

**Thomas de Cantimpré's Representations of Holy Women
in the Thirteenth Century Low Countries**

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In thirteenth century medieval Europe, a religious movement arose consisting of women who wanted to lead exemplary lives espoused the apostolic qualities of poverty, chastity, and charity. These women were referred to as Beguines. This movement took place in a geographic locale known as the low countries, which was already an important urban and trade center by the 1200's. Not all of the women were themselves Beguines, however many of the thousands of women who participated in the movement were associated with the Beguines at some point in their religious career.¹ Roughly fifteen women were held up as particularly holy because of the lives they led, and each was the subject of a kind of religious writing called hagiography, or saint's life. This literature also functioned as propaganda in that the author's aims characteristically included promotion of a cult and winning the patronage of a monastery or church which housed relics (physical remains like a finger bone or clothing or other personal item associated with the holy person). Patronage brought in money that directly benefited the religious order associated with the author. Another of the author's common motives in writing a life of a holy person was to legitimize the latter's religious lifestyle the subject led. Ultimately, all writing of holy lives strived to have the subjects recognized as saints by the Church. Hopefully popular patronage and/or legitimization of a new religious order would then also follow.²

A mendicant preacher of the Dominican order named Thomas de Cantimpré contributed three lives and a supplement to the first known Beguine life, that of Marie d'Oignies. Thomas's

predecessor, Jacques de Vitry, had penned the life of Marie and although Jacques had moved on to be ordained a cardinal, his writing inspired Thomas to take up where Jacques left off. ³ Thomas's three lives of the holy women, Lutgard of Aywieres, Christina of St. Trond, and Margaret of Ypres, along with his supplement to Jacques's Life of Marie d'Oignies, constitute a larger contribution than that made by any other author to writing the lives of the Beguines.

The Beguines consisted of informal groupings of women living in or by towns. Shortly after the movement began they faced social and religious critics because they lacked legitimization from the Church. Criticism centered around the violation of the medieval social norm that women, particularly religious women, belonged under the protection of men and within the physical confines of a building like a convent. Women who did not meet this norm and who were not married or did not have a permanent vow of chastity as formal nuns did were viewed by men, especially clergy, as threatening. Medieval thought dictated that females were sexually lavicious and a general threat to society if not "contained" under male protection or formally professed to a Church authorized order. ⁴

Fortunately for the Beguines, male cleric supporters such as Jacques de Vitry, soon after the Beguine movement gained momentum, began to champion the holy lifestyle of these women. By writing holy lives of some of the women, these men helped generate both the popular and the religious support necessary to win authorization of the Beguines as an order. Jacques de Vitry

wrote a life of a holy woman named Marie d'Oignies whose sanctity and lifestyle he witnessed firsthand and whose merit he held above all that of all the other holy women he encountered. He wrote in the prologue to his Life of Marie d'Oignies that "She shone wondrously among the others like a jewel among other stones." ⁵ Jacques and other preachers were actively preaching against heretics of the church found in the south of France, and he found examples of contemporary saints useful in holding up a religious ideal. Owing to the aspects of her spirituality as extolled by Jacques de Vitry, Marie is usually referred to as the prototypical beguine. ⁶

Thomas began his religious career at the Victorine abbey of Cantimpré. However, he was intrigued by the Dominican ideal of preaching abroad as a way to rejuvenate the christian life, and he subsequently joined the Dominicans in Louvain. ⁷ Thomas's lives differ from the other written Beguine lives in the manner of how he represented his subject's spirituality. Three topics, those of bodily miracles, bodily suffering, and intercession, clearly figure most prominently in Thomas's accounts. Margot H.King notes that Thomas, as a Dominican biographer, regarded the lives he wrote as sermons. King states "...Both the life and the woman must be understood as an *exempla*, that is to say, 'brief tale(s) presented as truth and destined to be included in a discourse (usually a sermon) to edify the audience by the utilization of a salutary lesson.'" ⁸ In Thomas's views, the most significant aspect of the life and spirituality of each of the women he wrote about were the lessons gained by their

individual examples of bodily miracles, bodily suffering, and intercession. Thomas also defined a female spirituality of a more active nature than other biographers of the beguines. When scholars point to group characteristics of the Beguines, they usually draw on the constructs of holiness which Thomas held up as constituting female sanctity.⁹ Yet one of the most important kinds of holy behavior associated with beguine spirituality is almost absent in three of four of Thomas's lives.¹⁰ Eucharistic devotion has been shown to be a vital feature of Beguine holy behavior that clerics found useful in legitimizing the authority of the priesthood and combating heresy.¹¹ This idea was firmly articulated in the first Beguine biography of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques d'Vitry. Thomas's lives of holy women were influenced by Jacques's Life of Marie d'Oignies. Thomas wrote these to make cases for the sanctity of the holy women and to further strengthen the cause for a Church recognized Beguine order. Except in his Life of Margaret of Ypres, in which Thomas had to work from a preexisting model of holiness, eucharistic devotion is lacking in the other three lives of holy women. There are a few negligible mentions, yet overall Thomas did not emphasize eucharistic devotion in the spirituality of Marie d'Oignies, Lutgard of Awyières, and Christina of St.Trond. This affected Thomas's representations of female holiness and at the same time, suggests that Thomas had a more active role in mind for women in the church.

In order to illustrate the nature of Thomas's representations of feminine spirituality, Jacques d'Vitry's The

Life of Marie d'Oignies will be compared and contrasted to Thomas's female lives. Next, three other lives of holy women from the Beguine group will be compared and contrasted with Thomas's female lives. The three holy women are Alice the Leper of Schaerbeek, Juliana of Mount Cornillon, and Ida of Nivelles. The categories of that Thomas stressed in his representation of female spirituality are bodily miracles, bodily suffering, and intercession. These same categories will be used in discussing the portrayal of Alice, Juliana, and Ida when applicable. Otherwise, categories specific to each woman will suffice to discern the representation of spirituality. Because each female life discussed here was written to promote the sainthood of the concerned holy woman, holiness and sanctity are to be used interchangeably. The authors of the holy female lives, save Juliana's biographer, referred to the women as both holy and saintly. Juliana's biographer was promoting not the sanctity of Juliana, rather, the Corpus Christi feast that Juliana conceptualized and lobbied for within her lifetime. 12

Jacques de Vitry's model of female sanctity was presented in his Life of Marie d'Oignies. No other biographer had more influence on Thomas de Cantimpré's own view of female sanctity than did Jacques. In fact it was Jacques's Life of Marie that inspired Thomas to take up the novel idea of holding up women like Marie as living an apostilic lifestyle which the Church ought to condone as exemplary behavior.¹³ Thomas took from Jacques's model of female holiness specific characteristics and transformed Jacques's ideals into his own perceptions of what constituted female sanctity. In this section, the particular topics of bodily miracles, bodily suffering, intercession, and eucharistic devotion that Jacques emphasized will be discussed. Thomas gained much of his own concepts of female spirituality from Jacques's representation of Marie's holiness. However, Thomas did not consider eucharistic devotion to be central to the spirituality of three of the four women he wrote about. The special case of eucharistic devotion in Thomas's Life of Margaret of Ypres will be explained to illustrate why it constitutes an exception.¹⁴ Thomas's appropriation and development of three of the four categories that Jacques highlighted and the additional category of relics Thomas included affected how Thomas constructed female holiness.

