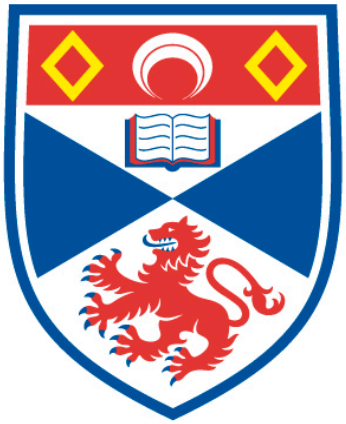
THE USE OF RITUALISED ACTS IN LATE MEDIEVAL MYSTICAL NARRATIVES

Miriam Buncombe

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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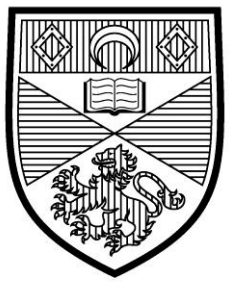

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of PhD at the

University of St Andrews

24th April 2015

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Abstract:

This thesis addresses the function of the depiction of ritualised acts in late medieval mystical narratives through the use of four case studies, those of Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Flowing Light of the Godhead* (c. 1260), Angela of Foligno's *Memorial* (c. 1270), the *Vita et Revelationes* of Agnes Blannbekin (c. 1315), and the Adelhausen sister-book (1318). The rituals of the Church appear throughout these texts, for instance in the celebration of saints' feasts and daily masses, to which these women devoted much of their time. Sacramental and liturgical practice portrayed within these accounts has been incorporated into the spiritual and mystical lives of women in various imaginative ways. Yet participation within such rites was not only a common and pious act, but also reinforced a social and religious hierarchy and offered access to the real presence of God. This discussion proposes that mystical texts are carefully constructed narratives which employ ritual acts as a strategy to frame and authorise their subjects. Positioning the mystic and their voice within, or interwoven with, both the performed rite, such as communion, or references to these rituals, for instance in the use of sacred spaces like the altar or objects such as the chalice, such texts can use such ritualised elements to embed the unusual or unstable mystical element in the familiar and orthodox. These ritual structures, which were theologically complex, are also integrated in order to explain and express aspects of the mystic's task and message. Through close study of the placement of ritual, the way in which it is described, and how it is changed or appropriated within the narrative's depiction, this thesis seeks to understand the ways in which rituals and references to rituals are deliberately considered and purposefully included within these spiritual texts.

Acknowledgements

I would firstly like to thank Dr Bettina Bildhauer and Professor Frances Andrews for their excellent supervision, insightful instruction, great patience and good humour. They have helped me to untangle many a mystical riddle. Having inspired me as an undergraduate to delve deeper into the fascinating world of late medieval religion, they have greatly added to this study in a generous willingness to share of their time and expertise. This project has been kindly supported by the University of St Andrews Interdisciplinary Scholarship. Thanks must also go to the University of St Andrews library, for their swift acquisition of vital books. The fellowship and breadth of knowledge of the St Andrews Institute of Mediaeval Studies has significantly enriched my time as a postgraduate in St Andrews, and provided the space for many thought-provoking discussions. A special mention must go to Dr. Eilidh Harris who read and commented on parts of this thesis, and to the many people who provided many restorative pieces of cake. I am greatly thankful to my parents, who instilled in me a love of words and gave me the freedom to think. Lastly, I would like to thank my wonderful wife Chloe, who has read this thesis more times than she would care to remember, and has been unwavering in her love and support, and without whom this venture would not have been possible.

Table of Contents:

Introduction: The Use of Ritualised Acts in Late Medieval Mystical Narratives

The abundant mystical literature of the late medieval period is littered with depictions of the participation of the faithful in, and references to, ritualised acts, for instance in Christina Mirabilis' immersion in a baptismal font, or in the heavenly bread which appears on the altar for Wilbirgis, or as occurring in Altheit of Herspruk's vision of Christ walking through the choir during mass, bowing to each nun.[1] Within the historiography of medieval politics, accounts of ritualised action have begun to be re-evaluated with an eye to these rites as a means of communication which could be presented within the text to political advantage.[2] In the religious sphere, however, researchers have hesitated to analyse ritual in terms of a consciously employed textual device rather than as a direct expression of devotion.[3] Yet the clear importance of rites within medieval religious practice, the frequency with which such actions are related in mystical texts, and the much discussed power-play which occurs within mystical texts in particular (between divine and temporal, speech and silence, exceptionality and humility, individuality and community), although not a political negotiation of power, suggests that a study of the place of rituals in the context of mystical narratives would be fruitful.[4] Moreover, the careful composition of mystical texts shown, for example, in studies

[1] Thomas of Cantimpré, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*, trans. Margot H. King (Toronto, 1986), p. 21; Einwik Weizlan and Lukas Sainitzer, *Die Vita Wilbirgis des Einwik Weizlan* (Linz, 1999), p. 296; Elsbet Stagel and Margarete Weinhandl, *Deutsches Nonnenleben: Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss und der Nonne von Engelthal; Büchlein von der Gnaden Überlast* (Stein-am-Rhein, 2004), p. 246.

[2] For instance studies by Edward Muir, *The Ritual of Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997); Phillipe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Oxford, 2001); Gerd Althoff, *Formen und Funktionen öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2001); Gerd Althoff, *Medieval Concepts of the Past: Ritual, Memory, Historiography* (Cambridge, 2002); Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2003).

[3] The division between secular and religious narratives within the research of rituals in history is mentioned by Christina Pössel, 'The Magic of Early Medieval Ritual', *Early Modern Europe*, 17 (2009), 111–125, n. 11; Emile Durkheim's classical division between sacred (or magico-religious) and profane is upheld by Althoff, see *Die Macht*, p. 12 and 'The Variability of Rituals in the Middle Ages', in Althoff et al, ed., *Concepts of the Past*, pp. 71–88, p. 73; Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Karen Fields (New York, 1995), p. 34; see also Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago, 1960), p. 1.

[4] Alois Haas, *Gottleiden-gottlieben: Zur volkssprachlichen Mystik im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt, 1989); Alois Haas, *Mystik als Aussage- Erfahrungs-, Denk- und Redeformen christlicher Mystik* (Frankfurt, 1996); Frank Tobin, 'Audience, Authorship and Authority in Mechthild von *Magdeburg's Flowing Light of the Godhead*', *Mystics Quarterly,* 23 (1997), 8–7; Michelle Voss Roberts, 'Retrieving Humility: Rhetoric, Authority and Divinizing in

by Bardo Weiß, Jörg Seelhorst and Patricia Dailey, indicates that the inclusion of rituals, too, may be a considered strategy of communication, no less purposefully deployed than in political texts and acts.[5] Looking at four examples of mystical narrative, from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century (Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Fließendes Licht der Gottheit*, Angela of Foligno's *Memorial*, Agnes Blannbekin's *Vita et Revelationes* and the Adelhausen sister-book), the following thesis will investigate the way in which depictions of ritual are made use of in these texts, asking when, how and why they are used, how their forms are modified and for what purpose.[6]

Previous studies, such as those by Caroline Walker Bynum and Rosalynn Voaden, highlight that sacramental and liturgical structures play an important part in late medieval theology, often finding expression in female spirituality.[7] Aspects of sacramental and liturgical devotion, such as those related to bride-ship or ascetic practice which mirrored Christ's suffering, have been much discussed, particularly in relation to gender and identity.[8] Yet as well as offering a record of spirituality, these narratives are contextual and purposeful

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Mechthild von Magdeburg', *Feminist Theology*, 18 (2009), 50–17; in other religious narratives, for example, Emma Gatland, *Women from the Golden Legend: Female Authority in a Medieval Castilian Sanctoral* (Woodbridge, 2011).

[5] Bardo Weiß, *Deutsche Mystikerinnen und ihr Gottesbild: Das Gottesbild der deutschen Mystikerinnen auf dem Hintergrund der Mönchstheologie* (Paderborn, 2004); Jörg Seelhorst, *Mechthild von Magdeburg, Meister Eckhart und Heinrich Seuse* (Tübingen, 2003); Patricia Dailey, *Promised Bodies: Time, Language, & Corporeality in Medieval Women's Mystical Texts* (New York, 2013).

[6] Gisela Vollmann-Profe, ed., *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (Frankfurt, 2003); Enrico Menestò, ed., *Il liber della beata Angela da Foligno*, 3 vols. (Spoleto, 2009); Ulrike Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations* (Cambridge, 2002); J. König, 'Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen', *Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv*, 13 (1880), 129–236.

[7] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, 1986), and Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007); Rosalynn Voaden, 'All Girls Together: Community, Gender and Vision at Helfta', in Diane Watt, ed., *Medieval Women and their Communities* (Toronto, 1997); also, Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998).

[8] On sacramental devotion see, for example, Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*; on spiritual bride-ship, see Ann E. Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1990); Hildegard Elisabeth Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Eros in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven, 2000); on the theological appropriation of medieval nuptial mysticism, see Fergus Kerr, *Twentieth-Century Catholic Theologians* (Malden, MA, 2007).

documents, suggesting that these frequent references to ritual may not only reflect but seek to interact with the socio-cultural environment of the text.

Theorists of ritual, for example Pascale Boyer and Anthony J. Blasi, stress that these acts exist in the time and situation of their performance. It is thus the case in all analysis of accounts of ritual it is not the ritual itself which is under scrutiny, but rather an interpretation, impression or fictional creation of that ritual, a circumstance acknowledged by scholars such as Christina Pössel and Hanna Vollrath.[9] This conclusion, consequently, applies equally to the description of rituals of any kind, be they secular or religious, that is, perceived as predominantly political, such as a judicial trial, or predominantly 'magical', such as expulsion of a demon from the possessed.[10] Whilst the function of the written ritual and the beliefs or ideas underlying the ritual may potentially differ, the distance and active influence of the interpreter (whether that reader is contemporary or modern) remains, just as the text remains a construction. This brings to the fore the issue of the role rituals play within a text as a form of communication and a facet of socio-cultural power.

The case studies which form the backbone of this research aim to illuminate medieval mystical texts by using insights into the functioning of rituals gained in the fields of modern anthropology and the historiography of medieval politics, which will be outlined in the following.

[9] Pascale Boyer and Pierre Liénard, 'Whence Collective Rituals? A Cultural Selection Model of Ritualized Behavior', *American Anthropology,* 108 (2008), 814–827; Anthony J. Blasi, 'Ritual as a Form of Religious Mentality', *Sociological Analysis*, 46 (1985), 59–71; Hanna Vollrath, ' Haben Rituale Macht? Anmerkungen zu dem Buch von Gerd Althoff: Die Macht der Rituale. Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 284 (2007), 385–400; Pössel, 'The Magic'.

[10] See for example Dino Compangi, *The Chronicle of Florence*, trans. Daniel Bornstein (Philadelphia, 1986), p. 18; *Vita Hildegardis*, chapter 20, in Anna Silvas, *Jutta and Hildegard: The Biographical Sources* (Turnhout, 1998), p. 193.

I: Ritual, Sacrament and Liturgy

This thesis will show the subtle and important ways in which the seemingly omnipresent rituals of later medieval spirituality are thoughtfully integrated within the mystical narrative to develop a theological position and to support the mystic's role. However, previous critique of ritual as a methodological approach within historical research has raised concerns, primarily regarding the failure of historians to engage with the anthropological origin of the field of ritual and an insufficient contextualisation in the medieval. This debate will be outlined in brief, and concerns addressed, before proceeding to illustrate the critical role of depictions of ritual within mystical narratives.

I i: Ritual as Methodological Approach in History

Gerd Althoff is among the strongest proponents of the importance of rituals in medieval societies and cultures, contending in particular that their deliberate manipulation within narrative accounts might be undertaken to political end, to the assertion of the power of a favoured party or the denigration of an opponent. Defining rituals as symbolic actions linked together and governed by a pattern, Althoff posits that they were employed purposefully as a 'bewusste Gestaltung, die Abwandlungen und Veränderungen erlaubte, um neuen Sinn zu erzeugen' (conscious construction, which allowed for points of deviation and changes, in order to create new meaning). [11]

Geoffrey Koziol, however, demonstrates the potential that Althoff's absolute emphasis on the integral and premeditated nature of ritual within medieval culture would eliminate the human

[11] Althoff, *Die Macht*, p. 13 and p. 26.

element of history, the possibility of chance or reaction.[12] Phillip Buc's later critique in *The Dangers of Ritual*, though problematic in both tone and argument, nonetheless raises two important issues. Buc underlines the difficulty of an unconsidered transfer of a modern socio-anthropological term into the field of history and the tendency to equate what is related in written accounts with actions which actually took place.[13]

Christina Pössel, and Hanna Vollrath similarly, caution that historians must be realistic in their reading of what historical ritual can do, avoiding the conception of a 'ritual world' in which 'ritual logic' makes sense (Vollrath) or 'a fairytale Middle Ages where ritual worked' (Pössel), thereby contrasting a 'rational' present with a 'magical' past.[14] These are valid words of restraint: then as now, simply placing a crown on a man's head did not make a king, and a reader of ritual must necessarily be subtle in approach. At the same time, ritual and the ritualised continue to be present, important and effective in facets of our post-enlightenment, 'logic'-driven, modern society.[15] Certain seemingly illogical actions continue to carry significant power in their social meaning and the value of their perceived historical precedent, a collective weight which offers power both in acceptance and rejection.

Indeed, looking to the medieval period, Jörg Seelhorst goes further in arguing for the influence of rituals within a society which both expected them and accepted the invisible, sacred power which they designated, 'Rituale [sichern] in einem magischen Weltbild nicht symbolisch, sondern realiter den Fortbestand des Lebens' (in a magical worldview, rituals

[12] Geoffrey Koziol, 'The Dangers of Polemic: is Ritual Still an Interesting Topic of Historical Study?', *Early Medieval Europe*, 11 (2002), 367–388, p. 382, regarding argumentation as found, for instance, in the introduction to Althoff, *Formen und Funktionen.*
[13] Buc, *The Danger*, p.1.
[14]Vollrath, 'Haben Rituale Macht?', p. 390; Pössel, 'The Magic', p. 112–113.
[15] See, for instance, David I. Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, 1988); Joseph C. Hermanowitz and Harriet P. Morgan, 'Ritualising the Routine: Collective Identity Affirmation', *Sociological Forum*, 14 (1999), 197–214; on the development of early modern approaches to the physicality of religious phenomena, see Waltraud Pulz, ed., *Zwischen Himmel und Erde: Körperliche Zeichen der Heiligkeit* (Stuttgart, 2012).

secure the continuity of life not symbolically but in reality).[16] Seelhorst does not here suggest that rituals simply 'worked', but instead that the influence they held in a belief-context that ascribed them power was significant. His allusion to worldview, the role of people and perception tempers Vollrath's somewhat constrictive conclusion that 'wer Ritualen keine magische Kräfte zuschreiben mag, kann nur zu dem Schluss kommen: Rituale hatten keine Macht' (those who do not wish to ascribe any magical powers to ritual can only come to the conclusion that rituals had no power). [17] Whilst ritualised action has no inherent power, the power with which it is imbued through its place and function within a socio-cultural matrix is nonetheless real and can effect change. The discussion of the usefulness of ritual for historians highlights three conclusions of importance to this study, which balance a valid cynicism regarding the inherent (and absolute) power of ritual and its power within a belief system. Firstly, it necessarily follows that after excluding supernatural elements, the only actors in ritual (and the only source of its power) are human and socio-cultural. Secondly, in the understanding that the power of ritual is the power of belief, rather than contained within the form of the action, the resulting difference between ritual and non-ritual action is the framing (and social understanding) of the event. Finally, it becomes clear that, as suggested above, an account of ritual does not behave in an identical way to a ritual act. As Pössel notes, the 'games played by the writers of ritual were to a significant extent different and distinct from the game of ritual performance.'[18] Here, Pössel recognises the socio-cultural heart of ritual description, that narratives of ritual action are stories put together by people in a deliberately ritualised way, within a context, for a purpose. It is this which is of interest in the subsequent reading of mystical texts, as constructed narratives which negotiate power, difference and community.

[16] Seelhorst, *Autoreferentialität und Transformation*, p. 22.
[17] Vollrath, 'Haben Rituale Macht?', p. 398.
[18] Pössel, 'The Magic', p. 116, p. 117 and p. 119.

I ii: Other Ritual Approaches

In seeking to understand what role the ritualised might play within a spiritual narrative it is appropriate to examine the way the nebulous theme of ritual has been considered. At its most basic, considering the Church context, theologian Gary Macy suggests that ritual can be understood as 'a symbol that is acted out.'[19] Anthony J. Blasi proposes instead that 'ritual is more a physical cognate of a verbal process such as a narrative, political address, appeal or argument,' an avenue in line with Althoff's emphasis on the communicative significance of medieval ritual.[20] Whilst both statements are accurate, they do not appear complete, speaking neither to why value might be placed on this particular form of action, nor to why such action has, traditionally, been separated from everyday action. Addressing this perceived remoteness of ritual from the everyday, Edward Muir suggests that rituals are 'histories of commonplace actions performed under watchful eyes until they are no longer common but so exquisite, so appropriate to the moment, so precise in their details that they become precarious to execute.'[21] Macy's idea can be considered a condensed version of Muir's, which essentially expands the concept of enacted symbolism by stressing the historical precedent and cultural context which feed into the underlying efficacy of the symbolic, a binding to the past which certainly comes to the fore in late medieval Church rite. The meaning of ritual is neither fixed, nor inherent to its various component parts (such as act, space or dress), but is formed in the 'public and typified significance negotiated for it in social history.'[22] The key criticism of such definitions, expressed, for instance, by Pascale Boyer, is that 'so-called definitions [of ritual] are, in general, summaries of casual theories rather than behaviourally precise

[19] Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), p. 14.
[20] Blasi, 'Ritual as a Form of Religious Mentality', p. 61.
[21] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 2.
[22] Blasi, 'Ritual as a Form of Religious Mentality', p. 61; see also Douglas Marshall, 'Behaviour, Belonging and Belief: A Theory of Ritual Practice', *Sociological Theory*, 20 (2002), 360–380, p. 361, and Paul C. Martin, 'The Exploratory and Reflective Domain of Metaphor in the Comparison of Religions', *Zygon,* 48 (2013), 936–965, p. 952.

criteria.'[23] Whilst this is certainly true, it must be considered to what extent this in fact reflects the nature of ritual as a socio-cultural product whose criteria thus adjust with each individual context, and an action-type centred upon beliefs which are themselves without concrete and fixed definition.

Rituals might be considered under three categories, namely their context, the methods employed within ritual practice and finally the desired aim of the act.[24] The context of ritual is always social. It takes place between people, within a community, for example a convent. Rituals are, moreover, as stressed above, socio-historical cultural texts, which are shaped by past usage, development and present situation.[25] This means that they exist in their performance and as a consequence are both fleeting and momentary; any depiction of ritual, even in a modern context a live recording of ritual, is already different and separate from the ritual itself.[26]

In practice, ritualised action often follows a particular set of rules, governing for instance, where they occur, who may participate, when people can speak or what they must wear, resulting in rigidity and predictability. Controlled in this manner, appearance, space, gesture, movement and speech tend towards symbolism, even making use of special signs particular to the sphere of ritual.[27] This sphere is demarcated both by the prohibitions put in place, governing some or all of the aspects listed above, and by the suspension of non-ritual meaning in favour of ritual significance, for example in the use of redundant structures, such as the repetition of hand washing, and the choice of archaic language.[28] Witnesses fulfil an

[23] Boyer and Liénard, 'Whence Collective Rituals?', p. 814.
[24] See, for instance Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York, 1997).
[25] See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973).
[26] Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, p. 2; Victor Turner, 'Social Dramas and Stories about Them', *Critical Enquiry*, 7 (1980), 141–168, p. 167.
[27] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, p. 9; Turner, 'Social Dramas', p.160.
[28] Blasi, 'Religious Mentality', p. 67; Boyer and Lienard, 'Whence Collective Ritual?', p. 816; Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms*, p. 38; Bohdan Szuchewycz, 'Evidentiality in Ritual Discourse', *Language in Society*, 23 (1994), 389–410, p. 405.

important role in the affirmation and confirmation of what is enacted. Participants in ritualised action typically enter with an established ritual mentality, the appearance of the ritual's form and structures already evoking particular expectations of the type of process and result which should follow.[29] The ritual mentality and ritual space, important to the designation of ritual, are aided by preparatory actions for entering into and leaving a particular rite, such as proclamation, change of clothing or purification. It is a framework associated with high levels of participatory compulsion.[30] This is both because of attention-grabbing mechanisms which invite each person to respond, at least in their witnessing, and further through the threat of social hazard for non-compliance.

Whilst it must be underlined that rituals possess no power in and of themselves, and thus cannot effect any change in being performed, let alone through their record within textual form, they are nonetheless utilised within multiple socio-cultural contexts for many different purposes.[31] These are sometimes divided into acts which seek to promote belief and others which seek to establish belonging, a useful foundation though a simplification.[32] In this second category is the affirmation of identity, for example in the transition from one role to the next, designated by Arnold van Gennep as rites of passage, though the process of proclamation of identity can simultaneously offer a refinement of this identity.[33] At these moments, similarly to others such as in establishing peace during conflict, rituals are used in the negotiation of power in order to determine who holds power, what role each person plays within a hierarchy of influence.[34] In presenting a certain circumstance as valid and implicitly asking for affirmation of this, rituals are used to legitimise, authorise and, in some

[29] Blasi, 'Religious Mentality', p. 65.
[30] Boyer and Lienard, 'Whence Collective Ritual?', p. 814.
[31] Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power*, p. 10, argues that the power of ritual stems from its social matrix.
[32] Marshall, 'Behaviour, Belonging and Belief', p. 360.
[33] Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*; Hermanowitz and Morgan, 'Ritualizing the Routine', p. 198.
[34] For example, Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power.*

circumstances, glamourise power, symbolising the change understood to have occurred.[35] As an activity which is embedded within a community or society, which is undertaken together, and presented as stable, ritual acts play a part in creating and securing unity.[36] Similarly, shared rites aiding catharsis following trauma can be employed to re-establish unity in providing a structured forum for the expression of trauma and a way of proclaiming and affirming the changed situation.[37] Offering a reduced, controlled and simplified environment, they can depict an idealised microcosm of the society in which the rites exist.[38] Such a ritual environment can be employed in seeking understanding of the world and coping with difficulty and complexity.[39] In this vein, such action commonly invokes symbolic or intangible elements, often depicted as the divine, both providing controlled access to this belief, and in celebration and reaffirmation of its value within the socio-cultural matrix. Conversely, just as rituals are a product of their cultural context, they in turn influence the situation within which they developed, and are re-absorbed and adjusted in other parts of that context.[40] Of particular importance to the examination of rituals within mystical narratives, are the conceptualisation of ritual actions and space as set apart from the ordinary, ritual action as attention-grabbing, and their purposes in suggesting transition, role and hierarchy, and in framing trauma.

[35] Ibid., p. 5; p. 104.
[36] Ibid., p. 69; Koziol, 'The Dangers of Polemic', p. 387; Marshall, 'Behaviour, Belonging and Belief', p. 362.
[37] T. J. Scheff, *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (Berkeley, 1979), p. 13.
[38] Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 27–8.
[39] Alan Page Fiske and Nick Haslam, 'Is Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder of Pathology of the Human Disposition to Perform Socially Meaningful Rituals? Evidence of Similar Content', *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 185 (1997), 211–222; Boyer and Lienard, 'Whence Collective Ritual?', p. 820; Gary Brock, 'Ritual and Vulnerability', *Journal of Religion and Health*, 29 (1990), 285–295, p. 285.
[40] Cooke and Macy, *Christian Symbol*, p. 21.

I.iii: Medieval Ritual

There are a great number of acts depicted in medieval sources which might be considered rituals, but it is the Eucharist which is most prominent ritual in mystical devotion, reflecting the fact that by the thirteenth century, the Eucharist was the most important sacrament in the Church. Indeed, it is the ritual practices of the Church which dominate accounts of mystical devotion. However, the wider presence of rituals in late medieval society is evident, for example, in the use of altars for land transactions, or in political acts of reconciliation, as well as explicitly religious rituals such as the funerary mass undertaken to mark the entombment of an anchorite or in the changed dress and tonsured hair worn by men upon professing the religious life.[41] As these rites share in symbolic action, for instance bowing or kissing, aspects of many different ritualised acts (and meanings) can appear layered within narratives of mystical experience.[42]

Over the course of the later Middle Ages, and in particular after the fourth Lateran council in 1215, the Church sought actively to declare certain ritual acts, the sacraments and liturgy, as its own, introducing legislation that designated their form, meaning and usage. Attempts by the Church to claim its sole right in the provision of the sacraments led to a change in how these acts were seen. Whilst in the earlier Middle Ages sacramental rite was positioned as something in which both clergy and laity took part together as a community of believers, the division between professed clergy and the laity in relation to the sacraments became more absolute as the roles of ordained men were increasingly distanced and elevated from those of

[41] See Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women and their Biographers', in Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 1–43; Edward Foley, 'A Tale of Two Sanctuaries: Late Medieval Eucharist and the Analogous', in Ian Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 327–364, p. 342; Marguerite Ragnow, 'Ritual Before the Altar: Legal Satisfaction and Spiritual Reconciliation in Eleventh-Century Anjou', in Joëlle Rollo-Koster, ed., *Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Formalized Behaviour in Europe, China, and Japan* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 57–80; Althoff, *Die Macht*, p. 87.
[42] See Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 6.

women and the lay-faithful.[43] The causes of these developments within the relationship of Church and society to the sacraments are complex and various. Amongst the key factors which affected this change were the assertion of the power of the Church, the development of a sacramental theology which saw the Eucharist as the true body and blood of Christ, and the issue of groups, designated as heretical, who denied this idea.[44] Also in reaction to fears regarding unorthodox theology and practice, and with increasing numbers of women joining religious orders, female religious in the later Middle Ages were granted less independence within their roles in the Church.[45] The tighter regulation of women's spiritual lives, reflected in the strict enclosure of professed women demanded by Boniface VIII in the promulgation of *Periculoso*, included a reduction in their agency in relation to the sacraments.[46]

For Richard of St Victor (d. 1173), the sacraments were part of divine instruction for God's people within which spiritual power was concealed, a power to which women were depicted as having access through their piety if not through the roles ascribed to them by the Church.[47] According to Aquinas (d.1274), the sacraments were acts which 'not only symbolised but conferred Grace,' offering divine provision for salvation 'in the shape of corporeal and sensible things,' a conceptualisation reflected in the appropriation of liturgical rite (objects,

[43] For instance Josef Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite* (London, 1961); Bynum, *Holy Feast*; Jürgen Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform: Northern German Convents in the Late Middle Ages', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 21–45; Gary Macy, 'Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages', in Levy et al, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist*, pp. 365–398. For the hierarchy of ordination, see Jan Michael Joncas, 'A Skein of Sacred Sevens: Hugh of Amiens on Orders and Ordination', in Lizette Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1997), pp. 85–120.
[44] Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford, 2006), p. 165, in particular the Cathars and latter-day Donatists.
[45] See, for example, Mario Sensi, 'Anchoresses and Penitents in 13th-Century Umbria', in Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, ed., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 56–83.
[46] Boniface VIII, *Liber Sextus*, title 16; Gary Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination: Female Clergy in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2008).
[47] Richard of St Victor, 'The Mystical Ark', Book II, Chapter 6, in *Richard of St Victor*, trans. Grover A. Zinn (London, 1979), p. 183.

movements, spaces) within narratives of mystical contemplation.[48] The decrees of the earlier fourth Lateran council, in 1215, reflected the Church's growing ambition to regulate the sacraments, with the twenty-seventh constitution commanding that 'since the direction of souls is the art of arts' it was imperative that priests be diligently prepared for the performance of divine offices and 'in the proper administration of the sacraments of the Church.'[49] Adequate training of priests in the performance of these tasks was important in light of the now increasing regulation of interaction with the laity, as specified, for instance, by the twenty-first constitution of the fourth Lateran which dictated that all Christians were expected to confess to their parish priest and receive Eucharist at least once a year. In fact, more than half of the seventy-one constitutions concerned the clergy and their role in pastoral care, this role scrutinised in relation to, and reinforcing, the perception 'that correct performance of sacred rites would provide access to the divine power and protection which [the laity] desired.'[50]

A liturgy of words, actions and objects and practices grew around each sacrament, specifying ceremonial practice (rites) for these ritual acts. Though they were not fixed, the physical facets and theological understanding of such actions were integrated into narratives of mystical experience. Practices were diverse, including the lighting of the baptismal candle from the Easter candle, the tying of chrismatic bands about a confirmand's head, or the genuflection of a newly married couple with their priest before the altar.[51] As this suggests,

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[48] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, third part, q. 65, in InteLex Corporation, ed., *The Collected Works of Thomas Aquinas* (Charlottesville, VA, 1993); see also Miri Rubin, 'Sacramental Life', in Miri Rubin and Walter Simon, eds., *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 2010), pp. 217–237.

[49] Constitution 27, 'Cum sit ars artium regimen animarum districte praecipimus ut episcopi promovendos in sacerdotes diligenter instruant et informent vel per se ipsos vel per alios viros idoneos super divinis officiis et ecclesiasticis sacramentis qualiter ea rite valeant celebrare', in Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium, ed., *Concilia oecumenica et generalia Ecclesiae catholicae - Concilium Lateranense IV a. 1215* (Turnhout, 2010), p. 248; Cullen, *Bonaventure*, p. 167; see also Ronald M. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York, 2012), pp. 13–14.

[50] Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering*, p. 18.

[51] Ann Eljenholm Nichols, *Seeable Signs: The Iconography of the Seven Sacraments, 1350-1544* (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 218 (on the sacrament of confirmation); Peter Cramer, 'Baptismal Practice in Germany', in Miri

the forms of sacramental rites could be both playful and evocative, something which the baptismal rite recorded within the Metz Pontifical, for example, captures, with the priest's opening prayer proclaiming that 'torments are looming and judgement day is coming.' [52] This sense of a dramatic entering into the story of salvation history, already present within the liturgical form, is something reflected within mystical experience. Indeed, Aquinas' observation that 'the blessing of water is not essential to baptism, but belongs to a certain solemnity, whereby the devotion of the faithful is aroused,' indicates an awareness of the impact of the theatricality of such rites on those participating.[53] These were complex actions, which drew both upon other rites, such as lighting the baptismal candle from the Easter candle, as well as embodying scriptural reference and theological understanding. Accounts of female spirituality show an understanding and utilisation of the association of the physical accoutrements of ritual action, such as the pyx in communion or salve used in confession, with their sacramental context, and with the theological sphere of that ritual.

As stated above, the Eucharist came to be the most important sacrament, not only theologically, but also socially and within mystical accounts.[54] Theologians had long discussed the precise nature and action of God within the Eucharist, a debate which intensified from the eleventh century. This was epitomised in the conflicting theology of Berengar of Tours (d. 1088), who held that the sacrament could never become the same as the historical body of Christ, in opposition to thinkers such as Durand of Fécamp (d. 1088) and Lanfranc of Bec (d. 1089).[55] As the Aristotelian corpus became more widely known

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Rubin, ed., *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 6–12, p. 10; Christopher Brookes, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford, 1989), p. 56. For a more details on the physical form of the marriage rite, see John K. Leonard, 'Rites of Marriage in the Western Middle Ages', in Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 165–202.

[52] The baptismal rite is translated by Cramer, 'Baptismal Practice ', p. 7. This pontifical was used in the cathedral of St Stephen in Metz throughout the thirteenth century.

[53] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 'On the necessity of the Sacraments', third part, q. 66.

[54] Ibid, q. 65; Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 12; Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women', p. 9.

[55] Macy, 'The Theology of the Eucharist', p. 370–71.

within scholastic circles, the idea of the accidents and substance of host and wine further expanded the discussion, for instance in the thought of Peter Comestor (d. 1178), Alexander of Hales (d. 1245), and Duns Scotus (d. 1308).[56] The orthodox position came to be that whilst neither wafer nor wine seemed to change appearance, taste or texture (accident), through divine miracle, at the moment of consecration, it became both symbolically and physically the actual body and blood (substance) of Christ.[57] In 1091 the Council of Benevento had decreed that only those who were ordained could serve at the altar, and Gary Macy argues that the development of the association of ordination with the celebration of Sacraments meant that, 'ordination became, in effect, a ritual that granted a male (and only a male) an irreversible right to preside over the Eucharist'.[58] This consequently led to intensive discussion of the effect of the priest's actions during the rite on the validity sacrament, for example by John Beleth (d. 1182), Peter of Poitiers (d. 1215) and James of Vitry (d. 1240).[59] These debates regarding the nature of the Eucharist and the influence of the priest certainly resonate within accounts of mystical women, whose narratives grapple with these questions, as will be shown, in the form of mystical rituals which both anchor and offer an exposition of their divine insight.

After the fourth Lateran Council in 1215, the laity were required to attend communion at least once a year at Easter, receiving only the host rather than both body and blood, partially due to concerns over the danger of potentially spilling the blood of Christ from the chalice.[60] The idea of spiritual communion, that the priest could receive on behalf of the congregation whilst they received through pious sight of the consecrated host, developed, for instance, in

[56] Ibid., p. 365, p. 374, p. 377; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 30.
[57] Gerhard Lutz, 'Late Medieval Sacred Spaces and the Eucharist', in Levy et al., eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist,* pp. 471–497, p. 473.
[58] Macy, 'The Theology of the Eucharist', pp. 367– 368.
[59] Ibid., pp. 368–9.
[60] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 70.

the thought of William of Auxerre (d. 1231).[61] The moment in which the host was raised, a gesture recommended by the Parisian Synod of 1198, became central to the rite.[62] Responding appropriately to the sight of the true body of Christ, the communicants were encouraged to show reverence at this point, advised, for example, by William Durand (d. 1296) to adore the host, bowing and kneeling before it.[63] The environment of the altar was also adjusted to take the central importance of this moment of viewing into account, Innocent III suggesting the use of two candlesticks to light the area sufficiently.[64] A great number of regulations regarding the physical treatment of the consecrated host was introduced, the movement of the consecrated host was restricted to particular times, and elaborate containers developed to house the wafer.[65] Such prescriptions placed an emphasis on the physical form of Communion, a sense of God not only in the Host but in contact with, somehow, the parts of the rite.

As the sacraments punctuated the lifecycle of the faithful, the liturgy often framed medieval conceptions of time and purpose, over the year, each day and during the mass. The activities of the Church were governed by the liturgical calendar, which centred upon the Easter and Christmas cycle, seasons which affected the devotion of the pious, who held the newborn Christ-child, mourned with Mary at the foot of the cross or lay beside Christ in the tomb.[66] For the professed as well as some lay religious, each day was further structured by the liturgy

[61] Macy, 'The Theology of the Eucharist', p. 391–2; also Macy, 'Commentaries on the Mass', p. 33, and Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 50.
[62] Lutz, 'Late Medieval Sacred Spaces', p. 474; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 55.
[63] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 57–58.
[64] Ibid., p. 60.
[65] Ibid., p. 39–45; Achim Timmerman, *Real Presence: Sacramental Houses and the Body of Christ, c.1270-1600* (Turnhout, 2009).
[66] Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform', p. 39; multiple examples of such devotion cited in Chiara Frugoni, 'Female Mystics, Visions, Iconography', in Bornstein and Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion*, pp. 130–164, and also in Weinhandl, ed., *Deutsches Nonnenleben.*

of the Hours, particular prayers undertaken at Matins, Lauds, Prime, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline.

Mass, the celebration of the rite of communion, was performed for a number of occasions, such as for the daily *Horarium*, the ordination, profession and funerals of certain clergymen or the consecration of altars.[67] On Sundays, feast days, and in preparation for great festivals, for instance Lent, mass was available for the laity.[68] The text of the mass was divided between the Ordinary and that which was particular to a certain feast, the Proper.[69] Centred upon the moment of consecration, marked by the raising of the host, various prayers filled the mass, such as the *confiteor* and *misereatur* in preparation for communion, or the *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* which were often used in response to other prayers.[70] Other texts, such as the Kyrie, Gloria and Credo, would be sung by all or choir alone.[71] A highly regulated environment in which laity and clergy played different roles, the physical structure of the liturgy both rested upon and reinforced a complex temporal clerical hierarchy.[72] Yet, as Gary Macy has demonstrated on the basis of twenty-three commentaries produced on the mass between the late eleventh and thirteenth century, these physical attributes were not merely celebratory and reverential, but held a theological meaning in which contemporary commentators were highly interested, and, moreover, as the discussion of the accounts which

[67]Folley, 'A Tale of Two Sanctuaries', pp. 337–338.
[68] Jungmann, *The Mass*, p. 175.
[69] Folley, 'A Tale of Two Sanctuaries', p. 353.
[70] Jungmann, *The Mass*, p. 203, p. 309.
[71] Ibid., p. 300.
[72] Foley, 'A Tale of Two Sanctuaries', p.341. On the problematic, false distinction between 'liturgical' and para-liturgical actions, see Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform', and Edward Folley, 'The Song of Assembly in the Medieval Eucharist', in Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 202–234.

follows will suggest was absorbed within the portrayal of mystical interaction with this ritual framework.[73]

The liturgy was one way in which ritual was woven into the conception of time, purpose and space within the medieval communities, and although a religious structure, it cannot be understood as restricted to the Church alone, changing the appearance and activities of the lived environment. Liturgical seasons, such as Easter, were evocative of the events they recalled and recreated on a human level, more widely drawing people into the shifting and developing mood of the salvation-historical event which they recalled and recreated.[74] Moreover, these feasts spilled out into the secular community. This occurred in the later medieval period, for example, during the collective confession on Maundy Thursday, which sometimes took place in the square in front of the church, for example in Vienna, as well as through celebration such as Easter plays and processions.[75] One Italian example of the Easter liturgy is particularly evocative, requiring the women of the congregation to answer collectively as the women who found the empty tomb. [76]

Far from being an abstract, distant or unimportant structure, the liturgy brought 'Jesus Christ and his salvatory acts into the present time of the believers and [allowed] them to take part in the actual unfolding of salvation.'[77] Whilst women and men, and the professed and laity,

[73] Gary Macy, 'Commentaries on the Mass During the Early Scholastic Period', in Larson Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 25–60, p. 25; this speaks against the rhetoric of progression from the medieval elaborate ritual as mere decoration without content, to the Early Modern focus upon belief, for instance C. Caldwell Ames, *History Compass* (2012), 334–352, p. 334.
[74] Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform', p. 44; Anscar J. Chupungo, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies* (Collegeville, MN, 2000), p. 7, p. 147.
[75] Jungmann, *The Mass*, p. 311; Molly Morrison, 'The Paschal Mystery in the Visions of Angela of Foligno', *Italica*, 78 (2001), 36–52.
[76] Brian Møller-Jensen, *Medieval Liturgical Texts in Italian Manuscripts* (Lewiston, New York, 2006), p. 190.
[77] Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform', p. 31.

were expected to participate in liturgical rites in different ways, the framework created by such liturgical forms offered the 'immediate appropriation of sacred realities.' [78] This structure of actions expected and created physical, emotional and spiritual responses, something which is particularly clear to see in the spirituality of late medieval women.

II.i: Historiography of Late Medieval Female Spirituality

The form of late medieval spirituality, particularly mystical contemplation, has been seen as an important new development in spiritual expression. Studies have sought to define mysticism and situate the distinctive female mystical thought of the thirteenth century onwards in the history of mysticism and within the development of the visionary genre.[79] Mystical accounts have been lauded for their literary and linguistic novelty, offering rich sources in discussions of the development and influence of the vernacular, particularly within the Church.[80] Within the male dominated religious sphere of medieval society, they have been highly valued as alternative sources conveying women's lives and experience.[81] Their themes have been analysed in terms of theological outlook, and their language examined to uncover strategies of speaking. [82] This has been of special interest in the face of the apparent grey area created by the biblical prohibition on the teaching of theology by women (1 Tim. 2.11-2.12), and more generally negative perceptions of women and particularly women's

[78] Marie Anne Majeski, 'Reading the Word in a Eucharistic Context: The Shape and Methods of Early Medieval Exegesis', in Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 61–84, p. 64.
[79] See Alois M. Haas, 'Was ist Mystik?', in Kurt Ruh, ed., *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter: Symposium Kloster Engelberg* (Stuttgart, 1986), pp. 319–342; Bernard McGinn, 'The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism', in *Church History*, 65 (1996), 197–219, also Bernard McGinn, 'Visio Dei: Seeing God in Medieval Theology and Mysticism', in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter, eds., *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (London, 2007), pp. 15–33.
[80] See Elizabeth Andersen, *The Voices of Mechthild of Magdeburg* (Oxford, 2000); Hildegund Keul, 'Der ungelehrte Mund der Frauen: Eine verschwiegene Autorität in der Frage nach Gott', in Mariano Delgado, ed., *Die Kirchenkritik der Mystiker: Prophetie aus Gotteserfahrung* (Stuttgart, 2004), vol. I, pp. 225–246.
[81] Gertrude Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto, 1996).
[82] Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Word, Women's Voices: Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (Woodbridge, 1999); Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago, 1994).

speaking, set against the calling of the visionary to reveal, voiced, for example, by William of St Thierry in his assertion that 'whoever makes progress in the holy church by beholding spiritual things must offer them to others by recounting them.'[83]

In seeking a 'genuine' medieval female voice, the transmission and alteration of the text, and the multiple reading contexts of its history, cannot be disregarded. Attempts to disentangle 'male' and 'female' voices, to peel apart that which belongs to the 'mystic' herself and that which the confessor has 'added' or 'supplemented' may undermine the document in itself, imposing a perceived conflict of voices in a narrative which may have been constructed with a deliberate tension between two voices. This is particularly worth bearing in mind as medieval sources show both awareness and interest in this field of interaction between weak female vessel and literate aid, playing both on the humility *topos* within hagiographical tradition and the theological value of the female body reflecting the suffering Christ, a God in humble and broken image. [84] The prominence of the experiential and bodily within depictions of late medieval spirituality creates a sense of the texts as less constructed, less argued. Presented as experience they are accepted as, if not precisely documentary-like, then pertaining to, or bound to, 'lived' experience. Even in the recognition of the refraction of such lived evidence through the process of textualisation, this can lead to an underestimation of the texts' deliberate or persuasive qualities, a subconscious elision of that portrayed as experiential and experience.[85] However, in an echo of Koziol's caution regarding ritual

[83] William of St Thierry, *Excerpts from the Books of the Blessed Gregory on the Song of Songs I,* Chapter 8, in *Gregory the Great On the Song of Songs,* trans. Mark DelCogliano (Collegeville, MN, 2012), p. 238.
[84] John W. Coakley, 'Women's Textual Authority and the Collaboration of Clerics,' in Rosalynn Voaden and A.J. Minnis, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 83–104; John W. Coakley, 'Thomas of Cantimpré and Female Sanctity', in Rachel Fulton and Bruce Holsinger, eds., *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person* (New York, 2007), pp. 45–55; John W. Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth-Century Franciscans and Dominicans', *Church History,* 60 (1991), 445–460.
[85] For the debate regarding the reading of the mystical genre within German scholarship, see Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1981); Siegfried Ringler, *Viten und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien* (Munich, 1980); Ursula Peters, *Religiöse Erfahrung als literarisches Faktum* (Tübingen, 1988); Alois M. Haas, *Sermo Mysticus: Studien zu Theologie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg, 1979), and more recently, Haas, *Mystik als Aussage.*

within narrative, it is equally important not to treat such mystical texts as a totally controlled environment in which every described action is meaningful.

