the possibility of connectedness in

suffering. Sharing their pain the women are radically connected with their fellow human beings and, moreover, with the human God: Christ. It is God in his humanity, in his body and his suffering, for whom the women are longing. To eat Christ, to suffer with Christ, and, finally, to die for Christ means to achieve union with God.

Clearly, the sainthood of the three women rests on a cluster of associations and symbols. This cluster encompasses womanhood in its many aspects: nurturing, fasting, feeding, mediating, connectedness, etc. It furthermore promotes an alternate model of spiritual authority that is based on personal charisma and an unmediated closeness to God. This cluster also offers positive interpretation for physicality, suffering, and death, and, ultimately, for being human.

Thomas' portrayal of the women's sainthood reflects several mentalities, his own as well as the mentality of his collective and of his subjects. Moreover, the notion of sainthood which he presents shows the influence of the social realities in which these mentalities are formed. An understanding of the mentalities, therefore, goes hand in hand with an understanding of their social roots and social expressions. In the course of this study some aspects of the mentalities and the social realities which underlie three thirteenth-century women's sainthood have been named and analyzed. Whether the results of this study hold true for other female saints as has been suggested, is a question for future case studies on the subject.

ENDNOTES

1. Ulrich Raulff, ed., Mentalitäten-Geschichte: zur historischen Rekonstruktion geistiger Prozesse (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1987), 7.
2. Jacques Le Goff, "Eine mehrdeutige Geschichte," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff, 23-24.
3. Ibid., 24.
4. Ulrich Raulff, "Die Geburt eines Begriffs: Reden von >Mentalität< zur Zeit der Affäre Dreyfus," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff, 57-58.
5. Ibid., 59.
6. Ibid.
7. The transmission of "mentalité" from the field of sociology to the field of history happened mainly through the Revue de synthese historique. As a response to the criticism by the sociologists around Durkheim, who denied historians the status of serious social scientists such as sociologists, Henri Berr established this journal. The Revue was meant to be a forum for the theoretical debate between sociologist and historians and ultimately aimed at the revival of historiography as a science. See Andre Burguiere, "Der Begriff der Mentalitäten bei Marc Bloch und Lucien Febvre: zwei Auffassungen, zwei Wege," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff, 33-34.
8. See also Peter Burke, "Stärken und Schwächen der Mentalitätengeschichte," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff 127-54.
9. This is the main argument which Andre Burguiere develops in the article quoted above (n.7). In the following summary I mainly rely on Burgiere's discussion.
10. Marc Bloch, Les rois thaumaturges: Études sur le caractère surnaturel attribué à la puissance royale particulièrement en France et en Angleterre (London, New York: H. Milford, Oxford University Press, 1924).
11. Marc Bloch, La société féodale: La formation des liens de dépendance (Paris: A. Michel, 1939).
12. Le Goff, "Mehrdeutige Geschichte," 19.

13. Patrick H. Hutton, "Die Geschichte der Mentalitäten: Eine andere Landkarte der Kulturgeschichte," in Vom Umschreiben der Geschichte, ed. Ulrich Raulff (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1986), 108.
14. Le Goff, "Mehrdeutige Geschichte," 26.
15. Rolf Sprandel, "Erfahrungen mit der Mentalitätengeschichte," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff, 101.
16. Ibid., 134-35.
17. Ibid., 113.
18. Michel Vovelle, "Serielle Geschichte oder 'case studies': Ein wirkliches oder nur ein Schein-Dilemma?," in Mentalitäten-Geschichte, ed. Raulff, 117. Translation mine.
19. Ibid., 119.
20. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, Montaillou: Village occitan de 1294 à 1324 (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1975).
21. See also Vovelle, "Serielle Geschichte oder 'case studies'," 126.
22. In the context of the present study the term hagiography is used in the sense of the lives of the (Christian) saints and of scholarship pertaining to those lives.
23. Friedrich Lotter, "Methodisches zur Gewinnung historischer Erkenntnisse aus hagiographischen Quellen," Historische Zeitschrift 229 (1979): 303-04.
24. Jacques Le Goff, "Les mentalités: Une histoire ambiguë," in Faire de l'histoire, ed. Jacques Le Goff and P. Nora, 3 vols. (Paris: 1974), 3:86, cited by Michael Goodich, Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, no. 25 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1982), 2.
25. I am confining my observations about hagiographers to one world religion only: Christianity.
26. Friedrich Lotter, "Legenden als Geschichtsquellen," Deutsches Archiv für die Erforschung des Mittelalters 27 (1971): 198.
27. Lotter, "Erkenntnisse," 349.
28. Ibid., 314.