On the topic of bodily miracles, Jacques presents the miracle of Marie's endless tears. When Marie considers Christ's sacrifice, she cannot hold back her tears and sobs audibly. The floor of the church becomes muddy with her tears and she has to frequently exchange one tear soaked veil for

another. In one instance, Marie's miraculous amount of tears serve to edify a priest. The priest, disturbed by her copious sobbing during his sermon, admonishes Marie. She flees, knowing she cannot stop her tears. Marie prays that the priest will be shown that she cannot control her sobbing and the priest experiences a bodily miracle himself. He suddenly finds himself deluged with tears all over the altar cloths and flooding the books. He was thus shown, as Marie later told him, "'...that it is not in man's power to restrain the intensity of the spirit when the south wind blows.'" 15 This is the only bodily miracle which Marie performs in Jacques's life of her that constitutes the label of active. It is an active bodily miracle because the miraculous tears of Marie result in the disbelief of the priest and then the miracle happens to him.. However, this active miracle is the exception in Jacques's Life of Marie d'Oignies.

One bodily miracle that Jacques holds as evidence of Marie's sanctity is her ability to survive on very little nourishment. Marie, Jacques reports, took in only minute amounts of food most of the time. She frequently fasted for long periods of time and was satisfied by spiritual food rather than physical food. Jacques states that Marie would go for weeks wanting nothing but the eucharist. Real food did not satisfy her. Jacques explains "As long as her soul was so full and copiously overflowing with spiritual food, it did not allow her to accept any refreshment from corporeal food." 16 This idea of Marie's body being closed off from food made her in Jacques's eyes an

ideal vessel to be filled with the grace of God. Because she received spiritual nourishment from Christ, Marie did not need corporeal food to subsist.¹⁷ The bodily miracle of not eating was central to Jacques's construct of Marie's holiness. It made her other physical activities all the more miraculous. In Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women, Carolyn Bynum argues that food symbolism and eucharistic piety heavily figured into the spirituality of many Medieval holy women.¹⁸ Jacques's portrayal of Marie's spirituality certainly fits Bynum's central thesis and Marie is mentioned several times in Bynum's discussion.⁴ Fasting as a bodily miracle in Jacques's representation of Marie is passive in that the effects of the bodily miracle stopped. Marie's miraculous closed body did not take in much food and the miracle ended there.

Thomas also considered bodily miracles as significant in defining holiness in holy women. Yet Thomas often included active bodily miracles where the women aid themselves or others. When Christina of St.Trond fled to remote forests, she had no food to eat. She wished to remain alone, but needed to subsist on something. Thomas writes:

Therefore, pouring forth a prayer to the Lord, she humbly begged that He gaze on her anguish with the eyes of His mercy. Without delay, when she turned her eyes to herself, she saw that the dry paps of her virginal breasts were dripping sweet milk against the very law

of nature...Using the dripping liquid as food, she was nourished for nine weeks with the milk from her fruitful but virginal breasts. 19

Christina underwent a bodily miracle, and she used the milk she produced to nourish herself for weeks. This miracle, Thomas tells us, is doubly significant because none since Jesus's mother have undergone the same feat. The bodily miracle becomes active when Christina utilizes the milk. Christina actively sustains herself with the miraculous milk she produced. In another scene, Christina has been imprisoned by her friends who mistake her holy behavior for lunacy. When Christina is restrained by a wooden yoke, her skin under the wood is rubbed raw and her wounds soon fester. Miraculously, Christina's virgin breasts ooze oil and she uses the oil as an ointment for her wounds. Christina had also found the hard bread given to her to eat unpalatable until she used the same oil to render the bread more edible. 20 Thomas demonstrates that Christina experienced bodily miracles and actively used the miraculous fluids her body produced to help herself.

Thomas included other kinds of miracles which often involve the body of the holy woman. Lutgard of Aywières, Thomas states, healed many people by contact with her hand or her spittle. So many people came to be healed, he adds, that she prayed to God in order to have her healing ability removed. Thomas states that in lieu of being able to heal, Lutgard asked

and received the ability to better understand the Psalter. 21
 Lutgard's body and saliva from her body performed miracles.
 Thomas saw bodily miracles and miracles caused by the body as
 important to the sanctity of holy women he wrote about. His
 inclusion of active miracles like that of Christina's and
 Lutgard's suggests he, like Jacques, was concerned with the
 body and miracles. However, unlike his predecessor, Thomas
 saw active bodily miracles as integral to female spirituality.
 Thomas did not view the relationship between God and the holy
 woman as closed. He envisioned the spiritual relationship as
 signaling divine approval for the blessed female to act on
 behalf of others.

Because discussion of bodily suffering and intercession are
 linked in especially Thomas's holy female lives, an explanation
 of how gender specific roles performed by the concerned holy
 women affects their representation by both authors. Jacques
 shows Marie performing intercessory work, which unlike most of
 her praised roles. Intercession was largely a male specific
 duty that Jacques conceived was as effective, if not more, when
 performed by holy women like Marie. Thomas emphasized
 intercessory skills in his holy women even more strongly than
 Jacques and included other male specific duties. Priests'
 duties included spiritual counsel and hearing confessions,
 while mendicant (wandering) priests or friars offered to lessen
 purgatorial sentences for monetary fees. 22

Thomas shows Christina interceding, giving spiritual
 counsel and hearing a nobleman's confession. The episodes

involving her relationship with the Count of Looz clearly illustrates both the female and male specific roles she assumes. Thomas states that Christina acted like a mother to the Count and freely scolded him when he errored. She also acted as his spiritual counsel and heard his confession when he was on his deathbed. After his death, she agreed to take on half his purgatorial debt so that he would not linger for a long time in purgatory. ²³ By acting as his spiritual counsel, hearing his confession, and negotiating a purgatorial debt, Christina was performing male associated behavior. Christina, Thomas tells us, was so holy that she had God's approval to take on both female and male associated duties. Therefore, Thomas saw women like Christina constituting a whole new role and position of authority in the Church. By living chastely and modestly, some holy women might merit enough divine favor to perform some duties traditionally assigned to men.

Bodily suffering is a prominent theme in Jacques's The Life of Marie d'Oignies. Jacques writes of Marie gladly accepting any tribulation in the form of suffering that the lord wished to inflict upon her. He states "...that she had never seen a sick person but that she desired the illness whatever it was." ²⁴ Marie took on suffering by going on fasts in order to aid someone who needed her help. Jacques tells of a young nun from a Cistercian order who was possessed by a demon and made to utter blasphemous words. The nun was led to Marie, who welcomed her into her cell, and out of her compassion, started on a forty day fast with tears and prayers. After this, the

demon was forced to leave the nun alone and she was cured. 25 Marie voluntarily took on bodily suffering to help others. Jacques saw this bodily suffering as part of what made Marie saintly.

Thomas similarly stressed bodily suffering as significant in the lives of the holy women he wrote. Like Jacques, Thomas showed the women both welcoming bodily suffering, asking to be given bodily suffering, and actively taking on suffering on behalf of others. Thomas stated in his Life of Margaret of Ypres that Margaret suffered terribly in her final illness, yet she asked for more pain. He writes that "three days before her death, she began to be tormented in all her members to a degree beyond all human imagination...The pain of burning was present with such force that she felt the torments of fire in each and very member." 26 Yet Margaret, Thomas tells us, was not satisfied with the amount of pain she felt. He adds:

And when not one of her members had the power to move alone and only her tongue was free, she said to the Lord, 'Scourge, Lord Jesus, scourge this most miserable body and multiply your vengeance on that which undertook so many wicked offenses against you for such a long time!' 27

Thomas wrote that these women desired bodily suffering and wanted to suffer on account of others. Christina of St.Trond was driven by the spirit to beg for alms from publicans, Thomas

states. He explains that she suffered accordingly if the alms were wrongly acquired, "...it seemed to her that she was swallowing the bowels of frogs and toads or the intestines of snakes...Thus it was torture for her to eat any unjust plunder." 28 Christina suffered if the alms given to her had been gained by the giver through usury or robbery. She suffered on behalf of the criminal. Because Thomas greatly emphasized bodily suffering, he held that the ability of the holy women to seek to take on suffering on behalf of others was significant to his model of female sanctity.