As implied above, expectations of gender, particularly of the female body, women's education and women's ability to speak have been identified as important in the historiography of these texts. The approaches taken within previous research, and subsequent response to this scholarship, continue to form a foundation which is visible in the manner in which such narratives are read, both in positive and negative ways. Some of the main approaches will therefore be briefly addressed here, in order to show key underlying influences which colour the reading and categorization of women's mystical texts.

A division between 'male' and 'female' mysticism was quickly established within research on medieval mysticism, as for instance in the work of Carl Johann Greith.[86] The mystical spirituality of men, seen to be embedded within scholastic theology, has been associated with sophistication, learning, textuality and *auctoritas*. Narratives ascribed to women were initially read as theologically less complex, as 'outpourings of emotion and imagination,' a minor literature offering a window into the female psyche rather than an intellectual pursuit of theological exposition.[87] This earlier scholarship read female narratives as depictions of divine experience which were primarily reactive, and whose value was poetic rather than critical, personal rather than public, and different to the mystical writing of men. These conclusions are not without merit. Hadewijch's poems (thirteenth-century) are clearly different to Bernard of Clairvaux's popular twelfth-century sermons on the *cantica*

[86] Carl J. Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Prediger-Orden (von 1250-1350) nach ihren Grundlehren, Liedern und Lebensbildern aus handschriftlichen Quellen* (Freiburg, 1861); Franz Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Leipzig, 1845).
[87] Mela Escherich, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit von Mechthild von Magdeburg* (Berlin, 1902), p. VI.

canticorum. Yet over-emphasis of this contrast (male, Latinate, learned and deliberate, against female, vernacular, poetic and experiential) also obscures part of the picture, namely that of a text imagined in a context in which complex theological thought was present, as having been written, often in collaboration with others both male and female, and as a product to be read and heard, often by men and women. Whilst women did not have access to the scholastic education of men, and in most cases would not have had direct access to popular authorities on contemplation, such as the pseudo-Dionysian corpus (c. late 5th century) or Origen's commentary on the Song of Songs (d. 254), such women, or certainly their confessors, were not precluded from an awareness of contemporary theological themes and arguments.[88]

Although the theological complexity and place of the writings of female mystics within the broader development of devotional thought have increasingly been acknowledged, their definition as experiential and affective continues to predominate in the understanding of this spiritual mode. This is evident in two of the foremost modern studies of medieval mysticism in the Christian West, undertaken by Bernard McGinn and Kurt Ruh, both of which point to body and emotion as central in this type of spirituality.[89] Moreover, as Frank Tobin

[88] Albert Bruckner, 'Weibliche Schreibtätigkeit im schweizerischen Spätmittelalter', in Johannes Authenriet and Franz Bunhölzl, eds., *Festschrift Bernard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern* (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 441–448; Marie Luise Ehrenschwendtner, 'The Use of the Vernacular in Dominican Convents of Southern Germany', in Watt, ed., *Medieval Women*, pp. 49–71; Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford* (Woodbridge, 2001); Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Das literarische Leben in dominikanischen Frauenklöstern des 14. Jahrhundert: Das Modell St Katharinental bei Diessenhofen', in Falk Eiserman, Eva Schlotheuber und Volker Honemann, eds., *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.–26. Februar 1999* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 285–309.

[89] Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism* (New York, 1998), also 'Seeing God', in Muessig and Putter, eds., *Envisaging Heaven*, p. 20; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik* (Munich, 1993), vol. 2; Margot Schmidt, 'Das Lieht ist Vernunftekeit: Zur Mystik Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Paul Imhoff, ed., *Gottes Nähe: Religiöse Erfahrung in Mystik und Offenbarung* (Würzburg, 1990), pp. 48–61, p. 53.

concludes, the visionary episodes of female mystics are typified by private experiences which take a highly personal form, something which can belie their wider impact. [90]

Nuanced examination of physicality within mystical texts has shown that a network of theological trends and traditions informed the way in which the female body is portrayed and utilised in mystical narratives. These studies are important to the analysis of ritual in mystical narratives in many ways. Firstly, the portrayal of the body often relates to sacramental ritual, for example in penitential acts (confession), in ascetic practices which seek to mirror Christ's suffering (communion), or in sexual uses of the body (marriage). Secondly, and related to the first, women's bodies have played a large part in the conceptualisation of the difference of 'female' mystical texts and the 're-discovery' of women's voices. Thirdly, the understanding of the body in text is woven into the understanding of late medieval female spirituality as experiential, and a large part of the activity associated with this form of religious life, for women, is participation in liturgical and sacramental practice. These factors have (sometimes) contributed to the understanding of ritual within mystical narratives as less communicative and less purposeful than in other genres.

The changing understanding and depiction of God, especially the emerging importance of the humanity of Christ, promulgated in part through the expansion of the mendicant orders, led to a changing use of the physical body in devotional practice.[91] A renewed emphasis on the *imitatio christi* and the *vita apostolica* called for the participation of the body in spirituality through ascetic and devotional practice, and found expression in miraculous experience such

[90]Tobin, 'Audience, Authorship and Authority', p. 8.
[91] For example in Kent Emery and Joseph Wawrykow, eds., *Christ amongst the Medieval Dominicans* (Notre Dame, 1998); Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writing* (London, 1993).

as the stigmata of Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. [92] Developing ideas of a personal relationship with the divine in the brideship of the soul and the alignment of the spiritual body with Christ strengthened the interaction between the bodily and the spiritual. [93] Indeed, the moment of *unio*, the complete joining of mystic with God, is frequently held to be the zenith of the contemplative experience.[94] Growing out of the long tradition of Song of Songs imagery, seen in the authoritative commentary of Gregory the Great (d. 604) or the more creative anonymous twelfth-century *Trudperter Hoheslied*, the relationship between God and soul was often depicted as a mystical marriage, and the moment of total union was even described in a newly sexualised manner, the mystic for example being described as lost in pleasure or as sharing a bed with God. [95] The integral nature of body, both physical and spiritual, within the practice and understanding of spirituality at this time is undeniable. Indeed, for medieval and modern thinkers alike, 'a rhythm of life fully engaged with the divinity' is central to successful contemplative spirituality.[96]

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[92] See Ulrich Köpf, 'Die Stigmata des Franziskus von Assisi', in Waltraud Pulz, ed., *Zwischen Himmel und Erde: Körperliche Zeichen der Heiligkeit* (Stuttgart, 2012), pp. 35–60; Michelle Voss Roberts, 'Flowing and Crossing: The Somatic Theologies of Mechthild of Magdeburg and Laileswarē', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* 76 (2008), 638–663, p. 642, suffering body; Bynum, *Holy Feast.*

[93] See Margot Schmidt, 'Die Kraft des Herzens: Aspekte einer Anthropologie der Mystik bei Mechthild von Magdeburg und Mechthild von Hackeborn', in Michael Bangert und Hildegund Keul, eds., *Vor dir steht die leere Schale meiner Sehnsucht: die Mystik der Frauen von Helfta* (Leipzig, 1999), pp. 112–133.

[94] *Unio* is underlined within the definition of mysticism for instance by Alois Haas, 'Was ist Mystik?', p. 319; See also Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Ekstase, das zentrale körperliche Phänomen der Mystik', in Pulz, ed., *Zwischen Himmel und Erde*, pp. 17–34; and Elizabeth Andersen et al., eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion,* pp. 7–8.

[95] Friedrich Wilhelm Wenzlaff-Eggebert, *Deutsche Mystik zwischen Mittelalter und Neuzeit: Einheit und Wandlung ihrer Erscheinungsformen* (Tübingen, 1947), pp 47–49; Almudena Otero Villena, 'O du vliessender Got', *Euphorion,* 101 (2007), 301–336, p. 303, *unio* and language; Rosalyn Voaden, 'All Girls Together', p. 74, Christ's wounds as vagina-like; Petrus W. Tax, 'Die grosse Himmelsschau Mechthilds von Magdeburg und ihre Höllenvision: Aspekte des Erfahrungshorizontes, der Gegenbildlichkeit und der Parodierung', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur,* 108 (1979), 112–137, p. 124; Emily Hunter-McGowin, 'Eroticism and Pain in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *the Flowing Light*', *Blackfriars*, 92 (2011), 607–622. For further discussion of scholarly attention to sexual elements in Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Flowing Light* see the thorough analysis in Frank Tobin, *Mechthild von Magdeburg: A Mystic in Modern Eyes* (Columbia, SC, 1995).

[96] Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Minnis and Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 411–425, p. 416; for example Bernard of Clairvaux's first sermon on the songs, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs I*, trans. Killian Walsh (Kalamazoo, 1976); Richard of St Victor, 'The Mystical Ark', in *Richard of St Victor,* trans. Grover A. Zinn (London, 1979), p. 314.

Multiple avenues of 'rediscovery' have coloured scholarship on late medieval mysticism, first through the attention of nineteenth-century German scholars looking to medieval vernacular texts out of an interest in selfhood, and later, through the desire to recover female voices from a period whose sources were dominated by men.[97] This emphasis is now undergoing careful re-assessment, for example through a better understanding of the complex interaction between Latin and vernacular in the later medieval period, and in light of the last decades of scholarship, which has increasingly demonstrated the variety of contexts in which women held influence, agency and power.[98] Moreover, recent examination of the transmission history of the manuscripts containing mystical narratives has accentuated the uncertainty about whose voices these 'female' texts relate, something which brings to the fore questions regarding the nature of narratives read as firstly 'female' and further, as 'experience', though neither criteria can be rejected outright. Balász J. Nemes, for example, critiques the modern desire for an original single voice, arguing in his study of Mechthild of Magdeburg that the consequence of 'die Überzeugung, wir hätten es mit Mechthilds eigenhändigem und in eigener Regie niedergeschriebenem Werk zu tun' (the conviction, that we were dealing with a work of Mechthild's own hand and edition) is an undervaluation of community and process within the medieval context, the 'Marginalisierung von Schreibern, Beichtvätern und Mitschwestern aus dem Umfeld der Textgenese' (the marginalisation of scribes, confessors and other sisters in the environs of the creation of the text).[99]

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[97] See discussion in Tobin, *Mechthild of Magdeburg: A Medieval Mystic,* p.18. This rediscovery of women's voices, as well as other trends in recent religious history, are treated in Anne Thayer, 'What's New in the History of Christianity?', *Religious Compass,* 1 (2007), 1–5; see also Sara Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia, 2004), preface.

[98] See for example Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 2013); Susan Mosher Stuard, *Considering Medieval Women and Gender* (Farnham, 2010).

[99] Balász J. Nemes, 'Eya herre got, wer hat dis buoch gemacht? Zum Umgang von Editoren und Redaktoren mit der 'Autorin' Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Jochen Golz und Manfred Koltes, eds., *Autoren und Redaktoren als Editoren* (Tübingen, 2008), pp. 18–34, p. 20; see also Sara Poor, 'Transmission and Impact of Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit'*, in Andersen et al, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion*, pp. 73–102.

An area in which the multiplicity of voices in mystical texts has been much debated is in the context of the relationship between female mystic and male clerical scribe. Such analysis has shown this dynamic to be mutually beneficial in some cases, and that the supporting role of confessor or confidant (or at least of those portraying themselves in this manner in their text) was valued by churchmen.[100] Yet this field of enquiry has also sought on occasion to disentangle male and female voices, mystical experience from clerical gloss, a distinction within the narrative which is at the very least tenuous.[101] Chiara Frugoni, looking predominantly at Italian mystics, suggests that this distinction can be set aside on the basis of the assumption of a shared cultural and spiritual context, as well as a living discursive relationship between mystic and confessor-scribe.[102] Whilst it is good that Frugoni's approach recognises female input into composition despite any lack of participation in the physical act of writing or exact dictation, it underestimates the extent to which any voice, or even voices in conversation with each other, in the text may have been intentionally written into the narrative.

Patricia Daley's study of Hadewijch offers the following insightful summary of some of the key difficulties in the way in which these works are interpreted:

> That women's work is often read with less attention to its formal qualities because of our assumed emphasis on 'experience' reveals more about contemporary presuppositions regarding the natural, formless, egoistic (in the psychological sense of the term), or self-evident nature of experience than it does the variety and definition

[100] Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of the Friars', 445–460.
[101] For example Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin*, introduction.
[102] Frugoni, 'Female Mystics', p. 132.

> of experience in women's writing or the constructed form, function, and relation of what we think of as 'experience' in respect to literary and theological traditions.[103]

The suggestion that such narratives should be read as carefully and deliberately constructed despite their strong association with lived-ness, the everyday, personal experience, although they appear utterly entwined with the mystical subject and their first-hand interaction with the divine and the world, underpins the key question of this thesis. When these texts begin to be read not only as accounts that do not just record what happened, but as accounts which, although not rejecting their relation to an historical context and person, have been consciously woven together in a way which is aware of the context being addressed, to what end are all these rituals included? When sacramental and nuptial devotion are no longer in texts simply, or only because they are a representation of what these women did, how might the careful orchestration of such scenes be made use of within the purpose and function of the narrative?

II.ii: Historiography of Liturgy and Sacraments in Female Spiritual Texts

The importance of the liturgy and the sacraments of the Church in the spirituality of women in the late medieval period is recognised in the historiography, Niklaus Largier even asserting 'dass die Liturgie und die heilige Schrift [...] in den Schriften Hadewijchs und Mechthilds von Magdeburg eine wichtige Rolle spielen, mag eine selbstverständliche Feststellung sein' (the observation that liturgy and scripture play an important role in the writings of Hadewijch and Mechthild is self-evident).[104] Mechthild does indeed illustrate the influence of the liturgy in the *FL*, in her use of the Psalms as a response-phrase, recalling the antiphonal

[103] Dailey, *Promised Bodies*, p. 125.
[104] Niklaus Largier, 'Von Hadewijch, Mechthild und Dietrich, zu Eckhart und Seuse? Zur Historiographie der deutschen Mystik', in Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte: Kolloquium, Kloster Fischingen 1998* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 93–118, p. 99.

song during the liturgy.[105] Visions in the accounts of her fellow nuns in Helfta, Mechthild of Hackeborn and Gertrude the Great, are even more closely bound to the liturgical year, and their devotion to the heart of Christ is considered part of the impetus for the institution of the feast, though this did not occur until later.[106] Hadewijch's seventh vision takes place at the dawn of Pentecost, incorporating the feast into her visionary episode.[107]

The sacraments, too, feature heavily in mystical narratives, imagined as the locus for the personal encounter with God.[108] These were treated creatively, Christ's side wound, for example, imagined as a source of the Eucharist by the late twelfth century, in the work of Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153), Beatrice of Nazareth (d.1268) and Mechthild of Hackeborn (d. 1298).[109] The potential for such descriptions of sacramental and ritual action to go beyond the devotional and into the theological is proposed, for example, by Béatrice Acklin-Zimmermann, who, in her analysis of the Helfta community, suggests that these narrative accounts of mystical experiences of the Eucharist were, in that case, a visualisation of the theology of transubstantiation.[110] This approach views spiritual accounts of liturgical and sacramental rite as not only experiential but thoughtfully considered. Largier indicates that such visions can be understood as both representations and interpretations of the liturgy,

[105] Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 2, p. 259; Tax, 'Die grosse Himmelsschau Mechthilds von Magdeburg', 112—137, p. 113.
[106] McGinn, *The Flowering*, p. 270; Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. 2, pp. 63–80; On the influence of the Paschal liturgy on Mechthild of Hackeborn, see Patricia Demers, *Women as Interpreters of the Bible* (New York, 1992), p. 59.
[107] Bernard McGinn, *The Essential Writings of Christian Mysticism* (New York, 2006), p. 103
[108] Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'Prophetische Mystik zwischen Kirchenbindung und Kirchenkritik', *Theologischpraktische Quartalschrift*, 141 (1993), 121–129, p. 125; Also Margot Schmidt, 'The Importance of Christ in the Correspondence between Jordan of Saxony and Diana d'Andalo, and in the Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Emory and Wawrykow, eds., *Christ amongst the Medieval Dominicans*, pp. 100–112, p. 107; Schröder, 'The Feast of the Purification', p. 37.
[109] Voaden, 'All Girls Together', p. 73.
[110] Beatrice Acklin-Zimmerman, 'Die Nonnenviten als Modell einer narrativen Theologie', in Haug and Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, pp. 563–580, p. 573.

which was in itself scripture embodied and set into action through its ritual form.[111] The *sensus spiritualis* of the Bible was actualised in the practice of the liturgy, and this physical enactment of divine meaning, action and purpose is in turn absorbed and unpacked in the visionary manifestations, which offer a spiritual exposition of experience.[112] In this form of spirituality, ritual actions can be read like rich texts of interplay between (actual) scripture, theological content and enacted salvation-historical reality, with each experience of the liturgical performance revealing a world of visual language.[113]

The narrative accounts of such acts demonstrate an understanding of liturgy not only as pious act, but crucially creating an 'Allegorese der Schrift, als Deutung des allegorischen Gehalts der Schrift' (allegory of scripture, which is an interpretation of the allegorical content of scripture).[114] Largier concludes it was in the 'Neuschreiben der Liturgie und der Schrift' (writing of liturgy and scripture anew) within written accounts of visionary experience that Beguines could create a space in which to recreate the dramatic union of human and God.[115] L. M. Grimes identifies a similar tendency of purposeful manipulation of liturgical practice in the work of Gertrude of Hackeborn, arguing that she 'ändert Texte, Gesten und Riten der kirchlichen Liturgie [...] um sie den spirituellen Erfordernissen ihrer Zuhörerschaft [...] anzupassen' (changes texts, gestures and liturgical rites of the Church [...] to fit them to the spiritual needs of her audience).[116] Such 'reflections on the key Christian teachings embedded in ritualized changes of stage and tongue' are a form of communication argued by Ulrike Wiethaus to be a parallel form of literacy, which was 'necessitated by the gestalt of female

[111] Largier, 'Von Hadewijch, Mechthild und Dietrich', p. 101.
[112] Ibid., p. 101.
[113]Schröder, 'The Feast of the Purification', p. 36; Nicholas Largier, 'Von Hadewijch, Mechthild und Dietrich', p. 102.
[114] Largier, 'Von Hadewijch, Mechthild und Dietrich', p. 103.
[115] Ibid., p. 105.
[116] L. M. Grimes, 'Bedeutung der Liturgie im Werk Gertrudes von Helfta' in Bangert und Keul, eds., *Vor dir steht die leere Schale*, pp. 68–80, p. 71.

monastic spirituality.'[117] Ritual acts are shown thus not only to convey piety, but to demonstrate and explain theology, and can be moulded in order to address the mystic's individual context.

As outlined above, control over the sacraments existed within a strict hierarchy, within which women, and particularly lay women did not, in theory at least, have much agency.[118] Yet with an expanding body of theological interpretation and an ever more elaborate set of conditions and restrictions attached to sacramental action, these acts were increasingly elevated and valued as sites of divine power. In utilising liturgical and sacramental action, women's spirituality has been seen to interact with this dynamic of power and hierarchy. Several scholars suggest the (potentially) subversive empowerment of women through ritual practice. The enacted liturgy, which it has been suggested became like a narrative that could be appropriated and manipulated within the mystical experience to teach and define, could also be used to authorise, though there are several suggested avenues for this authorisation. 'As Dionysius and Eckhart ground their apophatic practice in the reading of the scripture,' Amy Hollywood writes, 'women like Angela and Beatrice use their daily liturgical and meditative practices [...] to engender authorizing experiences that then become texts to be unsaid in the pursuit of a closer, less limited and mediated experience of the divine.'[119] In this case, ritual acts as an orthodox springboard into intimacy with the divine. Rosalynn Voaden argues that within the supportive context of Helfta, the Dominican nuns could 'appropriate activities [...] which were traditionally gendered masculine' such as confession, absolution and Eucharist,

[117] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century', in Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson and Nancy Bradley Warren, eds., *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature* (New York, 2002), pp. 209–238, p. 226.
[118] An exception was the emergency baptism of infants, see Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* part three, q. 67.
[119] Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago, 2002), p. 9.

such as when Gertrude the Great washed herself in a fountain of blood from Christ's heart.[120] Examining the *vita* of Agnes Blannbekin, Ulrike Wiethaus similarly concludes that a beguine's mystical experience of liturgy could counter a ritual hierarchy which favoured men, arguing that 'through public and private ritual action, women thus shifted the androcentric drama of Church ritual practice and teachings back to female actors', and that 'women [could] re-insert themselves as actors into ritual space through ecstatic and visionary physical participation.'[121] Bynum proposes that many ecstatic experiences 'implicitly undercut the sacramental power of the clergy,' a suggestion echoed in Beatrice Acklin-Zimmerman's conclusion that the priest's role in the provision of sacrament was not overly esteemed in the sister-books.[122]

In contrast, looking at mystical receptions of the Eucharist, confession and absolution, Caroline Walker Bynum also suggests that 'such visions [...] serve as much to integrate the female ecstatic into the basic Christian structure as to liberate her from them', ultimately securing the subject within a system which was 'clerically controlled'.[123] Bynum's observation points to the necessity yet difficulty of the relationship between mystic, Church and community. Underlining the way in which sacramental rite was deeply embedded in the Church hierarchy, the link which is drawn out between community and rite moreover hints at the way in which the framework of rite might provide structures of justification and security for the mystic- something which will be explored in the case studies which follow.

[120] Voaden, 'All Girls Together', p. 81 and p. 85.
[121] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Spatiality and the Sacred in Agnes Blannbekin's Life and Revelations', in Wiethaus, ed., *Agnes Blannbekin,* pp.163–176, p. 164 and p. 165.
[122] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 61; Acklin-Zimmerman, 'Die Nonnenviten', p. 574; Wiethaus, 'Thieves and Carnivals', p. 225.
[123] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 45–46.

This initial research into the role of sacramental and liturgical rite within mystical spirituality is promising. It suggests that the use of such ritualised phenomena is not solely founded upon a perception of pious female action, but shows an interaction with theological themes, structures of power, Church hierarchy, role and identity. In looking closely at how ritual is employed in four narratives of female spirituality, this study aims to question how and why ritual is included in these accounts within the context of the texts as deliberately constructed narratives. In chronological order of writing, the four case-studies used in this thesis are Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit* (from c. 1260), Angela of Foligno's *Memorial* (from c. 1270), Agnes Blannbekin's *Vita et Revelationes* (c. 1315) and the *Chronik zu Adelhausen* (Adelhausen sister-book) written by Anna of Munzingen (1318). Each source records the seemingly typical abundance of depictions of liturgical and sacramental practice, and mystical episodes based on these action-types. These narratives share a theological background in their connection to mendicant spirituality, whose emphasis on a lived apostolic faith, and repentance deeply bound to a personal relationship with Christ as *Deus homo* was highly influential in shaping both late medieval mystical expression and relationship between penitent and sacrament. This is reflected in the appropriation and representation of sacraments in the mystical narrative. Though different in its way from the others, each account is entwined with the Christocentric spirituality which came to dominate the spiritual expression of the later Middle Ages, particularly amongst the mendicants. The women associated with these texts, however, represent differing forms of attachment to mendicant orders, something which changed their role within their socio-cultural context and consequently their relationship to that community's rituals. Both Angela and Agnes were attached to the Franciscan order, whilst Mechthild and the Adelhausen sister-book were associated with the Dominicans. Between them, they convey different religious roles open to women: the Adelhausen sister-book depicts enclosed Dominican nuns; the *Memorial* offers

the penance of a Franciscan tertiary; Agnes' *Vita et Revelationes* the life of a beguine attached to a Franciscan confessor; and the *Fließendes Licht* the thought of a Beguine (and later a nun) Mechthild with a Dominican confessor. In written form, too, they offer a variety of relationships between mystical subject, scribe and text. Mechthild claims to have both composed and written the majority of the *Fließendes Licht* herself. Angela of Foligno's *Memorial* presents itself as dictated by the tertiary, piecemeal, in Italian, to a Friar-confessor, who translated it into Latin. However, dialogue recorded within the narrative suggests that the composed text would have been read aloud to Angela, who would then comment on it, which appears to imply an interactive process. Seemingly in contrast to Angela's *Memorial*, Agnes' Latin *vita* was written by an anonymous Friar, possibly her confessor, the style of the text appearing to be more generalised. The Adelhausen sister-book, a series of brief lives presented as written by a fellow nun, Anna, do not profess to have been recorded in dialogue with the subjects of these experiences but from the memories of witnesses to the mystical experiences of others. These differences in the portrayal of the relationship between mystic, confessor and text are also of interest in terms the use of ritualised action within the negotiation of power, authority and belonging.

At first glance, the depictions of the liturgy and the sacraments within mystical narratives can appear repetitive in form and language, and to be found in such great numbers as to render them meaningless. As a trope unique to no account, they would consequently have little to reveal about the spirituality or text other than affirming it as a representative of late medieval affective piety. At the other extreme, certain episodes read as so graphic that they seem to deny any form or structure, convincing that they are part of a deeply intimate relationship between the broken flesh of the pious woman and the bloody flesh of Christ. Again, they seem to point away from any intentional, carefully constructed argument. Yet in order better

to understand how these narratives work as texts, it is important to look more closely at ritual as an area which finds so many references within these accounts and which was so highly valued in the spiritual life and theology of the late medieval Church. The direction of this study began with the much discussed question of how women could write on theological themes when forbidden to do so. Instead, it has become an enquiry which has been turned on its head. The liturgy and the sacraments were a means through which God was expected to speak, as well as a structure through which important values, hierarchies and traumatic events were proclaimed and addressed within the medieval context. Ritualised action appears throughout late medieval mysticism. This discussion thus seeks instead to look at how it is that these texts speak, and in which ways the narrative was constructed in order to convey and convince, and how an understanding of the relationship between Church, society and divinity, in rite and ritual, speaks out of the text.

1. Constructed Frames: Speaking Through Ritual Re-imagined in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Flowing light of the Godhead*

'Es ist vil lihte angenomen', Mechthild of Magdeburg observes sceptically, 'dass man vor den lúten gůt si' (to appear good to people is very easily undertaken).[124] This critical approach to piety captures a wariness regarding the potentially deceptive nature of physical appearance, which permeates Mechthild's *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit*. It is a stance which suggests a complex relationship with the rites of the Church, which formed a large part of the devotional activities of religious women both professed and unprofessed.

Mechthild herself moved to Magdeburg to live as a Beguine after a number of visions, the first when she was twelve.[125] There, the Dominican brother Heinrich of Halle became her confessor, and in 1250 persuaded her to write down her experiences.[126] She joined the convent of Helfta in about 1270, where she finished her text with the aid of the nuns.[127] Aspects of the ritualised behaviour typical of the religious form of life are not excluded from the *FL,* becoming apparent, for example, in symbolic tokens exchanged and changes of clothing. Such facets are of interest to the present discussion of the potential relationship between ritual, narrative and power, both authorial and mystical.

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[124] Gisela Vollmann-Profe, ed., *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit* (Frankfurt, 2003), V.2, p. 344, abbreviated as *FL*. All citations will be taken from this edition; translations are my own.
[125] *FL,* p. 228, book IV.2; Vollmann-Profe cautions that all biographical information regarding Mechthild derives from the *FL,* p. 344.
[126] Whilst Heinrich is the only confessor mentioned in the *FL*, it is possible Mechthild had others, for example Wichram von Arnstein; see Kurt Ruh, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg und Wichman von Arnstein' in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 120 (1991), 322–325.
[127] Helfta followed a Cistercian rule though it was not officially Cistercian; see Elizabeth Andersen 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, her Creativity and her Audience', in Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor, eds., *Women, the Book and the Godly: Selected proceedings of the St Hilda's conference, 1993* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 77–88, p. 77.

In part, Mechthild's scepticism about physical action can be seen to arise from her theological emphasis on a real, internal relationship with God as the path to salvation.[128] In connection with this, Mechthild is sometimes highly critical of the Church, berating clerical laxity, scholastic theology without true faith, false piety and sacramental apathy amongst the laity.[129] Lastly, Mechthild's concern relates to her task as mystic, receiver of revelation and writer of text. Claiming theological knowledge stemming not from textual *auctoritates* but from heaven, Mechthild needed to employ different strategies to prove her source and defend her role in the face of a questioning audience who moreover had the power to silence her and her text.[130] Perhaps because of her own perception of the theological novelty of her thought, or because of her critical stance towards the Church, or more simply, because she was a female author unprotected by the authority offered by a male clerical scribe and, furthermore, writing in the vernacular, a language less trusted by the theological sphere of her time, the *FL* is bursting with the safety-mechanisms of the medieval hagiographical tradition.[131] Whilst her confessor is invoked as a source of authority, most striking is the extensive and rather poetic use of humility *topoi*, calling herself, for example, no better than a dung-heap. Mechthild consistently asserts a deep personal unwillingness to write but for the repeated command of God, through vision and revelation, that her writing and her book were entirely his will.[132] Strategies of authorisation within the *FL*, such as those mentioned above, have

[128] *FL*, p. 107.
[129] For example, *FL*, p. 170, p. 200, p. 302, p. 342; See Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'Prophetische Mystik zwischen Kirchenbindung und Kirchenkritik', *Theologischpraktische Quartalschrift*, 141 (1993), 121–129; Hildegund Keul, 'Der ungelehrte Mund der Frauen: eine verschweigene Autorität in der Frage nach Gott', in Mariano Delgado, ed., *Die Kirchenkritik der Mystiker: Prophetie aus Gotteserfahrung* (Stuttgart, 2004), vol. 1, pp. 225–246.
[130] *FL* II.36, VI.36; see Frank Tobin, 'Audience, Authorship and Authority in Mechthild von Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead*', *Mystics Quarterly,* 23 (1997), 8–17, p. 12.
[131] A difficulty not exclusive to women, see Hildegard Keller, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Albert Lutz, ed., *Mystik: Die Sehnsucht nach dem Absoluten* (Zurich, 2011), pp. 69–74, p. 69; Jane Duran, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg: Women Philosophers and the Visionary Tradition', *New Blackfriars*, 87 (2006), 43–49, p. 47; Beate Korntner, *Mystikerinnen im Mittelalter: Die drei Frauen von Helfta und Marguerite Porete - Zwischen Anerkennung und Verfolgung* (München, 2012), pp. 63–88.
[132] For example *FL* p. 107, p. 134–6, p. 228–30.

been much discussed.[133] This chapter, however, will instead examine the way that Mechthild's interest in, yet caution regarding, physical ritualised devotional activities of the Church are in dialogue with this need for validation within her text. This discussion will consider to what extent the narrative seeks to access the socio-cultural authority and meaning of such ritual in aid of Mechthild's conception of her role.

Given Mechthild's hesitancy about the physical expression of piety, the reader might expect little ritual to appear, such acts representing the type of action perceived as susceptible to falsity. The seeming tension between interest in, yet scepticism regarding, rites is reflected in scholarship. Kurt Ruh suggests, for example, that outside of the experience of *unio*, Mechthild rejected all paths that were not directly from God, including the sacraments of the Church.[134] Marianne Heimbach-Steins, however, identifies that sacramental thought, grace in the form of sacraments which binds the community and purpose of the Church, nonetheless underpins the spirituality of the *FL*.[135] Indeed, not only are there references to the customary rituals of the Church, such as communion and confession, but the *FL* displays a curiosity about physical devotional practices. [136] So, for example, Mechthild expresses her regret at having carried out good works, amongst which acts such as ritualised prayers of penance or

[133] Hildegund Keul, *Verschwiegene Gottesrede: Die Mystik Der Begine Mechthild Von Magdeburg* (Innsbruck, 2004); Balázs J. Nemes, *Von der Schrift zum Buch, vom Ich zum Autor: Zur Text- und Autorkonstitution in Überlieferung und Rezeption des "Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit" Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Tübingen, 2010), p. 110–217; Marianne Heimbach-Steins, 'Gottes und Menschen 'heimlichkeit': zu einem Begriff der mystischen Theologie von Mechthild von Magedeburg', in Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde, ed., *Contemplata Aliis Tradere: Studien zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Spiritualität* (Bern, 1995), pp.71–86; Rosalynn Voaden, 'God's Almighty Hand: Women Co-writing the Book', in Smith et al, eds., *Women, the Book*, pp. 55–66.
[134] Kurt Ruh, *Geschichte der abenländischen Mystik*, 4. vols (München, 1996), vol. 2, p. 266; Also similarly Maren Ankermann, 'Spielarten erlebnismystischer Texte: Mechtild von Magdeburg: 'Das fließende Licht der Gottheit' - Gertrud die Große von Helfta: 'Legatus divinae pietatis', in Wolfgang Bütow and Thomas Beutin, eds., *Europäische Mystik vom Hochmittelalter zum Barock. Eine Schlüsselepoche in der europäischen Mentalitäts-, Spiritualitäts- und Individuationsentwicklung. Beiträge der Tagungen 1996 und 1997 der Evangelischen Akademie Nordelbien in Bad Segeberg* (Frankfurt, 1998), pp. 119–138, p. 134; Margot Schmidt, 'Das lieht ist vernunftekeit: zur Mystik Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Paul Imhoff, ed., *Gottes Nähe: religiöse Ehrfahrung in Mystik und Offenbarung. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag Josef Sudbrack* (Würzburg, 1990), pp. 48–61, p. 60.
[135] Heimbach-Steins, 'Prophetische Mystik', pp. 121–129; on liturgy in Helfta, see Alois M. Haas, *Sermo Mysticus: Studien zu Theologie und Sprache der deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg, 1979), pp. 74–5.
[136] *FL*, for example: p. 168, p. 452, p. 502; p. 189, p. 194; p. 58, p. 135; p. 71, p. 148.

attending masses for the dead were commonly included, without any actual need for them, but she is swiftly told that these are necessary for heavenly reward.[137] Equally, Mechthild's criticism of clerical failure is inherently bound to the liturgical and sacramental tasks carried out by priests, and the moral standing and preparedness for the provision of the sacraments of ordained men certainly entered into contemporary theological discourse on the sacraments.[138] However, running alongside the ecclesiastical ritual is that of courtly literature, seen in the importance of the greeting, gift giving and clothing.[139] Marriage or bride-ship also holds a crucial place in Mechthild's imagination, the state of complete devotion to God presented as a marriage between the bride-soul and divine spouse.[140] In the state of being denoted through this spiritual marriage, a person comes fully to know of God and is able to reveal, the mystical role itself thus bound to ritual.[141]

The *FL* is often seen as an unusual text, and in comparison with the three other examples considered in this thesis, ritual, too, enters its narrative in a different way.[142] In part, this may be due to the literary influence which is well documented in the historiography of this text.[143] Just as religious and courtly genres come together in the *FL*, so too are their rituals

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[137] *FL*, p. 442.
[138] For example, *FL*, p. 68, p. 120, p. 170; On the discussion of the relationship between sacrament and celebrant, see Gary Macy, 'Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages', in I. C. Levy, G. Macy and K. Van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 365–398.
[139] *FL*, for example p. 19, p. 294; p. 67, p. 77; p. 400; p. 58, p. 93; p. 59.
[140] On spiritual bride-ship, see Kurt Ruh, 'Die Hoheliederklärungen Bernards von Clairvaux und Wilhelms von St Thierry', in Dietrich Schmidtke, ed., *Minnichlichiu Gotes Erkennusse: Studien zur frühen abendländischen Mystiktradition* (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 16–28; E. Anne Matter, *The Voice of my Beloved* (Philadelphia, 1990); on bride-ship in the *FL,* see Hildegund Keul, 'Du bist ein inniger Kuß meines Mundes,' Die Sprache der Mystik, eine Sprache der Erotik am Beispiel Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Hildegund Keul, ed.,*"vor dir steht die leere Schale meiner Sehnsucht": die Mystik der Frauen von Helfta* (Leipzig, 1999); Hildegard Keller, 'Wan got geschuof inen nie schemeliche lide: zur Geschichte der Sexualität und Scham im Spiegel des «Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit» der Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Brinker, ed., *Contemplata aliis tradere*, pp. 19–45.
[141] *FL*, p. 107.
[142] See, for example, Amtstätter, *Die Partitur*, p. 7; Andersen, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg, her Creativity and her Audience', p. 79; Albrecht Classen, 'Flowing Light of the Godhead: Binary Oppositions of Self and God in Mechthild von Madgeburg', *Studies in Spirituality*, 7 (1997), 79–98, p. 82.
[143] Ruh, *Geschichte der abenländischen Mystik*, vol. II, p. 259; William Seaton, 'Transformation of Convention in Mechthild von Magdeburg', *Mystics Quarterly*, 10 (1984), 64–72; Mark Amtstätter, *Die Partitur der weiblichen Sprache: Sprachästhetik aus der Differenz der Kulturen bei Mechthild von Magdeburg* (Berlin, 2003), p.7; Regina M. Koch, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, Woman of two Worlds', *Fourteenth Century English Mystics Newsletter*, 75 (1981), 111–131.

intertwined, examined, detached and re-woven by Mechthild to form a structure which says new things about its participants. Mechthild uses metaphor to illustrate the theological truths she perceives, and references to ritual are built into these images in the form of objects, colours and movements, image-blocks which recur throughout the text. This literary playfulness with ritual is perhaps compounded by Mechthild's relationship to her text. Unlike Agnes Blanbekinn, Angela of Foligno or the Adelhausen sister-book, Mechthild is ostensibly conveying her own experience, a position which significantly alters the nature of witness in the narrative. The mystical account conveyed by the *FL* thus assumes a form which reads less like a record of physically imagined and historically placed experience, as for example the day to day church attendance of Agnes Blannbekin or the pilgrimage of Angela of Foligno.

Background and Textual Transmission:

The *FL* is comprised of seven books of 'revelations' about Mechthild's experiences of, and insight into, the divine. It appears to have been written in three phases, with the majority written between 1250 and 1259, a further book between 1259 and 1271, and then a final book before 1282.[144] No copy of the *FL* exists in its presumed original language, the regional dialect of Middle Low German.[145] The Einsiedeln codex, the version 'discovered' by historian Carl Johann Greith in the nineteenth century, contains a translation into Alemannic based on that made by the priest Heinrich of Nördlingen between 1343 and 1345, around fifty years after Mechthild's death.[146] Heinrich, a member of the Friends of God in the Basel area, intended his translation of the *FL* as an example for the pious women under his care, where it

[144] Ibid., p. 250.
[145] Natalija Ganina and Catherine Squires, 'Ein Textzeuge des 'Fließenden Lichts der Gottheit' von Mechthild von Magdeburg aus dem 13. Jahrhundert', *Handschriftenfunde zur Literatur des Mittelalters*, 193 (2010), 64–88.
[146] Ruh, *Geschichte*, vol. II, pp. 252 –245; Carl Johann Greith, *Die deutsche Mystik im Predigerorden* (Freiburg, 1861).

was circulated and copied. The Einsiedeln copy was made by Margaret von dem Goldenen Ring.[147]

A second redaction, containing only six books, is preserved in a Latin translation dating from the mid-fourteenth century, which it has been argued descended from a translation made in the Dominican monastery at Halle during Mechthild's lifetime.[148] The Latin text in this manuscript has several marginal *FL* citations in Middle Low German, implying that it may have been based upon a now lost copy in that language which may have been the autograph or a copy of the autograph. The Halle copyist appears to have re-organised the 200 chapters of the text according to subject matter, changed some language and omitted certain erotic passages.[149] Subsequently, there was also a fifteenth-century translation back into Middle High German from the Latin.[150] A critical edition of the Latin text, *Lux Divinitatis* was published in 2004.[151]

Most recently, a fragment of the *FL* has been found in Moscow, which fits into neither redaction. It contains excerpts of the text in central German, as well as excerpts from an unknown spiritual text interspersed in the *FL.* The language used in this *FL*, however, retains traces of translation from a Middle Low German copy, for example in the rhyme scheme. In this and many other linguistic factors, it deviates from the Einsiedeln text. Dated to the last quarter of the thirteenth century, and placed in proximity to Magdeburg by its language, it is

[147] Sara Poor, *Mechthild von Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia, 2004), pp. 89–94.
[148]Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. II, p. 252. Manuscripts of this text are Basel, Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. B IX ii, a mid-14th century translation of books I - VI; Basel Universitätsbibliothek, MS. A VIII 6, early 15th century, closely related to MS. B IX ii; Poor, *Mechthild von Magdeburg and Her Book*, p. 2, p. 79.
[149] Ibid., pp. 86-87.
[150] Wolhusener Handschrift, Luzern, Romero Haus, Zentralbibliothek, Luzern, MS. N. 175.
[151] Elke Senne, Ernst Hellgardt and Margarete Hubrath, eds., *Lateinische und deutsche mystische Texte des Spätmittelalters: Mechthild von Magdeburg, Lux divinitatis - Das Liecht der Gotheit* (Berlin, 2004)

the earliest and geographically closest example to Mechthild, with the possibility remaining that it was written during her lifetime.[152]

In total 20 copies of the *FL* survive, some in excerpt form.[153] This chapter will use the most widely used edition, translated into German by Hans Neumann and Gisela Vollmann-Profe, published in 2003, which follows the Einsiedeln copy written by Margaret von dem Goldenen Ring on the basis of Heinrich of Nördlingen's text. This remains the earliest manuscript of the *FL* with all seven chapters.