29. Vovelle, "Serielle Geschichte oder 'case studies'," 120-21. Translation mine.
30. Le Goff, "Mehrdeutige Geschichte," 19. Translation mine.
31. Hippolyte Delehaye, Les légendes hagiographiques, (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1927).
32. Le Goff, "Mehrdeutige Geschichte," 19.
33. For the following discussion compare Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell, Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom 1000-1700 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 2-3.
34. Michael Goodich, "The Dimensions of Thirteenth-Century Sainthood" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1972).
35. Charles George and Katherine George, "Roman Catholic Sainthood and Social Status: A Statistical and Analytical Study," in Journal of Religion 35 (1955): 85-98.
36. Sofia Boesch Gajano, Agiografia altomedioeval (Bologna: n.p. 1976), 29-32. See also Baudouin de Gaiffier, "Mentalité de l'hagiographie médiévale d'après quelques travaux récents," Annalecta Bollandiana 86 (1968): 397.
37. John M. Mecklin, The Passing of the Saint: A Study of a Culture Type (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941).
38. Pitrim A. Sorokin, Altruistic Love: A Study of American "Good Neighbors" and Christian Saints (New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969; reprint ed., Boston: Beacon Press, 1950).
39. Simone Roisin, L'Hagiographie cistercienne dans le diocèse de Liège au xiii siècle (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1947).
40. See above n.30.
41. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 3.
42. Ibid., 18.
43. Ibid., 9. Emphasis mine.
44. Michael Goodich, Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters, Band 25 (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1982), 2.

45. Ibid., especially 69-124.
46. Ibid., 3.
47. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 243.
48. For the following comments on childhood see *ibid.*, 19-47.
49. This fact contradicts the assumption made by Philippe Ariès (among others) that medieval people did not have a concept of childhood. See Philippe Ariès, L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime (Paris: Plon, 1960).
50. Michael Goodich, "Childhood and Adolescence among the Thirteenth-Century Saints," History of Childhood Quarterly 1 (1973): 285-309.
51. Ibid., 291.
52. Ibid., 289.
53. Ibid., 298.
54. Ibid., 291.
55. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 30.
56. Ibid., 58-59.
57. Ibid., 49.
58. Ibid., 70.
59. Goodich, "Childhood and Adolescence," 298.
60. Ibid., 299-303.
61. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 199.
62. Ibid., 100.
63. Ibid., 110-20.
64. Ibid., 73-75.
65. Ibid., 98-99.
66. Ibid., 142-47.

67. Ibid., 154.
68. Ibid., 157-60.
69. Ibid., 211.
70. Ibid., 208-09.
71. Ibid., 184.
72. In a broader sense this was the cultural setting of various groups, most of them formal orders, yet some outside the mainstream of organized religion, for example the Beguines.
73. Goodich, Vita Perfecta, 11-12, 133, and 208.
74. Michael Goodich, "A Profile of Thirteenth-Century Sainthood," Comparative Studies in Society and History 18 (1976): 429-37.
75. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 196 and 198-201.
76. Ibid., 202 and 204.
77. Ibid., 206-09.
78. Ibid., 216-17.
79. See Shahar Shulamith, The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages (London and New York: Methuen, 1983).
80. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 42 and 27.
81. Ibid., 37; and Goodich, Vita Perfecta, 177.
82. Ibid., 40-41.
83. Ibid., 97.
84. On this line of thought see among other discussions: Shahar, Fourth Estate, 23-24.
85. Weinstein, Saints and Society, 83 and 87.
86. Ibid., 81 and 236.
87. Ibid., 220 and 229-233.