Interceding on behalf of souls in purgatory was a new idea in the thirteenth century. The idea of purgatory itself was being refined and integrated into the Church and Christian thought in general. However, with the new knowledge of purgatory, came new concerns for the populace. Many people worried about the length of time that departed loved ones might have to serve in purgatory, and the length and severity of their own sentences. To meet the needs of many Christians, Friars attempted to fill this niche. Friars offered the service of accepting alms in exchange for chunks of time shaved off of time in purgatory based on various sins, or declaring a earthly penance to be performed. 29 However, Jacques had found that holy women like Marie d'Oignies could perform a similar service by interceding on behalf of sinners doing penance in purgatory and taking on some of the suffering ordained for these souls. Jacques also writes that Marie was able to inquire about the state of particular souls and of what length

of penance they had incurred in their earthly lives. 30

Jacques saw women like Marie as providing a valuable service by interceding on behalf of living people who worried about the fate of their deceased loved ones. Marie could intercede and report back to living relatives that their deceased loved one had only so many years of penance in purgatory. Often Marie herself would take on some of the suffering in order to help speed the soul to paradise. Jacques's emphasis on Marie's skills in interceding suggest that he thought that this service might be one of the most important functions that the holy women known as Beguines could provide. He saw these women as living such holy lives that they could effectively intercede on behalf of souls stuck in purgatory and stand in contrast of corrupt and greedy clergy. 31

Thomas also thought that women like Marie made good interceders and made intercession vital to his representation of their holiness. Thomas emphasized similarly the taking on of bodily suffering and the offering of constant prayers in order to intercede. He advocated an even more active role for these women as interceders by showing the holy women using their bodily miracles to help intercede. Thomas explains the whole religious career of Christina of St.Trond in such terms. He states that Christina died and came back to life after agreeing to function as an interceder:

(The Lord said)... 'I now offer you two choices, either to remain with me now or to return to the body and

suffer there the sufferings of an immortal soul in a mortal body without damage to it, and by these your sufferings to deliver all those souls on whom compassion in that place of purgatory, and by the example of your suffering and your way of life to convert living men to me'... 32

Christina chose to return to the living and underwent various ordeals and suffering as agreed. Thomas illustrates the significance of the role of the interceder by showing Christina as coming back to life solely for the purpose of helping souls in purgatory. Her bodily miracle is her resurrection accompanied with her specific mission. ³³ While Jacques has Marie intercede on behalf of some people, Thomas built his whole text of Christina around the premise of her intercession.

Thomas's The Life of Lutgard of Awyières contains so many intercessory feats of clerics and important people performed by Lutgard that Jacques le Goff deemed her "the patron saint of purgatory" in his Birth of Purgatory. ³⁴ The most notable of the deceased persons who petitioned Lutgard for help in intercession was the late Pope Innocent III. ³⁵ What Thomas tries to impress through the mention of several souls enlisting Lutgard's aid is that her intercessory abilities testified to the holiness of her lifestyle.

For Jacques, the centrality of the eucharist to Marie's spirituality was one of the most important ways in which women like Marie could be held up by preachers as a weapon against

the Albigensian heretics in the south of France. The idea of the Eucharist wafer being transformed by the Priest into the body of Christ during the Sacrament was contested frequently by heretics and skeptics. ³⁵ Jacques included many instances of Marie's intense Eucharistic devotion which served to legitimize both the doctrine of transubstantiation and the authority of the priests who perform the ceremony. Jacques wrote of Marie undergoing fasts for thirty-five days in which she ate no corporeal food and spoke no words except "'I want the Body of Our Lord Jesus Christ'". Jacques added that she was rapt in ecstasy for days after having received the eucharist. ³⁷ During the ceremony itself, Marie witnessed miracles. Jacques reported "Frequently when the priest was raising the Host she saw between the hands of the priest the outward appearance of a beautiful boy and an army of the heavenly spirits descending with a great light." ³⁸ According to Jacques, Marie also saw "in spirit...the Lord remaining in the soul of the priest and filling him with a wondrous brightness." ³⁹ Of particular interest to Jacques, who sought to combat corrupt clergy, was Marie's special talent for discerning bad priests from good priests. Jacques explained "If, on the other hand, he (the priest) received it unworthily, she saw the Lord withdrawing with indignation and the soul of the wretched man remaining empty and shadowy." ⁴⁰ Marie's ability served to provide recognition of the legitimacy of transubstantiation and whether the priest himself was morally fit to perform it. Women with similar skills like Marie could find support and recognition of

their abilities and lifestyle from clergy like Jacques de Vitry.

Jacques reported of many miraculous visions shown to Marie at the moment of the transformation of the eucharist. 41

Although Jacques did not doubt her powers, he recalled one occasion he and others decided to test Marie to see if she could consume an unconsecrated host. Jacques wrote "She was immediately revolted by the smell of the bread. As soon as her teeth touched the tiniest part of it, she began to cry out and to spit..." Jacques and his colleagues were intrigued enough with Marie's eucharistic devotion to administer the test. 41 Their collective interest and the space Jacques himself devoted to the subject of eucharistic devotion within his Life of Marie d'Oignies demonstrate that he considered this behavior to be one of the most important facets of Marie's spirituality. Eucharistic devotion and intercession seemed to Jacques to be the two defining characteristics of the new female spirituality and skills the women known as beguines could offer the Church as a legitimized order.

In turning to the subject of eucharistic devotion in Thomas's four lives of holy women, it is clear that the majority of mentions of such devotion reside in his Life of Margaret of Ypres. There is a mention or two of eucharistic devotion in the other three lives, yet the subject takes up little space overall. 42 This difference between Thomas's Life of Margaret of Ypres and his other lives is not the singular one, either. In his essay examining the importance of purgatory in Thomas's lives of holy women, Robert Sweetman

pointed out the lack of mention of purgatory in The Life of Margaret. He ascribed the discrepancy to the fact that Thomas did not have a free hand in composing Margaret's biography. Sweetman asserted that the miraculous core of her claim to sanctity was provided to him by the Dominican Siger of Lille.

43 Therefore, the degree of eucharistic devotion that was emphasized in Margaret's spirituality cannot be taken as how Thomas personally chose to represent female holiness. By not including eucharistic devotion as vital to the core of the spirituality of Lutgard and Christina, the resulting female sanctity depends less on the role of the priest. Even Marie d'Oignies in Thomas's Supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies is shown as more authoritative in the episodes where she answers a man's questions about purgatory, guides him through a mystical meditation, and posthumously appears in a dream to Jacques d'Vitry because he did not follow her wishes. Whereas Jacques described Marie as languishing in her bed for the eucharist, Thomas portrayed her as a formidable enough that Jacques was inviting trouble by not following her advice. 43

Because Thomas's Marie was not shown repeatedly as dependent on the eucharist and the priest administering it, Marie in Thomas's version appears more active.