An Imaginative Appropriation of Rites

Whilst the symbolic elements associated with ritual practices, both sacred and secular, are present within the *FL*, the text contains, as suggested above, perhaps surprisingly few experiential rather than theoretical examples of the rites of the Church. It is these instances which utilise sacramental and liturgical practice that will be examined here. This chapter will first consider the most explicit example of Church ritual presented as experiential in the *FL*, which is the mystical mass presented in II.4, before examining some of the seemingly more oblique references to rites of the Church and uses of ritualised action found in II.36 (a judgment scene), II.44 (divine affirmation of Mechthild's calling as writer) and VI.29 (a wedding feast). These episodes have been chosen as they both integrate ritual in a meaningful way and touch upon themes which emerge repeatedly as key themes within the *FL* and in how the *FL* presents the role of a pious believer, and of Mechthild herself. Through the exploration of the way ritual is used, including the portrayal of ritual objects and spaces as

[152] Ganina and Squires, 'Ein Textzeuge', p. 65, Moscow, Halberstadt collection, fragment 1.47.
[153] Poor, *Mechthild von Magdeburg and her Book*, Appendix 1 offers a complete list of manuscripts, other than the Moscow fragment.

well as their symbolic associations and the theologically loaded actions they recall, the relationship between ritual, writer and text will be drawn out.

I. Witnessed in Rite

Book II.4 relates a mystical experience of a Eucharistic mass, in which a pious woman is taken to a heavenly Church and drinks from a lamb. The striking differences between the mass depicted in this episode and a temporal mass point to Mechthild's creative appropriation of the frame of liturgical ritual. Moreover, whilst instances of mass and depictions of church space increase in the later books that record Mechthild's life in the convent, neither are commonplace images within the *FL*, something which makes their presence in this scene noteworthy.[154] Interestingly, the female subject of this mass, whose relationship to Mechthild is unspecified, remains anonymous apart from deprecating labels such as 'arme dirne' (poor maiden) and 'unselig phůl' (impious wretch), which, as Sara Poor notes, creates an 'instability of boundaries' between the voice of the anonymous woman and the narrator. This blurring leaves Mechthild, narrator and women closely aligned, suggesting that the purpose of this episode and the ritual it depicts relate not only to the woman but to Mechthild as well.[155] Indeed, over the course of this mystical mass, it is not the woman and her piety alone are which are validated, but, as the woman is shown to progress into a new holy role, her voice, and that of the pious women in the abstract, finds affirmation through the ritual within which she is depicted.[156] In order to understand better the way in which this ritual functions within the narrative of the episode, three aspects in particular will be extrapolated, namely the

[154] For examples of other masses see III. 5; IV.22; VI.10; VI.36.
[155] Sara Poor, 'Cloaking the Body in Text: The Question of Female Authorship in the Writings of Mechthild von Magdeburg', *Exemplaria,* 12 (2000), 417–453, p. 425.
[156] On other approaches to transformation in the *FL*, see Classen, 'Flowing Light of the Godhead', 79–98; Oliver Davies, 'Transformational Processes in the Work of Julian of Norwich and Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Marion Glasscoe, ed., *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 39–52.

deliberate construction of the form of the rite, avenues of power within the ritual, and identity as shown within and produced by the process of this mystical Eucharist.

The narrative of this episode presents two key strands which run parallel to one another: the ideological argument supporting the value of pious human will and the physical representation of this theology in the form of the mass. Thus the dual threads are woven from the outset: 'Wie nútze si, das ein mensche von gůtem willen si, noch denne das si werke nit vermag, das wisete únser lieber herre einer armen dirnen, do si nit me zů der messe komen mohte' (How it is useful for a person to be of good will, even if she cannot act upon it, this our dear Lord showed to a poor wretch, as she could not come to mass).[157] In the mind of the author act and idea are to work together. The narrative indicates that the experience is divine acknowledgement that the woman's piety (gůte[r] willen) is recognised and effective, despite her inability to fulfil the physical requirement, or work, of mass attendance. This reward for piety follows the pattern of the original *werke* which was not completed: it also takes the form of the ritual of mass.

Several aspects of the scene's ritual significance are made clear at the outset. The mass appears to take place in a heavenly place, its location described as a *schoene kilche* (beautiful church). Within this experience *schoene* appears to hold a sense of the ceremonial, as for example in the characterisation of the manner in which the scholars arrange themselves, 'do giengen si vil schone' (Then they went [from there] with great beauty/ceremony).[158] This idea of a wondrous location is re-enforced through the statement that, 'in dirre begerunge benam ir got alle irdenische sinne' (in this state of desire God took from her all her earthly senses). The woman does not reach the location of the mass herself but rather 'got [...] brahte si wunderlich hin' (God [...] miraculously brought her there). Both the removal of sensory

[157] *FL,* p. 84.
[158] Horst Laubner, *Studien zum geistlichen Sinngehalt des Adjektivs im Werk Mechthilds von Magdeburg* (Kümmerle, 1975), pp. 17–18, argues that 'schoene' here has a sense of divine power and dignity.

perception and passive transport are tropes commonly used within mystical texts to suggest a separation from the temporal and the passivity of the recipient.[159] Moreover, Mechthild not only shows the location to be transcendental but also begins to suggest that it is ceremonial space, through the dual meaning of 'schoene' and the delimitation of the space through the woman's passive transport to the church. The area is divine and inaccessible but for God's hand in moving her and requires first the cleansing state of desire, which the woman experiences upon missing mass, in order to precipitate transport to this location. Underlying this description is the implication that the use of ritual is deliberate and considered.

A central facet of this rite, as a response to the woman's pious fear and desire, is the provision of an audience to her experience. Witnesses are acknowledged as important within the ritual process, firstly in providing their tacit approval of the process they observe (rather than obstruct), and secondly in offering a record of what has taken place, in this instance the affirmation of the woman's valid piety. The importance of witnesses to this ritual is suggested in the number of witnesses, and the manner in which they are purposefully introduced as the narrative progresses. This begins with the four youths, who 'nigen [...] schone und giengen enweg' (bowed ceremonially and then went away), and who are followed by the two scholars, who 'giengen si vil schoene und sasten in dem kore' (went with great ceremony and sat in the choir).[160] Linked by their ceremonial 'goings', the narrative establishes a relationship between the groups in language and action. Yet linguistic and spatial proximity also underline the key difference between the figures, namely that whilst the first group leaves with ceremony, the second group, equally ceremonially, chooses to

[159] See Frank Tobin, 'Medieval thoughts on Vision and its Resonance in Mechthild of Magdeburg's Flowing Light of the Godhead', in Anne Clark Bartlett, ed., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 44.
[160] *FL*, p. 84.

remain. This indicates that it is the Scholars' continuing presence which is important to both author and episode, with the explicit decision to remain in the choir suggesting their role as witnesses. In fact these men become the first part of a heavenly audience: four youths, two scholars, John the Baptist (carrying the Lamb), John the Evangelist, St Peter, a youth carrying garments, a great crowd, a group of repentant sinners, a group of virtuous women, a group of chaste widows, the Virgin Mary, St Katherine, St Cecilia, bishops (unspecified), martyrs, angels and many virgins and finally God's voice.

As the proceedings draw towards the climactic point of the woman's reception of the Eucharist, Mary indicates that she should assume a position beside her at the head of the church:

> Do gieng si fúr den kor stan und sach hin in, wa únser liebú frŏwe stůnt in der hoesten stat und Sant Katherina, Cecilia, bischove, martere, engele und megde harte vil [...] Do winkete ir únser frŏwe, das si oben Katherinen stůnde; do gieng si bi únser lieben frŏwen stan.[161]
>
> Then she went and stood before the choir and looked into it, where our dear Lady was standing in the highest place and Saint Katherine, Cecilia, bishops, martyrs, angels and very many virgins [...] Then our Lady beckoned to her that she should stand above Katherine; then she [the pious woman] went to stand by our dear Lady.

This holy hierarchy gives a sense of the formal and distinguished nature of the space into which the woman is being invited. Whilst initially a likeness is drawn between the woman and the anonymous group of other women, *megde*, she actually takes her place not only above them but above even St Katherine, reinforced by the repetition that she stands specifically by the Virgin Mary. This special placement, given voice and absolute legitimacy

[161] *FL*, p. 86

by Mary herself, positions the woman in the centre of the action, thus as the centre of attention and, importantly, where she can be seen by all.[162] The movement, a procession from the entrance to the choir to her (apparently physical) elevation by Mary, appears to produce the desired effect as, 'alle die in dem kore warent, di sahent si mit eim suessen lachen an' (all who were in the choir looked at her with a sweet smile).[163] However, more than simply affirming that the woman is definitely witnessed at this point in the ritual, and with approval, the depiction further posits this witnessing in the form of a recognisable sign, that of the blessed gaze.[164] This intensifies the act of seeing and being seen, asserting its intentionality and critical nature. That the woman is meant to be seen is affirmed by the use of the line of sight for this gift exchange. She is first witnessed and then approved through the successful transfer of the blessed gift of the gaze of the holy.

The resultant still scene with Mary, the woman, Saint Katherine and other holy figures, is reminiscent of an altarpiece [see figure 00]. This is particularly the case because of the line of sight first described: the woman pauses at the entrance to the choir, 'gieng si fúr den kor stan, und sach hin in' (she went and stood before the choir and looked in), and sees before her the gathered figures as if on display, echoing the action of a nun coming to mass and glimpsing a painting above the altar.[165] It is only after this pause that she joins the 'picture', presenting a sort of *tableau vivant* which would be familiar to a monastic audience, and leave them in no

[162] As Mary was often seen as the beloved in the Song of Songs, she is a particularly appropriate example for the woman here, see Seaton, 'Transformation of Convention', p. 65; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York, 2002), p. 275.
[163] *FL*, p. 86.
[164] Burkhard Hasebrink, 'Spiegel und Spiegelung im 'Fließendes Licht der Gottheit', in Walter Haug and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang: neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte : Kolloquium, Kloster Fischingen 1998* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 157–175, p. 160.
[165] See Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998).

doubt as to the woman's status in this scenario.[166] Just as nuns would direct their devotion through such an image in their daily lives, so they are presented with a parallel image within the narrative and can understand it in the same way. It is to be looked at intently, and invites visual interaction and contemplation. In this way the reader is also included as a witness to the woman's elevation in the heavenly Mass. The form of the episode thus seeks to legitimise the woman's virtue, through the holy audience's act of witnessing the ritual in front of the text's readers, in turn asking them to affirm it through their own 'witnessing' of the narrative.

Figure 00: Altarpiece, Chur Cathedral (c. 1150-1272)

The woman further benefits from the mystical ritual provided for her, as by placing her experience of the saints and the Lamb within the context of the ritual, these figures honour the woman in a way which allows her a privileged access to their holiness. This extraordinary access also provides the woman with knowledge, as within the ritual the roles allotted to each figure reveal their theological meaning. The most important figure, as would be expected, is Christ. Seeing Christ placed in the role of the Lamb who offers his own blood as the

[166] See, for example, Jeffrey Hamburger, 'The Use of Images in the Pastoral Care of Nuns: The Case of Heinrich Suso and the Dominicans', *The Art Bulletin*, 71 (1989), 20–46.

Eucharist, Mechthild's narrative reconnects this ritual practice with that initial sacrifice around which it is centred. Christ physically sheds his blood for the repentant sinner, 'do nam Sant Johannes das wisse lamp mitt sinen roten wunden und leit es in den kŏwen irs mundes' (then Saint John took the white lamb with his red wounds and laid it against the hollow of her mouth).[167] This, in turn, places her, ritually speaking, in the position of the ideal repentant sinner, returning from exile and separation from Christ, to Christ in heaven. The woman is allowed not just physical proximity, but interaction and intimacy, in an act of receiving Christ's blood which William Seaton argues is not simply a suckling but also, in the framework of the *FL*, the truest form of greeting between bride-soul and Christ, namely the kiss.[168] After she has drunk from the lamb, the lamb in turn suckles from her heart, an offering which goes far beyond the physical actions of any recipient partaking of a temporal mass. Within the ritual context this interaction becomes meaningful and accessible to the contemporary recipients because of their personal experience with these ritual forms. Presented as a divine response to one woman's piety, a reward for a loyal servant, the ritual is unique and made to be as valuable as the subject it celebrates is valued. Indeed, the narrative shows awareness of the privilege the episode allows, illustrated in the depiction of the woman's disbelief, protestations of inadequacy and humility, for example in her cry that 'Joch bin ich leidor so selig nit' (Sadly I am not yet so pious).[169] The ritual demonstrates two things: for the woman it is a precious experience of the divine; for the audience it gives irrefutable proof – the judgement of God – which validates and elevates the subject.

Superficially, the roles allotted to various participants of the mass appear to be almost as expected. Only the male figures of Christ, John the Baptist and John the Evangelist fulfil the duties expected of the clerical role. John the Evangelist is described as the lector reading the

[167] *FL*, p. 90.
[168] Seaton, 'Transformation of Convention', p. 66.
[169] *FL*, p. 86.

Gospel, John the Baptist as cantor singing the *Gaudeamus omnes in Domino* and Christ as offering himself as the Eucharist.[170] The most prominent female figure, the Virgin Mary, does not perform the liturgy, but aids and guides her fellow female participant in her actions during the Mass, enacting a physical form of intercessory prayer. In this sense, the woman in Mechthild's narrative never exceeds her earthly status. She does not take on the role of the cleric, or have access to God but through the mediation of an intermediary: she remains without special authority. However, in terms of the narrative it is the woman who controls the action of the Mass. Mechthild allows her this control through two avenues: her voice and her sight. It is the woman's voice which initiates the Mass and all the ensuing action of the chapter. This is significant, as it becomes clear that the presented Eucharistic mass is also a ceremonial exchange of sacrifice: that of Christ upon the cross for the woman's human free will.[171] Thus it is appropriate that the ritual is initiated and stimulated by her will, or rather by her 'begerunge' (desire/ excitement) to experience Mass.[172]

In the first of several integrated snippets of speech, Mechthild offers her audience a sense of immediacy and intimacy, recording the woman's desperate plea,

> eya lieber Herre min,
> sol ich húte ane messe sin?'
>
> Woe, dearest Lord of mine,
> will I be without a mass today? [173]

[170] In a second episode recorded in VI.26, Mechthild describes that she experienced John the Baptist celebrate mass in her soul. This was criticised as John the Baptist was a layman and thus not allowed to celebrate the Mass, something which Mechthild vehemently refuted. Andersen understands the discussion in VI.26 to be a response to the mass described in II.4; see 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, her Creativity and her Audience', p. 86. Poor sees the two as separate; 'Cloaking', p. 452. The link between the two scenes remains uncertain, as in II.4, Mechthild attributes the experience to an anonymous woman, and in VI.26, claims a mass was said in her own soul.

[171] Amy Hollywood and Patricia Beckman, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c.1100–c.1500* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 411–425, p. 423 on the relationship between will, grace and the Church in the *FL.*

[172] *FL*, p. 84.

[173] Ibid., p. 84.

As it is presented in the text, it is in response to this heartfelt request that God gives the woman the experience of the mystical Mass. The use of rhyme in this couplet and the song-like form seem deliberate, giving the impression of being the first question in the sung question and response of the Latin mass: the action which follows is her answer. In this case, the woman's words both stimulate the performance of the Mass, and form the beginning of the rite, creating a conduit between her own desire and the Lord's response to her desire. The two become connected within the ritual of the (mystical) mass, both in the sense of action, the woman's question to the Lord's answer, but also in spiritual state. It is the Lord's response to the woman's already achieved state of good will which brings about the mass and her desire, which becomes physical in the beginning of the sung antiphon, which enables her to be acted upon by God.

This is not the limit of the woman's vocal control of the Mass. She makes another request, this time to Mary, 'eya frŏwe, moehte ich hie gotz lichnamen enpfan, wan es stat hie nút ze vare!' (Oh Lady, would that I could receive the body of God here, because here there is no deception).[174] The woman's hint is bold, and once again it moves the action on to a key part of the ritual, namely the taking of the Eucharist. As the woman herself has noticed, her surroundings are out of the ordinary in their virtue, depicting an awareness that the successful outcome of her contemplation offers her great honour. She will be able to receive the Eucharist untouched by the taint of earthly sin, suggested in her reference to danger. Finally it is her unprompted question as to whether she should offer a sacrifice to God which changes the tone of the Mass, 'do sprach dú arme zŏ únser frŏwe: "Sol ich oppferen?' (then the poor one said to our Lady: "Shall I sacrifice?"). Mary offers the woman the golden penny of the woman's own will, 'nu nim disen guldinen pfennig, das ist: dinen eigenen willen, und oppfer den minen heren sune' (now take this golden penny, that is: your own will, and sacrifice it to

[174] *FL*, p. 88.

my elevated son).[175] The woman's successful devotion is physicalized as a precious object, separated from her and already present, before her own self, it seems, in the divine space.[176] Her 'will' has been touched and kept in holy hands (those of Mary) in expectation of her, in an exquisite echo of Mary's biblical role as keeper of that which was to be sacrificed: Mary as bearer of Christ. This spiritual faculty, once made physical and visible, becomes integral to the ritual of the mass. It is this which leads to the climax of the text, namely the sound of God's voice, explaining directly to her that "oppferst du mir disen pfennig, also das du in nit wider nimst, so wil ich dich loesen von dem crúzze und bringen dich zů mir in min riche" (If you sacrifice this penny to me, so that you never take it back again, then I will release you from the cross and bring you to me in my kingdom), the ultimate reward for a pious soul.[177] The woman's participation occurs in the form of her will, which she verbalises in the initial plea, in the form of her questions and in the sacrificed 'penny'. Her participation is clearly active, something acknowledged in God's proviso that she never takes her 'penny' back. This suggests that she could choose to reclaim her 'penny', and that leaving it with God is a continuing, not a finite, action. It requires her constant, active participation in the future. The result is that it is the woman, and her faith, participate in the shape and outcome of the ritual.

Sight is the second avenue through which the woman is depicted to have authority within the narrative of the ritual, the reader viewing everything through the woman's eyes. So, for example, when she is initially transported to the 'schoene kilche' by God, the reader sees nothing but an empty space made larger and more daunting because of the woman's

[175] Ibid., p. 88.
[176] It is possible that Mechthild had taken this image of the golden coin directly from the practice of donation of specially produced coins during mass, see Barbara Weber, *Die Funktion der Alltagswirklichkeit in der Metaphorik Mechtilds von Magdeburg* (Göppingen, 2000), pp. 115-116; see also Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York, 2002), p. 254, who reminds of the likeness between coins and seals, and the medieval imagery of the divine mark on the soul being like marking a wax seal.
[177] *FL*, p. 88.

expressed fear that she is late and thus in error, 'das du nu bist uf gestanden, das mag dir hie kleine fromen' (that you finally got up will help you little now).[178] It is only when the four *jünglinge* appear, scattering petals in the church, that the outline of the space is clarified:

> Do sach si ein jungeling komen. Der brahte ein gebunt wisser blůmen. Die strowete er niden in dem turne und gieng hin. Do kam ein anderer und brahte ein gebunt vielaten. Die stroewete er mitten in der kilchen. Do kam aber einer und brahte ein gebunt rosen. Die stroewete er schoene vor únser frowen alter. Do kam der vierde und brahte ein gebut wisser lilien und stroewete si in dem kore.[179]
>
> Then she saw a youth coming. He brought a bunch of white flowers. These he scattered down in the tower and went away. Then another came and brought a bunch of violets. These he scattered in the middle of the church. But then another came and brought a bunch of roses. These he scattered ceremonially before the altar of Our Lady. Then the fourth came and brought a bunch of white lilies and scattered them in the choir.

One by one the tower, church, Marian altar and choir are revealed both to the woman and the reader through her observation of the actions of the youths. Because the reader can experience exclusively through the restricted view of the woman's eyes, the action, or the ritual, only progresses when it passes through her vision. The reader sees what the woman sees, and her sight is in alignment with the ritual, simultaneously identifying what she looks at as important. Thus, when the woman observes each figure or group of figures enter, it places a spotlight upon them and their importance in relation to her: they are present as her witnesses, even as she witnesses them enter the scene. This level of alignment means that the woman emerges as not simply the lens through which the reader experiences the ritual but the

[178] *FL*, p. 84.
[179] *FL*, p. 84.

focal point of the ritual itself, deviating from normal liturgical practice in which the Host, associated celebrant and altar are the focus, rather than the participant.[180] This perspective shows the value of the woman's faith. The reader follows the woman not as just another participant in a heavenly Mass – which would surely qualify as a great honour in itself – but as the central participant in a Mass created to celebrate her virtue.

The Mass represents an extraordinary progression for the woman, a process conveyed by each element of the scene. Attention is paid to ceremonial details of movement, the absence and presence of each figure involved. Elements of this sort have already been touched upon, for instance in the youths' bowing, an action then echoed by the Scholars' placing lamps upon the altar. Beginning as empty and blank, the church is filled by colour and light as the vision progresses, first through coloured petals (white, violet and red) and lamps, ultimately finding saturation in red blood upon the white lamb as the woman takes communion, and in a beam of light shining out of Mary's mouth, spurring the lamb upon the altar to offer its blood to the woman, 'ein lúhtendú strale schein usser únser frŏwe munt' (a bright beam shone out of our lady's mouth).[181] Such signs and gestures signal the ritual nature of the action, separating plain action from meaningful. More than a simple physical action, ceremonial actions also represent the moving into place of concept: the illustration and affirmation of theological ideals invisible to the eye and changes enacted in its participants. Ceremony speaks change or presence which cannot be seen, such as the transformation from sinful to forgiven. The narrative of this mystical rite portrays a physical development from emptiness to fullness, which mirrors the emotional and spiritual development of the women it frames and validates.

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[180] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Theology and Practice of the Eucharist in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 60.
[181] *FL*, p. 90.

As the space becomes increasingly textured and 'known' to the woman, in parallel with the woman's realisation and vision, so too is her presentation changed. Initially, the woman is described as an 'arme dirne' (poor wretched woman), which suggests the lowliness of her appearance. An explicit description of her attire comes only after she has seen the other groups of women in the tower, where she is described as 'úbel gekleidet und [...] krank am libe' (dressed shabbily and [...] sick in body).[182] Yet after finding a place beside the Virgin and other saints she sees herself changed in dress, wearing:

> einen roten brunen mantel, der was gemachet von der minne und nach der burnekeit der sinnen nach gotte und nach allen gůten dingen. Der mantel war gezieret mit golde und ŏch mit einem liede. Das sang alsust: 'ich sturbe gerne von minnen.' Si sach ŏch einer edeln juncfrowen glich und trůg uf irm hŏbet ein schapel von golde herlich. Dar an was geleit aber ein liet, das sang alsust: 'sin ŏgen in min ŏgen, sin herze in min herze, sin sele in min sele, umbevangen, unerdrossen.' Und ir anlút sach sich selben den engeln glich.[183]
>
> A red brown cloak, which was made of love and according to the fire of the senses towards God and for all good things. The cloak was decorated with gold and also with a song. This sang thus: 'I would gladly die of loving.' She also looked just like a noble virgin and wore upon her head a crown made of regal gold. Upon this crown was written a song, which sang thus: 'his eyes in my eyes, his heart in my heart, his soul in my soul, embraced and unimpeded.' And her face saw itself as like an angel.

This passage indicates a substantial change in dress from poor clothing to something sumptuous, celebratory and expensive. The woman is not alone in having a description of her clothing. Both John the Evangelist, John the Baptist and St Peter are brought clothes to

[182] *FL*, p. 86.
[183] Ibid., p. 86.

change into, an action Mechthild specifically mentions, 'da kam ein jungeling gros. Der brahte ein gebunt gegerwedes. Da mit gewerten sich die drie herren' (then a large youth came. He brought a bundle of clothes. The three men clothed themselves in these).[184] The groups of pious women in the tower are also identified by their clothing, for example chaste widows in 'rosevar kleidern' (rose-coloured clothing). Moreover, the presence of the song on the woman's cloak and crown suggest a use beyond the aesthetic.[185]

The progression in each of these aspects indicates shift in the woman's identity and with it her sense of belonging.[186] This change is marked by the progression in her knowledge, the development of ritual confidence or security and finally in a new position within the community which observes her. Indeed, Poor observes that the reader 'sees', or, thinking ritually, witnesses, the narrator see the newly cloaked woman.[187] At this moment in the text, the awareness of the woman's new identity is transmitted through a chain of witnesses to the woman herself.

The initial 'darkness' of physical detail is matched by the mental 'darkness' of confusion and error in that the woman falsely believes herself to have missed a mass due to her sloth, which is not only incorrect but the opposite of what is happening. However, her knowledge grows as the rite progresses, reaching its peak when the woman kisses the lamb Christ, thereby gaining intimate experiential knowledge of God. Her new insight finds physical form in the cloak she finds herself wearing, and her awareness that it is made of her own love. She has been physically gifted the scripture of her own experience. Presented to her before God and in the context of the mass, are the woman's words in the form of her new clothing - which

[184] Ibid., p. 86.
[185] For the song-cloak and gender see Poor, 'Cloaking', pp. 417–453.
[186] Indeed, Ayanna suggests that the woman being dressed in the cloak is a prelude to her *unio,* see Amira Ayanna, 'Renegotiating the Body of the Text: Mechthild of Magdeburg's Terminology of the Sublime', *Exemplaria*, 20 (2008), 385–409, p. 398; Weber notes that contemporary medieval metaphors of adoption used the language of taking a child under the mantel, which might further suggest the use of the cloak to indicate not just a new identity but a new belonging, see *Die Funktion der Alltagswirklichkeit*, p. 85.
[187] Poor, 'Cloaking', p. 343.

indeed are Mechthild's words as author of the text. These mark her new identity and portray her role. Covered in this text, she receives the blood and thereby the affirmation and approval of God.

An alignment between the woman's changing role and increased knowledge is revealed in her speech. Four rhythmic couplets appear in this episode, the first, mentioned above, starting the mass. Like the first, these moments of speech mark points of transition from one state to another. The first occurs whilst the woman is still in an earthly state and location, just before she is transported to a mystical space. The second occurs shortly after she arrives in this mystical space: 'owe du vil armú tregú, nu bist du ze spate komen; das du nu bist uf gestanden, das mag dir hie kleine fromen' (alas you most poor idle one, now you have arrived too late; that you have now arisen, that will help you little).[188] Alone and confused, this couplet represents the second stage in the woman's transformation, when her piety has not yet led to understanding, represented by her misinterpretation of the situation and the emptiness of the space. It is only once the ritual progresses that she is outwardly changed to match her new inner status, as she remarks, 'owe ich unselig phůl, wie ist mir nu geschehen? Joch bin ich leidor selig nit, als ich mich da han gesehen' (oh wretched muck that I am, what has happened to me? I am unfortunately not as virtuous as I saw myself there). Despite her protestation to the contrary, her remark signals to the audience that she has viewed her own real and visual change to one of the 'selig'. The final cry occurs when Mary invites the woman to stand beside her, which the woman recognises as a high honour, saying 'eya dú libe wolgemůt! Das nam sú vúr gůt, das dú un-edele kra bi der edeln turteltuben stůnt' (oh the kind and benevolent one! She considered it right, that the ignoble crow stood by the noble

[188] *FL*, p. 84.

turtle-dove).[189] This represents the point at which the woman takes her rightful place, as implied by the ritualized form, at the head of the church in view of all others, alongside the most divine of company, Mary and Christ. Although the woman still humbly describes herself as 'ignoble crow', her position in height and proximity beside Mary, in terms of ritualized action, indicates the fruition of the process and thus her transformation from *un-edel* to *edel*. Vocalized at the different transitional stages of the ritual, the woman is portrayed as aware that she is changed, first in the humble disbelief at her angelic appearance and then in her surprise at Mary's choice to allow her to stand beside her. By acknowledging this change the woman acknowledges the power of the sacramental act, and makes the reader aware of the veracity of her complete transformation.

The ritual process which validates the woman's inward change, demonstrated in her increased knowledge, changed appearance, position by Mary and receipt of the 'Eucharist', also positions her within a new community. Initially, the woman meets groups of people, identified by their clothing, of whom she does not feel worthy, as she was 'ubel gekleidet [...] bi den drin scharen mohte sie niena bliben' (dressed poorly[...] she did not want to stay with those three groups).[190] Yet once her appearance is changed through the cloak of love and song-crown, the woman sees angelic likeness in her own face and finds her rightful place, and belonging, in the ritual, above St Katherine alongside the Virgin. Poor explains that there was an understanding of baptism as 'putting on' or 'being clothed' with Christ (Gal. 3:27), and in this sense the process by which the woman is cloaked can be seen as rite of passage into the new group.[191] The holy people whom the woman has joined are visually demarcated by the light of *swebendige wunne*, a sign that designates them (now including the woman) as

[189] *FL*, p. 88.
[190] *FL*, p. 86.
[191] Poor, 'Cloaking', p. 437.

a group.[192] Her entry into the group has been 'paid' by the donation of the golden 'penny' of her will, which can also be understood as a mark of covenant concluded between woman and God. Whilst the act of offering a golden penny has an origin in the mass rite, here the penny is richly symbolic of a physical and final offering of self to God, the acceptance of which is clearly demonstrated in the result.[193] In short, through the process of the ritual the woman is offered new knowledge with which to identify herself and upon rejecting her fallible will, takes of the blood of the Lord and is allowed entry into a community of the heavenly holy.

Mechthild's description of ritualized action within this chapter is both careful and deliberate. Through her use of the ritual of mass Mechthild demonstrates the value of the virtue of the woman and illustrates the ultimate reward which will be offered to such a woman: heaven. Moreover, she shows that this virtue has led to a real change in the woman. It is the alignment of the woman's desire, and her will, with divine will, which is rewarded in a mystical ritual through which her 'donated' will is accepted. Appropriately, her authority in sight remains passive and in speech is entirely led by desire for God. Through her use of ritual, Mechthild is able to legitimize the change which she depicts and the voice she ascribes to the woman.

II: Trial by Rite, Trial of Rite

In contrast to the mystical mass, in which Mechthild places the unfamiliar into the familiar to frame the virtue of sacrificed will and anchor the radical validation of personal devotion in the orthodoxy of rite, in II.24 Mechthild removes sacrament from its familiar frame. Doing

[192] See Katharina Bochsler, *`Ich han da inne ungehortu ding gesehen': die Jenseitsvisionen Mechthilds von Magdeburg in der Tradition der mittelalterlichen Literatur, deutsche Literatur von den Anfangen bis 1700* (Bern, 1997), p. 54, on heavenly light in the *FL*; Margot Schmidt, 'Das Lieht ist Vernunftekeit: zur Mystik Mechthilds von Magdeburg', in Paul Imhoff, ed., Gottes Nähe: religiöse Erfahrung in Mystik und Offenbarung (Würzburg, 1990), pp. 48–61, p. 56.
[193] Weber, *Die Funktion der Altagswirklichkeit*, p. 116.

this she deliberately destabilises context, interrogating the situation through the juxtaposition of sacred and secular in order to present a divine judgment of her own role placed alongside the framework of the clerical hierarchy. Unlike the mystical mass offered to the anonymous woman, this episode explicitly records Mechthild's own experience. This account, which examines the theology of the Eucharist and the role played by ordained men in offering communion, is embedded in a prayer of supplication to the saints. Mechthild's prayer forms the first level of familiar ritualised action woven into the episode, creating a mesh into which a mystical experience and critique of clerical laxity is woven. Yet whilst this outer shape is familiar, Mechthild's contemplation plays with the audience's expectations of ritual to underline her point. The chapter vacillates between prayer and experience or revelation, not only echoing the practice of Mechthild's contemplation but persistently re-attaching Mechthild's bold revelations to the familiar and pious practice of the prayer.[194]

Mechthild begins by remembering that Christ's pure blood has flowed through her soul. This suggests a cleansing of the body, which is integrated at the beginning of her prayer, acts like a ritual of purification before she enters the sacred, ritual-oriented space of her subsequent mystical experience. Here the space of the ritual is not straightforward, as this experience is not specifically attached to a physical location, such as a church, yet the conceptualisation of a holy space is central to the metaphor which follows. It is within the space created through the process and content of contemplation that Mechthild is offered great knowledge.[195] After the cleansing of Christ's blood, Mechthild invokes Mary, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Peter and Paul. Naming each saint, a process by which she calls upon their

[194] Beckman, 'Swimming in the Trinity', p. 61, notes the reflection of the mystical process in the form of the *FL*.
[195] See Alois M. Haas, 'Mechthild von Magdeburgs dichterische Heimlichekeit', in Heinz Rupp and Rüdiger Schnell, eds., *Gotes und der Werlde Hulde: Literatur in Mittelalter und Neuzeit : Festschrift für Heinz Rupp zum 70. Geburstag* (Bern, 1989), pp. 206-223, p. 210-211; Bochsler, *`Ich han da inne ungehortu; ding gesehen'*, p. 5.

authority, Mechthild implicitly aligns her personal experience of the divine with their historical actions and tropological meaning. Moreover, once brought into the experience through Mechthild's supplication, the saints become witnesses to her subsequent experiences and conclusions. Each saint speaks to an aspect of Mechthild's character or her role as mystic, and her reflection of each figure is physically presented in the parallel of Mechthild's action with the action of that figure. So, for example, Mechthild declares that it is through her love of Christ that she stands with Mary beneath the cross, made to suffer as 'das swert des heiligen jamers snidet durch min sele' (the sword of holy suffering cuts through my soul) because of the unreliability of those in the spiritual sphere, 'das der so vil ist wandelber, die geistlich schinent' (that they are so very changeable, who appear to be spiritual/pious).[196] Mechthild's proclamation offered before or to, and also, contemplatively, with Mary, emphasises the mystic's consistent devotion to God, a metaphorical remaining with Christ through or despite suffering as Mary did, whilst simultaneously intimating the flaws or inconsistencies of other people who might at first glance appear holier than her. Likewise, Mechthild describes herself as captured with John the Baptist, proclaiming to him that she is 'gevangen' (caught) with him. This parallel captivity has resulted because 'dú ungetrúwú dirne der valscheit hat gotz wort getoetet in minem munde' (the disloyal maid of falsity has killed God's word in my mouth).[197] Mechthild's language and imagery draw upon the biblical account of the arrest of John the Baptist.[198] Furthermore, beyond a simple alignment to the general holiness of John, her poetic depiction of God's words killed in her mouth recall John's biblical role as messenger and his daring to profess God's law as the reason for his arrest.[199] Whilst this is an outward profession of humility, the explicit reference to God's word is clearly bound to Mechthild's role as mystic and act of writing and revealing. The

[196] *FL*, p. 120.
[197] *FL*, p. 120.
[198] Matt. 14:3.
[199] Matt. 11:10; Matt. 14:4.

implication is twofold: it points to the impossibility of conveying divine experience in human language, but also suggests that Mechthild, in the tradition of John the Baptist, is chosen by God and, in this divinely appointed role, will likewise face opposition. Suggesting her likeness to John the Baptist in action and character, Mechthild places herself and her task within this biblical and salvation-historical lineage, whilst rebuking her detractors. Interestingly, Tobin notes that the *FL* makes more references to John the Baptist than any saint other than the Virgin, which implies Mechthild's strong sense of the nature of her task.[200] It is important not just that the holy are present, but the way in which they reflect and relate to Mechthild and her task. These saints are called upon both to describe Mechthild's role, and to witness her piety and the mystical events she will experience. Furthermore, in the constant mirroring between Mechthild and the saints not only are they woven into her experience but she is woven into the ritual of their prayer. Split into two groups, one invoked before her vision of a pseudo-Eucharist, and one after, the authority of the Saints' witness, and the orthodoxy and familiar structure of the prayer of supplication thus surrounds the narrative of her personal revelatory experience.

Slipping from prayer into a mystical state, Mechthild sees a house so astonishing that she can barely believe that she is still alive, 'so das ich sider dem male ein lebendig mensche mohte sin' (that since this time I have been able to remain a living person).[201] As in her depiction of the woman's mystical mass, the subject is an extraordinary space whose physical power is made plain by her description of its effect as strong enough for her to believe it should have killed her.[202] Mechthild is removed from the temporal in vision and placed before the supra-temporal. Yet in this case, Mechthild does not enter the space presented to her, remaining at its boundary and entering and participating only through her sight. The space of the house

[200] Tobin, 'Medieval Thoughts on Vision', p. 49.
[201] *FL* p. 120.
[202] On the description of the proximity of mystical experience to death, see also chapter 2, p. 85, and chapter 4, p. 186.

sets up a metaphor which examines the Eucharist: in this house, God is the proprietor, Jesus is the cup and the Holy Spirit is the wine, 'der himmelsche vatter da ist der seligen schenke und jhesus der kopf, der heilig geist der luter win.'[203] Together, the Trinity forms the full cup. In God's tavern, Love acts as the waitress and Mechthild declares that she would gladly be invited into this house by Love, 'so neme ich gerne, das mich dú minne da zu huse bete', which is quite pertinent as it is Mechthild's devotion to God which has formed this mystical experience and brought her to this tavern-vision. Mechthild has already been invited in by Love.[204]

This experience draws upon the ritual of communion. The image of Christ as cup or chalice filled with the wine of the Holy Spirit which poured out by God echoes both the practices and theology of Eucharist, Christ as 'container' of salvific blood, Holy Spirit as the presence of God in the world to be consumed by the faithful. Yet Mechthild's vision breaks away from the expected and juxtaposes sacred (chalice, blood) and secular (tavern, proprietor, waitress) in a way which was surely both challenging and provocative.[205] This divine act of pouring wine and inviting the faithful onlooker into the action makes clear reference to the Eucharist, yet the practice is utterly detached from its usual context: it is removed from the space of the church and from the control of ordained clergy. Sarah Poor argues that Mechthild is able to benefit from the flexibility and familiarity of the courtly *topos* yet create distance from its secular roots by using an atypical language (namely middle lower German), and a similar

[203] Wine is also a recurrent metaphor in the FL, briefly examined by Margot Schmidt, 'The Importance of Christ in the Correspondence between Jordan of Saxony and Diana d'Andalo, and in the Writings of Mechthild of Magdeburg', in Kent Emery and Joseph Wawrykow, eds., *Christ Among the Medieval Dominicans* (Notre Dame, 1998), pp. 100–112, p. 109, for example in I.44 when the soul proclaims that she wishes to be alone and to drink 'undiluted wine' [ungemengeten win, p. 60].

[204] Ankerman, 'Spielarten erlebnismystischer Texte', p. 126, argues for love as a process of understanding in the *FL,* which emerges in the portrayal of Love as waitress in this ritual.

[205] John Howard, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, the German Mystic', in Katharina M. Wilson, *Medieval Women Writers* (Athens, Georgia, 1984), pp. 153–184, p. 158–9 suggests that this wine imagery stems from the biblical metaphor of the drunkeness of the soul' as the highest state of mystical union, found, for example, in the Song of Songs, and is related to the Eucharist. See also *FL* 2.7 and 3.3.

method can be seen in the juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar in this episode. [206] In the space of the holy tavern, the objects and act of the Eucharist are surprising, having been displaced. In fact, though some shapes are familiar, the rite is pared back to an almost purely divine context, space, action, with object and salvation created, performed and offered by God himself.

Mechthild's private witness of this heavenly Eucharist forms the sacramental foundation of the rest of her experience, providing a divine demonstration of the validity of her piety and an acceptance of her role, an approval which transmits onto what follows. Moreover in her detachment of sacrament (the Eucharist) and space (the tavern), the narrative facilitates an interplay between secular and sacred which subtly places the foundation of the Church, namely God, in contrast to its temporal practice. Through her visual communion, Mechthild opens up a critical assessment of her own role and experience, finding divine validation in her drinking of this cup through sight.[207] However, falling out of vision and resuming her prayerful contemplation, Mechthild expands this metaphorical drinking into a judgment of others, proclaiming her readiness to drink bitter gall in this life. The drinking of bitter gall, forced upon her by those false in their faith, is juxtaposed with the imagery of drinking in the metaphorical house of God she has revealed, pictorially, thematically and theologically linking the drinking (or experience) of this life to the drinking (or reward) of the next. Implied, and seemingly already proven in vision, is that her 'drinking' has been good and is currently being rewarded.

[206] Sara Poor, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, Gender and the Unlearned Tongue', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 31 (2001), 213–251, p. 225.
[207] On visual communion, see Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 63.

She then prays that God will give heavenly wine to those who pour out bitter gall for her on the earth, a merciful supplication for the Eucharistic blessing which she has been granted, something to which God agrees. God then goes further, declaring his full support of her and the power she shall have through her faith:

> Die groessi mines wunders sol úber dich gan, die loewen soellent dich voehrten, die beren soellent dir sicheren, die wolfe soellent dich vliehen, das lamp sol din geselle sin.[208]
>
> The greatness of my wonder shall go over you, the lions shall fear you, the bears shall protect you, the wolves shall flee from you, and the lamb will be your companion.