88. Ibid., 236-37.

89. Ibid.

90. Goodich, Vita Perfecta, 173.

91. Compare *ibid.*, 237-38. There are obvious limitations to distinctions between masculine and feminine, such as between the masculine and the feminine side of the Church. However, it is also a valid and useful distinction as long as one does not confuse it with the distinction between male and female. To clarify my position: throughout the course of this study feminine is used as a label for concerns, values, actions, and traits which are primarily associated with women. In an analogous fashion, the term masculine characterizes concerns, values, actions, and traits which the culture usually brings in connection with men. Thus, it seems justifiable to talk about the masculine side of the Church when discussing ecclesiastical hierarchy or the image of God the Ruler and Judge. On the other hand, one can view ecclesiastical concerns such as charity work as an expression of the feminine principle within the Church.

92. See above n.46.

93. Thomas de Cantimpré also wrote a supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry. I decided to exclude Thomas' fourth hagiographical work on a woman saint, since he designed it as an addition to the already existing life. Therefore, it is fragmentary and also too enmeshed with de Vitry's work to be suitable for the present study. See Thomas de Cantimpré, Supplement to The Life of Marie d'Oignies, trans. Hugh Feiss (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987).

94. See above n.92. The new piety honors values that are commonly associated with women rather than men, i.e., charity, powerlessness, poverty, non-hierarchical relationships. The same holds true for the themes of this piety, such as Christ's humanity and mystical union (i.e., unmediated contact with God).

95. Weinstein and Bell negate the existence of such a type: "But was there a 'feminine' type of saint? The virtues of penitential asceticism, private prayer, mystical communion with the Godhead, and charity often were found in male saints as well as females. The most widely venerated saints, both in their lifetimes and after death, were of the latter type, which might more accurately be termed 'androgynous' than female." Weinstein, Saints and Society, 237.

96. Quoted in Joseph R. Strayer, ed. Dictionary of the Middle Ages (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1985), s.v. "Hagiography, Western," by Margot H. King.

97. Richard W. Southern, Western Society and the Church in the Middle

Ages (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Inc., 1973), p. 16.

98. A main methodological weakness of Weinstein's and Bell's quantitative approach is the neglect of hermeneutics. Rather than taking into account the unique context of each source, their application of statistical methods necessitates the equal treatment of all sources.

99. Biographie Universelle, 1970 ed., s.v. "Thomas de Cantimpré ou Catimpré."

100. Thomas de Cantimpré, The Life of Christina Mirabilis, transl. Margot H. King with introduction and notes (Toronto, Ontario: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987) 6 (hereafter cited as Thomas Life of Christina, reference made to respective page number).

101. Simone Roisin, "La méthode hagiographique de Thomas de Cantimpré," in Miscellanea Historica in Honorem Alberti de Meyer I (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l'Université, 1946), 548.

102. Brenda Bolton, "Vitae Matrum," in Medieval Women, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 260.

103. Thomas Life of Christina, 6.

104. This aspect of Canonical Spirituality is the main conclusion of Caroline W. Bynum's article on the subject. See Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Spirituality of Regular Canons in the Twelfth Century. A New Approach," Medievalia et Humanistica 4 (1973): 3-24.

105. Brenda Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women in the Low Countries," Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis 61 (1981): 23.

106. *Ibid.*, 13.

107. Alexander Kaufmann, Thomas von Cantimpré (Köln: J.P. Bachem, 1899), 13.

108. Thomas de Cantimpré, The Life of Lutgard of Aywières, transl. Margot H. King with introduction and notes (Saskatoon: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987), 4-5 (hereafter cited as Thomas Life of Lutgard, reference made to respective page number).

109. For unknown reasons the translation of Thomas' Life of Margaret does not include the death of her father. I base my statements about his death on a different source. Brenda Bolton, "Vitae Matrum: A Further Aspect of the Frauenfrage," in Medieval Women, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 258.