Jacques spoke little of relics in his Life of Marie d'Oignies, while Thomas eagerly provided information regarding the relics of three out of the four holy women he wrote about. Not only did Thomas include the details of various relics and miracles attributed to the relics, he devoted more than a few

chapters in his Supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies in describing how Jacques de Vitry benefited from Marie's relics. 44 Thomas's Supplement is particularly eye opening because in two instances, once during her life, and another after her death, Marie is portrayed as actively fragmenting herself. The first instance happens when after hearing Jacques complain of illness, Marie pulls a huge chunk of hair out and gives it to him. Thomas recorded a total of three miracles performed by Marie's hairs. The latter occurs when before her death, Marie admonishes a relic eager cleric that despite his expressed wishes, he will not get any teeth from her dead body. After she passes away, the cleric finds the said task impossible until he prays and asks the deceased Marie. To his amazement, his prayers are answered when her head shakes and a few teeth fall right out. 45 What is significant about the relic stories that Thomas includes is that scholars when discussing the relics of Marie d'Oignies usually don't note or point out that the relic stories come only from Thomas. 46 Because Jacques's and Thomas's representations of Marie differ, keeping the relic stories in mind as having been written by Thomas helps to understand how Jacques and Thomas, separately, viewed female holiness.

In the three out of the four lives of holy women that Thomas wrote about, the close relationship between the holy woman and the male cleric associated with her is tied to his later possession of a relic from her. Like Jacques d'Vitry, Friar Zeghar acted as confessor for the holy woman (Margaret of

Ypres) After her death and burial, he recovered the tear soaked veil Margaret often wore from the ground and found it sparkling white and spotless. 47 Thomas admitted he found a spiritual mother in Lutgard of Awyières. Although he was not her confessor, he was very close to her. 48 All three of these men were Dominican priests and the relationships they formed with the holy women worked both ways to benefit the men through association, while the women gained recognized legitimacy, protection and guidance. 49 After the death of the holy woman, a relic was held to have special spiritual value for the recipient. The relic might retain some of the miracle working powers the holy woman held and simply possessing the relic was useful when petitioning the deceased woman to intercede. Even priests like Jacques and Thomas worried about their souls in purgatory and found relics as a form of assurance for help during life and after. 50

Jacques did not emphasize relics in his Life of Marie d'Oignies because of a few reasons. The most evident one is the purpose in his writing the life of a holy woman which he hoped would serve as propaganda for the Beguine lifestyle. As Jacques noted in the introduction, many women living holy lifestyles, like Marie, without a formal order and not in religious houses were already incurring suspicion and criticism. 51 Wanting to win support and eventually papal approval for a new order, Jacques selectively included events and topics that seemed less controversial. One of the most debated topics in Jacques's lifetime was undoubtedly the

validity of relics. Some people held that relics were powerful and the cult surrounding them justified. Others argued that relics held no special powers and holding stock in them could be sacriligious.⁵² By not touching on the subject of relics, Jacques avoided a topic that might have detracted from his goal of bringing attention to a new kind of female spirituality and lifestyle.

On the other hand, Thomas's greater emphasis on intercession and active bodily miracles could reasonably lead to his belief that episodes involving relics might serve to strengthen his assertion of the holiness of the women he wrote about. Thomas did not include just any casual relic story. He only related wrote of episodes involving testimonies of upstanding men associated with the Church.⁵³ By the time Thomas wrote his Supplement, Jacques de Vitry had been consecrated as a Cardinal. Thomas backed up many of his relic episodes involving Jacques by pointing to the Cardinal's prestige within the church.⁵⁴ In The Life of Lutgard of Aywières, Thomas justified his possession of the deceased Lutgard's little finger by citing her earlier expressed permission and Jacques's similar possession of Marie d'Oignies's little finger.⁵⁵ For Thomas, a revered relic of the dead holy woman helped to ensure that her miracles and intercession would continue while reminding worshippers of their saintly lives. Relics particularly could help the development of a cult around the proposed saint. Thomas probably hoped that the relics of the holy women he chronicled would increase veneration and even

formal recognition of the Beguine order.

The Life of Blessed Alice of Schaerbeek

The Life of Blessed Alice of Schaerbeek is radically different from Thomas de Cantimpré's Lives in regards to the three topics which Thomas emphasized: bodily miracles, relics, and intercession. In part this is due to the Cistercian tone to the biography as a whole. Alice was a Cistercian nun and apparently her anonymous but eloquent biographer was also a Cistercian. 56 The most discernable Cistercian characteristic of Alice's spirituality is the emphasis on spiritual marriage within which the holy woman is the bride and Christ, the bridegroom. Taken from the Song of Songs in the bible, the concept of Jesus as the bridegroom and the soul as a bride was popularized in the twelfth century by St. Bernard of Clairvaux who subsequently brought notice to the relatively new Cistercian order. 57

The dating of the completion of the one known manuscript of The Life of Saint Alice the Leper falls in the estimation given as between 1250 when Alice died and 1260 by Martinus Cawley who translated the text. The author relied on a few eyewitnesses and appeared to have had little information to work from. Cawley suggests that the author was less interested in creating a incredulous life filled with fictive seeming miracles than a simple but inspiring narrative. 58

At the age of seven, Alice of Schaerbeek was professed to a Cistercian nunnery, and later took formal vows to become a nun. Alice contracted leprosy and was sequestered from the rest of the religious community. She spent the rest of her life in a little hut constructed for her use and was aided by her sister Ida who

was also a nun. Alice appeared to have died from leprosy in the year of 1250. 59 The uniqueness of The Life of Blessed Alice lies in the premise of the sanctity of a leper.

The stigma of leprosy in medieval society was great and fear of contagion resulted in social and religious practices which effectively cut lepers off from society as a whole. A person who was diagnosed as leprous was formally separated from the general population and was forced to wear signifying clothing and carry a rattle to warn passerbys of their approach. Lepers were suppose to live in appropriate communities and lived off of alms. One's social station or wealth could make life more bearable as a leper if they could afford to live in isolation. However, the social stigma associated with leprosy held that lepers were so morally corrupt that they were believed to be suffering for their sins in this life. Because of the stigma of leprosy and the sometimes horrifying appearance the disease could impart on its victims in advanced cases, lepers were usually treated as outcasts of society. 60 Fortunately for Alice, her noble birth made possible the construction of a little hut on the grounds of the monastery for her to reside in isolation 61

The significant categories in the representation of Alice's holiness are nuptial imagery and eucharistic devotion. Alice is shown as suffering from leprosy and eventually dying. Alice's biographer explains that for her, leprosy is not a curse, but a gift endowed to Alice who is the beloved bride of Christ. Leprosy enabled Alice to remain alone with her bridegroom instead of being preoccupied with earthly duties to the religious

community. 62 The author thus portrays Alice as preferred by God and her perceived infirmity is transformed into a blessed state. Her suffering becomes a privilege conferred upon her as evidence of her holiness and a marker of her status as the bride of Christ. The representation of Alice's spirituality is truly an unique twist of the Cistercian idea of the spiritual marriage in that Christ gives Alice leprosy to denote her as his own. Each infirmity she experiences during her illness is described as an additional present she receives because of her holiness. Therefore, the long passage in which Alice's appearance in her last days detailing her grotesque body in the advanced stage of leprosy provides a two seemingly contractory opposites reconciled by the understanding of leprosy as the bestowed gift. The author states:

She was totally deprived of the use of her body and her members, and was set aside upon her bed in the way a rotting corpse is laid in the earth, as if to let the rotting make an end of her. Any sufferings or weaknesses that attacked her more suddenly than usual, she accepted with the kind of glad delight expected of a bride receiving from her groom little gifts she had secretly longed for. 63

Here the author emphasizes that Alice does not passively endure the suffering thrust on her. She does not have any choice in whether she will suffer, but her will actively welcomes the pain

instead of bearing the infirmities passively. The role of bodily suffering for Alice, the author maintains, is that it becomes the pivotal vehicle for mystical union with her Bridegroom. The physical description in one instance that the author provides likens the skin on Alice's hands to bark. Alice's body is jointly described as having been ravaged by leprosy and adorned by gifts from her Bridegroom in the climax of the life. 64 The author turns around the premise that Alice earns the label of holiness due to her tolerance of bodily suffering which very well could have been the emphasis. Alice is portrayed as so holy that God gave her leprosy so he could have her company all to himself.