Mechthild's opponents, posited as aggressive animals, are either shown as persuaded to her cause, the bears who will protect her, or subdued, in the case of the wolves and lions. The mystic herself is protected by the lamb, symbolic of Christ, and, in connection with the preceding images of the cup and wine, associated with the Eucharist. Just as the Eucharistic imagery in the first part of Mechthild's experience is removed from the space of the church and detached from clerical action, agency reduced to God and Love, here the pious woman appears again separated from the masculine and implicitly clerical and scholastic detractors, able to access the lamb through God alone. This is affirmed in her highly critical assertion that:

> Ich bin des gewis, unde als mir untz har ist beschehen, das ich noch manigen kopf mit gallen us sol trinken, wand leider der túfel hat noch under geistlichen lúten vil manigen schenken, die der gifte so vol sint, das si es nit alleine moegent getrinken: Si muessen gotes kinden bitterlichen schenken.[209]

[208] *FL*, p. 122.
[209] *FL*, p. 122.

> I am sure after all that has already happened to me, that I shall have to drink many more cups of gall, because unfortunately the devil still has many waiters amongst the spiritual people, who are so full of poison, that they are not able to drink it alone: They must bitterly pour out for God's children [to drink].

This ominous statement, and its thinly veiled judgment of the state of the people of the Church, is followed by a mystical judgment of Mechthild, as she returns to her prayer again. In a scene which appears to lie between contemplative motif, metaphor and vision, Mechthild finds herself kneeling with Stephen before the Sanhedrin for judgment, 'Stephane, ich knúwe bi dir vor den júdschen herren.'[210] Stephen, implicitly aligned with Mechthild, faced accusation and attack for speaking out about his faith. Placed beside Stephen, Mechthild's vision suggests she too faced, or perhaps would face, opposition, and casts her in the role of the righteous voice remaining loyal to God against the false and misleading but powerful structures of temporal society who only claim to represent the divine. This is underlined when Mechthild describes herself being stoned alongside Stephen, and she explains that, 'die guote lúte schinent, die steinent mich ze rugge und vliehent und wellent nit, das ich es wisse, das es mir von inen si geschehen. Got hat es doch gesehen' (those who appeared to be good people, they stoned me from behind and then fled and did not wish for me to know that they did this to me. But God has seen it).[211]

The placement of this biblical judgment after Mechthild's visual consumption of the Eucharist and her critique of the earthly clergy seems deliberate, aligning her not only with Stephen but also with his role and with God's positive judgment of his outspoken nature. God is invoked here not only to testify to Mechthild's righteousness but as a witness to the

[210]See Acts 7 for the trial of Stephen; On the use of biblical narrative in the *FL,* see Ingrid Kastern, 'Formen des Narrativen in Mechthilds fließendes Licht der Gottheit', in Brinker, ed., *Contemplata aliis tradere*, pp. 1-18, p. 4.

[211] *FL*, p. 122

holiness of her revelation and in judgment of the error of those who would criticise her. If the previously discussed example asked the audience to imagine themselves as witnesses to the holiness of the woman presented to them, then this scene asks the reader to question how God would judge their witness of Mechthild - positively, as he did Mechthild like Stephen before her (who was rewarded with a glimpse into open heaven), or as one of the anonymous detractors, who have not remembered that God is witness to all? This defence of Mechthild's task is multiply embedded: placed beside Stephen, Mechthild is woven into biblical history; this judgment is pre-approved by the mystic's successful vision of the Eucharist and also anchored within a prayer of supplication, which brackets the experience with the beatific witness of saints, suggesting not only their approval of Mechthild but her likeness to them. The radical and visionary are framed by the comforting and familiar rite of prayer, the mystical judgement preceeded by sacramental seal.

As Mechthild then subsequently prays to St Katherine she recalls her own experience of temptation by the devil through the medium of the mass. This introduces a mystical episode which addresses Mechthild's role in relation to the Church and sacrament, demonstrating that Mechthild's devotional practice is not limited to physical manifestations of piety but relies on God. Approached by a beautiful figure carrying a glowing book, Mechthild is told she may receive the *petze* or *pax* even at times when she could not physically attend mass, a situation which echoes that of the poor woman. Mechthild's soul, however, answers that the person who has no peace cannot give peace to others, implying that the tempter is not a liberty to offer her the peace he implies in the object of the *pax* and indeed the peace she seeks to find through participation in the mass. The devil continues to try to persuade her to help him, flattering her by indicating her holiness and the power that this offers to her, giving voice to concerns over the place and abuse of the power offered to the contemplative. Finally Mechthild ends the dialogue, exclaiming:

> Du hast ein ewige siechi; wiltu gnesen so var hin un zoege dich einem priester oder einem bischof oder einem ertzbischof oder dem babest. Ich han enheinen gewalt denne alleine, das ich súndigen mag.[212]
>
> You have an eternal sickness; if you wish to be healed go and show yourself to a priest or to a bishop or an archbishop or the pope. I have no power, but alone that I can sin.

Mechthild's vehement proclamation openly recognises the hierarchy of the Church and the limits of her place and power within this structure: the ordained ministers of the Church hold functions within the community which she does not, and which, moreover, she does not claim for herself.[213] Yet the strong refutation of this role places the focus of the scene on those ordained men that do and silently recalls, once again, their failings. Whilst their role may not be hers, neither, so her implicit critique claims, are their faults. In more than one way, this speaks to the core of Mechthild's role, addressing the perceived problems with both mystical revelation and un-tempered devotion to the rite of the Sacrament. Mechthild is presented with a ritual object in order to trick her into collating ritual practice with divine presence. Yet Mechthild has already visually received communion from its real, eternal, trinitarian source, utterly detached from the Church, clergy or rite.[214] Her devotion to the sacrament remains founded upon its potential as a true union with God, and Mechthild's ability to resist temptation in the form of a false sacrament instead points to the total reliance of her revelation on God.

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[212] *FL*, p. 124.
[213] Andersen highlights the possible influence of a 1261 ruling by the local synod, which ordered beguines to obey parish priests, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg, her Creativity and her Audience', p. 86; Keul, *Verschwiegene Gottesrede*, pp. 166–172.
[214] On Mechthild's prioritisation of divine over clerical agency within the liturgy, see Koch, 'Mechthild', p. 122.

Mechthild's contemplation progresses into a discussion of her relationship, and that of her revelation, to God. In an exclamation which is deeply personal and addresses the issue of her role in revelation, Mechthild cries:

> Herre himelscher vater, zwúschen dir und mir gat ane underlas ein unbegriflich atem, da ich vil wunders und unsprechlicher dinge inne bekenne und sihe und leider wenig nútze enphahe, wan ich bin so snoede ein vas, das ich dinen minsten funken nit erliden mag.[215]
>
> Lord heavenly father, between you and me an unfathomable breath travels unendingly, in which I understand and see many wonders and unspeakable things but from which I sadly gain little benefit, because I am such a worthless vessel, that I may not even withstand the smallest of your sparks.

The image of a continuous breath of inspiration which passes between God and mystic suggests that, however imperfect Mechthild's ability to convey it, it is God himself who directs her thought and offers her knowledge.[216] The mystic's understanding of God is presented as an ongoing process, rather than restricted to moments of vision, and, just as in the suckling between lamb and the poor woman, this exchange is mutual. The biblical language of divine breath symbolizes God's power to give life to humankind as well as the process through which divine revelation became written scripture.[217] Presented as a vessel holding God's spark, Mechthild's image of herself recalls the image of Christ in a trinity of pourer, cup and wine, a cup through which she has been previously justified in vision. Like the cup, Mechthild is filled with God, in the form of the wine of the Holy Spirit or spark. A contrast is established between the Tavern Eucharist and the unattended mass, and between

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[215] *FL*, p. 124.
[216] Almudena Otero Villena, *'O du vliessender got.'* Die Sprache in Bewegung bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', *Euphorion*, 101 (2007), 301–336, p. 310, suggests that this visual representation of the communication between Mechthild and God, in the form of breath, attempts to reveal something that is inexpressible.
[217] Gen. 2:7; 2 Tim 3:16.

the first and second objects, the filled cup and the false *pax.* Mechthild is made into a truly useful object empowered by the presence of God and by her conformity to divine will, a cup in the mould of the tavern rather than a false *pax,* which can be seen as an expected object associated with the temporal ritual. The three objects, cup, *pax* and vessel are offered agency by God alone. The cup, which references the communion chalice but is destabilised through its unusual context, is in fact no object but made entirely of God himself. The *pax* appears to be sacred because of its familiarity from sacramental ritual, and thus purports in its form to offer the peace of God, yet is shown to be a deception, and demonstrates that the object alone holds no power without divine presence. Though the final object, namely Mechthild as vessel, does not appear conventional or important, she is filled by God and empowered by this presence, so that she may accept the cup in vision and reject the tempter's false *pax.*

The chapter ends with a discussion of the relationship between the senses, love and the salvation of the soul, which both relates back to Mechthild's experiences of sacramental objects and pertains to her role in revealing divine insight. A love which remains in the senses, so Mechthild is led to understand, is unbound. As it does not reach the soul, it changes according to the senses, and may fall asleep. Only if the soul sinks to the lowest depths, becoming wounded, can real love remain there.[218] Elsewhere this wounding is also expressed as the total surrender of the bride to the desire of the bridegroom, more explicitly demonstrating such wounding as symbolic of the intimate relationship between soul and God, and the correlation in turn between this intimacy and the insight offered to the 'bride' mystic.[219] Mechthild is given to understand that it is in this wounded soul that love can be bound, waiting and watching for God, 'hoeret nach der unsprechlichen stimme und siht in den unbegrifflichen lieht' (listening for the voice beyond speech and looking into the

[218] See Emily Hunter McGowin, 'Eroticism and Pain in Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light*', *New Blackfriars*, 90 (2011), 607–622.
[219] McGowin, 'Eroticism', pp. 611-612; *FL*, I.22.

incomprehensible light). [220] This state of listening and watching for God reflects Mechthild's personal gifts of insight and revelation, suggesting that her own soul has been bound by love. Mechthild states that only if the body stops trying to flap its own wings can the soul receive the fullest reward, 'mag denne der lichnam vedersclagen, so enmag dú sele das hoeste, das menschen geschehen mag, niemer ervaren' (if the body flaps its [own] wings, then the soul can never experience the highest that can happen to a person).[221] Yet once love is bound within the soul, Mechthild senses a great assurance, namely that 'an dem kan ich enkeinen val zuo dem houbtsúnden vinden, wan dú sele ist gebunden, si muos ie minnen' (on them I can find no reason for the mortal sins, for the soul is bound and she must always love).[222] The metaphor of flight used to visualise the human role fits in with Mechthild's treatment of height and depth in the *FL*, in particular with the statement offered by God to Mechthild when she questioned her task as writer: that it is inherent in its nature that God's grace flows downwards.[223] This underlines Mechthild's own passivity in revelation, intimating that if she were actively working to become spiritually great, flapping her own wings, the heights of mystical insight could never be made open to her. Conversely, the metaphor casts doubt on those who are considered great in the Church. The revelation of this insight is especially bold, as Mechthild's mystical insight, witnessed by the saints and already demonstrated in vision and divinely approved through that vision's form, suggests that she possesses bound love, and it is her own watching state that is revealed in her mystical vocation. Mechthild's own imagined freedom from mortal sin, which she perceives to be attached to this state of being, can be applied to the mystic herself.

[220] *FL*, p. 124.
[221] *FL*, p. 124.
[222] *FL*, p. 126.
[223] *FL*, p. 138.

Mechthild's narrative rises and falls through layered experience. Prayer becomes contemplative space, contemplation deepens into vision and revelation, which becomes entangled with memory, turning once more into insight and prayer. What seems initially a series of disparate pious experiences becomes a single narrative exploration and affirmation of Mechthild's role as revealer of God, centred upon the nexus of the ritual of the Eucharist. Though it is not one single ritual experience, Mechthild's narrative uses her contemplation to hold up one rite against another, to contrast a first ritual object with a second. In this episode, Mechthild plays with the familiarity and expectations of ritual. Removing ritual objects from their normal sacred context she exposes them and their context to interrogation. This process of questioning, based upon the destabilisation of the familiar through the juxtaposition of previously separated frames, validates Mechthild. Where others might be confused, Mechthild, as mystic, is able to discern the truth through her relationship with God and in this process also to authorise this very relationship and the resultant power she holds. However, these ritual references are nonetheless employed to frame the mystic's orthodoxy: her rejection of the false ritual, embodied in the object of the *pax* instead highlights the valid Eucharist which has been offered to Mechthild in vision by God. This sacrament, like her relationship to God, is offered to her independently of the clergy and the Church. In fact Mechthild's visionary experience of sacramental rituals, one which she correctly identifies as true and one which she equally correctly identifies as false, act as an orthodox testament to her union with God, which embeds her critique of the failings of churchmen.

Mechthild's interaction with ritual declares her to know the truth of God from the deception of the devil. Indeed, God affirms this several times in the course of the episode: her soul is cleansed by His blood before she begins, she is offered the Eucharist, she is judged positively with Stephen and is finally given to know that her soul is bound to God, as proven by the

divine insight afforded her. Conversely those who would judge her negatively do not fare well: They pour out bitter gall, kill God's words in Mechthild's mouth, are witnessed by God stoning Mechthild and are promised that no independent action on their part (wing-flapping) will take them to the heights that Mechthild in her humility and passivity might reach. Indeed, the entire episode provides a witness to Mechthild's role as mystic and task as writer. Surrounded by the saints of the Old Testament invoked in the supplicatory prayer in which the entirety is embedded, Mechthild's contemplation, vision and conclusion are witnessed and judged positively by these figures and by implication God.

The motifs of these two rather different communion scenes, the heavenly mass and the tavern judgment, re-occur in Mechthild's vision in affirmation of her text, in II.26. Upon being told by unnamed clerics that she should not write her book as it might be burned, God appears to Mechthild holding her book in his right hand and declares that the truth cannot be burned.[224] He explains that her book is protected by the skin of Christ and that the words of the text flow from his mouth to her soul, much like the image of breath offered in II.24.[225] Mechthild responds that if only the Lord had made this great miracle come to pass through a learned cleric some honour might be derived from it. How could anyone believe that God had erected a golden house in her? She calls herself a dirty swamp and says that the wisdom of this world would never find God there. Here Mechthild returns to previous images. This time she herself, not an anonymous woman, is the wretched one. She becomes the house, which recalls the place in which she saw God as proprietor. The house, like the penny of the poor woman's freely offered will, is golden. Once again, Mechthild is totally separated from the learned clergy. However, Mechthild receives a decisive and irrefutable answer:

[224] *FL*, p. 136.
[225] On the significance of the book, see Nigel Palmer, 'Das Buch als Bedeutungsträger bei Mechthild von Magdeburg', in Wolfgang Harms et al, eds., *Bildhafte Rede in Mittelalter und früher Neuzeit: Probleme ihrer Legitimation und ihrer Funktion* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 217–236.

> Tohter, es verlúret manig wise man sin túres golt von verwarloesi in einem groessi herwege, da er mitte ze hoher schuole moehte varen; das muos ieman vinden.[226]
>
> Daughter, many a wise man loses his precious gold through inattention (carelessness) on a great road, by which he hopes to reach a university; someone must find it.

Mechthild's authority and the problem of external criticism of her text are now intertwined with the reoccurring metaphor of gold. The golden penny offered by the poor woman becomes transformed into the treasure lost or discarded by those men of the church, so it is implied, who have sought out not spiritual devotion but worldly elevation through scholastic pursuits in the schools. It suggests, moreover, that humble women have been deliberately elected by God to fulfil a spiritual role precisely because male figures have failed in their role. Mechthild's house, too, is built of the gold that the clergy have lost, and, consequently, her book, so it is suggested, is in fact more authoritative than that produced by the great men of the Church. This gold is pre-figuratively found, accepted and ritually offered within the mystical mass.

The image Mechthild introduces of the poor woman's new cloak, covered in the text of her book, also makes a re-appearance in this vision. When Mechthild requests a reward of grace for the scribe of her book, the Lord assures her that in heaven the words this man has written will cover his outer clothing and be written in glowing golden letters over all his jewellery. This further usage, which sees the appearance of clothing-text in heaven as an eternal reward, underlines the transformation of the poor woman, as indicated by her new cloak, into a

[226] *FL*, p. 136.

participant in heaven. In this case, the previous image of the text-cloak, which encompasses Mechthild's right to reveal and acceptance by God, is fully affirmed and placed into an eternal, divine space, implicitly indicating that its wearer will also receive this honour.

III: Mystic and Sacrament, Joined in Purpose

The object of the chalice features many times in the *Flowing Light* both in Mechthild's mystical experience and in the varied metaphors adorning the theological explanations proffered to her by God in response to her contemplative piety. The use of this object is also interesting as, although celebration of the Eucharist became more common over the late-medieval period, access to the blood of Christ in celebration of communion was increasingly restricted for lay-people, who would exclusively receive the Host.[227] Although the context of the image differs significantly, Mechthild's conceptual understanding of the chalice (*kopf*) is remarkably coherent between different examples, and, perhaps understandably, deeply intertwined with the practice and theology of the Eucharist.[228] What is more astonishing, is the manner in which Mechthild builds the object of the chalice and her understanding of its place in Eucharistic practice into her conceptualization of the pious soul as bride of God and the function of the bride in speaking.

A particularly layered example of Mechthild's understanding and use of the chalice occurs in Book VI.29, entitled 'Ten parts (or pieces) of Divine Fire out of God's Nobility'. Mechthild states that this was something one 'unworthy person' saw with the eyes of their soul, whilst

[227] Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 83.
[228] The word 'kopf' means bowl or cup. Perhaps the more expected word for a chalice would be 'kelch' which stems from the Latin 'calix'. However, as Mechthild often integrates secular objects, situations and themes into her religious thought, and the context of the 'kopf' in Mechthild's thought regularly suggests a Eucharistic situation, it does not seem misleading to translate it as chalice.

considering the nobility of God.[229] The person is first shown an eternal fire burning above all things, which is God. The sparks which have come from the fire are angels, the glow of the fire becomes the saints, the embers are the pious in heaven and the smallest sparks are the pious yet to receive the glory of heaven, which recalls Mechthild describing how she could not even bare the smallest spark in II.44.[230] On the Day of Judgment, so this person is told, Jesus will come and will 'von den geneisten die allerschoenesten koeppfe machen dem Vater' (make out of these sparks the most beautiful chalices for the Father).[231] This is because, on this day of celebration, the Lord wishes to drink all the holiness which has been poured into mankind, 'in siner ewigen hochgezit [er] selber us trinken wil alle die heligkeit, die er mit sinem lieben sune in únser menschlichen sinne gegossen hat' (at his eternal feast; alternatively, wedding feast), He himself wishes to drink all the holiness which he poured into our human senses with (or through) His son).[232] However, at the feast which marks Judgment Day, it is not only God who will drink. Mechthild explains that 'ich sol trinken us von dir und du sol trinken us von mir alles, das got guotes in úns behalten hat' (I shall drink from you and you shall drink from me all the good that God has kept in us).[233] Each person will drink from the other. However, Mechthild glosses her explanation with the proviso that these shall surely only be those people who have not wasted that which God has poured into them.[234]

In this passage, the pious on earth, perhaps such as Mechthild, are literally fashioned into chalices by Christ from which God himself drinks the holiness of people. As in the tavern,

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[229] The image of chalice and wine appear multiple times across the seven books of the *FL*, for example related to thirst in book III (p. 118); book IV (p. 145).
[230] Fire is associated with eternity in the *FL*, see Paola Schutze-Belli, 'A New Perspective on the Metaphorical Language of Mechthild von Magdeburg's *Flowing Light of the Godhead'*, *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft*, 11 (1999), 211–232, p. 219.
[231] *FL,* p. 488.
[232] *FL,* p. 490; 'hochgezit' can mean both a high feast of the Church, such as Easter, as well as wedding. Given the importance of bride-ship within the *FL* it does not seem inappropriate to describe this as a wedding feast.
[233] *FL,* p. 490.
[234] On the flowing between soul and God, see Villena, 'O du vliessender Got', 301–336.

this metaphor plays with expectations of the Eucharist, as in this case the pious do not receive the chalice, but instead, becoming the chalice themselves, are offered. Moreover, it is not the Lord's blood which fills these cups, indeed it is not blood at all, but instead the holiness which has been stored or preserved in people which may now be returned, but offered in return, to God. Further still, if it is considered that Christ, who was 'made' human in order to shed His blood and cleanse the sins of the world, is like a vessel containing this salvific blood, the first historical 'chalice', then this act is echoed, though explicitly not equalled. The passage makes clear that what is offered to God is already His own, in the making of these chalices out of the pious and God's drinking of the holiness which was preserved in their bodies. Yet it is not simply piety which God has poured into people, but a holiness of the senses, *menschlichen sinne,* which are surely the *sinnen* and the *selen ovgen* with which the *unwirdig man* in this case may perceive the divine, but which also forms the foundation of Mechthild's own understanding and thus the basis for the *FL.* This posits the pious as chalices filled with the understanding of the divine or perhaps the ability to have knowledge of this. In this way, the chalice, with its function as vessel and symbolism as ritual object, draws a connection between Mechthild's act of writing, Mechthild as vessel filled with insight into the divine, and the Eucharist, a chalice filled with blood offered for the salvation of souls. A final layer within this metaphor is that of the wedding feast, which ties this chapter in with the metaphor of the soul as the long absent bride of Christ which underpins Mechthild's thought.[235] The end of time, Judgment Day, is thus appropriately marked by a wedding feast when the pious souls are finally united without end with their Bridegroom, God.[236] Furthermore, the chapter suggests that the holy are physically changed into vessels in which God preserves a holiness which is His own. This new shape is revealed by Christ on the Judgment day which is also the final wedding day of the soul. Its form, the chalice, is

[235] See Hildegard Keller, *My Secret is Mine: Studies on Eros and Religion in the German Middle Ages* (Leuven, 2000).
[236] On the wedding as an eschatological event, see Keller, *My Secret*, p. 54.

deeply significant, closing the circle of sacrifice and redemption opened by the death of Christ on the cross, which is commemorated and fulfilled in the rite of communion, and is closed here by the full redemption of good souls who finally are made in to vessels entirely filled by God, the chalice. Yet the wedding feast bears perhaps a second significance for Mechthild, because entwined with her conception of the soul as bride is her portrayal of herself as bride and the bride as perceiver and revealer of God, represented in her own role as mystic and writer.

Mechthild ends the chapter, uniting fire and chalice in her thoughts:

> Swer hie von me sprechen wil, der lege sich in das vúre und sehe und smeke, wie dú got vlússet, wie dú menscheit gússet, wie der heilg geist ringet, und manig herz twinget, das es got manigvalteklich minnet.[237]
>
> Whoever wishes to speak further of this, they must lay themselves in the fire and see and taste, how God flows, how humanity pours, how the Holy Spirit strives, and compels many a heart, so that it loves God in very many ways.

Like a chalice being forged, Mechthild suggests that a person must lay herself or himself in the fire of God, a fire which consists of experiencing God through sight and taste.[238] In her understanding, it is through this experience that each person may participate in the flowing and pouring which appears to form a bridge between humanity and God.[239] In this image, Mechthild links rite, in the form of the chalice, with the task of revelation and her conceptualisation of the nature of humanity's relationship with God. Rather than any kind of the sacraments, Mechthild suggests that sacramental and mystical tasks fulfill part of the

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[237] *FL,* p. 490.
[238] See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 26; on senses and divine understanding, see Rachel Fulton, 'Taste and See That the Lord is Sweet: The Flavour of God in the Monastic West', *The Journal of Religion*, 86 (2006), 160–204.
[239] See Keller, 'Mechthild von Magdeburg', p. 73.

same whole, and makes use of reference to sacramental rite within her narrative to show similarity.

Mechthild is distanced from this example: it is an unworthy person, not her who is offered this revelation. Yet the witness offered by Mechthild in this chapter clearly indicates her, too, as amongst those who have seen and tasted God and experienced the flowing and pouring of the relationship between God, as exquisitely documented in the *FL.* Perhaps Mechthild remains once removed from this particular revelation because it is so bold. In this new time, the Eucharistic feast is utterly re-imagined, and not only is there no priest to stand between the soul and God, but the soul itself becomes a chalice from which to be drunk and offers itself to God's lips.[240] The familiar ritual object is re-made in the mystic's mind, and, separated only by an anonymous token figure, the mystic becomes part of an intimate rite of communion (and re-union), with a body and actions, as a chalice which echoes Christ's own. Moreover, this is also presented as a wedding feast and thus in this metaphor two separate images of the pious soul as able to have knowledge of God are integrated: firstly that of the chalice, as a faithful person being filled by holy knowledge preserved by God, and secondly the recurrent metaphor of the soul as bride of God, who is offered access to insight into the divine through the loving intimacy established by her deep devotion to her divine Bridegroom. In this revelation, Mechthild weaves together multiple threads of meaning-laden imagery, both taken from her socio-cultural context and of her own making, in order to produce a rite in which marriage union and Eucharistic communion are utterly unified just as soul and God are imagined as unified in the act she has created. Using the familiar object of the chalice, Mechthild confronts her audience through its displacement in her revelation and its transformation into the human soul. Yet the object retains its ritual associations and ultimately, in affixing the soul to the centre of the rite through the forging of bride as chalice

[240] See Sonja A. Buholzer, *Studien zur Gottes- und Seelenkonzeption im Werk der Mechtild von Magdeburg* (Bern, 1988), p. 177.

and chalice as bride at her own wedding feast, Mechthild demonstrates the full acceptance of the knowledge-filled chalice which is to say the speaking bride and source of her mystical insight in God, who drinks 'back' this insight with which He had filled the soul in a final flowing-back.[241] At its heart, the wedding feast of the chalice is an act of divine approval of the speaking out of the faithful person, but also by association a seal of approval on Mechthild's act of revelation, a revelation which is bound in marriage to God.

The *FL* is deeply imbued with sacramental understanding, a conception of a Church of the faithful redeemed through the grace of the actions of Christ. This is not separate from, but rather utterly entwined with Mechthild's church-critical eschatology, which identifies a false (whether lax or deceptive) attitude towards and within the expression of this sacramental understanding. These unite in a soteriology which is both personal, justifying Mechthild, and general, validating the piety of the ordinary faithful and the mystical voice which originates in a relationship between soul and God. This understanding of the salvational relationship finds expression within the narrative in the physical structures offered by liturgical forms. Based on sacramental practice and theology, the *FL* builds a framework of metaphor which underpins its theological conclusions. Working with the socio-cultural frames and expectations of her context, Mechthild displaces sacred and secular in order to speak, this displacement perhaps also the foundation of her role as humble, an unlearned woman teaching educated men and sinners. Through the juxtaposition of familiar and unfamiliar, secular and sacred, Mechthild raises questions about God, her own role, her society, and the Church, which illuminate and underpin her task. Ritual is used to present a tangible connection to orthodoxy, to frame, delimit, but also to authorise the unexpected role, as for example in the case of the mystical mass where heavenly rite becomes a transformative

[241] The imagery of movement between mystic and God in the *FL* is comprehensively explored in Beckman, 'Swimming in the Trinity', 60–77.

reward for a pious woman. Yet in contrasting a familiar frame with deviation from the norm, Mechthild also interrogates the spaces and boundaries of perceived orthodoxy. Taking apart the elements which contribute to ritual practice and re-imagining them their hidden or underlying meaning and source in the divine are laid bare, and with it the underlying power of mystical insight.

2. Unstable Knowledge: The Place of Ritual in Ordering Angela of Foligno's Experience

When Angela of Foligno's anonymous Franciscan confessor read out to her the text of the *Memorial* he had composed, based upon their conversations, Angela immediately expressed her dismay at the account's deficiencies, decrying 'omnia ista que modo dico sunt ita male dicere quod est blasphemare illa.'[242] The association of the concept of 'blasphemy' with Angela's spiritual thought may seem a disadvantageous choice, undermining the validity of the account. However, the mystic is not alone in her scepticism. Her scribe and confessor, a friar named only as *frater* or Fra. A., makes clear that he initially mistrusted Angela's spirituality.[243] He explicitly indicates that he did not immediately recognise her holiness, instead feeling confused, ashamed and angry at Angela's behaviour (step 20, p. 19). Moreover, Fra. A's description of being forced into furtive attempts to note down Angela's confessions due to the negative reaction of other friars, 'propter timorem fratrum qui murmurabant quod sedebam cum ea in ecclesia' (Ch. 2, p. 20), does nothing to boost confidence in either the quality of the text or the orthodoxy of the witness. Indeed, it adds to the sense of suspense and danger in the account. Tension is central to the narrative of Angela's journey: that of her (changing) social position, raised by her unexpected physical performance as well as that inherent in the difficulty and imperfection of mediating an extraordinary experience.

The confessor's discomfort highlights the troubling nature of this mystic's experience. It is

[242] Angela of Foligno, 'Memoriale', seventh supplementary step, *Il liber della beata Angela da Foligno*, Enrico Menestò, ed., 3 vols. (Spoleto, 2009), vol. 1, p. 89; all Latin citations are taken from this edition, and referred to by step number, or chapter number where the material is not part of a step (on the step schematic of the *Memorial*, see below). Significant variation from the critical edition produced by Thier and Calufetti, see below, will be noted. Translations, unless otherwise stated, taken from Paul Lachance, *Angela of Foligno: The Complete Works* (New York, 1989). Angela's text has no fixed title, however it is named in the Assisi manuscript as the 'Liber sororis Lellae de fulgineo de tertio ordinis sancti franciscani,' see Lachance, *Angela*, pp. 111–117 and Tiziana Arcangeli, 'Re-Reading a Mis-known and Mis-read Mystic: Angela of Foligno', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 13 (1995), 41–78, pp. 47–48 and p. 41.

[243] On the identity of Angela's confessor, see p. 83.

not hard to imagine Angela's often physical and public demonstration of her undeniable yet un-definable difference from other people in the community was unsettling.[244] Yet the element of unease is something which the narrative does not seem to wish to suppress entirely. Though such a position flirts with danger it also offers power, drawing attention and, correctly manipulated, offering visible, performed proof of Angela's mysticism as something which cannot be entirely explained or confined.

Instead, the difference displayed in Angela's spirituality is framed through use of the familiar, and anchored through its interweaving with the orthodox, historically accepted and socio-culturally rooted structures of the Church. Just as mysticism was often perceived by the mystic as a constant ebb and flow of delightful proximity to, and dreaded absence from, the divine, so too Angela's text swerves between the familiar and the radical, the comforting and the shocking, seeking, in revelation, a balance between absolute truth on the one hand, and cultural acceptance and understanding on the other. This chapter will examine the potential place and function of ritual in creating this equilibrium, and will argue that the ritualised is implemented as a socio-cultural language in order to try and make the extreme or liminal nature of Angela's experience both tangible and acceptable.

In her study of the *Memorial*, Tiziana Arcangeli insists that, 'Angela's experience resists any attempt at being structured according to a linear form', and moreover that efforts, such as those in earlier scholarship, to uncover a biographical chronology are a fiction pandering to 'Western male paradigms.'[245] Yet, whilst Archangeli is correct in her assertion that markers

[244] On the similarities between signs of good and evil influence, see Nancy Caciola, 'Mystics, Demoniacs and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 142 (2000), 268–306, p. 273.
[245] Arcangeli, 'Re-Reading a Mis-known and Mis-read Mystic', p. 58; on the imposition of linear forms by male biographers, Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), p. 38, on the lack of structure of women's experience, p. 49.

such as birth, marriage or profession are of little importance to the *Memorial*, order is nonetheless imposed upon Angela's nebulous lifetime of interaction with God. This begins with the presentation of her experience as a journey of thirty steps, 'triginta passus vel matationes quas facit anima, que proficiscitur per viam penitentie, quas inveniebat in se' (*Incipit*, p. 5). Recalling the tradition of Jacob's ladder, this depiction grounds Angela's personal expression of (enacted) theology within Church tradition, whilst introducing an element of control and of ritual.[246] Angela's progression becomes a meaningful series of steps towards God, echoing the devotional practice of pilgrimage and the liturgical act of procession.[247]

The text known to historians as the *Memorial* is the first of two texts ascribed to Angela's thought, the second known as the *Instructions*. The *Memorial* relates Angela's penitential journey of thirty steps, condensed by Angela's scribe into twenty steps and seven 'supplementary steps', the first of which is cited as a continuation of the twentieth step. All told there are twenty-seven steps, divided into nine chapters, the first of which contains the first twenty steps. The *Instructions* are a collection of responses, sometimes called letters, which expand upon Angela's theological insight. The number and order of these letters varies, and it is probable that they circulated without the *Memorial*.[248]

Angela's spiritual journey from laywoman to Franciscan tertiary, depicted in the *Memorial*, is punctuated by experiences through which her bodily and spiritual senses are purified,

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[246] See for example John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Colm Lubheid and Norman Russell (London, 1982)

[247] To Rome and to Assisi, see *Memoriale,* chapter 3. On procession, see Stijn Bossuyt, 'The Liturgical Use of Space', in Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 187–206, p. 193–196; Brian Møller Jensen, *Medieval Liturgical Texts in Italian Manuscripts* (Lewiston, 2006), p. 187.

[248] See Dominique Poirel, 'Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu', *Revue d'histoire des Textes*, 32 (2002), 225–264; Massimiliano Bassetti, 'Un manoscritto francescano?', in Menestò, ed., *Il Liber*, vol. 1, pp. 21–46.

offering her the stages of contrition, confession, satisfaction and absolution required in penance.[249] Within the *passus*, Church rite is explicit in celebration of the liturgical Feasts such as Candlemas and Easter, typical for a religious woman.[250] Yet references to ritual are also implicitly embedded in the depiction of Angela's devotion: in questions and proclamations expressed in the mystical moment, in the exchange of objects, both physical and metaphorical, and in the movement between, and use of, sacred spaces. This integrated presence of the ritualised conveys its implicit value within the narrative, and, if rituals are not envisaged as inflexible acts, but rather as a malleable and expressive form, it asks how they might be employed or imagined as a structure offering support and affirmation to an extraordinary life.

In many ways, the depiction of Angela of Foligno's spiritual journey from a secular life in Foligno to Franciscan tertiary is typical.[251] The *Memorial* itself offers few clues, with the only datable events being the Pontificate of Celestine V (1292-1294), and the death of Angela's confessor and scribe (d. 1296).[252] She married and had children before seeking a religious life. Nothing further is recorded of this family, though Angela's donation of properties and goods suggest that she and her husband were reasonably wealthy.[253] With the establishment and increasing popularity of the mendicant life in the thirteenth century, and in particular the emergence of the tertiary orders, it was common for women to follow a

[249] Giovanni Benedetti, *La teologia spirituale di Angela da Foligno* (Firenze, 2009), p. 31; Ronald Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (New York, 2012), p. 25.
[250] For instance fifth supplementary step (p. 58) and seventh supplementary step (p. 74); on Franciscan women and the development of liturgical practice, see Lesley Knox*, Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Leiden, 2008), p.160; on liturgy in Angela, see Molly Morrison, 'A Mystic's Drama: The Paschal Mystery in the Visions of Angela da Foligno', *Italica*, 78 (2001), 36–52; Joy Schroeder, 'The Feast of the Purification in the Liturgical Mysticism of Angela of Foligno', *Mystics Quarterly*, 32 (2006), 35–67.
[251] See for example, Hans Joachim Schiewer, 'Preaching and the Pastoral Care of a Devout Woman in Fifteenth-Century Basel', in Miri Rubin, ed., *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 126–134.
[252] Arcangeli, 'Re-Reading', p. 50. M. J. Ferré estimated a timeline, proposing Angela was born in c.1248, married in 1270 and lost her mother, husband and children in c.1288, see Lachance, *Angela*, p. 16. This approach has been criticised by Arcangeli, 'Re-Reading', p. 49.
[253] *Memoriale,* eighteenth step, p. 13.

religious vocation after marriage and children, though this was by no means a new phenomenon.[254] Indeed, the explicit rejection of familial obligations and secular wealth was reminiscent of the story of St Francis, who, according to his hagiographers, turned from life as a mercenary and cloth merchant only after 'boiling in the sins of youthful heat'.[255] Though hagiographical accounts tended to show women's holiness as constant, there were also women who became religious after or alongside secular roles, such as Marie d'Oignies (d. 1213), Umilità of Faenza (d. 1310), and Maria Mancini of Pisa (d. ca. 1431). [256]

It cannot be claimed that Angela's situation as a once married woman seeking to follow the spiritual life was in itself threatening. Yet Angela's promptly answered prayer that her mother, husband and children should die and the subsequent donation of her property, were active choices demonstrating an explicit rejection of her marital and maternal role, a disavowal of her old life which facilitated a new form of life and a new status. The active and independent form of Angela's life, especially given the valuable and powerful nature of her claimed insight into divine things, contributed to her problematic role.[257]

[254] On religious life after marriage, see Katherine Clark, 'Purgatory, Punishment and the Discourse of Holy Widowhood in the High and Late Middle Ages', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 16 (2007), 169–203; on women in penitential orders see Mario Sensi, 'Anchoresses and Penitents in Thirteenth and Fourteenth-Century Umbria', in Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Chicago, 1996), pp. 56–69; Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (New York, 1994), pp. 114–127; Michael Goodich notes that whilst approximately one quarter of saints canonized in the thirteenth century were women, the majority were cloistered, 'The Contours of Female Piety in Later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History*, 50 (1981), 20–32, p. 20; Emore Paoli, 'Santità, culto dei santi e agiografia nell'Umbria del XIII secolo', in Enrico Menestò, ed., *L'Umbria nel XIII secolo* (Spoleto, 2011), pp. 167–223, p. 204.

[255] Thomas of Celano, 'First Life of St Francis', First Book, chapter 2, in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, R. J. Armstrong, J. Hellman and W. J. Short, eds. (New York, 1999), pp. 180–297, p. 184.

[256] Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 32; *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*, trans. Margot H. King (Toronto, 1993) chapter 13, p. 48; Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner, *Dominican Penitent Women* (Mahwah, NJ, 2005).

[257] Christina Mazzoni, 'The Spirit and the Flesh in Angela of Foligno', in Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, trans. by John Cirignano and notes by Cristina Mazzoni (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 79–103, p. 82.