110. Thomas de Cantimpré, The Life of Margaret of Ypres, transl. Margot H. King with introduction and notes (Saskatoon: Peregrina Publishing Co., forthcoming), 34 (hereafter cited as Thomas Life of Margaret, reference made to respective page number).

111. Thomas Life of Christina, 19-20.

112. Thomas Life of Margaret, 26.

113. Ibid., 28.

114. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 5.

115. Thomas Life of Christina, 12.

116. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 4.

117. Ibid., 6.

118. Ibid., 7.

119. Thomas Life of Margaret, 33.

120. Ibid., 34.

121. Ibid., 36.

122. Ibid., 36-38.

123. Thomas Life of Christina, 12-13.

124. Simone Roisin has analyzed the many facets of the thirteenth-century Cistercian ideal as well as the hagiographical presentation of this ideal in her previously cited work L'hagiographie cistercienne dans le diocèse de Liège au XIII^e siècle. See above n.39.

125. For an in-depth discussion of the roots and different types of the exemplum as well as of its development and medieval use see Claude Bremond, Jacques le Goff, and Jean Claude Schmitt, L'Exemplum, Typologie des Sources du Moyen Age Occidental 40 (Brepols: Turnhout, 1982).

126. Also Augustine's influence on the hagiographer surfaces repeatedly in Thomas' portrayal of Lutgard.

127. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 1.

128. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 12-15.

129. Ibid., 16-19.
130. Ibid., 22.
131. Ibid., 27.
132. Ibid., 30-31.
133. Ibid., 32-33 and 45.
134. Ibid., 42.
135. See, for example, *ibid.*, 48.
136. Ibid., 65.
137. Ibid., 37.
138. Thomas Life of Margaret, 39.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid., 40.
141. Ibid., 41 and 44.
142. Ibid., 49.
143. See, for example, *ibid.*, 49, 51, and 53.
144. Ibid., 51-52.
145. Ibid., 56.
146. Ibid., 58.
147. Ibid.
148. Ibid., 59.
149. Ibid., 57, 63, and 66-69.
150. Ibid., 61.
151. Thomas Life of Margaret, 65.
152. See, for example, H. Thurston, Surprising Mystics (London: Burns &

Oats, 1955), 147-55.

153. Margot H. King gives a brilliant analysis of the higher meaning of Christina's exemplum and its grounding in William's mystical theology in the following article: Margot H. King, "The Sacramental Witness of Christina Mirabilis: The Mystic Growth of a Fool for Christ's Sake," in Peace Weavers: Medieval Religious Women 2. Cistercian Studies Series 72, ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 145-64.

154. Thomas Life of Christina, 15.

155. *Ibid.*, 16-19.

156. *Ibid.*, 20-21.

157. *Ibid.*, 21-22.

158. *Ibid.*, 23.

159. *Ibid.*, 25.

160. *Ibid.*, 27-28.

161. *Ibid.*, 29.

162. *Ibid.*, 30. For an excellent discussion of the theme of "folliness" in the name of Christ see John Saward, Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

163. Margot King also points out this connection in her introduction to Thomas, Life of Christina, p. 9. See especially Joseph Campbell, The Masks of God, vol. 1, Primitive Mythology (New York: Penguin Books, 1976), 229-81.

164. Thomas Life of Christina, 30.

165. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 73-74.

166. *Ibid.*, 74-79.

167. *Ibid.*, 77.

168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*, 81.

170. *Ibid.*, 78-80.

171. Ibid., 84.
172. Ibid., 86.
173. Ibid., 87.
174. Ibid., 89.
175. Ibid., 91.
176. Ibid., 92.
177. Ibid.
178. Ibid., 94-95.
179. Ibid., 99-100.
180. Ibid., 101-02.
181. Ibid., 97.
182. Ibid., 97-98.
183. Roger de Ganck, "The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century Seen against the Background of the Second Wave of Cistercian Spirituality," Cistercian Studies 5 (1970): 182.
184. Thomas Life of Margaret, 69-70.
185. Ibid., 70-72.
186. Ibid., 73.
187. Ibid., 75.
188. Ibid., 76.
189. Ibid., 77.
190. Ibid., 78.
191. Ibid., 79.
192. Ibid., 80.
193. Ibid., 80-81.