The slow death of a leper might make the category of bodily suffering a strong possibility in The Life of Blessed Alice, however, the author deftly interprets Alice's suffering of leprosy as not a divine scourge, but as an opportunity to demonstrate her sanctity. The further proof of Alice's holiness, the author holds, is illustrated throughout the progress of her illness and her wholehearted welcoming of added pain. 65 The triumphant time for Alice occurs when she lays dying, her joy is the greatest and her suffering undoubtedly most intense is. The author describes at the scene of Alice's imminent death debilitated physical state and her exhilarated spiritual state. The last part of the passage demonstrates vividly her inner strength and fortitude. The author states "At the time of losing her eyesight, her soul seemed to be clothed with the Diety, caught up into divine embraces...Not one member did she retain still restful, not one still unpossessed by infirmity--except for

this one: her tongue. With her tongue, or as long as she was able, she ceaselessly chanted praises to God." 66 For Alice, the potential for the most bodily suffering instead becomes the occasion of intense anticipation of her ultimate and impending mystical union with Christ.

Thomas describes the deep longing of Lutgard of Awyières to suffer a similar martyrdom to that of the decapitation of Saint Agnes. Lutgard, however, actively wanted to be a martyr as testimony to her boundless love for Christ. At this particular time, Lutgard was greatly wishing to suffer like Saint Agnes and her request was granted. Thomas writes:

And when she...was already dying from desire, one of her veins burst which was situated on the outside opposite her heart and so much blood flowed from it that her tunics and cowl were most copiously drenched. ..Christ appeared to her and...said, 'Because through this effusion of blood you show your most fervent desire to experience martyrdom, accept the same merit of martyrdom that the most blessed Agnes received...because by your desire you have equalled her martyrdom in blood.' 67

Lutgard, as Thomas shows, actively wanted to experience martyrdom so much that Christ granted her enough suffering to constitute a martyrdom. Alice's receiving of leprosy is spoken of in a passive sense; Christ gives her the gift of leprosy not because she asked for it, rather she had earned it. Thomas represents

Lutgard's gained infirmity as actively wished for by her yet similarly merited.

Intercession in The Life of Blessed Alice of Schaerbeek is referred to in one chapter when Alice's sister and caretaker notices that Alice is experiencing even greater pain and expresses sorrow only to be consoled by Alice herself. Alice explains she suffers not for her sins but for others both dead and living. She states :

I am being exposed to such torments...for the Dead, who are long to be excruciatingly dealt with in the penal regions; and also for the sinners of the world, already trapped in the snares of the fowlers, and apt to be unendingly seduced- unless, by means of the pain, in which thou seest me being consumed, those Dead have the happiness of being freed, and those Living, of similarly being released from those snares. 68

Although the author does not go into detail over each individual case, the reader is left to assume that all the pain she suffers over the course of her illness is given up for intercession on behalf of the dead and the living. Despite the broad interpretation given for Alice's pain in this one passage, the fact that this is basically the only mention of intercession and appears to have been casually inserted in the latter part of the text. Intercession is not central to the author's representation of Alice's holiness.

In the three lives of Marie, Lutgard, and Christina, Thomas strongly shows that their work as interceders is the major category pertaining to defining their sanctity. Even after the deaths of Marie and Lutgard, Thomas makes a strong case for the continuance of their intercessory abilities by listing various miracles attributed to the deceased women when the living petition them for help. In The Supplement to the Life of Marie d'Oignies, Thomas tells how the Jacques de Vitry who frequently invoked the prayers and help of the deceased Marie on behalf of his soul was convinced she continued to aid him from beyond the grave. Jacques was spending all night in front of Marie's tomb in prayers. Thomas states "Suddenly he was rapt in spirit and saw the venerable Marie, risen from her place of rest, ...interceding to the Lord on his behalf. The manner of his exceptional vision gave the bishop great joy." ⁶⁹ Marie was so holy during her lifetime, Thomas tells us, that beyond the grave her power to intercede remains strong.

Eucharistic devotion was central to Alice's spirituality before her sequestration, her biographer tells us. After she was sequestered, communion became her consolation. The author identifies Alice's intense longing for the eucharist with bridal imagery resulting in a rich and symbolic description of her anticipation for when she will receive the eucharist and be united with her bridegroom. Her biographer writes "All day long, before receiving the Holy Eucharist, she burned inwardly with so great a desire, was held in the grip of so suave a joyousness, preparing her bridal chamber for her Groom..." ⁷⁰ To describe

the spiritual union that Alice experienced, the writer speaks of a door to Alice's heart opened by her Groom:

On the verge of the hour for receiving the Holy of Holies, she could feel her heart opening up like a door, the Lord opening it for himself, and then she felt the opening knit closed again,...Then suddenly the Lord, with inestimable joyousness,...unutterable jubilation for the spirit, would come right in to the garden of the heart of his bride. 71

The poignancy of Alice's spiritual marriage is strengthened by her separation from other people. The importance of the eucharist to Alice is emphasized by her lonely existence in her hut where the receiving of the eucharist would be the only tie to her previous communal life among the other nuns.

Alice also missed the chalice that accompanied the eucharist and represented the blood of the lord. The custom of drinking from the chalice existed in the Cistercian order, according to the biographer, and lepers were forbidden to drink from the chalice. Alice's complaints were promptly answered by a voice from heaven that explained she was receiving the benefits of the chalice. The author stated the divine response, "It befits a firm faith that whoever has tasted of my Body rejoice at having, beyond doubt, also been refreshed with my Blood." The revealed knowledge consoled Alice and the eucharist would take on an even greater meaning to her. 72 This passage illustrates that the

symbolism and significance of the eucharist increased in her spirituality as portrayed by the author. The consolation of the eucharist to a leper nun sequestered and slowly dying provided the affective interiority steeped with imagery of a bride languishing in desire for the arrival of her groom. The biographer of Alice strongly emphasized that nuptial imagery and eucharistic devotion were the most important aspects of her spirituality.

Thomas included a few mentions of eucharistic devotion in the three lives of holy women where he can be considered responsible for the core of their spirituality. One of the more strange episodes involving the eucharist occurs in The Life of Lutgard of Aywières. Lutgard is depicted as attending the sacrament every Sunday as is the regular custom expected. The particular instance happens when Lutgard received the eucharist and finds her appetite for corporeal food gone. Thomas wrote that she addressed the lord, saying "'Lord Jesus it is now not the right time for me to be occupied with Your delights. Go instead to Elizabeth...and occupy her heart; as for me, permit me to eat and be refreshed.'" Elizabeth was a nun in the convent who apparently had a hard time staying away from regular food, so Lutgard managed to successfully transfer her eucharistic ecstasy to Elizabeth, a miracle in itself.⁷³ Thomas departs from his narrative to praise Lutgard for not neglecting her physical body. He writes "This story is told in opposition to those who, having tasted once or twice a sweetness of the spirit, crush their bodies cruelly as if they were enemies to themselves."⁷⁴ He

holds up Lutgard as being wise enough to preserve her body in order to perform physical tasks instead of dallying in spiritual excess. Thomas is criticizing holy women who allow the deterioration of their physical bodies due to immoderate spiritual endeavors. The mark of a notice lies in their inability to balance their spiritual work with their physical activities. As Thomas represented the women he wrote about being active in their physical and spiritual work, his condemnation of women who eschew an active lifestyle for convalescence is consistent with his view. Lutgard in her advanced spirituality is able to successfully balance the areas of her life which makes her in Thomas's eyes the ultimate model of female holiness.