The Text and its Production:

The *Memorial* makes clear that Angela herself never put quill to parchment.[258] Instead, Fra. A. describes, with unusual care and attention to detail, the process of (apparent) co-authorship by which the composition of the text was facilitated, initially recording their discussions on scraps of paper and later reworking them.[259] Angela would then listen to, or possibly read what had been written, and offer her critique.[260] This depiction has been interpreted as demonstrating the divergence between the voice of Fra. A and the voice of the mystic within the narrative, a separation offered as evidence for the active involvement of the mystic herself in the creation of the written narrative.[261] According to the description given in the *Memorial*, Angela related her thought to her confessor in the vernacular, who translated it into Latin.[262] The narrative names the confessor only as a 'frater scriptor,' who was a blood relative and special counsellor.[263] He is most frequently referred to as Arnaldo within the scholarship on this text, on the basis of a fifteenth-century Avignon manuscript, whilst the Perugian manuscripts name him as Adamo, and Mario Sensi has put forward the name of a Franciscan brother Andrea.[264] The *Memorial* ends before Angela's death, probably between 1297, the earliest date set for the approbation of Colonna attached to the text, and 1300, the probable year of Fra. A.'s death.[265] The *Instructions* record a collection of exchanges between Angela and her spiritual children and a brief obituary. None has a named recipient,

[258] The level of Angela's literacy remains unclear, see Arcangeli, 'Re-Reading', p. 56; *Memoriale*, chapter II, p, 16.
[259] *Memoriale*, chapter 2, p. 18.
[260] Ibid., p. 19.
[261] Cervigni, 'Angela da Foligno's 'Memoriale'', p. 341–343; Lachance, *Angela*, p. 51.
[262] *Memoriale*, chapter 2, pp. 15–19.
[263] Ibid., p. 18.
[264] Lachance, *Angela*, p. 47, p. 343, n. 136; J. Ferré, 'Le opere autentiche di Angela da Foligno ritrovate dopo sei secoli di dimenticanza', Studi Francescani 10 (1924), 113–126, p. 114; Mario Sensi, 'Angela nel contesto religioso folignate', in Clement Schmitt, ed., *Vita e spiritualità della beata Angela da Foligno. Atti del convegno di studi per il VII centenario della conversione della beata Angela da Foligno (1285–1985), Foligno 11–14 dicembre 1985* (Perugia, 1987), pp. 39–96, p. 43 and 'Fra Bernarrdo Arnolti il frater Scriptor del Memoriale di Angela?', in Menestò, ed., *Angela da Foligno terziaria francescana* (Spoleto, 1992).
[265] Lachance, *Angela*, p. 50; Ludger Thier and Abele Calufetti, *Il libro della beata Angela da Foligno: edizione critica* (Grottaferrata, Rome, 1985), p. 50.

and although their tone and content indicate a connection to the group of friars and, possibly, other devotees surrounding Angela, it is unclear whether any of these texts originates from Angela and the scholastic approach of some letters has further called their authorship into question.[266]

There are currently twenty-eight known manuscript copies of Angela's text.[267] These divide into two main versions of the text, which appear to be different redactions, one of which one contains a shorter *Memorial* and fewer *Instructions*. This shorter version is contained in five manuscripts known as the Belgian family, held in Brussels, Bologna and Liège.[268] Of the manuscripts which contain the longer version, the oldest extant manuscript is Assisi, Biblioteca Communale, MS. 342, which is dated to the early fourteenth century. [269] The relationship between long and short versions has been much debated. Ludger Thier and Abel Calufetti argue that the shorter text was an earlier version, on the basis of textual analysis, through which they found that the long version contains what they identify as more historical and biographical coordination, greater thematic arrangement, as well as additional material taken from further witnesses, and changes to Angela's vocabulary and style.[270] This theory has since been refuted by Giovanni Pozzi and Dominique Poirel, who suggest that the

[266] Lachance, *Angela*, p. 82–83, for example Instruction 31.
[267] Dino Cervigni, 'Angela da Foligno's "Memoriale": The Male Scribe, the Female Voice, and the Other', *Italica*, 82 (2005), 339–355, p. 339; Arcangeli, 'Re-reading', p. 45; for early modern copies, see Lachance, *Angela*, pp. 114–117.
[268] B1: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS. 2864 –2871, dated 1409; B2: Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale, MS. 11851–11853, late fifteenth-century; B3: Brussels, Societé des Bollandistes, MS. lat. 398, early fifteenth-century; B4: Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, MS. lat. 1741, c. 1485; B5: Liège, Bibliothèque du grande séminar, MS. 6.g.4, 1420–1430, see Dominique Poirel, 'Le *Liber* d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un *exemplar* disparu', *Revue d'histoire des textes,* 32 (2002), 225–264, p. 229.
[269] Poirel, 'Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno', p. 229; Poirel lists the other key medieval manuscripts of this longer version as I: Roma, Biblioteca S. Isidoro, MS. 1/141, late fourteenth-century, Latin; M: Milano, Biblioteca Trivulziana, MS. 150, late-fourteenth/early fifteenth-century, Veronese; R: Rieti, Biblioteca Paroniana, MS. Fontecolombo 9, fifteenth-century, Latin; S: Subiaco, Biblioteca del Monastero di S. Scholastica, MS. 115, dated 1496, Latin.
[270] Thier and Calufetti, *Il Libro*, p. 112.

evidence presented by Thier and Calufetti is not conclusive. [271] There is no consensus regarding the, now lost, *exemplar* from which the extant manuscripts were copied.[272] Masimilliano Bassetti has identified the hand of the Assisi text with that of other manuscripts recorded in the 1381 Assisi inventory, namely MS Perugia 1046 and MS Assisi 572, which Bassetti determined to share significant similarities in their size and layout with MS 342.[273] The content of these manuscripts, Bassetti argues, indicates a Franciscan setting, and the style of initials and rubrication links them to the Assisi scriptorium.[274] On the basis of the chronology internal to the text and the marginal annotation in MS 342 which adds Angela's obituary notice, Attilio Bartoli Langeli argues for a dating of between 1306 and 1309, a dating further strengthened by the dating of MS Perugino 1046 to between 1310-1312.[275] In light of the complexity of this manuscript's history, this chapter will use the transcription of Assisi Biblioteca Communale MS 342 edited by Menestò, although significant divergences in the text highlighted by the edition produced by Thier and Calufetti will be noted.[276]

The subject and structural devices of the *Memorial* result in an interplay between the disorder (or radical nature) of Angela's unenclosed mystical spirituality and the order found in familiar ritual structures, and it is this dynamic which drives the narrative. Certain passages in Angela's penitential progression not only mention ritual but feature detailed use of ritualised elements, which hold significance for Angela's role. Three such episodes, namely a

[271] Giovanna Pozzi, *Il Libro dell'esperienza* (Milan, 1992); Emore Paoli, 'Le due redazioni del Liber: il perché di una riscrittura', in Giulia Barone and Jacques Dalarun, eds., *Angèle de Foligno: le dossier* (Rome, 1999), pp. 29–69, p. 43.
[272] Paoli, 'Le due redazioni', p. 43, p. 33.
[273] Bassetti, 'Un manoscritto francescano?', p. 28–29.
[274] Ibid., p. 26, p. 28.
[275] Langeli, 'Il codice', pp. 13–16; Bassetti, 'Un manoscritto francescano?', p. 27.
[276] Apart from excerpts translated by John Cirignano in 1999, the most recent complete translation is that published by Paul Lachance in 1993. This is translated from the critical edition of Thier and Calufetti. An outdated translation, though occasionally cited, is that produced in 1909 by Mary Steegman on the basis of a significantly altered later text which collates *Memorial* and *Instructions*, Mary Steegman, *The Book of Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno* (London, 1909). This contains, for example, only 18 steps. Steegman is used, for example by Ruth Smith, 'The Mystical Self in the Book of Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno', *Mystics Quarterly*, 24 (1998), 8–22.

proto-Eucharist in the fourteenth step, a mystical marriage in the nineteenth to twenty-first steps, and a celebration of Communion in the fourth supplementary step might be considered to mark particular stages of Angela's spiritual development, offering first preparation for, then proclamation of, and finally the validation of Angela's mystical role.

I: Preparation:

The fourteenth step employs the sacrament of the Eucharist to frame and explain Angela's unique personal journey. Angela sees Christ, who commands her to put her mouth to his side-wound, 'ponerem os suam in plagam lateris sui', and allowing her to see and drink the blood from it, 'sanguinem eius fluentem recenter ex latere suo'.[277] Such images, which have Eucharistic overtones, were not unusual within the genre, for example Mechthild of Magdeburg drank from the lamb, and Agnes Blannbekin also drank from Christ's side-wound.[278] Interestingly, whilst in Agnes' case Christ's wound is specifically described as not flowing, this aspect is emphasised in Angela's account, which may speak to the nurturing role the receipt of blood plays in Angela's development.[279] The interpretation of the vision voiced by Angela within the narrative, and the position and function of this rite within the thirty steps, suggest its significance. The vision begins as Angela stands to pray, a prayer which Angela states allowed her greater knowledge of Christ. She sees Christ on the cross more clearly, which is interpreted as being given a greater awareness of Christ: 'hoc est quod dedit michi maiorem cognitionem de eo (Christo)'.[280] The narrative implicitly suggests that it is as a result of Angela's act of devotion, standing piously in prayer, that she receives her vision of Christ, the deeper knowledge of God that this conveys and the intimate Eucharist which follows. Indeed, as the thirty steps form a penitential journey, which, detailed in

[277] Fourteenth step, p. 10.
[278] Mechthild, *FL*, Book II, chapter 4; Agnes Blannbekin, *Vita*, chapter 140.
[279] On the parallel of Christ's wounds and the breast, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkley, 1986), pp. 271–2.
[280] Fourteenth step, p. 10.

previous *passus*, includes physical and emotional acts of penance, it is Angela's behaviour in conjunction with divine intervention which has brought her to a position, spiritual and physical, in which such a vision can occur. Angela moreover states that it was clear to her that Christ's flowing blood was intended to cleanse her, 'dabat michi intelligere quod in isto mundaret me', an interpretation of which Angela is mystically made aware through her close contact with Christ. [281] Only after this does she begin to understand the passion of Christ, and to receive a great, though not unfettered, joy, 'letitiam magnam, quamvis ex consideratione passionis haberem tristitiam'.[282]

The fourteenth step manifests a turning point for Angela, marked by her mystical 'transference of sacrality' in communion, which both affirms in her own mind and demonstrates for her audience a distinct movement away from her previous life.[283] Before this vision each step is mainly, though not exclusively, concerned with the remnants of Angela's secular and sinful life: weeping over sinfulness (first step), the need for a confessor (second step), awareness of mercy coupled with harsher penance (fourth step), the realisation of her role in Christ's suffering for sin upon the cross (seventh step), the stripping of clothing and promise of chastity (eighth step), the need for poverty and to abandon all earthly ties (twelfth step). Angela's feeling of intense sorrow and grief dominate the first thirteen steps. She describes being made aware of her sin, 'qua profunde dabatur michi cognitio omnium peccatorum' (sixth step), how the soul is 'in dolore' (third step), and even the experience of sorrow to the extent that the soul felt no love, 'non sentit amorem set sentit dolorem' (second step). Whilst the fourteenth step is not the first time Angela experiences a vision of God, which occurs in the tenth step, it marks an emotional transition as the first time Angela feels

[281]Ibid., p. 10.
[282]Ibid., p. 10.
[283] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London, 1993), p. 52.

joy in the presence of God.[284] Whilst Angela is never totally free of sorrow regarding her own sinfulness and that of humanity, and the suffering of Christ, her joy is an outward sign of a shift in the relationship between Angela, God and the earthly life. After her mystical Eucharist the stages are imagined as increasingly positive, indicating spiritual improvement and increasing distance from the earthly: she receives the Pater Noster deep within her heart (sixteenth step), receives consolation in her dreams (seventeenth step) and feels God so vividly that she forgets to eat, a poignant marker of her movement away from temporal life (eighteenth step) and a precursor to the promise later offered to her that even her eating is pleasing to God. Indeed, the order within Angela's own journey reflects liturgical practice, in which confession and penance, represented in the first thirteen steps, were a prerequisite for receiving Communion, which Angela receives as a gift offered directly from the body of the living man Christ.[285]

Allowed to come into contact with Christ himself, it is through her experience in the fourteenth *passus* that Angela appears to begin to accept that even she, who considered herself utterly sinful, could be, and indeed had been, forgiven by Christ. Furthermore, it demonstrates to her that she will now become not only a good Christian woman or follow a religious life but be spiritually blessed with mystical experiences of the divine which brought the person of Christ himself to her lips. Through the physical acceptance of blood from Christ, Angela is also presented with and accepts affirmation of her own spiritual transformation.

Receiving Christ's blood from His wounded body, something which she understands to be a

[284] The sorrow-joy dynamic in the *Memorial* is discussed by Benedetti, *La teologia*, p. 117.
[285] Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi*: *The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 85; the connection between penance and the Eucharist is made several times within the *Memorial*, for example in the fourth supplementary step.

deeper form of knowledge of the divine, Angela is spiritually cleansed by God. This action offers interesting points of comparison with the action of the tenth step, in which Angela witnesses Christ plucking each individual hair from His body as an enumeration of humanity's sins.[286] During this earlier scene, for all its tortuous physicality and intimacy, Angela never touches any part of Christ's body.[287] Although it foreshadows the wound-episode in the presence of the body and the theme of human sinfulness, Angela herself remains firmly distanced from body and theological knowledge, to which she is allowed full access for the first time during the Eucharist.

The graphic image of Christ tearing out His hair is unusual and not directly biblical. Hair-tearing finds a two-fold use in the Old Testament, firstly as a motif of grief and secondly to enumerate countless sins, symbolism absorbed into Angela's vision of Christ plucking out his hair. [288] This is a personalised demonstration of human error, including Angela's own, a unique re-enactment of the divine solution for the redemption of mankind through the suffering of the man-Christ.[289] Individual hairs are torn out in a vivid and flesh-bound demonstration of each human sin for which Christ continues to suffer. [290] This actually causes Angela to weep tears which burn her flesh, 'lacrimabar tam ardenter quod lacrime coquebant carnem'; this is in itself a spiritual gift which allows her to be washed and cleansed by her

[286] *Memoriale*, chapter I, step 10, p. 8.
[287] On a layered use of sensory imagery in the *Memorial*, see R. V. Coralli, *La retorica dei sensi spirituali in Angela da Foligno* (Bologna, 2010), p. 56.
[288] Isaiah 22:12; Psalm 40:12, 69:4. The psalms were widely used and commented on in the Middle Ages, for example by Augustine, Cassiodorus and Thomas Aquinas, and integral to both liturgical and personal devotion, see John Eaton, *The Psalms* (London, 2003), pp. 51–54. Augustine's commentary on Psalm 40:12 (39:12 during the medieval period) glossed that just as a person could never count the number of hairs on their head, so they would never be able to know the number of their sins and that although each appeared small, they were great in number, 'Ennaratio in psalmos XXXIV, 22' in E. Dekkers and J. Fraipont, eds., *Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, XXXVIII (Turnhout, 1956), p. 441; Katherine L. Jansen, 'Like a Virgin: The Meaning of the Magdalen for Female Penitents of Later Medieval Italy', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 45, (2000), 131–152, p. 133, gives an example from Domenico Cavalca's vernacular *vitae patrum*, of the Magadalen tearing out her hair in penance. Agnes Blannbekin's *Vita* offers an Epiphany vision of a dove plucking hair from the heads of the faithful, symbolising their afflictions, chapters 47–50.
[289] This Christocentric expression was common, echoing the influential *Meditationes vitae Christi* and *Stimulis amoris*, see Paoli, 'Santita', p. 207.
[290] Angela's hair appears as one symbol of her secular transgressions, Mazzoni, 'The Spirit', p. 81.

pious response and devotion to Christ.[291] Yet it is in the vision of the wounds, in which Angela places her mouth to Christ's side and drinks blood directly from his wound, reflecting the New Testament fulfilment of the covenant, that the divine and earthly are able truly to connect despite the sinfulness of humanity.

This Christ-centred Eucharist here denotes, even instigates, a turning point in Angela's spiritual being: following the shame and sorrow which initially compelled her to seek out a confessor and begin her journey toward the Divine, it is only once she is offered this salvific blood that she begins to experience the joy of God. Whilst the image of hair-plucking is uncomfortable, Christ's offer of His own blood which follows is, within the framework of salvation history, by far the more significant. Angela's transformation mirrors that between Old Testament and New, the distant God and divine sorrow becoming an intimate God and shared sorrow, a closeness between man and God which develops into the consolation which signifies Angela's mysticism.[292] It is once Angela is spiritually and physically 'touched' by Christ that her path is changed. Indeed, after Angela imbibes Christ's blood her spirituality takes on a more physically active nature, for example in the pilgrimage of the nineteenth to twenty first steps. This journey and Angela's experience of collapse in the Basilica are foreshadowed by the fourteenth *passus*. Having acquired a deeper knowledge and experience of the crucified Christ, Angela prays for the realisation of her desire to die in a manner as horrific as her saviour, seeking to be marginalised both in the treatment of her body and a shameful location, 'quia Christus fuit crucifixus in ligno, me crucifigeret in una ripa vel in

[291] *Memoriale*, chapter I, step 10, p. 9; On tears, see Kimberly-Joy Knight, 'Si puose calcina a' propri occhi: The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Thirteenth-Century Religious Women and their Hagiographers', in Elina Geertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York, 2012), pp.136–155.
[292] This echoes the late medieval image of the *Deus-homo*, see, for instance, Michael Robson, 'Saint Bonaventure', in G. R. Evans, ed., *The Medieval Theologians* (Oxford, 2001), p. 191; Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 91.

uno vilissimo loco vel in una vilissima re.'[293] These references to space and body find an interesting parallel in the basilica scene, which, as argued below, portrays the crucifixion of Angela's body. Humbly protesting that she was not worthy to die like a saint, her desire in fact invites her reader to draw a parallel between her and such figures, prefiguring the spiritual elevation and pain which she will soon experience in Assisi.

II. Proclamation:

Angela's mystical experience of God recorded in the nineteenth to twenty first steps forms a focal point in her development. This is a long and complex episode, which frames both Angela's role and that of Fra. A. Whilst the entire process is embedded within the physical ritual form of a pilgrimage, this journey also becomes the rite of Angela's marriage to Christ, in itself a rite marking her passage into a new role.[294] It has four parts, which play with space and body, voice and witness to demonstrate Angela's divinely sanctioned identity: Angela's prayer in Foligno, the journey (via Rome) to Assisi, an experience of Christ in the Basilica of Assisi and the return to Foligno, and a final period of conclusion in Angela's cell. This open proclamation and definition of Angela's role is not only pivotal in terms of Angela's role as mystic, but critical in the cross-over from the mystical moment of confession-revelation, to the confessor's production of a revelation-text, the text at hand. This constantly shifting equilibrium between the one who reveals and the revelation, the witness and the text, forms an undercurrent throughout the *Memorial*. This relationship emerges in the way in which Fra. A, as witness and narrator, is embedded within this episode, which will be examined first, before looking at the way the narrative makes use of the ritual forms of pilgrimage and marriage to define and authorise Angela's mystical voice within her community.

[293] Fourteenth step, p. 10.
[294] On the socially binding implication of becoming a *sponsa Christi*, see Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010), p. 33.

In the Basilica of Assisi, Angela receives a vision which forms the striking centre piece of her pilgrimage. The importance of this vision is underlined by Fra. A's decision to interrupt the narrative of the twenty-seven steps just before this scene to discuss his role in relation to Angela and her revelation.[295] Tantalising the reader-listener with the promise that the next step is especially significant, 'qui est valde mirabilis et magne revelationis divine et multum longus et multe delectationis et familiaritatis divine', Fra. A emphasises the consequence of this episode.[296] Moreover, Fra. A's declaration that the events in the Basilica were Angela's first confession of her mystical experiences to him suggests the relevance of this rite to the depiction of the relationship between mystic and confessor, and Angela's role, within the narrative. Furthermore, the account embeds Fra. A in the process by which Angela is shown to make the transition to her new role and the affirmation of her public voice in this role, revealing him to be an eyewitness Angela's experience in the Basilica. [297]

For Angela, her rite of transition is depicted as beginning when she receives a new height of divine consolation, 'primam consolationem magnam de dulcedine Dei,' standing in prayerful contemplation in her cell.[298] Feeling this, Angela loses her ability to speak and falls to the ground, causing her companion to believe Angela is dead. At an unspecified time after this, again in prayer, Angela declares to God that she wants Him alone and is consequently told

[295] This window shows St Francis standing before Christ, both figures facing outwards. Christ, large and majestic behind a small Francis, rests his left hand upon Francis' left shoulder, with His right arm wrapped around Francis. Both figures appear to hold the same golden cross before them. Francis is elevated, as though held up in Christ's embrace.
[296] *Memoriale*, chapter I, p. 15.
[297] Whilst the *Memorial* does not appear to seek Angela's canonization, it is possible that Fra. A's interest in witnesses reflects increasing attention to the role of accurate and reliable testimony in the canonization process, see Michael Goodich, 'A Note on Sainthood in the Hagiographical Prologue', *History and Theory*, 20 (1981), 168–174; on the relation between experience, witness and text in the mystical genre, Walter Haug, *Brechungen auf dem Weg zur Individualität: Kleine Schriften zur Literatur des Mittelalters* (Tübingen, 1995), p.503.
[298] *Memoriale*, chapter I, p. 14.

that once she has finished distributing her belongings, the whole Trinity will come into her.[299] This forms the foundation of the rite, making clear Angela's identity going into the process, and the intended outcome of the ritual.

During the second stage in this ritualised progression, Angela travels first to Rome, to request permission to follow the Franciscan rule, then to Assisi, before returning to Foligno.[300] Arriving from Rome, at the crossroads between Spello and Assisi, the Holy Spirit speaks to Angela and declares that He is a messenger answering her request. He promises that He will go with her to Assisi, speaking with her constantly, and furthermore that whilst this consolation will end after Angela's second entry into the Basilica, He himself will never leave Angela as long as she loves Him.[301] During this time Angela's identity begins to be changed in a worldly sense, as she receives permission to follow the Franciscan rule and sells her possessions, but also spiritually, as the dialogue with the Spirit assuages her doubts.

In the third stage, which marks God's public proclamation of covenant with the mystic, Angela enters the Basilica of Assisi and genuflects, told by God that He will hold her as close as Christ held St Francis in the window she could see, promising that He will not leave, Angela then turning to see Him. Upon his departure, Angela, witnessed by Fra. A, her companions and other friars, cries out unintelligibly, and feels her joints dislocate. On the way back to Foligno, Angela talks constantly, finding it almost impossible to keep silent. The Holy Spirit gives her the sign of the cross, which she feels within her.

Reaching Foligno and the final stage of her transition, Angela experiences a great consolation which results in eight bed-bound days and a desire to die. As this consolation ends, Angela is

[299] Ibid., p. 15.
[300] The journey from Foligno to Rome, Rome to Assisi and back to Foligno is approximately 320 km.
[301] *Memoriale,* chapter III, p. 22.

made aware that the Holy Spirit does not want her to lie down whilst He is leaving, but to stand, prompting her to rise up. She is then told that she holds the ring of the Holy Spirit's love: that she is engaged to Him and will never leave Him. After His departure, Angela is able to smell indescribable fragrances.

The narrative of Angela's pilgrimage is imbued with ritual, borrowing not only from the rite of marriage, seen in the ring and the exchange of promises, but also from ritualized forms of prayer reflected in her standing and genuflection. The divine control of Angela's speech and movement is interwoven with these references to ritual behaviour, before either the presence, or conspicuous absence, of witnesses. Indeed, the impact of divine insight on Angela's interaction with others is central to this account, which defines Angela through three interrelated relationships presented within the rite: that between Angela and God, that between Angela and the community and that between Angela and her confessor-scribe. In a sense, ritual is employed to define and regulate the interaction of different worlds: the when and what of Angela's access to the divine; the how and when of Angela's revelation of this 'world' to her companions and her confessor; the how and what of the transmission of this information between confessor and textual narrative. Angela's contemplative acts and separate encounters with God over the course of the pilgrimage emerge to form a ritualised process which explains, proclaims and validates her new life as a tertiary and mystic.[302] Through its depiction at the beginning of the episode, Angela's prayer for three things becomes the foundation which sets the theme and purpose of her pilgrimage. This prayer is for the feeling of Christ's presence, the ability to observe the Franciscan Rule, and true poverty, requests fulfilled in the ritual experience which follows.[303] Highlighting aspects of Angela's secular life which were problematic within her spiritual role, such as her marriage

[302] Benedetti notes Angela's 'transformazioni più profonde e radicali' through contemplation, however does not address the presentation of this within the narrative, *La teologia*, p. 35.
[303] *Memoriale,* Chapter III, first supplementary step, p. 21.

and wealth, the prayer indicates the implicit purpose of the rite she undergoes, which addresses these unresolved issues. Indeed, the sense of transition which is already inherent within the sacrament of marriage, as well as in the text's allusion to death, are affirmed in symbolic markers Angela receives, such as a cross, which Angela bears internally, the engagement ring, and her newfound ability to smell extraordinary scents.[304] Representing a physical and spiritual progression, the narrative of the Assisi experience both announces and seeks to validate Angela's identity and purpose, as well as that of her confessor, within the interaction of movement, space and spiritual revelation.

The preparation for Angela's marriage to Christ and her rite of passage into her new social position as mystic begins when she experiences a new closeness to God in contemplation, 'fuit maior consolatio quam unquam fuissem experta'.[305] This causes her to rise involuntarily, and remain standing for a long period whilst alone in her cell, 'oraveram constipata et solo', leaving her in such delight, 'in illa delectatione,' that she loses control over body and speech, 'iacui et perdidi loquelam'.[306] Whilst Angela's rise and fall mirror the actions of contemplative prayer, they are portrayed here as utterly controlled by divine influence, in the first instance of many demonstrations of divine control over Angela's body and speech, and Angela's total passivity in her role.[307] Such physical acts of prayer were imagined ideally to translate into a spiritual experience which encompassed the whole body, bringing body and spirit closer to the divine.[308] For Angela, this ideal is realised, divinity and mystic acting harmoniously in testimony to her piety. This explicit and visual transfer of control, shown through the divine orchestration of body, silence and revelation, forms a key part of Angela's

[304] See Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, 1960); on the sign of the cross, Benedetti, *La teologia*, p. 172.
[305] *Memoriale*, Chapter I, nineteenth step, p. 14.
[306] Ibid., p. 14.
[307] St Dominic, *The Seven Ways of Prayer*, in Simon Tugwell, ed., *Early Dominicans* (London, 1982).
[308] A form of physically bound theology also integrated within liturgical celebration, see Gary Macy, 'Commentaries on the Mass in the Early Scholastic Period', in Lizette Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1997), pp. 25–60, p. 34.

transition to her new role. Angela's unconfirmed and unclear social position and motivation at the beginning of the pilgrimage – as a wealthy widow, potentially free to govern herself, possibly still controlled by her husband's family – is dispelled through the demonstration, on multiple levels, of the absolute and powerful nature of divine control over her (and her willingness to accept this).[309]

Angela's experience both begins and ends in her cell, depicted as a space for personal contemplation, even becoming tomb-like in the perception of Angela as dead, a state both traditionally connected with the need for a rite of passage, and also associated with medieval monasticism, in which professed parties became 'dead' to the secular world.[310] Emerging from this enclosed and private space, Angela begins a transition from an old life, to which she has now died, into a new one provided by God, in an echo of New Testament theology. It is as she travels to Rome to ask for the grace of poverty that she feels God has granted her the poverty she seeks. In light of God's previous promise that once Angela had renounced her worldly goods she would be filled with the trinity, 'quando hoc quod facis factum fuerit, tota Trinitas veniet in te,' this is presented as a preparatory act which allows progression towards a new state of being.[311] As Angela reaches a meeting of three paths, and chooses to follow the narrow road, 'viam artam,' to Assisi she continues to be made ready for the role which will be given to her in Assisi.[312] If crossroads represent a point of change or a decision faced, then here they take on a spiritual aspect with the three roads recalling the presence of the Trinity. Moreover Angela's position on the narrow road to Assisi suggests that she was now on the

[309] On will and mystical agency, see Amy Hollywood, 'Gender, Agency and the Divine in Religious Historiography', *Journal of Religion*, 84 (2004), 514–528, p. 514, p. 519.
[310] On those in the monastic life as dead, see Giles Constable, *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 22; tomb-like imagery is common in relation to anchorites such as Wilbirga of St Florian (d. 1313) as well as tertiaries isolated within their family home such as Catherine of Sienna (d. 1380); On the designation of spaces of female agency, including tombs, see Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women and Their Biographers', in Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 1–43, p. 23.
[311] Nineteenth step, p. 14.
[312] Twentieth step, p. 22.

correct path, the straight and narrow road a biblical metaphor of a life following God (Matt. 7:14, 'quam angusta porta et arta via quae ducit ad vitam et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam'). Indeed, Angela's choice is affirmed as correct when it is on this new path that the Holy Spirit speaks to Angela, declaring:

> Veniam tecum intus in te usque in Sanctum Franciscum et, ut perpenderet aliquid, et volo venire loquendo tecum per viam istam et non dabo finem locutioni et tu non poteris facere aliud quia ego levavi te.[313]

> I will accompany you and be with you until the Basilica of St Francis, so that everyone can carefully assess, and I wish to speak with you on this road and I will not finish speaking and you will not be able to do otherwise for I have raised you.[314]

Once again, Angela's communication is divinely controlled, her silence dictated by, and in contrast to, the constant revelation of the Holy Spirit. Angela is left with no choice but to receive this word passively. In addition, she is isolated from her companions by the fact that she alone can hear God. The relationship between Angela and her companions, or her immediate community, is again characterised by the absolute control of her ability to speak and, consequently, to reveal to those around her. Her role is depicted to be in her voice, her voice demonstrated to be guided by God alone, and it is this voice, or rather its silence, that marks her as distinct from her companions.

The connection between Angela's task and speaking is demonstrated in the progression of

[313] Chapter III, p. 22.
[314] My translation and emphasis. The Assisi text diverges from the others which read 'et non perpendent aliqui', a negative rather than a positive clause, as well as a change of final verb to 'ego ligavi te'. Both versions nonetheless place emphasis on the complete control of God and the importance of witnessing.

this faculty over the course of the journey to Assisi. When speaking with her on the road, the Spirit makes clear that Angela will be rendered totally unable to speak with other people, 'si totus mundus veniret modo tecum, tu non posses modo eis loqui, quia tecum venit totus mundus.' Just as her movements submit to divine will, so too is her voice subjugated to God, her intimacy with the Holy Spirit intervening in her relationship with her companions.[315] Before her pilgrimage Angela's voicelessness causes the perception that she is dead. On the road, the Spirit declares that he will accompany her and all will judge it, but that Angela will have no choice but to listen to God's revelation, 'non poteri[t] facere aliud.'[316] The Spirit later states that her companions will remain oblivious to this presence, 'tu venis cum sotiis et nullus conscit,' and moreover that should Angela try to speak to her companions she will find herself restricted, that she can only think of God, 'non cogitare aliud nisi de Deo.'[317] Angela notes that her companions seem disturbed by her demeanour, 'perpendebant languore meum', her impromptu audience becoming witnesses to her spiritual development. In a metaphor made physical, Angela's awakening into her new life is mirrored as her outward state changes from death and stillness, to (outward) silence and movement, a preparation of Angela's voice which will culminate in the revelation which is central to her new role as mystic.[318] Two separate threads, witness and speech, are brought together for the purpose of revelation. Angela moves from the private space of her cell, witnessed by only one person, to the transitional space of her pilgrimage to Assisi, during which her companions are mentioned by the Holy Spirit six times. Increasingly witnessed, becoming closer to the Holy Spirit, and developing in status, in highlighting the presence of those surrounding her, this passage places the mystic's new role as amongst (and for) other people. The metaphorical

[315] First Supplementary step, p. 22.
[316] Ibid., p. 22.
[317] Ibid., p. 23.
[318] Chiara Frugoni, 'Female Mystics, Visions, Iconography', in Daniel Bornstein and Roberto Rusconi, eds., *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (London, 1996), pp. 130–164, p. 52; John Coakley, 'Thomas of Cantimpré and Female Sanctity', in Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger, eds., *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person* (New York, 2007), pp. 45–55, p. 45.

process of insight within the soul made public in the act of revelation is physically integrated within the depiction of Angela's ritualised transition to mystic, physically journeying out of her cell and into the light.[319]

A second aspect of this ritualised period of the preparation of Angela, community and reader for the role into which Angela is about to be initiated, is overcoming doubt. Through the conversation recorded between Angela and the Holy Spirit, the narrative creates a second opportunity for the introduction and resolution of doubts within the context of ritually embedded mystical experience, this time regarding not Angela's temporal life but her spiritual ability and its origin. Angela's special role is made clear in the Holy Spirit's profession of love for her, 'filia et sponsa, dulchis mihi [...] ego diligo te multum', but also in the suggested intimacy of mutual rest expressed in the affirmation that 'ego colcavi [...] me in te, modo colca te tu in me.'[320] Yet Angela's response, understanding herself to be frail and concerned that she might be corrupted by this elevation, simultaneously reassures the audience of Angela's humility and underscores the power of her relationship with the divine. This careful balancing act is inherent to the mystical mode, crucial to Angela's role, and central to the ritualised transition which publically places her in this identity as mystic. An emotional exchange ensues, with Angela overwhelmed by the memory of her sinfulness, and the Holy Spirit seeking to remove her doubts by showing Angela, and the readership, her freedom from this state, now that she is entirely under God's control. This proof takes several forms. First Angela hears a divine voice proclaiming her relationship to God, that she is His creation, 'ista est mea creatura,' a statement affirmed an ineffable feeling of divine sweetness

[319] Jane Duran, 'Mechthild of Magdeburg: Women Philosophers and the Visionary Tradition', *New Blackfriars*, 87 (2006), 43–49, p. 44.
[320] First supplementary step, p.22. The Assisi text varies from the others here, which record 'ego collocavi vel pausavi me in te, modo colloca te tu in me vel quisce tu in me' (Thier and Calufetti, p. 180), a difference which does not change the meaning of the passage, but amplifies the existing tone.

and in a gift of knowledge of Christ's Passion.[321] The second doubt Angela raises is that if the Holy Spirit were with her as He appeared to be, then her soul ought not to be capable of enduring it, 'non deberet posse sustinere.'[322] The Holy Spirit corroborates Angela's suggestion, recalling that one person, to whom He had said less than to Angela, fell to the ground, lost their senses and became blind, in another forceful depiction of the potential power of Angela's relationship with the Spirit. However, the Spirit reminds Angela that any gifts and revelations she might display, that which constitutes her mystical role, remain completely under divine control, 'nichil potest esse vel fieri nisi sicut ego volo.'[323] In this stage of Angela's transition, both mystic and reader are being prepared for the subsequent stage of this rite, the more socially difficult and divisive events in the Basilica. Reminded that God governs everything, and told that others had collapsed beneath divine presence, in this dialogue the next stage of Angela's experience is glossed and authorised by the voice of the Holy Spirit, the physical results of her upcoming marriage 'set apart', in advance, as a particular signifier of God's presence.[324]

The relationship between mystic and God is externalised in the Basilica of Assisi. Entering the church, Angela describes how, upon genuflecting and seeing the stained glass window depicting St Francis embraced by Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals to her the reward with which she would soon be honoured:

> Ita te astrictam tenebo et multo plus quam possit considerari oculis corporis. Et modo est hora quod te, filia dulcis, templum meum, adimpleo quod dixi tibi quia pro ista

[321] First supplementary step, p. 22
[322] Ibid., p. 23
[323] Ibid., p. 23
[324] The idea of setting apart is both biblical, for example Ps. 4:3, Rom 1:1, and associated with liturgical practice, see Anscar J. Chupungo, *Handbook for Liturgical Studies* (Collegeville, MN, 2000), p. 8, p. 136.

> consolatione dimitto te, set te non dimittam unquam si me diliges.[325]
>
> Therefore I will hold you tightly and much more than it is possible to examine with corporeal eyes. And now the time has come, sweet daughter, my temple, to fulfil what I have said to you, for I will take away this consolation from you, but I will never leave you if you love me.

This is a radical promise, not only in its suggestion of the connection with God of which Angela is assured but moreover in its confident alignment of Angela, a formerly unchaste married woman, with Francis, founder of an order and *alter Christus*.[326] Just as Angela's pilgrimage begins with a prayer to follow the Franciscan rule and to be able to feel Christ, so the answer to these prayers, and therein the affirmation of Angela's new life and role, are also linked to the saint. Furthermore, placed in the portal of the church, viewing a particular window, the body of the Basilica are explicitly drawn into Angela's mystical experience. It does not seem coincidental that the holiness of both historical saint and building are incorporated upon Angela's receipt of this most extraordinary claim. Intertwined with saint and sacred space, Angela is embedded within Franciscan history through the use of the physical building within the narrative and framed by the orthodoxy of the space, a use of connections which serves to anchor and authorize her mystical role.

The mystic's genuflection and (involuntary) collapse in Assisi echoes her standing and (voluntary) genuflection in Foligno, a repeated motif which offers a sense of order within this stage of her mystical journey. In this moment she sees the image of Francis and receives the Holy Spirit's promise of embrace. Once again the Holy Spirit makes reference to the outward

[325] First supplementary step, p. 24.
[326] The role of this embrace in Angela's theological progression is examined by Benedetti, *La theologia*, p. 168.

perception of this embrace, revealing that Angela will be held more closely than can be seen with bodily senses, *oculis corporum*, implying the confusion amongst witnesses who have not been able to see the complete spiritual picture which indeed follows.[327] Instead the division between Angela's mystical sight and the temporal sight of other witnesses creates a private moment between the mystic and her most desired future spouse, which concomitantly illustrates the necessary distance between the mystic and her audience, those who see with the eyes of the body and those who see with the eyes of the spirit. This illustrated difference between Angela and her companions, demonstrated to originate in a position achieved through her relationship with God, is underlined when she turns herself to see God with both spiritual and bodily eyes, 'respexi ut viderem etiam oculis corporis et mentis.'[328] Her curiosity is answered by an incredible sight not of a physical person, but, perhaps, the essence of the majestic goodness of God, 'rem plenam, maiestatem immensam quam nescio dicere, set videbatur michi quod erat omne bonum.'[329] Finally allowed not only to hear but to see God, which, although without physical description is clearly intended to have a physical aspect engaging both bodily and spiritual eyes, Angela is elevated through her relationship with the divine.[330] It is significant that, as one of Angela's more audacious experiences of God, this encounter occurs not, as in the case of her previous aural experiences, on the open road, but protected within the sacred and orthodox space provided by the Basilica.

After this (quasi) face-to-face meeting with the divine, the Holy Spirit withdraws from Angela, causing her to cry aloud and question why, 'amor non cognitus, et quare scilicet me

[327] First supplementary step, p. 24.
[328] Ibid., p. 24.
[329] Ibid., p. 24.
[330] It remains somewhat unclear within the text whether the image Angela sees with corporeal eyes is that of Christ depicted in the window, or whether this corporeal aspect part of a new visionary manifestation. Moreover, it is unspecified whether the image of God Angela sees is as Christ or as Father, though it was generally held that no person could see the face of God and live until the last judgement. It is possible that the narrative has been left deliberately unclear at this point for this reason. See Bernard McGinn, 'Visio dei: Seeing God in Medieval Theology and Mysticism', in Carolyn Muessig and Ad Putter, eds., *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (London, 2006), pp. 15–33, p. 15.

dimittis?'[331] She reports that she did so without shame, unable to say any other words, 'non poteram vel non dicebam plus.'[332] Angela recalls that her speech is physically restricted, 'intercludebatur a voce,' making her communication unintelligible, and she is left feeling as though she wants to die, remaining alive having become painful, 'dolor magnus erat michi quia non moriebar et remanebam.'[333] This pain is echoed in her subsequent sensation of her joints being dislocated, 'omnes compages mee disiungebatur', a torment which had come to be understood as part of the physical suffering of Christ in the crucifixion.[334] Angela's *imitatio christi* displays her affinity with Christ for all to see, and is suggestive of the mystic's rebirth into a new role, positing relationship with Christ and new role in relation to one another. [335] Her position between temporal and eternal, and her journey between two modes of life is violently embodied in this dislocation of her joints, which physically separate just as she is separated from the Spirit.[336] Moreover as she chokes over the words in her throat, it even seems as if such divine knowledge becomes physically caught in her imperfect earthly body, becoming inexpressible. The repeated themes of her experience emerge once more: her body aligned to divine will, her voice controlled by God, and her interaction with those around her, her community and witnesses, coloured by the intervention of the Spirit. This validation of the nature and origin of Angela's potential revelation is carefully situated

[331] Ibid., p. 24.
[332] Ibid., p. 24; MS A records 'stringo' (draw tight), which makes little sense here, MS S records 'strido' (shriek).
[333] This trope of unintelligible speech takes many forms in the hagiographical tradition, both disturbing, such as the wailing of Mezzi of Adelhausen, see J. König, 'Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen', p. 175, and beautiful, such as the heavenly song of Christina Mirabilis, *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*, trans. Margot H. King (Toronto, 1986), p. 21.
[334] First supplementary step, p. 24; Morrison, 'A Mystic's Drama', p. 44. Dislocation is an image of the *imitatio christi* found, for instance, in Jacapone da Todi's Laude 93, 'Donna de Paradiso', see *Jacopone da Todi: The Lauds*, Serge and Elizabeth Hughes, trans. (London, 1982), p. 278.
[335] For Angela's embodied spirituality, see Mazzoni, 'The Spirit and the Flesh', p.80; on the use and destruction of the body in mystical experience, see Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Sexuality, Gender and the Body in Late Medieval Women's Spirituality: Cases from Germany and the Netherlands', *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 7 (1991), 35–52, especially p. 45; relation between spiritual and temporal bodies in Paul Martin, 'The Body in the Realm of Desire: Gendered Images on the Horizon of Desire', *Mystics Quarterly*, 30 (2004), 99–125; ascetic practice as realization of the flesh, Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 294.
[336] This sensation is also described in the fifth supplementary step, and in Instructions 1 and 4, as well as an explicit reference to a pain which crucified Angela in the seventh supplementary step; on the later medieval ideas of suffering as penance, see Ronald K. Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012), p. 28–30.

within the ritualised development of her relationship with the divine, as she physically moves towards her mystical marriage. The union, shown in reference to ritual form, signifies her total connection to God and thus underpins her ability to reveal divine word.

Yet Angela is not alone during this encounter, but positioned publically in the entrance-way of the Basilica, observed by an audience of Fra. A, several friars, a man who was Angela's travelling companion, and other male and female friends, who become witnesses to this ritualised display of Angela's 'engagement'.[337] Fra A., however, records that whilst Angela's companions watched her actions with reverence, he found her actions distressing and shameful, watching Angela with 'verecundia et indignatione' and consequently forbidding her from coming to Assisi again.[338] This is portrayed as a dramatic performance, attracting the friars who hear Angela's screams. The juxtaposition of action and setting that occurs when Angela screams within a space designated as sacred makes it attention-grabbing.[339] Also, the account suggests that because Angela's strange outburst occurs in Fra. A's spiritual 'home', this makes it even less comprehensible to him, explaining that Angela 'venerat Assisium ad Sanctum Franciscum, ubi ego morabor conventualis, et strixerat multum sedens in introitu hostii ecclesie.'[340] In contrast to Fra. A's negative perception, the source of Angela's disturbance is not only pious but divine: the lacuna created by the recent presence of the Spirit in Angela and thus also in the church. The mystic's holiness separates her from her audience, but also divides the witnesses into those such as Angela's companions who were faithful, and those who, like Fra. A, were doubtful. This echoes the 'position' of her

[337] *Memoriale*, chapter two, p. 18.
[338] Ibid. p. 18
[339] Barbara Newmann, 'Possessed by the Spirit: Devout Women, Demoniacs and the Apostolic Life in the Thirteenth Century', *Speculum*, 73 (1998), 733–770, p. 764; on adverse reactions to extreme the behaviours of religious women, see Patricia Deery-Kurtz, 'Marie of Oignies, Christine the Marvelous and Medieval Heresy', *Mystics Quarterly*, 14 (1988), 186–196, p. 186. A similar separation between mystic and companions is established in Agnes Blannbekin's *Vita*, chapter 44.
[340] Twentieth step, p. 18.

revelation, which, in the hands of Fra. A, also lies between understanding and obscurity.[341] The moment which marks Angela's promise of total union with God within her rite of passage to mystic, is also the moment in which she first reveals her purpose and identity to Fra. A. Thus the moment in which Fra. A assumes his identity as confessor-scribe of her revelation is also embedded within her ritualised progression, and her rite of marriage to Christ.