194. Ibid., 81.
195. Ibid., 82.
196. Ibid., 83.
197. Ibid., 83-84.
198. Ibid., 84-85.
199. Ibid., 85.
200. Ibid.
201. Thomas Life of Christina, 31.
202. Ibid., 32-33.
203. Ibid., 33-34.
204. Ibid., 35.
205. Ibid.
206. Ibid.
207. Ibid., 36.
208. Ibid.

209. Christina's ambiguous attitude towards her body can be placed into the broader context of medieval piety. Caroline Bynum has demonstrated the existence of two divergent religious notions about the relationship between body and spirit. The prevalent notion--the one commonly emphasized by historians--is based on a dualistic understanding of body and soul and requires the subjugation of the flesh for the sake of the spirit. The second notion--the one Bynum has called attention to--perceives the body as a vehicle for the encounter with God in his humanity. According to Bynum, this second notion plays a central role in the lives of religious women. It seems as if Christina weaves both strands together. Caroline Walker Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 208-18, 294-96.

210. Ibid., 38. Emphasis mine.
211. Ibid., 39.

212. Ibid.
213. Ibid., 40.
214. Ibid., 41.
215. King, "Sacramental Witness," 158.
216. Thomas Life of Christina, 12.
217. Thomas Life of Margaret, 47.
218. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 84-86.
219. Thomas Life of Christina, 37.
220. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 87.
221. Thomas Life of Margaret, 51.
222. Rudolph M. Bell, Holy Anorexia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).
223. See Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast.
224. Thomas Life of Christina, 15.
225. This link exists for many Italian saints. See Bell, Holy Anorexia, 55.
226. Thomas Life of Margaret, 47.
227. Ibid.
228. Ibid.
229. Thomas Life of Christina, 24.
230. Ibid., 23.
231. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 21.
232. Compare Bell, Holy Anorexia, 116.
234. Ibid., 51.
235. Norman P. Spack, "Medical Complications of Anorexia Nervosa and

Bulimia," in Theory and Treatment of Anorexia Nervosa and Bulimia, ed. Rev. Steven Wiley Emmett (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1985), 6-7.

236. Thomas Life of Margaret, 38.
237. Ibid., 61.
238. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 11.
239. Thomas Life of Christina, 24.
240. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 26.
241. Ibid., 23 and 28.
242. Ibid., 33.
243. Thomas Life of Margaret, 66.
244. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 45.
245. Thomas Life of Margaret, 38.
246. Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 191.
247. Thomas Life of Christina, 15.
248. Thomas Life of Margaret, 36.
249. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 8.
250. Ibid., 12-13.
251. Ibid., 20.
252. Thomas Life of Christina, 17-18.
253. Ibid., 14.
254. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 9.
255. Ibid., 62-63.
256. Thomas Life of Christina, 24-25.
257. Thomas Life of Margaret, 70.

258. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 27.

259. Thomas Life of Margaret, 72.

260. Thomas Life of Christina, 13-14.

261. *Ibid.*, 25-26. It is not totally clear from the text whether Christina is expanding on her first vision of purgatory or has a second experience to report. Judging from the context and from Thomas' description of her revelation it seems more likely that Christina actually had another vision of the place.

262. For example, Roger de Ganck reports about thirteenth-century Cistercian Nuns that "their penitential practises were more and more inspired and illuminated by the idea of conformatio or configuratio with the poor Christ in his life and sufferings." De Ganck, "Cistercian Nuns," 176.

263. Thomas Life of Margaret, 69-70.

264. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 50.

265. *Ibid.*, 50-51.

266. Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century," Women's Studies 11 (1984): 189.

267. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 89. See also Bynum's observation that thirteenth-century mystics tend to experience union with Christ either in terms of pain and suffering or in terms of sexual union and marriage. Bynum, Women Mystics, 191.

268. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 74.