The author of The Life of the Blessed Alice of Schaerbeek represents her spirituality as based around nuptial imagery and eucharistic devotion. Alice's bodily suffering due to leprosy is transformed into gifts given to her from Christ as the bridegroom. Alice additionally is shown offering up her suffering on behalf of those in purgatory and sinners still on earth.⁷⁵ Intercession is an aspect of her spirituality, although not a major component.

The Life of Juliana of Mont Cornillon

In The Life of Juliana of Mont Cornillon, the anonymous author has two main focuses in his text: the holiness of Juliana's behavior, and the growth of the liturgical Corpus Christi feast from Juliana's early revelation of its needed conception to the formal approval and incorporation into the liturgical year as by the church after her death. The author, who was reputed to have been a canon of St. Martin, composed the life between 1261-1264 shortly after Juliana's death in 1258. 76

The values which form the core of the spirituality of Juliana in the text are eucharistic devotion, bodily suffering and asceticism. Each aspect of her holy behavior both demonstrates her sanctity and justifies her divinely appointed mission to introduce the Corpus Christi feast and oversee it incorporated into the liturgical year. Juliana's eucharistic devotion is tied to the concept of the Corpus Christi feast. Juliana is shown a vision of a full moon with a small segment missing. Eventually it is revealed to her that the moon represents the liturgical year of the Church and the small segment representing a missing feast specifically honoring Christ's body and blood. 77 Juliana's devotion to the eucharist is best demonstrated in the holy mission she is chosen for. In spite of her acute shyness, Juliana enlists friends to begin the campaigning for a special feast dedicated to the eucharist. she waits twenty years after being shown the vision detailing the missing feast to approach a cleric who could help initiate it. 78

Bodily suffering in The Life of Juliana of Mont Cornillon is referred to in discussion of her limited labor in the later part of her life. The author speaks of the harsh fasts and labor that Juliana undertook in her earlier years, resulting in her frail health. Juliana, the author states "...while still a young woman, incurred the great physical weakness from which she suffered as long as she lived. " 78 We are not told what this infirmity is, however an educated guess might be a weakened heart from excessive fasting. Newman points out that "her extreme and to some extent involuntary fasting follows the pattern delineated by Carolyn Bynum in *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*: not only did she subsist throughout her life on one scanty meal a day, but even when she wished she found it difficult to swallow food." 79 The biographer of Juliana is somewhat embarrassed over her lack of physical labors and spends space apologetically explaining her fragile health. 80 Like many other religious women, Juliana would be expected to attend to various physical tasks as part of her contribution toward the religious house. Because of her frail health and the sizeable dowry she brought with her, Juliana was permitted to forgoe such duties. 81 Juliana's bodily suffering and her later poor health is shown by her biographer to be evidence of her holiness. She might have been physically weakened, yet Juliana incurred her suffering because her taste for spiritual food outweighed her want for physical food. 82

Juliana experienced bodily suffering sometimes when she was reminded of Christ's passion. On a visit to the recluse Eve of St. Martin, Juliana took ill and her friend had her lay down. The

recluse opened her Veronica's veil to decorate the altar for the vigil of the dedication of the church. The author states that Juliana "...fixed her eyes on the Saviour's image and at once, stricken by a sharp pain at the memory of Christ's Passion, she fell to the ground and fainted." 83 Her bodily suffering was like many other holy women, an imitation and identification with the suffering of Christ. Unlike Thomas's holy women, her suffering as depicted by the author, did not benefit others directly. Juliana did not take on bodily suffering aside from her fasts. When Juliana is shown helping others, she did so without suffering on her part.

Juliana's holiness is represented by her skill in prophecy. Her biographer writes of many events predicted by Juliana over her lifetime. Not only could Juliana foretell certain things, she possessed an ability to read people's minds, hearts, and spiritual conditions. The author states she helped detect false relics and could discern good spirits from evil ones. 84

Juliana's biographer holds that her exceptional eucharistic devotion along with other holy attributes like humility succeeded in her divinely elected role. Her biographer noted the intensity of Juliana's eucharistic devotion began early on by stating:

From childhood, in fact, she began to conceive for this marvelous sacrament an affection that was far from childish. At first she felt a wonderful inner sweetness infused by the Holy Spirit at the hour of the sacrifice, as if her heart were overflowing with

water; and she prayed in the sight of the Most High that she might more fully experience the grace of the sweetness she had tasted. Day by day, she was rendered more capable by her vehement desire of what she longed for, so that the fervour of her devotion increased until, ...she could be scarcely be torn away from the torrent of her pleasure (Ps. 35:9) 85

The intensity of Juliana's eucharistic devotion made her hunger only for spiritual food, the author noted. She evidently forced herself to attempt to go through the motions of everyday customs. Juliana wanted nothing more than to be present at the sacrament daily, however, as this was not the usual practice of her fellow sisters, she tried to devote herself to prayer at the time of the sacrament. Noting her deep devotion, Juliana's spiritual mother had a special oratory constructed for this very purpose. 85 The case of Juliana's eucharistic devotion was exceptional, her biographer emphasized, because her capacity for reverence toward the sacrament itself was exceptional.

The profoundness of Juliana's experience is hinted at by the biographer in order to confirm her special status. The author argues that Juliana was exceptional because of the mystical gifts she received during the sacrament. He states "...to give you an idea of the singular privilege of grace that Christ bestowed on his handmaid...(whenever) she received his Body and Blood, he revealed to her some new secret from his heavenly mysteries." 85 For Juliana's biographer, eucharistic devotion defined her

spirituality. Bolstered by asceticism and humility, Juliana's reverence toward the eucharist secured her election as the inaugurator of a new feast honoring Christ's body and blood.

Juliana of Mont Cornillon's holiness as represented by her biographer provides a varied contrast to how Thomas defined sanctity in holy women. The degree of eucharistic devotion she was depicted as exhibiting demonstrates Juliana was dependent on the priests for the sacrament, and hence, the core of her spirituality. Juliana's extreme asceticism resulted in life long problems making her dependent on others for physical help. . Even the Corpus Christi feast she is chosen to introduce conceptually honors in part the priests' monopoly in performing transubstanciation. All of these qualities denote passivity in Juliana's spirituality. Yet the active motion in beginning the process of adding a new feast to alter the liturgical year, even though Juliana chose to have someone act in her stead, alters the end product of her eucharistic devotion. Juliana's eucharistic devotion is shown by her biographer as so exceptional that it ultimately merits the introduction of the Corpus Christi feast by the Church, although after her life time. Unlike Thomas, Juliana's biographer does not argue for her sanctity. The author is more concerned with showing her holiness as evidence for the divine appointment Juliana is given to inaugurate the feast. 86

The sole mention of possible eucharistic devotion in Thomas's The Life of Christina of St.Trond occurs when, in the city of Liège, Chrisina desires the Eucharist to "strengthen her...against the anguish she was suffering.." Christina cannot

get immediate communion from the first priest she approached, so she finds another who wastes no time in giving her communion. The seemingly commonplace request of a speedy communion is compromised by what Christina does next. Thomas states that "with no delay, struck with a certain violent emotion, she fled and left the city." The priest is left wondering what prompted her actions.⁸⁷ We are left pondering what to make of this singular mention of eucharistic devotion. It should suffice to state that because it is the only instance, Thomas did not consider eucharistic devotion to be vital in representing Christina's overall spirituality.