Seated in the entrance-way, Angela is symbolically placed between the secular world outside this building and the realm of the Church inside.[342] It is a liminal space, which reflects the unusual nature of Angela's display, but is not a space without a function in the ritual life of the community, participating, for example, in festival processions and the marriage liturgy.[343] Whilst Angela's marriage is not concluded here, her relationship with God is presented publicly, if passively, through her collapse and cries. These physical signs were witnessed in the church portal, a space whose association coloured the perceived meaning of the action for an audience accustomed to using this space for the exchange and sealing of agreement between parties.[344] In Angela's case, this is perhaps further influenced by parallels drawn between the church as a local temple of heavenly Jerusalem, and the *porta caeli*.[345] In the process of Angela's marriage to Christ, the familiar associations of the entranceway create a

[341] On the desirability of difference, see John Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of the Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth Century Franciscans and Dominicans', *Church History*, 60 (1991), 445–460, p. 450.
[342] The only other specific reference to the architecture of a church is in *Instruction* 26, the record of a vision of the Portiuncula during which Angela finds herself unable to move as she crosses the threshold of the chapel.
[343] Sible de Blaauw, 'The Church Atrium as a Ritual Space: The Cathedral of Tyre and St Peter in Rome', in Frances Andrews, ed., *Ritual and Space: The Proceedings of the Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington, 2011), pp. 30–43, p. 40; Albrecht Classen, *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Age* (Berlin, 2009), p. 18; Sarah Hamilton and Andres Spicer, eds., *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 9–10; Nancy Spatz, 'Church Porches and Liturgy in twelfth-century Rome', in Thomas J Heffernan and E. A. Matter, eds., *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* (Kalamazoo, 2001), pp. 327–368, p. 342; Bynum argues for a deliberate use of the liminal as an escape from the benefit of high status, which certainly resonates with the projection of Angela within the *Memorial*, see *Fragmentation*, p. 34.
[344] Donal Cooper, 'Access all Areas? Spatial Divides in the Mendicant Churches of Late Medieval Tuscany', in Andrews, ed., *Ritual and Space*, pp. 90–107, p. 100, p. 102.
[345] Møller-Jensen, *Medieval Liturgical Texts*, pp. 247–248.

stage on which Angela's intended and promised union with God, the basis of her role, is presented to the community. The contract of her new role is physically written on her body, as performed within the sacred space of the church entrance, where marriage rites were performed, before witnesses.[346] What occurs in the church is thus not simply a display of affective spirituality, but the witnessing of a contract of promise between God, mystic and community. Additionally, whilst Angela's dramatic reaction disturbs her confessor, who does not understand it, this moment of rupture facilitates the mystic's revelation to her confessor. Mary Giles suggests that 'the enraptured woman was bound to live by the terms and consequences of her performance', yet in this case, Fra. A's witness offers Angela the chance to gloss her action.[347] It is through this pivotal moment that the relationship between receiver and recorder, experience and text takes its shape, that the narrative is born. In this case, both trauma and resolution are embedded within the rite of passage, where the ritual act forms a microcosm of the wider community, and offers security through its sacred frame and (some) control, through the presence of interrogating witness.

Travelling back to Foligno after this public display Angela is much changed. In contrast to her journey to Assisi, and a sign of the development her mystical role over the progression of the rite, she relates how she now finds it difficult to be silent, wishing to speak with her companions about God constantly, 'et per viam veniebam loquendo de Deo et erat michi magna pena tacere, set conabar abstinare, sicut poteram, propter sotietatem.'[348] It is poignant that this ability, even need, to speak, occurs after she has seen God and her body has been broken. Furthermore, Angela's desire to speak occurs after the visual declaration of a promise

[346] The idea of witnessed bodily experience as covenant is echoed in Rosemary Drage-Hale's suggestion that the memory of mystical experience is mapped onto the female body, 'Taste and See for God is Sweet: Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience', in Anne Clark Bartlett, ed., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 3–14, p. 10; Morrison highlights Angela's body as a stage, 'A Mystic's Drama', p. 38.
[347] Mary Giles, 'Holy Theatre/ Ecstatic Theatre', in Bartlett, ed., *Vox Mystica*, pp. 117–128, p. 123.
[348] First supplementary step, p. 24.

before witnesses in the Basilica. Angela and her role are secured through performed proclamation (the collapse) within a sacred space whose very walls delineate her scope and whose history speaks to her orthodoxy. Only once her position within the wider community, spiritual companions, confessor and other friars alike, had been publically presented and marked within the physical frame of the sacred, or affirmed in ritual form, is she made free to speak with them of divine things.

Indeed, Angela's new ability is given a divine seal, which is again suggestive of this process as a rite of transition. She is told by the Holy Spirit that she will receive proof that it is God whom she has heard, in the form of a cross and love of God which she will bear within herself for eternity, 'hoc signum erit tecum in eternum.'[349] As though a physical object, Angela even feels this mark within her, 'sentieba[t] illam crucem corporaliter.'[350] This sign is private, knowable first-hand only by Angela herself. Yet the mark is nonetheless quasi-physical, and because it has been guaranteed for eternity, it represents a permanent gain of spiritual significance, showing her progression into a new identity. The cross forges an important link between Angela's spiritual and bodily life. Having received it, the properties of that body itself are changed and the activities of eating, drinking and sleeping, which might signify the earthly body and the requirements of temporal flesh, become transformed into acts of worship, 'tota vita tua comedere et bibere, dormire et omne tuum vivere michi placet.'[351] Bound to the earthly through her former marriage, family and social situation, Angela has never been definitively removed through re-location or enclosure, remaining to an extent within the same community in which she had previously played a different role. A response to this embodiment, the placement of the cross within her body does not reject Angela's temporal physicality but integrates it by converting it into a spiritual attribute.

[349] First supplementary step, p.24.
[350] Ibid., p. 24.
[351] Ibid., p. 25.

In Foligno once again, Angela enters the final stage of this experience, marked by a feeling of peace, a lack of words and a desire to die. She lies in a state of languor for eight days, during which she describes that she could barely move speak to pray, 'parum potu[it] loqui nec dicere 'Pater Noster' nec multum surgere.'[352] Yet as the Holy Spirit proclaims her again as His temple and delight, she realises that she is not positioned as she is meant to be, and rises to her feet, 'noluit quod ego tunc in recessu iacerem, set in istis verbis steti pedibus'.[353] Once she has done so, she receives a ring and hears the Spirit's proclamation and affirmation of her new state of inseparability from God, 'tu habes anulum mei amoris et es artata a me et de certo non discedes a me.' This is sealed by a blessing, 'benedictionem Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti habeas tu et sotia tua', familiar from the closing of the marriage liturgy.[354] Angela is then left with the ability to smell extraordinary scents, 'odores indicibiles', which she cannot find the words to describe.[355] The end of Angela's experience mirrors its beginning, returning to her own cell. Bed-bound, weak and silent, Angela's state re-affirms her absolute bodily submission to divine will. The extent of this passivity offers an especially strong physical statement in support of her humility before and connection to God, yet it also reflects the nature of the relationship between them: a relationship with a physical aspect, in which Angela's body endures things which are beyond what an earthly body could endure; a relationship which brings mutual rest; a loving and spousal relationship.[356] Yet if this incapacity displays Angela's weakness and humility, the action of standing, precipitated by the Holy Spirit's tender call to her, speaks to the power of her position, and, in humility, her readiness to assume the role offered to her by God. In addition, the implicit divine command

[352] Ibid., p. 25.
[353] Ibid., p. 25.
[354] John K. Leonard, 'Rites of Marriage in the Western Middle Ages', in Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy*, pp. 165–202, p. 186.
[355] On apophatic sensory language in Angela, see Coralli, *La retorica*, p. 65.
[356] Angela's bridal mysticism here is not as eroticised as for other mystics, with the emphasis not primarily on love, but control, understanding and revelation, see, for comparison, Wiethaus, 'Sexuality', esp. pp. 40–46.

to rise from her bed has clear biblical parallels, indicating her transition from old life to new, or indeed rising from the dead.[357] In this new form, and new role, Angela commands a position of honour, standing before her new husband in contrast to the humility and total subservience of her genuflection in the Basilica.[358] The value of Angela's new role is affirmed in a final token, the ring of love, a clear symbol of marriage, accompanied by the (now) un-restricted promise that Angela would never leave Him.[359] This promise echoes the statement made by the Holy Spirit three times previously, that He would never leave Angela as long as she loves Him, offered first at the crossroads, before entering the Basilica of St Francis, and then before Angela's experience of consolation comes to an end in the Basilica. The final declaration, offered after the gift of the ring, appears more final than the previous declarations, which are dependent upon Angela's input. Whilst previously, the Spirit proclaims He will never leave if she loved Him, in his ultimate declaration he asserts that they will never be parted, 'de cetero non discedes a me'. The last statement, in contrast, appears to refer to a completed, unchangeable and irrefutable state. Thus, the arc of the progress through which Angela is affirmed in her relationship with the divine is completed where it began. Through ritual the narrative is allowed to address and answer the questions of Angela's status and her past, her new role finally arising out of the 'death' of a former life and beginning in a new betrothal.[360] Interweaving the development of Angela's mystical voice with space and rite, the narrative affirms the validity and origin of her task, firmly situating her both within and apart from her community.

[357] This recalls the story of Lazarus in John 38–44; see also Job 14:12, Eph. 5:14; The Song of Songs 2:7, 3:5 and 8:4, for example, describe the bride's awakening love, a metaphorical image which would fit Angela's situation well.
[358] In marriage rites, the bedchamber would be blessed at the conclusion of the ceremony, see Leonard, 'Rites of Marriage', p. 192.
[359] Christopher Brookes, *The Medieval Idea of Marriage* (Oxford, 1989), p. 58.
[360] On use of space to depict role-change in female spirituality, see Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London, 2000), p. 85.

III: Validation:

The approach towards a new and active spiritual life, and saint-like role, implied in the purifying affirmation of the mystical Eucharist, and assured through the confirmation of the pilgrimage to Assisi, finds its fulfilment during the fourth supplementary step.[361] This episode begins as Angela hears God's voice declaring that:

> Ego quo loquor tibi, sum divina potentia, qui adporto tibi gratiam. Et gratia, quam tibi adporto, est talis, quod volo quod prosis omnibus hominibus qui videbunt te, et non solum illis, set etiam iuves et prosis illis qui cogitabunt te vel audient nominari te. Et illis, qui plus habebunt de me, plus proderis.[362]

> I who speak with you am divine power who wishes to give to you a grace. And the grace which I give to you is this one: I want you to benefit all who see you; and not only them, but also that you aid and help all those who will think of you or hear your name. And you shall be of greater benefit to those who have more of me.

Placed in the mouth of God, this bold opening statement outlines the purpose of this mystical encounter, for the episode is a divine affirmation of Angela's role. Presented as a spiritual conduit amongst men, ritual is employed to offer an orthodox and public validation of her divinely sanctioned position.

Made aware of the power and gravity of her role, Angela becomes afraid of her pride.

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[361] Fourth supplementary step, p. 48.
[362] Ibid., p. 48.

However, God makes clear that this task and any accompanying power are only placed in her care, and have been entrusted to her by God, declaring that 'tu non habes ibi facere aliquid, quia non est tuum, set solum es inde guardiana. Serva illud bonum, et redde illud illi cuius est.'[363] God remains the ultimate force both driving and authorising Angela's extraordinary actions, yet this lack of agency instead increases her potency. As in the account of Angela's pilgrimage to Assisi, control of a potentially powerful role is explicitly and repeatedly removed from Angela and placed with God. Once again, a fine balance is sought between clearly asserting the value, importance and wonder of Angela's new spiritual role whilst protecting her humility and passivity, as her entire role, and its power, rests upon the perceived real participation of the divine.

In an echo of the Assisi Pilgrimage, the initial action of the episode occurs before the church and thus outside sacred space. Angela receives divine preparation for what ensues, and is given absolute confidence within her soul before entering the space in which the potency of her relationship to God will be displayed. The initial conversation between God and Angela's soul both comforts the nervous Angela and forms an open confirmation of the nature of Angela's agency, namely that Angela cannot cause the wondrous action she is about to undertake but that it instead belongs to God. Angela is almost separated from her mystical action, coming to understand she cannot be harmed by this grace, 'comprehendebat quod isto modo non poterat michi nochere'.[364] Although God's proclamation does not seem to physically change Angela's soul, the soul's moment of realisation of the possession of a unique status which was not within its control, both facilitated by divine presence, is transformative. It allows Angela to act with impunity in the knowledge, and with the reader-listener-audience's knowledge, that her actions are now those chosen by a divine hand.

[363] Ibid., p. 48.
[364] Fourth supplementary step, p. 48.

This is put to a further test through Angela's prayer to the Virgin Mary for the grace of knowing that what she hears is true, 'quod non essem decepta in locutionibus que fiebant.'[365] As if in answer to a critical audience, Angela becomes anxious about the true origin of her experiences. However, with the Virgin Mary as a second holy witness, Angela is offered the grace of being automatically granted divine permission, 'fiet michi gratia quod semper, quidquid fecero, faciam cum sua licentia.'[366] Moreover, the Virgin comforts Angela by stating that the mystic has been left with the ability to feel God's presence, and that this has been given to her in order that she might be deterred from seeing, hearing or saying anything other than that which comes from Him. Angela then experiences a period of three days when her heart is removed from the world and placed in God, 'cor levatum fuit ab omnibus terrenis et positum in Deo, ita quod nichil poteram cogitare et videre nisi Deo.'[367] Thus, before she enters the church and before any further action occurs, Angela is offered a saintly guarantee of her absolute connection to God. Angela's three day absorption in God, a length of time depicted as 'tribus diebus et tribus noctibus,' makes a clear allusion to Christ's death and resurrection (Matt. 12:40, [...] sic erit Filius hominis in corde terrae tribus diebus et tribus noctibus).

This period of verbal confession of fear and verbal affirmation of righteousness is then followed by what could be considered a period of physical testing of the role proclaimed for Angela at the beginning of the episode. Released from her three day consolation, Angela is left bereft, feeling 'tristitia et vagatione.'[368] She then hears a demonic voice, which tries to trick her into believing that he is St Bartholomew and that it is his feast day. Later

[365] Ibid., p. 48; Møller-Jensen, *Italian Liturgical Texts*, pp. 254–261, suggests Mary was undertsood as able to act through knowing the truth of Gabriel's words, a parallel to Angela's situation here, where her knowing the truth of the divine voice she hears allows her to act in the celebration of the sacrament.
[366] Fourth supplementary step, p. 48.
[367] Ibid., p. 49.
[368] Ibid., p. 49.

discovering that it is in fact the Feast of St Clare, Angela falls into a state of sadness for ten days. At the end of this period, at the Feast of the Virgin Mary, Angela travels to Assisi, an occasion which not only allows her to be released from her melancholy state but to reaffirm her alignment with the divine.

Following Angela's elevation and subsequent fall, the episode finds its lesson and conclusion in a rite of the Church, framed once more by the orthodoxy and history of the Basilica of Assisi. Entering the sacred space, Angela receives an experience which offers her supra-earthly knowledge. This final great revelation is anchored within the celebration of communion, presented as if part of the 'communion' in itself. Fra. A. writes that Angela makes herself ready for communion through confession. What Angela actually receives is a mystical revelation, yet this too echoes the Eucharist in her description. Out of piety, Angela moves to be near the Eucharist, 'posuit se iuxta crucem inter crates ferri', whereupon she hears God speak healing words, 'locutione divina dulcissima, que statim reactavit eam totum.'[369] This communication mirrors the physicality of eating the Eucharist in its sweetness and in its restorative properties, and echoes the conception that the God of the host could be taken in through the eyes. [370] The initial restoration also answers directly the disturbance of her soul by the demon, which has caused her sadness. Indeed, after being healed by the Lord's first words, her current experience is tied back to her initial conversation with God, when He states that no other creature is able to offer her consolation, 'filia mea, dulcis michi, nulla creatura potest tibi dare consolationem nisi solus ego.'[371] Here God's words return to the assurance provided initially that Angela, and her audience, will have certainty that her knowledge comes from God. It is only in this place that her eyes are opened, 'fuerunt aperti

[369]Fourth supplementary step, p. 49; religious women were often physically separated from the Eucharist, see Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998), p. 96.
[370] Macy, 'Commentaries', p. 33; Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 45, p. 128.
[371] Fourth supplementary step, p. 49.

oculi anime', and that God chooses to show her something of His power, 'ego volo tibi ostendere de potentia mea'.[372] With these new senses made available to her by God in order to inform her, Angela is shown what would be impossible to see otherwise:

> Videbam unam plenitudinem Dei in qua comprehendebam totum mundum, scilicet ultra mare, citra mare et abyssum et mare et omnia. Et omnibus predictis non discernebam nisi tantum potentiam divinam, modo omnino inerrabili.[373]

> I *beheld* the fullness of God in which I *comprehended* the whole of creation, that is, what is on this side and what is beyond the sea, the abyss, the sea itself, and everything else. And in everything that I saw, I could perceive nothing except the presence of the power of God, and in a manner totally indescribable.[374]

This divinely-provided insight, which proves to be beyond human words, is a moment of great unity between Angela as mystic and God in which Angela, with divine help, can see the world through God's eyes. Such knowledge is life-changing, and indeed Angela proclaims that she 'comprehendeba[t] quod posteram intelligere melius alia.'[375] It is clear that in these 'demonstrations' Angela is given privileged access to knowledge of the divine, which will continue.

Seeing anew, Angela's new knowledge is sealed with the Eucharist. Yet even in this, Angela is hesitant. Humbled by the divine attitude towards humanity, 'tantam profundam humilitatem Dei ad homines', she perceives herself as utterly unworthy, 'omnino indigna',

[372] Ibid., p. 50.
[373] Ibid., p. 50.
[374] Lachance, *Angela*, pp. 169–170, my emphasis.
[375] Fourth supplementary step, p. 50.

and wishes not to receive communion.[376] With Angela almost refusing to take communion, overcome by her unworthiness, the voice of God intervenes. He reassures her that no person could reach such a vantage point other than through grace, 'ad istum punctum videndi istud non potest venire aliqua creatura nisi per divinam gratiam, ad quem punctum venisti tu.' This statement underscores not only that Angela speaks and experiences through divine grace rather than her own will, but moreover that here she has reached an extraordinary point of seeing, beyond that of most people on earth. As Angela observes the host being raised, her new ability is made clear to her when God speaks to her for the last time, telling Angela:

> Ecce potentia divina que modo est super altare. Et sum intus in te; et si tu me non recipis, tu me iam recipisti. Et communica cum benedictione Dei Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Et ego qui sum dignus facio te dignam.[377]

> Behold, the divine power which is now present on the altar. And I am within you. And if you do not receive me, you have already done so. Receive communion with the blessing of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I who am worthy make you worthy.[378]

Upon hearing these words Angela is filled with sweetness and joy, 'dulcedo inerrabilis et letitia magna,' which are such that she believes she will retain these feelings for the rest of her life.[379] Moreover, Angela then states in complete confidence that she has no doubts, 'non remansit in me aliquid dubium,' that this is granted in response to her prayer to the Virgin Mary, namely the certainty given from Christ of never doing anything without His

[376] Ibid., p. 50.
[377] Ibid., p. 50.
[378] Translation adapted from Lachance, p. 170.
[379] Ibid., p. 50.

permission.[380]

It is clear that the actions of this episode have been building towards a climactic point centred upon the ritual of the Eucharist. Yet Angela is not depicted actually ingesting the host or Christ's body in another form, something which appears out of alignment with the thrust of the narrative towards the final communion scene. This suggests that a different element is involved. Angela does respond to the final revelation, experiencing sweetness and joy in a description which echoes many medieval descriptions of receiving the host.[381] In this instance, however, it appears to be the information given to her by God which Angela experiences as a physical response. She is filled by the knowledge that God could be both in the host, which she sees raised as if in a visual demonstration of presence, and in her soul at the same time, in answer to one of the key theological questions of her day.[382] Thus the Eucharist is both a visual presentation of a divine seal on Angela's mystical role as proclaimed by God at the beginning of the episode, but also a demonstration of its efficacy. Unlike those around her, Angela is granted knowledge of the power of God through which she might benefit all people. This assurance is carefully constructed: intention proclaimed, doubts raised and overcome, (divine) witnesses put in place, fail-safe mechanisms (Angela's open-question prayer) implemented all before Angela enters the church building.
Beginning her journey as an un-extraordinary woman, Angela receives no particular foreshadowing of the grace she is to receive, other than a realisation of her own sin. Yet this spurs a spiritual pilgrimage during which Angela is portrayed as making the transition from married laywoman to mystic and bride of Christ, a change which has not only spiritual but

[380] Ibid., p. 50.
[381] See Caroline Walker Bynum, 'The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages', *Church History*, 71 (2002), 685–718, p. 688; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 289.
[382] Discussed, for example, by Hugh of St Victor and Alexander of Hales, see Gary Macy, 'Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages', in I. C. Levy, G. Macy and K. Van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 365–398, p. 371–372.

social impact. Other than the penitential frame, the *Memorial* does not refer to sacramental and liturgical practice as extensively as other mystical narratives. However, references to ritual do emerge, particularly at key turning points in the development of Angela's role. It would be an overstatement to imagine the twenty-seven steps of the *Memorial* as clearly defined stages within a rite of mystical progression: the portrayal of Angela's spirituality is characterised by both the peaks of understanding, and troughs of spiritual regression. Nonetheless, certain moments, particularly relating to the knowledge of divine things made available to her through her piety, and her role in revealing this insight to those around her, appear to be framed by, and anchored in, the familiar and orthodox forms of the Church. Her emerging mystical 'voice' is interwoven with sacramental rite.

Upon understanding her need for repentance, Angela receives the healing blood of Christ, a new physical proximity which also represents her growing spiritual proximity to God. The moment of her first public revelation is framed as a point of public and divinely sanctioned change of role, marked by the rejection of the remnants of an old life, the subjugation of her body and voice, and the seal of a new role within a new rite, namely that of her mystical marriage. Yet this role is not one which is solely private and intimate, but, through use of sacred space and witness, one which is shown to be intended to function within a community. Having been placed in this role, she then receives validation or proof of what this means, once more in the form of a public and orthodox ritual, namely that of communion. Gary Macy argues that 'participation in the Eucharist was an extremely important moral and social act, establishing oneself publically as a member in good standing in the Christian community.'[383] In Angela's case, her experience of the Eucharist proclaims a membership which is both integral and valid in piety, yet separate.

[383] Macy, 'Commentaries on the Mass', p. 42.

By virtue of their orthodoxy, familiarity and limitation, these moments provide a secure space in which doubts, for example, regarding Angela's former life or physical extremes, can be addressed. Indeed, the text does not ignore this secular past, but makes use of her connection to the worldly, for example in the depiction of Christ's hair plucking, and the use of her body when she is ritually engaged to Christ. Yet Angela is equally framed as different, even disturbing. Indeed, this state of being both embedded within a community, yet set apart from them, becomes clear through her Assisi pilgrimage, which juxtaposes space and speech in a manner which almost embodies the problematic nature of mystical insight as a private or personal revelation that can only find its fulfilment in revelation. Like Angela, the *Memorial* interweaves familiar and extreme, playing with the instability of Angela's position, and addressing doubt within rite both to demonstrate and authorise the power of her difference.

3. Occupying the Space Between: Ritual and Identity in the *Vita* of Agnes Blannbekin

In some ways, it has been the fate of Agnes Blannbekin to become lost in between. Only one record of her life remains, the full version of which has perished through a quirk of transmission: the manuscript disappeared in the process of creating its first edition.[384] The narrative itself is described by Peter Dinzelbacher as a functional text with no literary aspirations, and whose Latin he describes as 'not simply plain, but – measured against the Latin of its contemporaries – downright poor.'[385] Agnes' blood-soaked traumas, devotion to the Hours and Eucharistic fanaticism, moreover, seem to slip into an overflowing stream of later medieval female mysticism without much comment, submerged as a mundane example within a broad corpus. [386] Lacking the literary wow-factor of Mechthild of Magdeburg or the controversy of Angela of Foligno, the *Vita et Revelationes* of Agnes Blannbekin appear as the plain sister of medieval mystical narrative. With no sources for Agnes' biography other than the *Vita et Revelationes*, several previous studies have focussed upon defining her religious identity, hoping to be able to claim this text as an elusive example of beguine presence in Vienna or testing the extent of its 'Franciscan' profile. The aim of this chapter is not to re-visit this debate, which is eloquently discussed by both Anneliese Stolaska and Peter Dinzelbacher.[387] Instead, it will approach the spiritual identity presented by the narrative of

[384] Bernhard Pez (d. 1735). For discussion of manuscripts, see below.
[385] Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Einführung', in Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Vogeler eds. *Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin (1315)* (Göppingen, 1994), p. 16.
[386] The typical nature of Agnes' *vita* within this genre is raised by Ulrike Wiethaus in the introduction to her translation, *Agnes Blannbekin, Viennese Beguine: Life and Revelations* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 4; also by Dinzelbacher, *Leben und Offenbarungen,* Introduction, p. 3. All Latin citations will be taken from Dinzelbacher's edition, English translations from Wiethaus.
[387] See Dinzelbacher in *Leben und Offenbarungen*, p. 13; Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Die Vita et Revelationes der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin im Rahmen der Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur ihrer Zeit', in Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer, eds., *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter* (Ostfildern, 1985), pp. 152-177; Anneliese Stoklaska discusses evidence for Agnes' affiliation in 'Weibliche Religiösität im Mittelalter', in Dieter Bauer and Peter Dinzelbacher, eds., *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* (Cologne, 1988), pp. 165-184.

the *Vita* through the lens of one feature which is strikingly prevalent and in relation to which Agnes' role is defined: Church ritual.

Ritual appears in almost every chapter of this text, and is at the core of its concerns, alongside, and in connection to, the Franciscans and Vienna as an urban community, all of which lie beneath an overarching anxiety regarding spiritual decay and the forthcoming divine judgement of humanity. As will become evident, the *Vita* is strongly influenced by the *corpus christi* debate and anti-donatist sentiment, illustrated in its treatment of the virtue of celebrants, scenarios which cause disruption to the host, and episodes which examine the experience of consuming the body of Christ.[388] The presentation of mystic's task as holy intercessor which emerges from the narrative, based on that of the Virgin Mary and a common model for female piety, is also at the theological core of sacramental action and associated priestly role, with the two modes of intercession subtly entwined throughout the text. [389] Moreover, ritual acts, often centred upon the sacraments, played an important part in the establishment of urban identity and resolution of the tensions which emerged between different social groups.[390] As acts whose multiplicity within the *Vita* suggest their value to the socio-cultural context of the narrative, these liturgical rites will be examined in order to illuminate to what end they are depicted within this text.

[388] Especially chapters 93, 103 and 167. The use of female voices in support of heterodoxy is discussed by Michael Goodich, 'The Contours of Female Piety in later Medieval Hagiography', *Church History*, 50 (1981), 20–32.
[389] Marian devotion discussed in, for example, 9, 13, 14, 121, 182, 184, 186, 205; On intercession and the sacraments, see Ullrich Bruchhold, *Deutschsprachige Beichten im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert: Editionen und Typologien zur Überlieferungs-, Text- und Gebrauchsgeschichte vor dem Hintergrund der älteren Tradition* (Berlin, 2010), p. 39–52.
[390] Albrecht Classen, 'Introduction', in Albrecht Classen ed., *Urban Space in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age* (Berlin, 2009), p. 30; Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women and their Biographers in the Thirteenth Century', in Anneke Mulder-Bakker ed., *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century: The Lives of Yvette, Anchoress of Huy; Juliana of Cornillon, Author of the Corpus Christi Feast; and Margaret the Lame, Anchoress of Magdeburg* (Turnhout, 2011), pp.1–43, p. 9.

The Text and its Production:

The complete text survives only in an eighteenth-century printed edition, completed in 1731 by Bernhard Pez (d. 1735) in the Benedictine foundation of Melk.[391] He names his source as the 'Neresheim' text, which he dates to the fourteenth century, now presumed lost. It was removed from the monastery of Neresheim by Pez and then transcribed by Leopold Wydeman, a Carthusian monk from Gaming (lower Austria). Both original and transcription were returned to Pez in Melk, but the location of both texts after this point is unknown.[392] The Pez edition proved controversial, and was almost completely destroyed by the Jesuits in the eighteenth century.[393] Particularly problematic was the question of the location of the Holy Foreskin after resurrection, as Agnes' experience of swallowing the foreskin appeared to contradict the officially validated position later proposed by Birgitta of Sweden, that the foreskin had been resurrected with Christ.[394] The Pez edition is the text used in the most recent critical edition, completed in 1994 by Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Voegeler. According to the critical edition, several partial Latin versions remain, namely those of Zwettl, MS. 384, Mainz, MS. I 115a and Mainz MS. I 117.[395]

Dinzelbacher concludes that both Mainz manuscripts, containing the partial redaction, are deliberate abbreviations of the complete text, breaking off at chapter 122:27. In ms I 115a the remainder of the folio remains blank, suggesting to Dinzelbacher that the rest was also

[391] Wiethaus, *Agnes Blannbekin*, p. 12.
[392] Dinzelbacher, *Leben und Offenbarungen,* p. 28.
[393] Ibid., p. 30.
[394] Ibid., p. 31.
[395] Zwettl (Lower-Austria), Cistercian library; MS. 384; Latin; 1st half 14th century; Contains text from the incipit, without title, up to middle of chapter 189, ends mid-word; bound with 'Distinctiones sive illucidationes sacre scripture' and exempla from saints' lives; Mainz , Stadtbibliothek; MS. I 115a; Latin; Miscellany of theological texts, 15th-century codex, *Vita* dated to second half of the fourteenth century because of the early form of the gothic cursive script, previously an independent codex with the inscription 'Iste liber est Carthusiensium prope Moguntiam'; text appears to largely follow Zwettl, but gaps in the Zwettl text are supplemented through use of the Neresheim/ a Neresheim-family text (used by Pez, now lost, see above). Ends at chapter 122.27 mid-sentence; Mainz, Stadtbibliothek; MS. I 117; Latin; Miscellany of theological texts, codex dated to 1343, Agnes text added in late 14th; Text corresponds with 115a.

missing from the exemplar being copied. Several earlier chapters, such as 93, 99 and 109, are left out, whilst others, for instance 92, are shortened.[396]Dinzelbacher observes that it is predominantly chapters concerned with the mendicants which are affected, though chapters critical of the Church (e.g. 30, 41) and those unpleasant for a male audience, as on the foreskin (37), were also expunged. Dinzelbacher suggests that this text may have been adjusted for the Carthusians, as the manuscript was kept in a Carthusian library.[397]

A Middle High German fragment cited by Joseph von Görres (1776-1848) in his study *Die christliche Mystik* (1837) is no longer available in any manuscript. Kurt Ruh, in particular, has questioned whether Görres found a German text, or translated a Latin example into archaic German. Dinzelbacher, however, does not share Ruh's concerns, viewing such falsification as improbable, as he found Görres' citations of other manuscripts to be accurate, and the German cited by Görres retains, in Dinzelbacher's assessment, echoes of Middle High German word-form.[398]

The *Vita* was written before 1321, by which year the so-called *Zwettl* manuscript was in the possession of Otto Gnämhärtl, the Chaplain of St Maria am Gestade in Vienna.[399] It is unclear whether the text, which contains 235 brief chapters and appears to be unfinished, ending abruptly with an 'etc', was begun during Agnes' lifetime or after her death in 1315.[400] It was composed by Agnes' confessor, a Viennese Franciscan, but whether this man can be equated with the scribe named as 'Ermenrich' in a final note in the Neresheim text is uncertain.[401] As will become clear, the *Vita* is highly supportive of the Franciscans in Vienna,

[396] Dinzelbacher, *Leben und Offenbarungen*, p. 20.
[397] Ibid., p. 21.
[398] Kurt Ruh, 'Agnes Blannbekin', in *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin, 1977-2008), p. 888; Dinzelbacher, *Leben und Offenbarungen*, p. 27.
[399] Anneliese Stoklaska, 'Die Revelationes der Agnes Blannbekin: Ein mystisches Unikat im Schrifttum des Wiener Mittelalters', *Jahrbuch des Vereins für die Geschichte der Stadt Wien* 43 (1987), 7–34, p. 9.
[400] Dinzelbacher, 'Einführung', in *Leben und Offenbarungen,* p. 4. In the Neresheim manuscript, a note, whose exact date and origin is unclear, adds this information.
[401] Ibid., p. 4

and appear to address concerns directly relevant to the validity and spiritual value of their role. This suggests that they strongly influenced the text's composition, though whether this occurred through mutual discussion between friars and Agnes or through the confessors' shaping the written text itself remains open. [402] Despite at least fourteen religious houses flourishing in Vienna in this period, Agnes' text is regarded as one of just two late-medieval Austrian mystical accounts, and the only one based in Vienna, the other being the *Vita* of the recluse Wilbirga.[403]

The Franciscan order of the later thirteenth century faced several difficulties. As the order expanded, competition developed over the care of souls, particularly in the urban environment, a struggle for validity which seems to feed into the underlying tone of Agnes' *Vita* and its interest in the sacramental practice of the city. In Vienna, the conflict between the Franciscans and the clergy over rights of pastoral care became problematic enough to be brought before Pope Martin IV, who in 1282 decided in favour of the Franciscans.[404] A larger conflict, which came to expression in the *usus pauper* controversy, was based on differing ideas within the Order on its practical and spiritual future, and the eventual split into two groups who became known as spiritual and conventual Franciscans. Two issues at stake were the exact nature of apostolic poverty, centred upon property ownership, and the radical apocalyptic thought of some of the spiritual-leaning friars. [405] Whilst discussion of poverty

[402] On the cooperation of clerics and religious women in producing texts, see Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford, 1994), chapter 8; for Agnes in particular, see Stoklaska, 'Die Revelationes der Agnes Blannbekin.'
[403] Richard Perger and Walther Brauneis, *Die mittelalterlichen Kirchen und Kloster Wiens* (Vienna, 1977), p. 133 - 154; on evidence for a Beguine community, see Stoklaska, 'Weibliche Religiösität', p. 168, p. 179; on Austrian mysticism, see Stoklaska, 'Die Revelationes der Agnes Blannbekin'; *Vita Wilibirgis* (d.1289) by Einwik Weizlan (d.1313), in Lucas Sanitzer, ed., *Die Vita Wilbirgis des Einwik Weizlan* (Linz, 1999); See Dinzelbacher, 'Die 'Vita et Revelationes' der Wiener Beguine Agnes Blannbekin', p. 153.
[404] Peter Dinzelbacher, 'Die Wiener Minoriten im ausgehenden 13. Jahrhundert nach dem Urteil der zeitgenössischen Begine Agnes Blannbekin ' in Dieter Berg, ed., *Bettelorden und Stadt: Bettelorden und städtisches Leben im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit* (Werl, 1992), pp. 181–192, p. 182.
[405] David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: from Protest to Persecution in the Century after St Francis* (University Park, PA, 2001); see also James M. Powell, 'Mendicants, the Communes, and the Law', *Church History*, 77 (2008), 557–573, who emphasises the changing membership of the order as catalyst for the division, rather than issues of property ownership.

is, perhaps conspicuously, absent from the *Vita*, the text's underlying eschatological perspective, though never explicit, appears to resonate with that of thinkers such as Joachim of Fiore, echoed by Ubertino da Casale and Peter John Olivi, who pointed to the corruption of the religious as a sign of the approach of the third and final age.[406] Probably written soon after 1315, Agnes' *Vita* may reflect a Franciscan adjustment to the discussions and prescriptions of the Council of Vienne in 1311, which, though dominated by the anti-Templar sentiment, also resulted in Pope Celestine V's *Exivi de paradiso*, which David Burr has interpreted as an attempt to place a moratorium on the *usus pauper* debate and the condemnation of aspects of Olivi's teaching.[407] Moreover, it contained a condemnation of the beguines, which specified their failure to respect the rite of communion as a damning attribute.[408]

The subject of the *Vita* is nonetheless, however nominally, Agnes. A farmer's daughter, under the confession of a Franciscan in Vienna, Agnes died on 10 May 1315.[409] Her childhood, in line with hagiographical tradition for female sanctity, is marked by the pious acts of desire for the Eucharist and denial of food through fasting and donation.[410] Agnes' childhood desire to become a beguine is recorded, as well as reference made once to a holy and virginal companion, yet Agnes herself is never named as a beguine. [411] Although a

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[406] David Flood, 'Recent Studies on Peter Olivi', *Franciscan Studies*, 58 (2000), 111–119; Frank Lane, 'Freedom and Authority: The Law, Peter Olivi, and the Second Vatican Council', *Franciscan Studies*, 62, (2004), 155–176, p. 12, Council of Vienne; Mary Beth Ingham, 'Self-Mastery and Rational Freedom: Duns Scotus's Contribution to the "Usus Pauper" Debate', *Franciscan Studies*, 66 (2008), 337–369; on Franciscan apocalyptic thought, see, for example, Raymond Clemens, 'The Pope's Shrunken Head: The Apocalyptic Vision of Robert of Uzés', in Rachel Fulton, ed., *History in the Comic Mode:Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person* (New York, 2007), pp. 36–44; Zdzislaw Jozef Kijas, 'Prophecy and Christology in Olivi's Commentary on Isaiah 7:14', *Franciscan Studies*, 57 (1999), 149–177, whose conception of Kairos is of particular interest; Bernard McGinn, 'The Abbot and the Doctors: Scholastic Reactions to the Radical Eschatology of Joachim of Fiore', *Church History*, 40 (1971), 30–47; David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, p. 76.
[407] Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans,* p. 146.
[408] Constitutions of the Council of Vienne, 28.8, *Concilium Viennense a. 1311 - 1312 / Concilia oecumenica et generalia Ecclesiae catholicae (medii aevi)*, J. Alberigo et al, eds. (Turnhout, Brepols), p. 384.
[409]Dinzelbacher, *Leben und Offenbarungen*, postscript, p. 482.
[410] Chapter 39; see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), p. 32, p. 48.
[411] Chapter 41 (childhood); 142 (companion); 86,106, 116, 177, 208/9 (friends).

document recorded in the *Urkundenbuch* of the Neuburg convent makes mention of a sister Eysal, mistress of the penitent order, in Vienna in 1306, the *Vita* itself does not record Franciscan tertiaries, and offers no specifics regarding Agnes' affiliation.[412] It is the liturgical season which shapes Agnes' spiritual life, who is even told by God that her heart adjusts with the season, 'cor [sua] tempori coaptatur.'[413] That her feelings are moved by the emotion of each feast bespeaks the centrality of ritual to Agnes' practical and spiritual existence. Her contemplative day was divided by the celebration of each liturgical Hour, a practice of such importance to her that she experienced pain when unable to participate.[414] Yet Agnes' life reveals friction between these devotional activities and the gift of mystical experience of which she is a passive recipient, again painting a picture of a life pulled between two things. On one occasion she is even portrayed as distressed at being unable to say the hours due to mystical experience, 'eratque ei poenale, si pro aliqua spiritus consolatione ommitere eam oporteret cursum orationum suarum'.[415]

The record of Agnes' numerous encounters with the Viennese friars conveys an important and friendly relationship. This was based upon questions concerning the spiritual life, and in particular the significance of the sacraments, and those entrusted with their provision, in communicating God to the temporal world.[416] The desire to show Agnes' proximity to the mendicant community in Vienna is represented in the text's depiction of her access to the brothers' space, hearing Matins in the Friars' church, visiting the friary's refectory and

[412] Stoklaska, 'Weibliche Religiösität', p. 179, MS GStWII/1, 145; FRA11/10 (Urkundenbuch von Kloster Neuburg, vol. 1), p. 104.
[413] Chapters 81, 82.
[414] Chapter 214/15.
[415] Chapter 192.
[416] On the relationship between similar women and the mendicants, John Coakley, 'Gender and the Authority of the Friars: The Significance of Holy Women for Thirteenth Century Franciscans and Dominicans', 60, *Church History* (1991), 445–460, especially Coakley's observation that as such women were ultimately subject to the friar's authority and the relationship 'gave safe occasion to explore and articulate doubts', p. 450.

garden in mystical experience, and even seeing the Franciscan 1292 General Chapter in vision.[417] The scribe draws a parallel between Agnes and the Franciscans in suggesting that young Agnes' experience of the Eucharist's sweet taste was like that related by a friar, stating that his brother Otto had said something similar, 'similiter dixit mihi frater Otto de ordine fratrum minorum'.[418] It is in connection to this passage detailing Agnes' childhood experience of the Eucharist that the scribe makes reference to Rev. 2:17, which describes God giving hidden manna to the victorious. This sweetness comes to be typical for Agnes' experience of God, and in connecting Agnes' youthful experience of sweetness in the Eucharist with the manna of victory in the last times, the narrative interweaves the salvation-historical trajectory with Agnes' profession as mystic, just as it retrospectively connects her calling to the Franciscans from an early age.

Seeking out the sacraments, Agnes appears to be in constant motion, traversing the city to visit churches.[419] Three are explicitly named as the parish churches of St Stephen (first mentioned 1137) and St Michael (first mentioned 1276), the Convent of St Jacob (from. c. 1190), probably under the Augustinian rule at the turn of the fourteenth century, and one identified as the friars' chapel, which, though not named, may be the *Minoritenkirche* whose construction began in 1247.[420] Each church was associated with a particular area or group, presenting a prominent visual symbol of collective identity, as well as a focus for the rites which affirmed the hierarchy and value of that community, whether parish or religious order.

[417] For example chapters 30;126; 228;158;107;174

[418] Chapter 39; The description of Christ as sweet-tasting became more common from the twelfth century for both men and women, for instance in the late twelfth-century Cistercian Meditation X, 'On the Passion of Christ' (attrib. Anselm), trans. Sarah Lipton, in Lipton, 'Images in the World: Reading the Crucifixion', in Miri Rubin, *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 173-188.

[419] See for instance Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991); Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women: Periculoso and its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, 1997)

[420] See chapters 30; 208; 166; 104. See Stoklaska, 'Die Revelationes Agnes Blannbekin'; Perger and Brauneis, *Die mittelalterlichen Kirchen und Kloster Wiens*, p. 140.

Agnes' perpetual motion between these sites emerges as a further representation of her self as situated between the faithful (lay and religious) rather than constricted to a single identity.

In light of this outsider status, the description of Agnes' actions within such spaces appears bold. Exploring the link between spaces of ritual and identity, Ulrike Wiethaus has examined a vision in the *Vita,* in which Agnes' sees a maiden, who is revealed to be her faith, dancing, skipping and clapping around the altar, 'plaudens manibus tripudiabat gradu superiori circa altare beatae virginis' (chapter 211). Wiethaus convincingly argues that this as an assertion of the power of female spirituality.[421] In approaching the altar and dancing, Agnes enters space normally restricted to the ordained men, and goes against the expectations of liturgical practice. Yet this behaviour, which Wiethaus interprets as the female usurpation of male clerical space, goes beyond a simple power grab. In acts which bring Agnes to the core of the ritual space, she aligns herself with that group through their rites, designating her avenue of power and the relevance of her role to that community.