269. Thomas Life of Margaret, 73.

270. Thomas Life of Christina, 13 and 53.

271. According to Bynum emphasis on the eucharist is a universal theme "in female saints' lives from all regions and orders." Even more, she states, that "in many, the eucharist and the closely associated theme of fasting (i.e., the abstaining from non-eucharistic food) provides a leitmotif which is both the major literary device tying the story together and the underlying psychological theme of the woman's life." Bynum, "Women Mystics," 183.

272. Thomas Life of Margaret, 38.

273. See, for example, Lutgard: "As for her, the more she continued her fasting, the stronger she was in body and heart." Thomas Life of Lutgard, 30.

274. Thomas Life of Christina, 23.

275. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 66.

276. *Ibid.*, 42.

277. *Ibid.*, 86.

278. See Thomas Life of Margaret, 78. Also, Thomas Life of Christina, 37. There is no explicit mention as to whether Lutgard, in the final stage of her life, receives any nourishment other than the eucharist as part of the "sanctifying sacraments." Thomas Life of Lutgard, 93.

279. Bynum develops this essential difference between men's and women's religious experience in the following article. Caroline Walker Bynum, "And Women in His Humanity: Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages," in Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrel and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 257-88. See also her observation on the use of images of reversal in the writings of religious men and women. Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 277-94.

280. Thomas Life of Margaret, 80.

281. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 56-57.

282. Thomas Life of Christina, 24.

283. Thomas Life of Margaret, 54.

284. Bolton, "Vitae Matrum," 262.

285. Thomas Life of Margaret, 55.

286. Thomas Life of Christina, 22.

287. *Ibid.*

288. Thomas Life of Christina, 25.

289. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 43.

290. *Ibid.*

291. Thomas Life of Margaret, 70.

292. Thomas Life of Christina, 27.

293. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 30.
294. Ibid., 31.
295. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 29.
296. Ibid., 37.
297. Ibid., 77.
298. Ibid., 29. Emphasis mine.
299. Ibid., 37.
300. Bynun, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 235.
301. Thomas himself wrote a supplement to de Vitry's biography. See
n.93.
302. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 37.
303. Ibid., 100-01.
304. Thomas Life of Christina, 14.
305. Ibid., 34.
306. Ibid., 40.
307. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 23.
308. Ibid., 25.
309. Thomas Life of Christina, 31.
310. Ibid., 18.
311. Thomas Life of Margaret, 56.
312. Thomas Life of Christina, 81.
313. Ibid., 79.
314. Thomas Life of Margaret, 28.
315. Thomas Life of Christina, 14.

316. See, for example, *ibid.*, 30.
317. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 65. Compare Bynum's observation "that it was men in particular who saw women as an alternative to and a criticism of wealth, power, and office." Bynum, "Women Mystics," 195.
318. Thomas Life of Margaret, 56.
319. *Ibid.*, 60.
320. Thomas Life of Christina, 31.
321. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 26.
322. *Ibid.*, 19. See also Bolton, "Vitae Matrum," 264.
323. Thomas Life of Christina, 30-31.
324. *Ibid.*, 37.
325. Thomas Life of Margaret, 71.
326. *Ibid.*, 56.
327. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 80.
328. *Ibid.*, 88.
329. *Ibid.*, 58.
330. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 88.
331. *Ibid.* See also *ibid.*, 60.
332. *Ibid.*, 93 and 100.
333. The mutual support between women even extends into heaven. Numerous are the examples of deceased female saints "counseling" the three saints on their religious journey.
334. Thomas Life of Margaret, 85.
335. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 76.
336. *Ibid.*, 30.
337. See above n.215.

338. Thomas Life of Lutgard, 96. Emphasis mine.

339. Ibid., 95.

340. Margot King made this connection first and describes it with more detail in an endnote to her translation of Thomas' Life of Lutgard, 165, n.249.

341. Thomas Life of Christina, 40-41. Emphasis mine.

342. See also Brenda Bolton's statement that "it is not possible in these Lives to distinguish particular trends in spirituality and to attribute them to one order or to one group." Bolton, "Vitae Matrum," 267.

343. Bynum, "Women Mystics," 193.

344. Bynum, Holy Feast and Holy Fast, 294-96.

345. See above n.317.

346. See above n.215.

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