Of all the holy women discussed, Juliana's holiness and her character are portrayed as having the most inward qualities. Juliana, the author repeatedly stresses, was incredibly shy and did not appear to wish to interact with people. Juliana had a close circle of friends and she served as prioress for her religious community. Yet Juliana abhorred any attention drawn to her because of her perceived holy behavior and often tried to downplay her asceticism.⁸⁸ Juliana's spirituality was entrenched with eucharistic devotion which aside from the sacrament does not entail social interaction. Given Juliana's introspective personality, certainly her eucharistic devotion and contemplation would figure as likely spiritual career endeavors for her.

Juliana's overall passive spirituality is a good contrast to the holy women Thomas held up as models of female sanctity. Juliana, her biographer tells us, was a paragon in eucharistic devotion among other qualities. Yet part of what seems to make

Thomas's holy women possess a more active spirituality, aside from active bodily miracles, active bodily suffering and intercessory work, is that they did not exhibit much in the way of eucharistic devotion.

The Life of Ida of Nivelles

The last of the three holy women to be discussed is Ida of Nivelles, who lived roughly 1200 to 1231. The Life of Ida of Nivelles was probably written only a few years after her death and interestingly before Thomas most likely penned his lives of holy women. Simone Roison has suggested that the author of Ida's life was Gosuinus de Bossut, based on the closeness of style of two lives of holy men also written by Gosuinus.⁸⁹ Cawley states that this early life became a pioneering work of major importance.⁹⁰ Ida of Nivelles, like Alice of Schaerbeek, was a Cistercian nun and accordingly her spirituality was Cistercian. Two of the most striking aspects of Ida's life are what Cawley refers to as "her towering personality" and the strong sense of religious community which Cawley, himself a Cistercian, identifies as a Cistercian feature.⁹¹ The Life of Ida of Nivelles, in terms of emphasized holy behavior, more closely resembles the holy women Thomas wrote about than the lives of Alice and Juliana. This is because Ida's spirituality is shown as active in regards to her prominent intercessory work in her community. At the same time, Ida exhibits eucharistic devotion which connotes a similar dependence on priests like Alice and Juliana. Her biographer holds up Ida's intercession work and eucharistic devotion as evidence for her sanctity.⁹¹

Thomas's categories of bodily suffering and intercession are the only ones that apply to Ida's spirituality as defined by her biographer. As in the case of the Alice and Juliana, Ida's holiness is due in part to her eucharistic devotion. Bodily

miracles, important to Thomas's representations of female holiness, are not present in the construct offered of Ida's holiness.

Bodily suffering ties into intercession often in the representation of Ida's sanctity. Ida takes on suffering on behalf of the living who sin and souls in purgatory. In one instance, Ida actively seeks to incur suffering when a nun of La Ramée asks for her prayers in behalf of the nun's deceased father. Ida prays ceaselessly until it is revealed to her that the man concerned has been given his purgatorial assignment. The biographer writes:

That much having been revealed to her, she took such compassion on its torments that she petitioned the Lord to inflict on herself any infirmity he might wish, so as to alleviate the other's purgatory. The Lord gave her prayer a hearing and, that very moment, so high a fever gripped her that she was vexed with its morbid effects for the next six weeks. 92

Ida is shown actively asking to take on bodily suffering so that the nun's father may finish his purgatorial sentence early. By offering to help deceased people stuck in purgatory through the sharing of some of the torments, Ida provided a service valuable to those worried about the state of souls of loved ones who passed on. Accordingly, when it is revealed to Ida that the concerned man's sins are partially purged, she can assure his

daughter that he would be out of purgatory soon. 93

Ida's bodily suffering is exhibited in cases where the living face temptation and evil. Once when Ida was sick and staying in the infirmary, she witnessed a demon attach itself to one of the sisters and start to tempt the nun. The demon lifted the tempted nun up and disappeared out the building with her. This scenario prompts Ida's affective piety as the author tells us "Seeing this, Ida so compassionated her as to shed copious tears and vomit blood and have her illness aggravated. " Pouring out prayers, she apparently disrupts the demon's plans and he appears to her. Despite the anger of the demon, Ida is able to vanquish the enemy by making the sign of the cross. 94 Ida's bodily suffering through vomiting blood and her compassion draws the demon to appear to her. Even though her vomiting blood and commiserating does not secure the disappearance of the demon, the affective piety Ida demonstrates is enough to affect a confrontation.

In one of the more unusual episodes, it is revealed to Ida that a man known to her is guilty of incest with his daughter. The knowledge causes her much duress, however Ida is afraid that the revelation was demonic in origin. 95 Ida's biographer describes her emotional turmoil in writing "Still, such was her compassion over so horrible a crime that she was vehemently afflicted and shed tears in abundance and was force to vomit blood from her mouth." 96 This example of Ida vomiting blood illustrates that her suffering is prompted by the magnitude of the sin and her compassion. Her biographer portrays Ida as so

infused with bodily suffering on account of others's sins, she often begins suffering before the sin is confessed.

The matter of the incestuous father is resolved in a way reminiscent of Thomas's holy women. After being reassured by God that the man was indeed guilty, Ida follows a divine order and has the man fetched to be questioned by herself. Ida interrogates the man and after his failure to confess the great sin, she informs him of his terrible sin. The man is shocked and begins sobbing when his shame is mentioned. The author adds, "In response to her upbraiding and exhortation, he did penance before her-- and not only for that detestable sin but for his other sins too".⁹⁷ Ida is represented as functioning in the priest's role by hearing a confession of a married man and putting forth a penance. Father Cawley also noted she evidently had the authority to summon the incestuous man in the first place. The seriousness of the crime and the special knowledge of the it given to Ida seems to outweigh any concern of the author in regards to Ida over stepping her boundaries. Rather, the author seems to suggest that holy women like Ida who are divinely sent knowledge of undetected sins of this magnitude can be beneficial to the Church. Ida's biographer considers the risk of major sins residing within the community to be more dangerous than an exceptionally holy woman sometimes filing in for a priest in order to save a soul in the long run. This episode of Ida acting as a confessor is the only instance in the text, yet seems to advocate that holy women could fulfill the role of priests hearing confessions.

An obvious parallel in Thomas's lives of holy women to Ida acting as a confessor occurs in The Live of Christina of St.Trond when Count Louis of Looz asked not for a priest to hear his deathbed confession but for Christina who had acted for some time as his spiritual mother. 98 This last request by the dying Noble testified his deep respect and belief in Christina's holiness and close association with God. Thomas writes:

...Count Louis...most persistently begged her (Christina) to stay with him until the hour of death. She obligingly granted this...and (he) kept Christina alone with him in the chamber. Without delay the Count pulled himself up with all the strength he could summon and lay fully prostrate before the feet of Christina and, with great lamentation, recited to her all his sins from his eleventh year right up to that very day. 99

Thomas demonstrates in this passage that an important man held more faith in Christina's holiness and in her ability to assist him in his purgatorial debt than a priest. Thomas does add directly after this passage the following statement; "He (the Count) did this not for absolution which she had no power to give but rather that she be moved by this atonement to pray for him." 100 The disclaimer Thomas inserted was no doubt due to the fact that women did not have recognized Church authority to hear confessions and provide absolution, and to suggest that Christina legitimately performed the task of absolution would be an error.

yet the act of the Count in trusting his soul to Christina shows that some people believed that women like Christina were already divinely authorized through their holy lifestyle to perform such tasks.