Both ritual and space are important signifiers of belonging, hence it is of interest that Agnes, whose identity and allegiance remain (perhaps deliberately) vague is repeatedly depicted within a ritual context. Moreover, these questions of sacramental intercession, and the role of the celebrant, are set against an undercurrent of spiritual decay, placing the textual Agnes at the nexus of concerns regarding the Franciscan task, an understanding of sacramental action as divine presence and intercession which was under threat, and an approaching time of divine judgement. In a close reading of episodes selected for their differing focus on ritual, depictions of movement, space and community will be scrutinized in order to illuminate how ritual action is understood and used within the narrative to interrogate these concerns, within

[421] Ulrike Wiethaus, 'Spatiality and the Sacred in Agnes Blannbekin's Life and Revelations', in Wiethaus, ed., *Agnes Blannbekin*, pp. 163–176, p. 163.

three approximate focal points: Agnes' identity, Agnes' intercession within the community, Agnes' position in relation to the eternal and sacred nature of sacramental action.

I: Agnes between Open and Closed

During an experience early one Easter morning, Agnes' theoretically distinct and lower position within the hierarchy of ordained men is vividly illustrated through a dramatic use of space. In an unnamed church, Agnes reflects on Christ's resurrection. Her surroundings recreate the closed grave:

> Erat autem chorus ecclesiae, in quia ipsa erat, clausus et intrinsecus ostium repagulo obseratum, et cuneus ligneus magnus inter ostium et repagulum stricte incussus, ne posset repagulum amoveri. Murus medius, qui dividebat chorum et ecclesiam, elevatus fuit et contiguus testudini chori, ut nusquam transitus vel modicus pateret.[422]

Emphasis is repeatedly placed on the inaccessibility of the choir, with a great wall, bolt and wedge described as dividing church and choir, mirroring the space of the tomb. Agnes is granted a dramatic miracle when the wedge is not only divinely removed, but smashes through the door and clatters before her. This shocks her, but she requests that God comfort her, 'consolare me etiam nunc', following which she falls asleep, 'mox accidit ei modicus somnus', resting on the floor of the choir.[423] Appearing to her in a dream, Christ brings her food, but after Agnes insists she would prefer that he eat it first, he dips fish in honey, takes a bite and savours it, then feeds the remainder to her from his hand. If the biblical miracle of the tomb is one of impossible escape (Jn. 20), Agnes' experience is a reversal: miraculous

[422] Chapter 128

[423] Sleeping within churches was normally restricted to pilgrimage sites, where the sick were sometimes allowed to lie in the sanctuary, see Sarah Hamilton and Andrew Spicer, eds., *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2005), p. 10.

entry into a seemingly inaccessible space. Divine approval of her presence in this sacred space, usually off-limits to a lay-woman, is displayed in the broken door and affirmed by the poignant symbolism of the meal shared between Christ and Agnes. It mirrors the theology of the Eucharist (a shared meal between God and humanity, offered by God), and, freely offered in the space designated as sacred by the community, the act is a validation of Agnes' presence there.[424] The food, too, appears symbolic, potentially recalling in the fish Christ's promise to make his disciples fishers of men found in John, 'venite post me et faciam vos fieri piscatores hominum', implicitly suggesting that Agnes also has a disciple-like calling from God.[425] The honey, echoing the sweetness of Agnes' experience of God, and woven into her early experiences of the Eucharist, is manna from heaven given to the spiritually victorious, an image which will reappear in Agnes' visions as a flow of grace from heaven.[426]

Moreover, in falling asleep before the choir and eating a meal there, divine intervention changes the sense of this space for Agnes. Both sleeping and eating are everyday activities, and in doing both in the Choir Agnes further gains possession of a space which had been formerly restricted. [427] Thus, even the spaces of ordained men, usually off-limits to lay-women during the liturgy, become accessible to Agnes through her interaction with their ritual and subsequently their community.[428] Here, divinely sanctioned access designates divinely sanctioned purpose, intimated through the fish and honey. Agnes' divinely-enabled breach of the barrier between open and closed sacred spaces, sealed through an intimate

[424] Stijn Bossuyt,'The Liturgical Use of Space in Thirteenth-Century Flanders', in Hamilton and Spicer, eds., *Defining the Holy,* pp. 187-206, p. 189, Bossuyt suggests that acts can derive their sanctity from the their environment, and vice versa.
[425] Matt. 4:19.
[426] Rev. 2:17.
[427] The laity did have access to sacred spaces within churches under certain circumstances such as donations to the church, see Donal Cooper, 'Access all Areas? Spatial Divides in the Mendicant Churches of Late Medieval Tuscany', in Frances Andrews, ed., *Ritual and Space in the Middle Ages: Proceedings of the 2009 Harlaxton Symposium* (Donington, 2011), pp. 90-107, p.103-107; Margaret Ragnow, 'Ritual before the Alter: Legal Satisfaction and Spiritual Reconciliation in Eleventh-Century Anjou', in Joëlle Rollo-Koster, ed., *Medieval and Early Modern Ritual. Formalized Behavior in Europe, China and Japan* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 57-80.
[428] Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary* (New York, 1998), p. 43, on women within the hierarchy of church space.

mystical proto-Eucharist, neatly summarises the role imagined for Agnes in the text. Because of her faith, the scene presents Agnes as someone who may cross the physical and metaphysical divide between open and closed, both in entering the chapel and in her insight into the divine. In this scene, Agnes is presented as contemplating that which appears impossible to her, such as Christ's escape from the tomb, to which God reassures that, 'Quia, quidquid vult deus, hoc est facilimum et possibile!' Perhaps this declaration of the absolute ability of God to assert his will also applies to the use of an unprofessed woman to offer insight to professed men. Thus, space and ritual are used to express and authorise both query and answer.

Whilst such juxtaposition of personal experience with the space of the religious community depicts Agnes' equal relationship to them, other experiences, anchored within familiar rite, frame and explain Agnes' role as mystic in itself. During a Candlemas communion, when a Franciscan priest mis-aims the Host and allows it to brush Agnes' lip, clerical error is imagined as inspiring Agnes' private ritual.[429] Agnes fears that the Host might be broken, and although greatly distressed and upset, 'perterrita et [...] multam desolata', Agnes shows confidence in the unseen element of the ritual and takes communion despite the error she has perceived. A familiar sensation of the sweetness in her heart, 'nec minus cordis suavitatem more solito' affirms her confidence. This first temporal ritual raises a question, which is answered by a mystical encounter.

The next night, after Matins, whilst Agnes is resting, the hand of God comes upon her and Agnes sees six heavenly women, each carrying a candle, 'puellae pulcherimae inaestimabili claritate fulgentes, habentes singulae cereos magnos ardentes in manibus; et erat lux candelarum illarum purissima et serena valde'. This clearly echoes the performance of

[429] Chapter 61.

Candlemas, during which a priest would distribute candles to the congregation.[430] Is Agnes' experience any more than a private version of the Feast? Though superficially plain, the care with which the narrative supplies each object, place and manner with a descriptor indicates a ritual context.[431] These women, joined in pairs, radiate virtue that illuminates the holy space into which Agnes has been placed.[432] This brightness is encapsulated in their objects. Two groups introduce themselves as firstly *Voluntary Poverty* and *Patience*, secondly *Desire to Suffer Much* and *Obedience*. These pairs offer declarations to each other, in a tableau echoing liturgical antiphon and response, here also a ritualised proclamation of intent.[433] *Voluntary Poverty* states, 'ego quaero deum omni tempore' (I search for God at all times), *Patience* replying, 'quocunque me verto, ipsum invenio' (wherever I turn, I find Him). *Desire to Suffer Much* proclaims 'omnia bona, quae fiunt in ecclesia, ego congrego et mihi approprio' (all good things, which happen in the Church, I gather together and make my own), *Obedience* responding, 'prompta sum ad omnem perfectionem' (I am ready for every perfection). The final pair introduce themselves, *Prayer* saying 'deum semper habeo' (I always have God), and *Love* answering, 'quidquid petis, tibi tribuo' (whatever you ask, I will give you). *Love* asks why Agnes' vision did not include souls of lesser holy such as (an otherwise unidentified) sister Gertrude, only those of great saints. Answering herself, *Love* declares that only those 'perfecti in sanctitate' appear in visions, that perfect holiness requires all six, an announcement hinting at the scene's purpose.[434] The ritual peaks when *Charity* tilts her candle towards *Prayer*, who gains a spark from *Charity's* candle and throws it to Agnes after

[430] Joy A. Schröder, 'The Feast of the Purification in the Liturgical Mysticism of Angela of Foligno', *Mystics Quarterly*, 32 (2006), 35–67, p. 35; candles were also symbolic of prayer, see Bossuyt, 'The Liturgical Use of Space', p. 191.
[431] Noted, for example, by David Kertzer in *Ritual, Politics, and Power* (New Haven, 1988), p. 8.
[432] Interestingly, the Romano-German pontifical prescribed the lighting of twelve candles during the rite of dedication, see Hamilton and Spicer eds. *Defining the Holy*, p. 8.
[433] Thomas P., 'Liturgical Drama and Community Discourse', in Thomas J. Heffernan and E. A. Matter, eds., *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* (Kalamazoo, 2001), pp. 619–644, p. 621, on dramatic response in the liturgy.
[434] This echoes Peter Lombard's theology of charity, which he saw as having three stages, the third of which, perfection, was achieved only in perfected saints, see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, 1993), p. 501.

she has heard and seen the rite, 'et tunc ista puella [...] inclinavit cereum suum adversus sodalem suam [...]. Quae accipiens quasi unam scintillam ardentem de facula charitatis, projecit de se supra pectus devotae hujus, quae haec audivit vel vidit.' Upon receiving the spark, Agnes feels devotion in her heart and sweetness in her chest, 'quae mox sensit incendium devotionis in corde et in praecordis miram suavitatem spiritus.'[435]

This grouping of facets - *Voluntaria Paupertas, Patientia, Desiderium Multa Patiendi, Obedientia, Oratio, Amor/Caritas* - is unique to Agnes. Elsewhere she lists six 'virtutes' as *Munditia, Humilitas, Disciplina, Temperantia, Patientia* and *Amor*.[436] Several groupings appeared in the medieval corpus, yet Agnes' list does not correlate with the virtues as imagined by the Church Fathers (Cardinal virtues of *Prudentia, Justitia, Abstinentia and Fortitudo*, together with the theological virtues of *Fides, Spes* and *Caritas*), the heavenly virtues found in Prudentius' *Psychomachia* (*Castitas, Temperantia, Caritas, Industria, Patientia, Humanitas and Humilitas*) or Galatians' fruit (Gal. 5:22-23, *Caritas, Gaudium, Pax, Longanimitas, Bonitas, Benignitas, Fides, Modestia* and *Continentia*).[437] Instead, the performers of this ritual are precisely suited to Agnes' contemplative spirituality. This tailoring is most explicit in the inclusion of *Desire to Suffer Much*, as the *Vita* emphasise suffering, and present a God who values it in His followers.[438]

In the imaginative world of Agnes' narrative, ritual answers ritual. Agnes perceives the communion ritual as disrupted by priestly error and, concerned that this might invalidate the

[435] Chapter 61.
[436] Chapter 60.
[437] See I. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought From the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century* (Leiden, 2011), introduction; Prudentius, *Psychomachia* (Turnhout, 2010); Sinead O'Sullivan, *Early Medieval Glosses on Prudentius' Psychomachia: The Weitz Tradition* (Leiden, 2004); on conceptualisation of virtue within the Laon school, see Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden, 1993), pp. 487-510. Interestingly, Hans Boersma, in his study *Embodiment and Virtue in Gregory of Nyssa: An Anagogical Approach* (Oxford, 2013), p. 4, argues that 'virtue is for Gregory a participation in the divine life; virtue, for Nyssen, is the anagogical progress itself', which forms a fascinating parallel to the use of virtues in displaying and declaring Agnes' ritualised 'profession' as mystic.
[438] See chapters 17, 114, 115, 138.

host's divinity, feels utterly desolate, an emotive response to a broken 'Christ'. Mystical experience arises in divine response, emotional reaction to ritual failure thus transformed into a stimulus for the performance of a different ritual. What exactly does this response tell her? The virgins embody acts expected of the pious, the figures initially held before her as an example and an ideal. They form a distinct group, distinguished from Agnes in their beauty, their unworldly brightness, and their candles. These markers unify their group, the pure light indicating their divine origin. Agnes' fear of having done something impious, namely receiving a broken host, is answered in an outstanding display of piety. This, alone, places Agnes in a privileged position. Such an opportunity is not a chastisement for incorrect action, but a reward, emphatically denying any impiety and asserting that this host remains divine.

The initial query, however, simply creates a springboard for an event unrelated to technical questions regarding the host, providing a pious and humble route into the narrative's declaration of the height of Agnes' holiness. As each figure vocalises the act they embody, the tableau is transformed into a process which completes holiness, in demonstration of the concept of this state introduced by *Love*. This process is elucidated in the interplay between the verbalisation of each figure's private desire and the act they embody. In the first exchange, it is not simply that *Voluntary Poverty* declares the intention to search for God, but also through freely choosing poverty that a constant search for God is enabled, a search only resolved through *P/patience*. This process continues through the *Desire to Suffer*, *Prayer* and *Love*. *Love* emphasises that complete holiness can only be achieved by attaining all six traits. Mirroring this proclamation, the ritualised performance of perfected piety is completed only once the final 'virtue', that of *Love*, is professed aloud. As witness to this performance, s*eeing and hearing,* Agnes progresses in the completion of virtue through witnessing it, in conclusion intimating Agnes' own completeness in virtue. The display ritually seals the state

she has achieved, enabling her to reach the final stage, and affirming this position. *Love's* provision of the spark is an invitation to Agnes, asking her to participate in a ritual from which she has been, but is no longer, excluded. This action offers Agnes a new position in the ritual hierarchy, and now holding her own 'light' Agnes becomes visually akin to the maidens. This integration, too, resounds with the Feast at hand, which recalls the purification of Mary and her re-introduction to the temple after Christ's birth. In mystical form, Agnes also undergoes a kind of purification through witness of pure virtue and subsequent admittance to a holy group. Passing from *Charity* to *Prayer* to Agnes, this spark is a token of what has occurred, emerging from the mystical and remaining with the temporal Agnes both as an imagined object within her possession and as a metaphysical embodiment of her experience.

Placing Agnes initially as a witness, distinct from the maidens, the narrative signals a change in Agnes' identity when the ritual action touches her. She is made a participant, joining the group through her possession of the spark. Now, like them, she holds her own 'candle' of virtue. Sharing the spark, *Love* indicates that Agnes has completed the process of perfection. Agnes is now physically and spiritually positioned facing *Love.* Returning to the initial declarations, it is as though Agnes may now receive *Love's* promise to give whatever was requested through *Prayer*. The spark thus becomes an answer to Agnes' prayer for complete holiness and a sign affirming an implicit question of her orthodoxy. In response to her pious anxiety, Agnes receives a divinely-sent proclamation of her own virtue, and, in an interesting parallel to Agnes' position in between, the virtues themselves were sometimes understood to be the perfection of extremes, for example temperance as the correct balance between flightiness and sluggishness.[439] Whilst many women were defined in their spiritual role through profession and enclosure, their difference from others secured in having undergone

[439] Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, p. 504.

such rites, Agnes as mystical subject within the context of mystical narrative is secured through mystical rite.[440] The narrative appears to develop Agnes' role as bound and related to the context of a Church in crisis approaching a time of judgement. In such a time Christ, like the host which began this episode, may be not be reaching the laity through the sinfulness of those professing to be religious. This theological rhetoric was not infrequently associated with the spiritual giftedness of women, and, separately, the mendicant orders.[441]

II: Agnes as between God and community

If the Liturgy of the Purification inspires a private affirmation of Agnes herself, using the ritual act to present the un-worldly nature of her ability and her absolute passivity in its receipt, an experience during a Maundy Thursday mass is a public display of the power of her inwardly accepted role. On this day, a crowd gathers to be absolved by the bishop, causing a cloud of dust. [442] Seeing this, Agnes prays that the dust will settle, after which rain falls, clearing the cloud. She is then able to move forward to the choir without harassment, and the chrism, to be used in the rite of absolution, is consecrated in her presence.

The Feast of Maundy Thursday saw the confession and reconciliation of penitents at the end of Lent before the celebrations of Easter.[443] As an important civic occasion, it was marked in the later medieval period by large public gatherings, for example in Perugia and Vienna.[444] Agnes is first placed as one penitent amongst many, but the pious actions of her response quickly distinguish her. Before the scene escalates, Agnes begins contemplating Christ's

[440] Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women', p. 25.
[441] There was anxiety both about laxity within the Church, and heretical groups, in this case perhaps particularly those who denied the efficacy of the sacrament if improperly handled, see Gary Macy, 'Theology of the Eucharist in the High Middle Ages', in Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy and Kristen van Ausdall, eds., *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2012), pp. 365–398, p. 369.
[442] Chapter 75.
[443] More explicit examples of confession in Agnes include chapters 54, 166, 167, 200.
[444] Josef A. Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development* (London, 1961), p. 92.

sacrifice. A divine voice follows, stating that on this day of forgiveness the just will receive what they request, 'quidquid justi petierint, accipiant', causing her to hope that she is one such person, 'O si ego essem de numero talium justorum!' The voice confirms that she is one of the just, something of which her fellow penitents cannot be certain.[445] The rain, as heavenly sign responding to effective prayer, displays Agnes' difference from the crowd, re-stating the private affirmation of Agnes' devotion in a dramatic and public manner - though only Agnes and the reader know this.[446] In a more subtle turn, however, it demonstrates the greatness of her piety: Agnes' intercession removes a barrier to devotional activity on the penitents' behalf, though they never identified this hindrance themselves. The sign she requests from God is thus for the spiritual benefit of all the faithful, 'da mihi hoc pro signo, ut quiescat pulvis iste, qui fideles tuos impedit a devotione sua'.[447] Even the rain which follows is extraordinary, described as enough to clear the dust yet not unpleasant, 'non offendens, sed respergens pulverem cessare fecit.' Not only does this miraculous rain allow the crowd to see the bishop and visually participate in the ritual bringing their absolution, it mirrors the ritual, as sprinkling water was a common gesture in rituals of forgiveness.[448] It is thus through Agnes' intervention that the penitents may participate to receive their penance.

Agnes' contemplation initiates the sacrament's mystical accompaniment, and through her prayer the crowd is showered by the heavenly water of forgiveness. Her personal belief in, and dialogue with, Christ-present-in-the-rite culminates in intercession for all those gathered. Encouraged by her success, she asks to receive the sacrament without being disturbed by the crowd, 'quiete intersim absque pressura populi'. Her prayers answered, she passes

[445] Chapter 75
[446] Gail Ashton discusses prayer as an acceptable avenue for female religious speech, *Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London, 2000), p.106.
[447] Chapter 75.
[448] M. R. Dudley, 'Sacramental Liturgies in the Middle Ages', in Thomas J. Heffernan and E. A. Matter, eds., *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church* (Kalamazoo, 2001), pp. 215–245, p. 217, p. 222, p. 229.

unhindered to the choir to view the bishop consecrate the chrism, 'ubi dominus episcopus coram ipsa charisma consecravit', and is allowed to receive the Eucharist from the hand of the bishop, a reward which also had social implications, as receipt was usually granted in order of rank within the Church hierarchy and according to social standing.[449] The narrative asserts Agnes' faith as powerful in precipitating access to the divine, yet the mystic's desire consistently returns to the rituals and agents of the Church: the goal of her prayer is an approach to the celebrant, the consecration of the chrism and an undisturbed communion. Both the portrayal of Agnes' desire and the divine response serve to validate the ritual in progress.

In this watery affirmation of Agnes as *de numero justorum,* her pious desire and divine action come together, resulting in a ritualized act of forgiveness. Agnes' role is centred upon ritual: her devotion to ritual has resulted in the divine gift of being able to see its hidden facets, sight which in turn proves her status and that of ritual as divinely approved. During the Maundy Thursday mass, Agnes' contemplation and subsequent prayer-requests probe into the presence of God within the earthly ritual. Arising from the gathered community, and surrounded and witnessed by them, it is as though her pious intercession serves this group by the revelation of divinity within the rite. This link to the community is also implicit in the image of the dust cloud, which conveys perhaps both a physical and metaphorical separation of the Viennese faithful from God. The dirtiness of the dust, and obscured vision it causes, are suggestive of the sinfulness of humanity, a state understood to distance the faithful from God, whilst the cloud itself physically separates the crowd from the sacrament of confession, subsequent absolution and communion, acts which provided the means to overcome this situation. Although the gathered people might have been aware of the dust-cloud, it is Agnes, through a deep understanding of the divine within the sacrament and faith of such strength

[449] Bossuyt, 'The Liturgical Use of Space', p. 197.

that her prayers are immediately answered by God, who can both see the issue and have the power to act upon it on behalf of the community.

Agnes' prayerful and grace-led actions are calming: as the rain settles the dust, so Agnes' approach to the bishop cuts through the throng, removing tumult by rejecting it. In traversing the space between bishop and crowd, Agnes also bridges the gap between act and intent. Her intercession refills 'empty' ritual with spiritual meaning, embodied in the settling of the cloud which would hide the rite of forgiveness through a symbolically loaded downpour, a divine 'washing' of the act itself. This episode conveys a transition from excitement to quiet, from big to small, from public to private, finding its ultimate focal point in the hand of the bishop and sacramental space formed between him and Agnes in the performance of the ritual of communion. As if in conclusion, the reader's sight is ultimately drawn to the pivotal detail of the Host in the Bishop's hand by the last sentence of the chapter, 'dominus episcopus eam manu sua de corpore domini communicavit', binding both rite and mystic to the body of Christ.[450] On this occasion the liturgical event frames the mystical ritual with orthodoxy, and the dusty disruption provides a humble reason for Agnes' act of intercession, which allows demonstration of her difference from the other penitents and the power offered to her through her relationship to the divine.

In a vision of a sinful friar, ritual becomes an avenue through which to display the necessity of Agnes' intercession not only for the laity, but also for the Franciscans.[451] The narrative relates how one night, a young and well-regarded friar leaves the friary with money, returning when he realises he has been tricked by the devil, a misdemeanour which results in gossip. Learning about this, Agnes begins to suffer, empathise and worry about scandal, 'graviter dolere et compati fratribus et ordini super scandalo', empathising deeply with the

[450] Chapter 75.
[451] Chapter 107.

friar. The *rumor* and *scandalum* resulting from perceived rule-breaking could be problematic, particularly for the religious, an anxiety over the delicacy of spiritual reputation Agnes shared with the friars.[452] Here, this friar's spatial transgression is also a spiritual and a jurisdictional transgression, a breaking of boundaries and rules which muddies lines of morality. This rule-breaking has repercussions beyond those immediately visible, which will be addressed in the atemporal mystical space, made available through Agnes' piety, yet ultimately it offers the stimulus for a ritual display which acts as a demonstration of Agnes' position in relation to the friars.

Reacting strongly to her friends' distress, she hears in return a stern voice declaring the righteousness of the friar's grave distance from God, 'opportet eum adhuc mei carere, eroque ei alienus'.[453] Agnes wishes to know how long this friar must be punished, receiving the vague 'non usque in finem' as her answer. A few days later the Lord appears with this friar, enveloped in a bright sphere of light. The Lord is walking and the friar follows, asking for forgiveness, but it is clear to Agnes that the Lord cannot hear him. Agnes sees that the friar does not recede from the Lord's back, and seeming to take pity, intercedes, saying, 'eja, benigne domine, misere et porrige ei manum tuam', apparently perceiving that the needed gesture of reconciliation is the extension of a hand. As though in response to her intercession, the Lord does as Agnes asks, 'extendit [...] manum suam et rapiens fratrem per manum allevavit eum in altum', pulling the friar up, implicitly to Himself. Having done this, the Lord states that He will not leave him again.[454]

Agnes' entry into this rite begins with her pious love for the virtue of someone she appears to see as a following a shared calling, or equal in the religious life, and her compassion with his

[452] Also chapters 167 and 178. See Thelma S. Fenster and Daniel L. Smail, *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, 2003), Introduction.
[453] Chapter 107.
[454] Similar accounts of insight into a friar's penance are found in Salimbene de Adam, *Chronica* (Turnhout, 2010)

plight that makes her a witness to the friar's rite of penance. Expressed in her strong response, it is Agnes' piety that enables her to seek answers from God, finding affirmation of the friar's forgiveness but not of the length of his penance.[455] In fact, the enactment of the sacramental act of confession, with its resultant divine forgiveness, is played out before her witness, allowing her not only to receive her answer but to observe and understand the inner working of sacramental action, the invisible divine power behind the sign.[456] The significance of Agnes' mystical intervention in this sacramental act becomes clearer in light of Richard of St Victor's explanation of the relationship between sacrament and human understanding:

> It is one thing that we see externally with regard to the thing or work of a sacrament; the spiritual power that lies hidden within in sacrament is quite another. And so, you are able to believe the thing of the sacrament that lies hidden within, but you are utterly unable to see it, and for this reason you are not able to extend your knowledge in this part up to a full cubit.[457]

Agnes' piety allows her to both see and understand, to the point of interacting, the divine working of the sacrament. The Lord appears large, and the friar 'apparuit pusillus apud dominum', visual cues indicating power and weakness. The friar follows behind the Lord in a position of inferiority, the sinner literally made small in size, punished through his place behind the Lord who withholds His face and His voice. Not receding from the Lord's back despite the lack of any response from God, he offers a visual expression of his contrition, re-discovered obedience and faithfulness. These two figures are encased in a large sphere of light: 'sphaera magna lucis erat in circuitu domini, et iste frater [...] in sphaera juxta

[455] Agnes' interest in the length of the friar's punishment may reflect the changing understandings of penance in life, and purgatory, see the introduction in Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman, eds., *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2000).
[456] See Gerd Althoff, *Die Macht der Rituale: Symbolik und Herrschaft im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt, 2003), pp. 106-108.
[457] Richard of St Victor, *The Mystical Ark,* book II, chapter 6, in *Richard of St Victor*, trans Grover A. Zinn, (New York, 1979), p. 181.

dominum', unequivocally separated from Agnes. Positioned as witness, the mystic is offered power in relation to the friar, as in seeing a condensed form of his penance she is given information of importance. Indeed, the scene is a model of the process of forgiveness held to be necessary for all fallen humanity.

Before Agnes' intercession, the friar remained unreconciled to God, yet Agnes' piety has placed her in a position to be able to help. By becoming active, choosing to speak to the Lord on the friar's behalf, Agnes makes the transition from witness to intercessor. Her plea is an assertion of her desire to fulfil this position, and her success in shaping the course of the ritual a (divine) statement in favour of Agnes' spiritual support of the friars and an affirmation of her ability. The scene demonstrates her intercession to be both necessary and effective even for the Franciscans, as a professed religious community to whom her confessor belongs. This is a bold statement of ability and (divine) purpose, as it was only ordained men who could ritually reconcile people to God through confession.[458] Here it is the vow-less and female Agnes whose devotional power releases the religious man. The narrative does not place her as another, perhaps holier, friar, but akin to a saint, positioned apart from, and in some sense above, the Church hierarchy. She is the holy other, divinely made available to the friars to see, through her distance, what the community cannot.

Agnes' role as one of service to the community, situated between the secular and religious communities, and between temporal community and God, is demonstrated in her reaction to a host under threat. [459] Here, the narrative portrays the mystic as clearly set apart from the clerical hierarchy, whilst nonetheless bound to a form of the divine heavily intertwined with orthodox sacramental practice. In an encounter with a witch, a stolen host is appropriated to

[458] M. R. Dudley,'The Liturgy of the Medieval Church', p. 230.
[459] For the role of Beguines within urban communities, see Penny Galloway, 'Neither Miraculous nor Astonishing: The Devotional Practices of Beguine Communities in French Flanders', in Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and Their Impact* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 107–128.

define Agnes' position between God, Church and laity.[460] Passing a particular merchant's house after visiting church, without knowing why, Agnes begins to bow towards a cellar, 'reverentiam faceret cellario nesciens inclinando'. Although her companions mock her for this, she is unable to stop, as she is made to do so by the Holy Spirit. Only once she has properly completed her veneration do priests arrive, processing with clerics carrying banners, singing hymns and carrying out devotions. It is revealed that the witch has sequestered a stolen host in a wine vessel in the basement of this house for an unspecified 'lucrum'. The priests take the host, and filled with remorse, the woman confesses. This tale reflects contemporary beliefs in the danger of women's secretive and malicious ways, but also underlines the fourteenth-century theological concerns about the exact nature and power of the host. Stories of pilfered hosts were not unusual, but Agnes' episode is distinguished by the ritualization lent by her bowing and the witch's use of a 'vase vini.'[461]

Underlying this account is a juxtaposition of secular and religious, made clear in Agnes' movement away from the clearly designated sacred space of the church to a building whose secularity is underlined in its connection to the pecuniary world of business - a merchant's house. It is the dislocation of Agnes' act of religious veneration from its expected sphere which makes it notable - an oddness which causes her companions to laugh at her - and gives this narrative both its drama and its significance. Several interesting details are added to Agnes' action. Her bowing is described as showing reverence, devotion stimulated when passing the basement, 'reverentiam faceret cellario nesciens inclinando', her veneration described as completed properly, 'bene perfecisset'. That such bowing has meaning, reverence, and that she has completed it well signal its ritualized nature, something affirmed in the reaction it generates. In disjoining this recognisably ritualized action from its expected

[460] Chapter 44.
[461] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 83, p. 195.

context (the church from which they have come), it is made profoundly peculiar and the subject of ridicule. This separates Agnes from her companions, suggesting that, through the influence of the Holy Spirit, Agnes is able to recognise and respond to the presence of God in a way that the others are not. Unlike them, utterly subject to divine will, she is able to show the due reverence despite the lack of an appropriate context perceivable to ordinary human understanding. Because of divine presence only she can perceive, Agnes creates her own (new) ritual context, her piety allowing her a private moment, nonetheless secured in ritual form, with God.

Once Agnes has finished bowing, the priests arrive in procession without further explanation, revealing the true significance of Agnes' initial gesture, namely the presence of the host. Ritualized genuflection, in fact signifying a concealed host, is re-connected to the procession approaching from the church, and provides a liturgical structure which extends its sacred space to the host.[462] This affirms Agnes' private ritual and encloses her act, and the host, within the orthodox ritual structure provided by the priests.[463] As much as Agnes is distanced from her fellows through their mistrust and disbelief, she is connected with the male religious through her action-type and its demonstration of an (unwitting) understanding, elevating her in the spiritual hierarchy of the episode. Ritual space and ritual action draw a line between Agnes and church, and Agnes and clergy, and by this performed parallel Agnes' action is confirmed as righteous.

This account addresses doubts, demonstrating that Agnes is neither entirely like her friends, who cannot sense the Holy Spirit, nor entirely like the priests, with whom she does not leave, showing a position as pious woman that is uniquely hers. She appears to have access to information neither group has, illustrated in that she prefigures the ritual that retrieves the

[462] Bossuyt, 'The Liturgical Use of Space', p. 193.
[463] Women's participation in processional liturgy was normally limited, see Catherine Lawless, 'Representation, Religion, Gender and Space in Medieval Florence', in Andrews, ed. *Ritual and Space*, pp. 232-258, p. 252.

host. Agnes is also placed in opposition to the witch. Both women interact with ritual, the witch in choosing to steal the host and Agnes through her ritualistic response to the Holy Spirit. Yet whilst the witch's disruption of ritual is shown as malicious, Agnes' assertion of ritualized action is demonstrated to be holy and successful. Whilst one woman acts against Christ, the other emerges as His servant.

Unlike other people, the narrative's use of rite demonstrates Agnes to be unfettered by the restrictions of space and community, normal to a temporal and secular existence, but made free to move in multiple spaces through her special relationship with God. Using space and ritual, the scene demonstrates that Agnes' holiness sets her apart from the textual and extra-textual audience, yet ritual is also used to re-integrate her spiritual freedom into the Church and make her divinely-inspired knowledge accessible to a temporal audience: her companions realise what Agnes' bowing indicates, only do not believe her. Here, ritual action is presented in the narrative firstly out of context, to alienate and thereby demonstrate Agnes' difference, and finally to authorise in the revelation that God (as host) was present throughout. Depictions of mystical experience that remove the divine from its Church context such as this one are sometimes understood as secularizing the sacred, yet in this case the emphasis appears to instead to draw on the value of the sacred in order to affirm Agnes' identity within, not external to, this framework.[464]

III: Agnes and Sacramental rite, Between Temporality and Eternity

Agnes' role in championing the presence of God within the sacraments, such as in confession, also finds expression in her juxtaposition with the ordained celebrants of these

[464]For example Jane Chance, 'Speaking *in propria persona*: Authorizing the Subject as a Political Act in Late Medieval Feminine Spirituality', *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liege and their Impact* (1999), 266–90, p. 287; Hermanowitz and Morgan, 'Ritualizing the Routine', p. 200.

rites. Multiple episodes recount Agnes' reaction to impious clergymen. [465] For instance, on an occasion of a mass celebrated by an unchaste priest, Agnes' belief in the divinity inherent within sacramental action for the faithful and her receipt of the true body despite the priest, reassures the reader of the inviolability of God.[466] It is clear that *Vita* is influenced by an interest in the theology of the Eucharist and a defence of orthodoxy against heretical rejection of the necessity and sanctity of the sacraments. However, whilst recording negative examples of clerical impiety and laxity, the text clearly shows a positive relationship with the Franciscan community in particular, with Agnes' role equally used to laud the critical value of the ordained in providing sacraments to the laity.

During a Palm Sunday mass in the friars' chapel, after the elevation of the Host, Agnes moves to see Christ, as 'corpus domini', on the altar. [467] During the chanting of Canons and before the *pater noster*, details which draw attention to the full orthodoxy of not only the act but the rite's performance, she sees the hands of the officiating priest glowing like the moon, 'splendebant sicut luna serena in die apparens', and the priest's face and the host shining 'sicut solem'. At this point her senses fall asleep, indicating a change to mystical experience. Caught in a beam, which resonates with the narrative's imagery of grace, and experiencing sweetness, a sign of divine presence, Agnes attempts to enter a full state of rapture but is unable to prevail. Her presence in the temporal act is clearly important to the scene, with the mystical action anchored in the ritual being performed. A golden tabernacle appears above the Eucharist, and Agnes watches a translucent figure turning between the priest and sacrament. Agnes realises that the actions of the figure she sees correspond exactly with those of the priest during mass, 'ipsa imago omnia, quae in missa agenda sunt, in signis et in

[465] Women often acted as critics of the clergy, for instance Margaret of Cortona, Marie d'Oignies and Ida of Louvain, see Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 136.
[466] Chapter 41.
[467] Chapter 72.

fractione specierium cum sacerdote operabatur'. She then observes three beams going from this figure to the priest. Agnes interprets this as an indication of the priest's purity of conscience, his heart's desire for God and his priestly purity.

Agnes' participation in this ritual is predominantly as witness, her role within the rite stemming from her ability to see aspects of the action invisible to others, judging the otherwise imperceptible merits of the sacramental action and its participants. Involvement on this level, as a lay-witness elevated through piety, enables her to affirm the spiritual correctness of what is being undertaken and to provide confidence in the ritual for lay and clerical participants alike. Offering new information through her point of view, the narrative presents God using Agnes' sight to validate the action. Here, her devotional fervour, expressed once again in an absolute trust in the divine nature contained within the ritual, is strongly linked to her mystical vision. This is demonstrated, for example, in that it is only once Agnes has moved to the altar to adore the body of Christ that the revelation commences, something inspired by her longing to behold the body 'cum magno desiderio et fide immensa'. Agnes' desire to see, prompting her approach to the body, in turn stimulates her ability to view things beyond the earthly, enacted desire to see leading to fuller vision. Through the influence of this gift, Agnes can see that the priest's hands and the sacrament are shining, perhaps as heavenly affirmation of the internal nature of these objects: both are touched by the divine. Having received assurance of the nature of the sacrament and the intention of the celebrant by fully seeing earthly ritual, Agnes is taken further into a mystical state.

A careful division of spatial levels is built into her experience, suggesting an ascent into increasingly rarefied knowledge. As the mass begins, Agnes perceives the raising of the host at a most basic, earthly level. After the expression of her desire to see articulated in her movement toward the altar, both a physical and spiritual approach, the virtue of action and

performer are, quite literally, illuminated for her. This allows her access to a new, spiritual level of sight, but as it is only after this point that her bodily senses fall asleep, the text suggests that this sight still occurs through her physical eyes. Once her bodily senses are subdued, it appears that she begins with non-bodily senses to observe things not attached to the earthly facets of the ritual, namely the golden tabernacle, three beams and the translucent figure. All the visual elements possess a distinctly heavenly aspect. Indeed, the three beams of light draw a visible line between heaven and the priest.[468]

In this manner Agnes' vision reveals the active relationship between the divine and eternal in heaven and the earthly-temporal action which is on display before her, contextualising the Eucharistic mass within a greater context of salvation-history in the image's echoes of the first Pentecost.[469] Moreover, the translucent figure made visible to Agnes is clearly Christ-like, offering the assurance that both performer (priest) and process (communion) are divinely guided. Indeed, Agnes views divine participation in the mass on a number of levels. Before she is distanced from the earthly she is allowed to see the shining Host and hands, but once her earthly senses are removed, intimating a view of the act through spiritual senses, she discerns that Christ is working through the priest to celebrate communion. Agnes' ability to see the eternal, attained through her desire to be close to the Lord, revitalises the ritual of communion by physically connecting it to its place in history and its source in the divine.

The biblical narrative of the tabernacle provides further insight. Stretching through the Old and New Testament, it is an image central to the narrative of the Law, and redemption of mankind. Jeremiah laments God's destruction of the tabernacle, forgetting of feasts and reproach of priests, 'demolitus est tabernaculum suum oblivioni tradidit Dominus in Sion

[468] A similar joining occurs through streams of Christ's blood in chapter 190.
[469] Acts. 2:3. The parted tongues frequently represented in medieval imagery as beam-like strands from heaven. Walter Haug explores mystical ways of speaking as exegesis which draws upon a system of references through use of salvation-history in *Brechungen auf dem Weg zur Individualität: Kleine Schriften zur Literatur des Mittelalters* (Tübingen, 1995), p. 537.

festivitatem et sabbatum et obprobrio in indignatione furoris sui regem et sacerdotem.'[470] The connection this verse makes between the descent of the tabernacle, failing feasts and judgement of priests is salient. The covenant is imagined as eventually being restored by God, through Christ acting as Priest and now provides an eternal tabernacle consecrated with His blood.[471] The tabernacle reappears in Revelation, where John sees the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony opened in heaven.[472]

The tabernacle informs the interpretation of what Agnes sees within the tent and the surrounding vision. Just as Moses' tabernacle contained God's law, the appearance of a tabernacle for Agnes' experience underlines that her vision contains the word of God for humanity. A visual cue and symbolic seal, the biblical theology and historical memory of the tabernacle colours this contemporary experience with implication. As an object, it reminds the reader of God's promise and asks them to associate it with Agnes' experience. The vision becomes a reassertion of promised salvation and a warning about the possibility of an encroaching condemnation. It is pertinent that Agnes is offered a view into an open tent, echoing John's revelation of the open tabernacle in heaven after the final battle, and acting perhaps as a reminder of an approaching time of judgement.[473] The tabernacle visually embeds a further context within the space of the ritual. In doing so it positions a different time - here an eternal time which is both past and future - inserting knowledge intended to speak to the 'framing' space and time, visually disentangling theological layers of practice.[474]

[470] Lam. 2:6.
[471] Amos 9.11; Heb. 9:11; Heb. 9:1.
[472] Rev. 15:5. For medieval interpretations of the tabernacle, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric and the Making of Images 400-1200* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 221- 277; Mary Clemente Devlin, 'Tower and Tabernacle', *Essays in Medieval Studies* 10, ed. A. J. Frantzen (Illinois, 1993), p. 99.
[473] Rev., 15:5.
[474] A similar type of connection between prefigurement, fulfilment and actualization was integral to liturgical rites, see Marie Anne Majeski, 'Reading the Word in a Eucharistic Context: The Shape and Methods of Early Medieval Exegesis', in Lizette Larson-Miller, ed., *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays* (New York, 1997), p. 64.

The relationship between the ritual and the vision of the tabernacle is glossed within the narrative, the tabernacle interpreted as showing the value of the priesthood, 'significat dignitatem presbyterii.' [475] This affirms that the signs, which Agnes has been shown, serve to underline the virtue of the priest and potential of that role, which makes it both powerful and valuable. Indeed, Agnes sees a multitude of people in the tent. They are poignantly portrayed as *now to be clothed, to be fed, to be marked, to be increased*. Both re-clothing and marking are biblical signs of salvation and key elements of resurrection in Revelation, giving the tent-space a heavenly aspect.[476] In a visual expression of the souls' status, each is presented with ivory objects, representing chastity, gentleness and nobility, 'castitatem, spiritus lenitatem et animae sive morum nobilitatem', forming a witnessed act of reward. Agnes' peek into the tabernacle reveals how the actions of good priests, an action-type contextually identified with the rituals of the Church, participate in human salvation.

Visualised just above the physical objects of the Eucharist, within the space of the performed communion, the tabernacle places the space of heaven and the salvation of souls in unmitigated proximity to the earthly rite. Further to this, it positions the priest, in enacting the ritual, between communicant-soul and the space of heaven, represented in the tabernacle. His role, through God, is shown as potential facilitator and the gravity of the actions being played out is underlined. In being granted access to heavenly space of the tabernacle through her sight, Agnes is associated with the knowledge within the historical tabernacle and, akin to Moses, with the duty of care for the divine word. Through her devotion to ritual, the account posits Agnes as a witness, and in her act of seeing depicts her as placed inside the tabernacle amongst the saved.