Intercession by Ida is given strong emphasis within the text. Ida's compassion and willingness to take on bodily suffering made her a vital part of her community. The accounts of Ida helping souls in need abound in a variety of scenarios. On one such occasion, Ida is sitting awake in bed at night when a dead kinswoman of another nun approaches her for help. The author describes the deceased as a "soul in bodily effigy" who is attempting to outrun three fiery demons at her heels. The deceased woman pleads her case to Ida stating that the demons were assigned to torment her in purgatory. The author refers to Ida as the "Warrior-Dame", who takes compassion on the woman and promises aid. At first Ida asks that she enlist the help of the nun who is related to the deceased, however the dead woman cannot wake her female relative. Ida, the author explains, takes control of the situation:

The Venerable Virgin thus recognized that she had been especially assigned to this, and so she turned to those demons, where they stood and waited the outcome, and said 'Unclean spirits, I command you in virtue of the Holy Spirit, to leave this place without delay and go down to Hell.' Unable to bear the weight of such an

adjuring, they gave a howl and vanished that very moment, and were drowned into Hell. 101

Ida is able to intercede in behalf of the soul and actually affect the deceased woman's purgatorial torments without taking on suffering in this particular case. She also is portrayed as performing an exorcism by sending the demons to hell. The appearance of the soul to Ida demonstrates that she was sought out because of her skills in interceding.

Ida's ability to effectively intercede is testified by the author in a chapter telling how Ida's seemingly eminent death rallies the community which greatly values Ida as an aide in intercession. The author writes of the great sorrow brought about by Ida's impending death and the many prayers both from the lay and religious peoples. The community's pleas center around the several people Ida had already given consolation to through her counsel and good works and those she will help in the future. Ida intercedes on behalf of kinspeople of other sisters in her convent often. According to the author, their prayers are answered when a grieving nun is consoled by God's voice. The nun is told that because of the many protests and the many more people who will benefit from Ida's help, the Lord would not take the revered woman for a long time. Ida recovers and lives another thirteen years, we are told. 103 The author represents Ida as being so holy and hence important to her community that she is ultimately spared by divine will. Here, her intercessory skills are highlighted as making Ida valuable to all those who

have been helped already and those who know of her great deeds.

Ida of Nivelles may have share the qualities of bodily suffering and intercession that resemble the kind of holiness that Thomas emphasized, however Ida's eucharistic devotion demonstrates her sanctity was constructed differently. Ida is remarkable in the extent of her eucharist devotion because she actually changed orders so that she could receive the eucharist more often. ¹⁰⁴ After she changes orders, Ida desires the eucharist so greatly that she tries to arrange a sooner sacrament. The author states that Ida, being "inwardly vehemently tormented in spirit," approached the chaplain and begging exhaustion from "acedia", asked for a secret communion. She is granted this request after stating she cannot wait to receive the eucharist with the other nuns the next day. ¹⁰⁵ Ida's yearning for the eucharist is so great that during her year of probation as a novice, she suffers acutely having to watch the nuns receiving the eucharist in the sacrament. Her biographer states "(Ida) would be tortured with a great anxiety, so much so as to prefer to have her head cut off a hundred times rather than be delayed any longer from receiving that sweetest of Sacraments." ¹⁰⁶ The author portrays Ida's eucharistic devotion as insatiable and thus shows Ida is dependent on the eucharist and the priest who performs the sacrament. The intense devotion and need for frequent sacrament that Ida exhibited appears to have dictated her life to some extent.

Not only did Ida constantly need the bolstering effects of the eucharist, her spiritual endeavors echo her preoccupation.

While praying at mass for a fellow nun erring in blasphemy, Ida is shown a detailed vision concerning the wayward sister. Ida later reports to the nun her vision, describing a huge light with a peaceful, older man in the middle of the light. The author writes that Ida stated that this man was holding a warped eucharist with the blasphemous nun's name on it. The author reported Ida's explanation of the meaning "...I divinely understood that the warp in the host meant that you had thought that worst of thoughts, namely, despair, as if the Lord could not say you." Ida continued by reassuring the nun that she should not despair. The gentleman instructed Ida that the name of the nun upon the host, however warped, meant her name was also written in the Book of Life. Therefore, the nun ultimately would be saved from her sin and could hope for salvation. Ida's biographer added that the nun was greatly comforted and recovered hope. 107 The importance of the host and its meaning within the vision illustrates the centrality of eucharistic devotion to Ida's spirituality. Just as she needed a priest to perform the sacrament and give her the host, a man in her vision holds the warped eucharist and explains its meaning to Ida. Within The Life of Ida of Nivelles, the biographer portrays Ida as dependent on priests for the eucharist so that Ida's active role in intercessory work and active bodily suffering is complicated by her passive role in her eucharistic devotion.

Ida of Nivelles is shown by her biographer to be a model of holiness through her active bodily suffering and intercession. In these categories, Ida is similar to Thomas's representations

of the active holiness of Marie, Lutgard, and Christina. The intense eucharistic devotion Ida exhibits that passive because of the dependence on the priest's role in the sacrament.

Therefore, it is this aspect of Ida's holiness that separates her from Thomas's holy women, in terms of how their spirituality is portrayed.

Conclusion

Thomas de Cantimpré wrote more Beguine lives than any other author. With the exception of The Life of Margaret of Ypres, Thomas did not emphasize eucharistic devotion in his representations of the holy women he wrote about. As Jacques de Vitry and the authors of the discussed other three holy women included eucharistic devotion in their separate representations of holy female behavior, Thomas's lack of stress on eucharistic devotion suggests that he had a different idea of female sanctity in mind. Further evidence is provided by the more prominent place the concept of intercession occupies in Thomas's female lives. In some instances, Thomas showed the holy women performing priest associated duties like hearing confession, and giving spiritual counsel. The bodily miracles, bodily suffering, and inclusion of relics spoken of in an active sense made Thomas's portrayal of the spirituality of these holy women come across as more active than the other women discussed. When considering eucharistic devotion and the other categories, Thomas's holy women were represented as being more active and typically unlike the other surveyed women.

The significance of these findings enables a new way of looking at how Thomas and others viewed female sanctity in the thirteenth century low countries. In writing this paper, I wished to better distinguish Thomas's representations of holy women by comparing and contrasting other women considered part of the Beguine group. Eucharistic devotion emerged as the most obvious category of holy behavior that separated Thomas's holy

women from the others. One of the most pertinent questions that remains to be answered (and may never be) is why Thomas did not follow Jacques de Vitry's lead and similarly emphasize eucharistic devotion? The additional question generated by the previous one is, did Thomas realize that the active spirituality he chose to portray in his holy behavior overlapped with duties of priests, and if legitimized, would have affected the status of clerics like himself?

Ultimately, the Beguines never gained formal papal approval to be legitimized as a Church authorized order due to a multiplicity factors too long to discuss here. Thomas's concept of holy women playing a more active role in the Church was never recognized. My research suggests that out of the holy women discussed, Thomas's representations of holy women were the most radical suggested because of the nature of their portrayed active roles. Within the new spirituality that the Beguines stood for, Thomas provided the most promising and ground breaking possibilities in expanded roles within the medieval Church.

End Notes

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