[475] Chapter 73.
[476] For instance, 2 Cor. 5.1-4; Rev 15:5.

The interaction of spaces within this vision is illuminating. Here mystical experience is consciously integrated within earthly mass. By underlining the staggered progression from earthly, pious, mystical to atemporal, and through the explicit denial of complete ecstasy, the reader is assured that the mystical action correlates with temporal. In doing so, the relationship between levels is emphasised: Christ in the Eucharist is not only within a past act, but also participating in present and future. Agnes receives knowledge that the Eucharist in which she participates is divinely sanctioned through the contemporary beatific witness and participation of Christ. The tabernacle of the Eucharist, invoked in the performance of the ritual of communion, continues to house the divine on earth.

Agnes' function in this scene is her ability to see aspects of the ritual which the celebrant does not. Her position as witness, rather than celebrant, has a clear view of the tabernacle above the host, beams affirming the priest and the beatific figure, placed in judgement over the action. Whilst the priest performs and his virtue is affirmed in heaven-sent illumination, the celebrant does not attest to these marks. Only Agnes' sight has the power to confirm divine validation of the ritual, and through this her ability is also ritually aligned with the divine. The desire of a pious witness thus asks questions about the divine source of the ritual, which those holding status within the earthly rite may not do without jeopardising their humility. Spiritual observance has elevated Agnes: in a divine answer to Agnes' faithful trust in communion, she is no longer distanced from the knowledge of the ritual as recipient, but is transformed by heaven-sent empowerment of her witnessing. The mystical perspective reveals the ritual's hidden strata, illuminating the place of contemporary action in the greater historical and atemporal framework. Restating the importance of communion and its agents, the vision positions Agnes at the heart of the Eucharist's salvation-historical potency.

The *Vita* makes use of an understanding of the rite of the Eucharist, in particular, as a sacred and atemporal space which is a source of knowledge and accessible through Agnes' piety, in

order to quell contemporary fears regarding sacramental practice. One such episode describes how Agnes is approached by a woman, who informs her that she has found a loose host on the altar. [477] Both women are alarmed, unable to discern whether the host is consecrated.[478] Attempting to ascertain the nature of the host, Agnes kneels before the altar. The spirit of consolation, signifying divine presence, appears as a response to her deliberate change of position, dissipating when she arises. Anxious, Agnes kneels again and the consolation returns, confirming the correlation between position and benefit. She is joined by the sacristan who keeps the host. Agnes then offers a tangentially unrelated prayer to discover whether hosts handled by sorcerers continue to be the body of Christ, receiving an affirmation. Subsequently Agnes sees in vision a calf-sized lamb of human flesh, with four legs, naked and with a human face, adorned with a diadem and looking towards earth. The next day during mass, Agnes sees a lamb of medium size with white wool. The lamb walks about the altars where masses are being read and kisses the priests' chasubles. Standing next to her, the lamb kisses her cheeks, filling her with 'sweet fire'. A well-meaning neighbour alerts her to the elevated host of the earthly mass, to Agnes' great distress causing her to leave a mystical state. However, on re-entering a mystical state she finds the lamb still standing beside her, who informs her that it had smelled the great devotion of the priests celebrating mass, 'odoratusque sum odorem suavitatis devotionis eorum circuiens per singulos.'[479]

It is the unnamed woman who is shown to draw Agnes into this sacramental conundrum, enabling the mystic to remain passive in her progression from bystander to agent, in a task

[477] Chapter 153.
[478] On the miraculous ability to distinguish consecrated and unconsecrated hosts, see Bynum, *Fragmentation,* p. 123.
[479] Chapter 154.

apparently unsuited to an un-ordained woman.[480] Yet, implicit in the woman's selection of Agnes is her perception of the mystic's suitability for the task at hand. Chosen in this way, Agnes is placed as an equal to the sacristan to whom she then presents the problem, and also in contrast to the laywoman who is described as a countrywoman, a rural woman and a peasant, under suspicion of having in fact placed the host on the altar. Neither Agnes nor the sacristan are fore-armed with knowledge to determine the status of the host and ultimately it is Agnes to whom the knowledge is given. It is thus Agnes, by divine guidance, who emerges as spiritual leader in this crisis. Able to access knowledge providing reassurance, Agnes' actions solve the problem independently of the sacristan.

Medieval churches are usually considered as closed and controlled spaces, yet for Agnes they are transformed into an area in which she has access to both knowledge and authority.[481] Presented with a query concerning the validity of the host, Agnes chooses to kneel before the altar. Rather than abandoning this form of practice when it is threatened, Agnes instead seeks her solution within its bounds, using ritual action to question ritual, and implicitly demonstrating the continued divine presence within the performed sacrament. This is validated through the consolation she receives, and, as if to stress this correlation, when doubts regarding the host return, Agnes checks its divinity by changing her position, finding affirmation once again. With the dislocation of the host from its ritual context, it becomes impossible to judge its sacred state, causing the women's anxiety. This instability is pacified through ritual action. As when bowing before a basement in response to a stolen host, here Agnes again resorts to the ritualised, kneeling in deference and prayer. In both cases, Agnes' main form of communication with other people is through non-verbal, though highly evocative, ritual actions such as kneeling or bowing.

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[480] Bynum suggests women were 'in some sense excluded from the Church' as the Church was the clergy, *Fragmentation*, p. 63.
[481] Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London, 2000), p. 72, p. 82.

The lamb's actions present God's positive judgement in a visual form, the host which has been questioned brought to life in the image of the sacrificial lamb, to which Agnes is sole witness.[482] Its movements are in themselves ritualized, and interwoven within the ritual occurring in the church. The approach to each altar, the observance of each priest, the placement of a kiss upon each chasuble, symbolic not only of office but the performance of that office, display a definitive affirmation that enacted rite, that each priest and his actions, are divinely sanctioned and judged to be good. What is more, the lamb seeks out a third object to kiss, namely Agnes' cheeks. Whilst this is an explicit gesture of divine approval of Agnes, a connection is created between objects, actions and ritual through the lamb's trajectory and action. Her role, just as that of the altar and the priest, both of which are undeniably essential, is unequivocally offered divine blessing and affirmation.

Temporal error finds answer in the divine space accessible to Agnes' mystical insight. The mystical space-knowledge realm, is also overtly aligned with the temporal action through the narrative's movement between the two spaces. Developing over two days, it is cemented in the time-scope of the contemporary-temporal, suggesting that the mystical action occurs during earthly time. The detail invested in the exact size of the lamb, which shrinks between the first viewing to its presence in the second mass, changing from the size of a calf to 'mediocriter magnus', is distinctive.[483] This supports the reader in a real-time visualisation of the lamb's movements in the actual church. Intended to interact with the earthly church space and objects, the lamb's size is important. Of medium size, the lamb may stand beside Agnes as she kneels, kiss her cheeks and the priests' chasubles. Both aspects serve to insist that the mystical speaks to the temporal and that Agnes' message is of immediate relevance.

[482] A lamb was sometimes depicted on the host by this period. See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 39.
[483] Chapter 154.

The presence of the lamb is a thread running through mystical and temporal experience of the mass. Agnes sees this lamb beside her in the initial mystical experience and again in the same position when she re-enters the state. Forced into and out of the mystical and earthly, the nature of the content of her vision is made explicit. By standing beside her, the lamb physically demonstrates that what it embodies, namely the divine, remains with her during the mass even when she cannot see it, and Agnes is consequently shown its potential presence during performed rites even when she is unaware. The experience implies that Agnes is allowed to see in 'real-time' action occurring on a spiritual level during every mass. Such a privileged point of view demonstrates not only that Agnes is conscious of the mass on a level her companion is not, but that such alertness offers valuable information, particularly in relation to contemporary theological interest in the nature of the Eucharist and the way in which sacramental power might be affected by virtue and behaviour of celebrant and recipient.[484]

This distinctive description of the lamb and its attributes occurs only once in the *Vita*.[485] Whilst Christ as God in human flesh or Christ as lamb are common biblical image-types, the image of lamb with a half-human and half-animal appearance is unusual. It is possible that this imagery is an amalgamation of several biblical image-tropes, echoing (though not replicating) the depiction in Revelation. For example, the *Vita* describes the lamb's fleece as bright and snow-like, 'agnum candidum ut nix, vestitum lana candidissima', which finds a striking parallel in the description of the one like the Son of Man in Revelation, whose hair was white like wool and snow, 'capilli erant candidi tamquam lana alba tamquam nix' (Rev 1:14).[486] The appearance of the lamb as clothed in human flesh, naked, with a human face

[484] See, for example, Macy, 'Theology of the Eucharist'; Marilyn M. C. Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus, and William Ockham* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 48–50.
[485] See also chapter 124, on a knight's shield, chapter 161-164, patience following the Lord.
[486] Chapter 154; see also Dan. 7:9.

walking on four feet, 'carne humana vestitus, nudus, habens faciem humanam, et incedens quator pedibus,' is more difficult to place, though God explains himself in the following chapter, stating that the calf-form is harder to kill than a lamb, yet calves are herded where they do not wish to go, just as God is driven by human sin.[487] Interestingly, two descriptors of Agnes' lamb, being the size of a calf and having a human face, echo the depiction of the creatures sitting around God's throne offered in Revelation.[488] Additionally, in John's vision of heaven, the slain lamb is strongly equated with the image of God enthroned in victory.[489] The lamb here appears to be partially one thing and partially another, made of flesh like Christ, shaped as the lamb of the apocalypse, with a face like a creature of worship yet crowned as a king enthroned.

The connection between Agnes and the lamb, or *agnus dei,* a word play which found expression in the lamb symbolism associated with the Viennese mystic's popular namesake, the virgin Saint Agnes, is further elucidated in the parallels drawn in this episode.[490] Reminiscent of the portrayal of Agnes in the *Vita*, argued in this discussion, the lamb is presented as situated between things, in the way it appears as a composite image, through its spatial position and through the theology of intercession demonstrated in the sacrament. Seen first in heaven with its face turned to the earth, and then to appearing in the church, the lamb is demonstrated to act in both spheres, highlighting that temporal actions resonate in heaven. The lamb's strange and somewhat grotesque description remind the reader of the historical sacrifice of flesh and blood offered in Christ's crucifixion, and the promise of a future in heaven which this created. In using imagery of Revelation, this communion is implicitly

[487] Chapter 154.
[488] Rev. 4:7 '[...] secundum animal simile vitulo et tertium animal habens faciem quasi hominis [...]'
[489] Rev. 5:6 'et vidi et ecce in medio throni et quattuor animalium et in medio seniorum agnum stantem tamquam occisum.'
[490] See, for example, Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints,* trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 2012), p. 101.

portrayed as remaining with the soul in the final judgement: just as the lamb is present in mass and in heaven, so too will the benefits of the Eucharist be felt eternally by the soul.

The closeness between temporal and eternal shown to have been created in the Eucharist in the narrative, is further illustrated in a vision of Christ. On the fifth Sunday after Easter, Agnes sees a young and beautiful man, 'juvenis bene adultus', naked and bathed in immense light.[491] Agnes notes that she is not repulsed by his nudity, but receives spiritual consolation, 'sed magis consolatione spiritus repleta est', an expression typical for her experience of the divine.[492] The man has his hands crossed over his chest, like a supplicant about to receive the Eucharist. A wound appears under his right arm, described in graphic yet domestic language, with bubbling blood that resembles water boiling in a pot over a fire, 'in quo sanguis recens bulliebat, quemadmodum olla fervens, cum ad ignem bullit nec tamen superbullit'. This man professes himself ready to gift himself, 'ego paratus sum propinare omnibus me cum humilitate desirantibus et sustentibus.' The use of culinary imagery of a pot on the boil in the description of the wound further strengthens its Eucharistic qualities, as Agnes uses such everyday description elsewhere in connection to the Eucharist, when she describes smelling freshly baked rolls at altars where communion is about to be celebrated.[493]

The narrative establishes the intended rituality of the scene through its interpretation of folded hands, as though referring the vision to the mass Agnes had just attended. Further to the explicit description of the man's stance as ritualistic, other elements are clear references to ritual: the wound mirrors the side-wound suffered by Christ during His crucifixion and the description of this wound as filled with bubbling blood likens it to the chalice filled for communion. Yet this blood does not spill out. Despite the beautiful man's profession of

[491] Chapter 140.
[492] Ibid.; Also, for example, in ch. 79 and 83. Chapter 87 suggests that Agnes was given access to Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs, and makes particular reference to consolation.
[493] Chapters 40, 175, 187.

readiness to give himself, the blood is plainly described as not flowing over, but only bubbling. The vision makes clear Eucharistic overtures in the image of the side-wound, blood and readiness to give, but these do not come to fruition in Agnes' drinking of the blood of Christ. This reflects the imagery within the *Vita*, as occasions on which Agnes is described as touching the embodied divine are infrequent, experienced twice as half-swallowing Christ's foreskin, and once as drinking from Christ's hand wound.[494]

The state of Christ's blood is in connection to the framework of an episode stimulated by and occurring during a mass. Earthly rite and visionary ritual are clearly intended to relate in form and meaning. So it is that just as the man of Agnes' vision declares himself ready to offer, she is awakened by a pious person so that she may see the host being raised. Agnes protests that this is done at the wrong moment, causing her to lose sight of the Lord. In fact, this unwanted interruption allows the reader to understand the full implication of both vision and rite. It implies that which is proffered by the wounded Christ in visionary form appears physically, in consequence, as the Host in the mass. In this sense His body does indeed 'flow', not here as blood but in the spiritual-physical form of body and salvation offered in the eternal realm: as the open wound bubbling in readiness to stream out in mystical experience and as the reconciliation and eternal life received through participation in the Eucharist. Through the blood about to flow from the side-wound, but not yet doing so, Christ the divine priest retains full agency over the communion, being seen to control when and whether His gift of blood will be given. The body of Christ, its power and His agency are shown moving between the spaces of heaven and earth, between the eternal and the temporal, between mystical and physical. The ritual commencing in the mystical is completed in an earthly state, in the familiar physical gesture of celebrant raising host.

[494] Chapters 37, 38, 167.

The response of the unnamed pious person breaks Agnes' mystical state, allowing the mystical action to be linked once more to the earthly. In this, the pious person's moment of misunderstanding is the reader's moment of enlightenment, made aware that mystical experience correlates with earthly. Thus the pious person's ignorance and their being bound to the earthly progress of the ritual further acts as a foil to the privileged nature of Agnes' knowledge and her special status as participating in the mystical. At a basic level, however, it illustrates the desirability of seeing the raised Host, and perhaps reflects fears regarding an attachment to the act rather than its essence. Whilst the whole congregation sees the Host, Agnes alone has access to a view of the beautiful, fully bodied Christ. What this depiction of the unnamed person's participation also indicates, is that those with greatest piety, even mystical insight, did not always appear this way to others.[495] This person could see that Agnes was not paying attention to the mass. However, they do not appear to have perceived of her as in a mystical episode or state of contemplation. They certainly considered it more important that she view the raised host than allow her to remain unaware, which implies that whilst the narrative presents Agnes as an intermediary and holy woman, she was not always successfully recognised in this.

In the interaction between the ritual within mystical experience and earthly ritual, Agnes is offered a unique perspective on the earthly action. The actions of the man within her vision, who is Christ himself, offer Agnes valuable knowledge. This experience reveals that the host is truly the body of the Lord, and moreover that the body is physically offered 'afresh' by Christ himself during the ritual of communion.[496] This idea of currentness or freshness is made particularly urgent by the vivid image of the bubbling wound: Christ's salvific life-blood about to be offered once again, a state which speaks to past (historical shedding of

[495] The misjudgement of mystical response is discussed further in relation to Angela of Foligno, see chapter two of this thesis, pp. 94–113.
[496] See chapters 95 and 103.

blood in the crucifixion), present (blood shed in the ritual in progress), and the remaining presence of blood within the body (which will continue to be shed for future forgiveness). The vision is an intimate and personal approval of Agnes. She is singled out and shown the physical and historical source of the Eucharist she experiences in each earthly performance of communion.

Such imagery participates in Agnes' broader theological symbolism, constantly binding man to God, uniting past, present and future, and illuminating her perception of a continual spiritual movement between the spaces of heaven and earth. The depiction of light to designate a flow of grace and the indwelling of God in the soul is supplemented by that of blood, a biblical image of promise, belonging, duty and reward. Blood, which has historically soaked into the earth, links man to earth, earth to heaven, and man to God. Indeed, amongst the first things revealed about Agnes' world is that divine blood, shed on the cross, is infused with the earth and temporal existance, 'deus corpora de terra sumpserat et quia corpora sanctorum sunt de terra et quia in passione domini terra infusa est sanguine salvatoris et sanctorum.' This initial outpouring of blood continues, imagined in spiritual nourishment flowing from Christ's side-wound, and that 'aliqui viatores, adhuc viciniores lateri Christi aliquibus in patria, nectar illud salutare bibunt', conveying that some pious people gain access to this wound through their virtue.[497] The world created within this narrative uses Agnes' mystical insight to demonstrate and defend the connection between temporal and eternal in the sacraments, with the result that the community of the faithful on earth and heaven are bound together through the ever-flowing blood of Christ.

[497] Chapter 6; Agnes never drinks from Christ's side-wound, but does from His hand in chapter 167.

This chapter began with the suggestion that Agnes was somehow lost, falling between identities, and with the observation that the rituals, which occupied a central place in the text's narrative, might offer an insight into the identity imagined for Agnes by the text. In re-approaching the presence (and potential) of ritual within the mystical narrative, it has been possible to gain a different perspective on the text's perception of both Agnes and ritual.

Indeed, Agnes' revelations are filled with images of the ritualised surely because they hope to say something about ritual itself. Agnes' insights make clear that despite any other factor, ritual error or human failing, divine power remains at the core of each Church rite, and the act (and Agnes herself) remain orthodox. By showing a living and eternal God to be present, but invisible, in every enactment of the sacrament, the sacred is deeply and vividly re-embedded in the temporal ritual, elevating not only the (literal) vitality of the sacramental act, in which Christ lives and brings life to the Church of the faithful, but the vital responsibility of the celebrant's role. The way rituals function in the text becomes cyclical. The ritual which is demonstrated to be even more powerful or even closer to the divine by Agnes' sight in turn reflects this greater imagined power and divinity back, not only onto Agnes, but also onto the providers of sacramental care such as the friars. In this way, the narrative uses Agnes' intercession within the ritual act as a defence, and concomitantly, in her mystical experience, as proof, of the sacred power of the sacramental act and the spiritual importance of the celebrant.

Secondly, because Agnes' experience demonstrates the living, bodily Christ to be truly present within each performed ritual, the narrative frames devotion and to, and the spiritual task of provision of, the sacraments as a literal following of Christ as man. Reacting to a (possibly) broken host is not simply reverential, but is transformed into an emotional suffering with a physically broken, suffering Christ. For Agnes, this pious reaction is depicted as resulting in her purification. In short, the presentation of Agnes' intense

relationship with the rites of the Church is not simply a depiction of admirable devotion or obedience to the Church, but a portrayal of discipleship through faithful adherence to such rites potentially available to both lay and religious, a *vita apostolica* in a the devotion of walking with Christ in the events of salvation-history.

The text consistently suggests a temporal world in moral crisis and approaching its end, something succinctly captured in its depictions of rites brought into uncertainty by human action. The well-intentioned friar who leaves his enclosure at night, the laity divided from confession by dirty clouds, and hosts, which are the body of Christ, maliciously stolen, even carelessly broken or lost by the ordained men chosen as their stewards, are symbolic of a community, the Church of the faithful under the priesthood of Christ, in disarray. Throughout the narrative Agnes' interactions with the ritual act intervene to highlight and amend the incorrect interrelation of God-in-sacrament, religious and laity. Re-framed as knowledge seen, by means of piety and divine response, within existing sacramental structure, the text underlines the importance of the divine purpose of ritual within salvation history. Through entwining references to the scriptural apocalypse, and revealing the Eucharistic moment as an atemporal nexus of the divine covenant with humanity, the *Vita* emphasises the tangible and consequential relationship between ritual on earth and the approaching final judgement. Inversely, in stressing this connection, it also intimates the true extent of the crisis stimulated by the corruption of this bond, something which occurs when the meaning of the rite is neither understood nor respected, which , whilst clearly a strong critique both of clerical laxity and any heretical position which rejected the necessity of sacraments in salvation, equally supplements the value of the ordained.

Returning, then, to the question of Agnes' identity, she is indeed between. Not lost, however, but rather deliberately so placed. As intercessor, she is necessarily between God and humanity, lay and clerical, becoming, moreover, almost a translator between God-in-ritual

and a stumbling audience. Furthermore she is equally placed apart in her recognition of a judgement about to occur, particularly as she is shown, ritually, already to have been judged as holy. This raises many questions. The interpretation of physical devotion to ritual as a discipleship of Christ echoes the Franciscan desire for the *vita apostolica*, which, together with the apparent emphasis on a final divine judgement, may suggest a reaction to the restrictions on placed on Franciscan spiritual expression after the council of Vienne in 1312. That the application of the mystical mode here is so highly beneficial to the non-peregrinatory, urban Franciscans, deeply involved in pastoral care, a group such as the Viennese brothers, begs the question of to what extent the textual 'Agnes' of the *Vita* is more or less a Franciscan construct or device, and why it was that these friars (or perhaps only this confessor) felt the need to defend the merits of their particular role.

In this text, the rituals of the Church authorise and are themselves authorised. Placing Agnes' visionary experience within a Church rite, and continuing to make use of the gestures which are associated with that rite even when experience is not directly within a temporal performance, the narrative implicitly conveys the orthodoxy of both the mystic and her revelations through the orthodoxy and familiarity of the ritual. Agnes' understanding of the divine action within ritual and its role in salvation, subsequently imbue the rituals with power, which, in being based in these rites, is reflected upon her insight. Yet, ultimately this structure of power established in the counter-affirmation of mystic and ritual appears to secure something else. It offers a validation of a particular mode of Franciscan life and a proclamation of the continuing purity of the sacraments despite a degradation of the Church and time of judgement.

4. Ways of Seeing, Ways of Speaking: Rituals of Cohesion in a Mystical Community

The *Chronik zu Adelhausen*, also known as the Adelhausen sister-book, depicts a convent in the midst of a 'golden age' of spiritual flourishing and an abundance of mystical gifts. Written in 1318 by Prioress Anna von Munzingen, lest (so she states) the wonderful deeds of the past be forgotten, it pertains to the Dominican convent of Adelhausen near Freiburg, founded in 1234.[498] As Rebecca Garber has astutely summarised, it is 'a literary construction' which presents 'a textual not a historical reality.'[499] Yet upon closer examination, this text, which preserves the *vitae* of some thirty-three nuns and the convent's founder, Vassar, also records a surprising amount of rough with the smooth for an idealized exemplar.[500] This can be illustrated by a strange experience recalled at the end of the *vita* of Elisabeth of Vackenstein, amongst otherwise virtuous experiences. Asked by a dying woman whether or not she should enter the religious life, Elisabeth vehemently counsels her against this choice. When Elisabeth herself dies soon after, however, God sends her back to the woman in order to correct her earlier advice and sing the praises of the regular life which she herself had chosen (Chronik, p. 156). Bemusing, somewhat awkward and ultimately a parable of human error made good through God's divine intervention, this tale seems to acknowledge an underlying factor: that life in a convent was neither easy, nor meant to be, and moreover that the life was not consistently loved by those who lived their spiritual lives within its walls.

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[498] J. König, 'Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen', *Freiburger Diözesan-Archiv*, 13 (1880), 129–236, p. 153.
[499] Rebecca Garber, *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers 1100–1375* (New York, 2003), p. 62.
[500] On idealization, see Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, p. 101; Kurt Ruh, 'Die Schwesternbücher der Niederlande', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 126 (1997), 166–173, p. 168; John van Engen, 'Communal Life: The Sister-Books', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, 1100-1500* (Turnhout, 2011), pp. 105–131, p. 114, emphasises the 'ordinary' element of the sister-books, describing Adelhausen's prose as 'neither nostalgic nor triumphant.'

As rituals were such an integral part of life within the convent, and indeed part of what formed the structure of the community, it is perhaps unsurprising that the nuns might use elements of these rituals as a resource to introduce structure and provide support at times of difficulty or liminality, such as an ecstatic experience. This chapter will argue that the Adelhausen sister-book imagines ways in which ritual may be utilised in support of mystic and community. Particularly through the involvement of a witness in ritual and using the familiarity of rites as communal acts, the narrative disassembles and re-appropriates the structures of ritual to re-establish cohesion and order lost through the presence of multiple members experiencing regular, extreme manifestations of mystical experience. Whilst John van Engen contends that the sister-books are texts of intimate spirituality, which move 'from the liturgical to the personal,' this chapter will consider instead how communal ritual, such as the liturgy, is employed to make private experience more public. [501] Weaving the role of witness into a ritualised process of mystical speaking, the text attempts to re-frame the extraordinary and ecstatic, shifting it from (only) an isolating, individual and sometimes disruptive event, to one which participated in and belonged to the community as much as to the mystic.[502]

The *Chronik zu Adelhausen* is one of nine sister-books, those of Diessenhofen, Engelthal, Gotteszell, Kirchberg, Oettenbach (also known as St Katharinental), Töss, Unterlinden and Weiler, written in the Dominican province of Teutonia in the fourteenth century. The extent to which the recollections of living sisters in Adelhausen who were witnesses to past nuns' gifts shaped Anna's text is unclear; nor is it clear how much the account was created from

[501] Van Engen, 'Communal Life', p. 110; The public purpose of divine experience was central to the medieval conception of such gifts, see, for example, Alois Haas, *Mystik als Aussage- Ehrfahrungs-, Denk- und Redeformen christlicher Mystik* (Frankfurt, 1996), p. 275.
[502]Christian Folini, *Katharinental und Töss, zwei mystische Zentren in sozialgeschichtlicher Perspektive* (Zürich, 2007), pp. 304–6, identifies the isolation of mystical sisters, and suggests obedience as a route for integration.

written sources now lost, as was the case for other sister books.[503] The spirituality of the sister-books was admired by followers of the *devotio moderna*, who copied, collated and excerpted the fourteenth-century texts, as well as producing new sister-books.[504]

The only printed version of the Adelhausen sister-book available was published by Johannes König in 1906. This edition is a transcription of the complete Early New High German version bound in Freiburg Stadtarchiv MS 98, made in 1433 by Dominican friar Johannes Hull of Strasbourg.[505] The text is preserved in four manuscripts: apart from Freiburg Stadtarchiv MS 98, fols. 1-76, there are: Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek MS 694 [919], fols. 133-215, text dated to1606, and copied 1731, a complete Early New High German version translated by Matthias Tanner; and Freiburg Stadtarchiv MS 99, fols. 1-22, an incomplete Early New High German version produced in the Freiburg Carthusian monastery in the seventeenth-century; Freiburg Stadtarchiv MS 107, fols. 268r-287v and MS 108, fols. 199r-212v, two identical copies of Johannes Meyer's excerpts of the sister-book.[506] The complete texts in Freiburg MS 98 and Einsiedeln MS 694 differ, with the Freiburg manuscript containing a more descriptive account. [507] During the early modern period, compilations of the sister-books appeared, such as the collation of the Oetenbach and Töss sister-books made by an Observant reformer, the Dominican Johannes Meyer (d. 1485), who helped to reform Adelhausen in the fifteenth century, and those of Katharinental and Töss by the Carthusian

[503] König, 'Chronik', p. 89; Gertrude Jaron Lewis, *By Women, for Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto, 1996), pp. 10–31, suggests that the description of Else of Neustadt was an earlier text, as well as accounts in Gotteszell, Engelthal, Kirchberg and Töss; John Van Engen suggests they 'suppose an in-house memorial culture', see 'Communal Life', p. 109.
[504] See John van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2008); Hein Blommestijn, Charles Caspers, and Rijcklof Hofman, eds., *Spirituality Renewed: Studies on Significant Representatives of the Modern Devotion* (Leuven, 2003); Ruh, 'Die Schwesternbücher der Niederlände', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 126 (1997), 166–173, p. 168.
[505] König, 'Die Chronik', p. 131, n. 2.
[506] Lewis, *By Women*, appendix, also Lewis, 'Eine Einsiedler Handschrift des Adelhausener Schwesternbuchs', *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur*, 119 (1990), 332–336.
[507] The original language of the Adelhausen text is undetermined. Walter Blank, proposes Latin, 'Anna von Munzingen', in Karl Langosch, ed., *Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters:Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin, 1979-2008), and Jaron Lewis concurs, 'Eine Einsiedler Handschrift', p. 335–336. Van Engen suggests the vernacular, see 'The Communal Life', p. 112.

Heinrich Mürer produced at the monastery of Ittingen between 1614 and 1638 (Frauenfeld, Kantonsbibliothek Thurgau, MS Y 105).[508] This chapter will use the König edition, as it based on a complete manuscript version.[509]

A plethora of women and their experiences of convent life are captured within the Adelhausen *vitae*. These brief *vitae* are not embedded within the form of a single smooth narrative over the course of the sister-book, many follow the same structure, as will be demonstrated below, and a unity of theme emerges from the document as a whole. Some of the sisters depicted held office as Prioress, such as Ite of Nellenburg, or as Infirmarian, such as Guote Tuschelin. The sisters portrayed have different backgrounds, some, for example Guote of Winzela, of a noble family.[510] Whilst some joined the convent young, such as Agnes Nordera who became a nun aged seven and Anna of Hoche who was ten, others, like the widow Adelheit of Brisach entered after marriage, and Gisela von Unkilch persuaded her husband and daughter to follow the religious life.[511] One sister, Else of Nuwenstadt, had lived her whole life in the convent.[512]

The spiritual gifts allotted to the sisters, though never ranked in terms of value within the narrative, were equally many and varied. They range from sisters putting salt in wine to diminish temptation and being offered the ability to resist eating fried food, to having a vision of sisters about to die.[513] Physical blessings appear in the form of pains in the hands and feet, the development of a wound over the heart which scabs over when the nun thinks of the world, and floating during the ecstatic state.[514] Visions of all kinds pepper these lives: of

[508] Lewis, *By Women*, p. 11.
[509] All translations are my own.
[510] 'Chronik', p. 171.
[511] Ibid., p. 154, p. 163, p. 183.
[512] Ibid., p. 177; On difficulties absorbing Beguines within a regular order, see Haas, *Mystik als Aussage*, p. 273.
[513] 'Chronik', p. 172, p. 188.
[514] Ibid., p. 168, p. 181, p. 188.

Christ's wounds, of the Christ child or the divine hand offering the Host during mass.[515] Whilst it is unlikely that all of these sisters lived in the convent at the same time, collected together within the sister-book, despite sharing in extraordinary spiritual gifts, they become a representation of a mixed and varied community.

Selected as examples of exceptional spirituality, these brief accounts nonetheless convey both the necessary situation of relationship to one another resulting from claustration and the practical problems the convent encountered.[516] Berchte Vinchin, for instance, is upset that she is so well liked, whilst it is recorded that Metzi of Walterhoven kept the community up at night with her loud wailing, illustrating that nuns in such a setting were never totally alone, but rather existed in relationships (good and bad) with their sisters.[517] The nuns had to complete the practical tasks of care, sometimes causing them to miss the Hours.[518] Sisters were recognised for their particular abilities, which they passed on to others, as in the case of Adelheit of Wendlingen teaching another sister how to pray.[519] Moreover, the text suggests that the women compared themselves to each other, Anna Turnerin for instance wishing for the gift of tears upon seeing the weeping of other nuns, just as Adelheit of Brisach became anxious about her widowhood knowing herself to be surrounded by virgins.[520] This sense of communal life is further highlighted in the practical aspects to which their spiritual gifts allude. Gertrude of Nufera prayed for resources, as the convent had (twice) run out of money during a building project, whilst Elisabeth of Riegel had the 'special gift' that, during her time as cellarer, the convent's supplier had not once left them without food.[521] These spiritual

[515] Ibid., p. 172, p. 181; See Richard Kieckhefer, 'Ihesus ist unser! The Christ child in the German Sister Books', in Theresa M. Kenney and Mary Dzon, eds., *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Est Et O!* (Toronto, 2012), pp. 167–198.
[516] Folini, *Katharinental und Töss*, p. 290, highlights the use of a 'normal' setting to lend these accounts believability.
[517] 'Chronik', p. 173, p. 175.
[518] Ibid., p. 169.
[519] Ibid,. p. 182.
[520] Ibid., p. 154, p. 173.
[521] Ibid., p. 162, p. 163.

gifts indicate the importance of the economic stability of the convent to the sisters, that the physical reality of this life was not always easy and needed to be managed.[522]

Typical of monastic practice at the time, daily life in Adelhausen was structured by the *liturgia horarum* and marked by the Feasts of the liturgical year.[523] This framework became inherent to the sisters' lives, seen in the use of liturgical hours to specify when mystical experiences began, or to measure the passing of time in ecstasy.[524] The importance of the hours is shown in the emphasis on the piety of fulfilling obligations which forced a nun to miss one or more of the daily offices.[525] As in the other sister-books and many contemplative accounts from this period, liturgical practice became part of nuns' ecstatic experiences, for instance being able to hold the Christ child at Christmas.[526] Moreover, objects associated with sacramental practice, such as the chalice and ciborium, re-appear in the nuns' mystical experience. [527] This indicates the way in which the women absorbed the liturgical practices of their everyday, creatively re-appropriating them in ways personal to themselves and their context. The integration of such activity in the sister-books reflects, as Jürgen Bärsch argues, that 'not only were the rich texts, images, signs and rituals of this worship constantly before

[522] On financial difficulties in convents, see also Marie Luise Ehrenschwendtner, 'Puellae Literatae: The use of the Vernacular in Dominican Convents of Southern Germany', in Dianne Watt, ed., *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff, 1997), pp. 49–71, p. 50; Lewis, *By Women*, p. 7.
[523] On liturgy in the sister-books, see Gertrude Jaron Lewis, 'Music and Dancing in the fourteenth-century Sister-Books', in Anne Clark Bartlett, ed., *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honour of Valerie M. Lagorio* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 159–169; Ehrenschwendtner, 'Puellae Litteratae', p. 51; Albert Bruckner, 'Weibliche Schreibtätitgkeit im schweizerischen Spätmittelalter', in Johanne Autenrieth and Franz Brunhölzl, eds., *Festschrift Bernard Bischoff zu seinem 65. Geburtstag dargebracht von Freunden, Kollegen und Schülern* (Stuttgart, 1971), pp. 441–448, discusses the production of liturgical material in Dominican convents.
[524] For instance Metze of Tùschelin, p. 161, and Agnes of Nordera, p. 182; In Katharinental (a convent which also produced a sister-book) new sisters were required to have several of their own liturgical books. Of the manuscripts that can be traced back to Adelhausen, 16 of the 18 pre-1400 texts were liturgical, see Hans-Jochen Schiewer, 'Literarisches Leben in dominikanischen Frauenklöstern des 14. Jahrhundert: das Modell St Katharinental bei Diessenhofen', in Falk Eisermann, Eva Schlotheuber, and Volker Honemann, *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 285–309, p. 289, p. 294.
[525] See Garber, *Feminine*, p. 74; See also discussion of Agnes Blannbekin in chapter three.
[526] For example, 'Chronik', p. 168, p. 161.
[527] Ibid., p. 170, p. 171.

the eyes of the women in spiritual communities, these women lived these modes of expression.'[528]

Deeply bound to the liturgical structure of the regular life, the *vitae* also signal an awareness of the value placed upon the different spaces within the convent, showing a divide between those used in the liturgy and those that were not.[529] However, beyond a simple separation of sacred space and mundane space, the understanding of difference also hinges upon the perception of an area as public or communal rather than private, related to a central theme within the *Chronik* of being seen and heard, or rather observed or unobserved. It is important to clarify that this division, particularly in the climate of personal spirituality and private devotion, was not absolute, meaning spiritual practice and ecstatic experiences were not restricted to particular spaces.[530] It is the choir, however, which emerges as the core of the convent life portrayed in the Adelhausen sister-book, which is unsurprising as it was the place where the sisters gathered for devotion many times each day, practices which created the foundation of their way of life and were at the centre of their community.[531]

Portraying 'women's constructions of the feminine exemplary', Garber concludes that the sister-books offer a narrative of female claustration which aims to validate multiple ideal spiritual forms, through which even an enclosed woman might combine the *vita contemplativa*, the *vita activa* and the *imitatio Christi*.[532] As previously suggested, this

[528] Jürgen Bärsch, 'Liturgy and Reform: Northern German Convents in the Late Middle Ages', in Elizabeth Andersen, Henrike Lähnemann and Anne Simon, eds., *A Companion to Mysticism and Devotion in Northern Germany in the Late Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2013), pp. 22–45, p. 22.
[529] On the separation of spaces, see Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York, 1998), pp. 44–57.
[530] For example nuns receiving visions of the Virgin whilst keeping watch at the convent gate, see Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, p. 83.
[531] Hieronymus Wilms notes that proximity to the choir was equal to proximity to the Host, 'Das Beten der Mystikerinnen: dargestellt nach den Chroniken der Dominikanerinnenklöster zu Adelhausen, Diessenhofen, Engeltal, Kirchberg Ötenbach, Töss, Unterlinden und Weiler', in Paulus von Loë and Benediktus Maria Reichert, eds., *Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens in Deutschland* (Leipzig, 1912), pp. 24–128, p. 104.
[532] Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, p. 63, p. 107; Peter Ochsenbein, 'Leidenmystik in dominikanischen Frauenklöstern des 14. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel Elsbeth von Oye', in Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter Bauer,

multiplicity of exemplary spiritual forms is reflected in the variety of women recorded by the Adelhausen sister-book. However, whilst the sister-books themselves are clearly a construct, this imagined space also points to the mix of women entering Dominican convents by the late thirteenth century and the social tensions which arose.[533] It was not only the varying backgrounds and expectations of these sisters that caused division, the difficulties of communal life were potentially exacerbated by an increasing emphasis on and desire for personal contemplation and union with Christ expressed in a mystical spirituality which could divide and isolate.[534]

Garber suggests that the 'exemplary sisters' preserved in the *vitae* of the sister-books 'exist against a sketchy background of other nuns who are less devoted, less humble, less rigorous in their upkeep of the rule, less ascetic and less silent.'[535] Yet the Adelhausen sister-book is deeply imbued with a sense of being embedded within, surrounded by, responsible for and reliant upon a community. Indeed, Garber's analysis of the portrayal of office-holders within the *vitae* underlines the recurrence of the virtue of obedience in the fulfilment of such roles, from Prioress to *Redfensterin* (porter).[536] Moreover, many of the spiritual gifts recorded point to the relationship of the individual with their community, for example Reinlint of Wilingen's special ability to empathise with other nuns, an angling of spiritual habit which indicates the

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eds., *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* (Cologne, 1988), pp. 353–372, p. 354; Alois Haas, *Gottleiden--gottlieben: zur volkssprachlichen Mystik im Mittelalter* (Frankfurt, 1989), p. 115, sees the sister-books as practical teaching on mysticism; Christian Folini, *Katharinental und Töss*, p. 280, identifies Katharinental and Töss sister-books as didactic, entertaining and for the edification of spiritual experience.

[533] See Ehrenschwendtner, 'Puellae Literatae', pp. 54–55, Dominican regulations stipulated that entrants were meant to be *puellae literatae*. The tension between this ideal and the reality may be one aspect reflected in the tension of the sister-book, as well as the differentiation between *moniales litteratae* who were permitted liturgical duties, and *sorores illiterate et laicae*, who were not; Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (Pennsylvania, 2004), suggests that social tensions increased through the reform movement as higher religious office was less tied to nobility, p. 36.

[534] Monica Gsell, 'Das fließende Blut der 'Offenbarungen' Elsbeths von Oye', in Walter Haug und Wolfram Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang. Neu erschlossene Texte, neue methodische Ansätze, neue theoretische Konzepte. Kolloquium Kloster Fischingen 3.–9. Oktober 1998* (Tübingen, 2000), pp. 455–482, p. 476.

[535] 'Chronik', p. 184.

[536] Ibid., p. 190.

importance of the group.[537] The unnamed 'other nuns' do appear within the extraordinary experiences of the Adelhausen sisters, both as witnesses to, and foils for, mystical experience. Indeed, it is clear that the narrative places a high value on the process of seeing and divulging private experience, an act inherent to the text itself, with sisters repeatedly told to change their location to be seen, and desiring or being commanded to speak out.[538] The way in which mysticism is handled in this text indicates an underlying connection between ecstatic experience and the emphasis on communal life.

This chapter will argue specifically that the narrative constructs ritualised forms of speaking, which draw upon both other rites and a ritualised understanding of space, in order to re-frame the private experience of ecstasy as a communal experience. This ritualised process is used to imagine a form through which less contemplative sisters could participate in mystical activity and in this, attempts not only to overcome the problems created by mystical behaviour but also to find a way by which it could be integrated.[539] In other words, the present chapter argues that the tension between individual and community and the use of ritual are related. Firstly, it will be suggested that whilst the ecstatic mystical experience of God for the individual is highly valued within the narrative (and indeed a key motivation for the text), this form of spirituality presents several problems within the communal setting, both practical and spiritual, which the *vitae* also record. On a physical level, women experiencing such ecstasy were often left incapacitated and unable to fulfil their duties, often, moreover, remaining unwell and in need of the care of other nuns. On an emotional level, the experience of such wonders led to the issue, much debated, of how to reveal something which is beyond

[537] Ibid., p. 173.
[538] Such as Adelheit of Wendlingen, Edelheit die Kugelerin, Else of Nuwenstadt, and Gisela of Unkilch.
[539] Beatrice Acklin-Zimmermann, 'Die Nonnenviten als Modell narrativen Theologie', in Haug and Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, pp. 563–580, p. 571, argues similarly that the extra-textual narrated experience becomes the experience of the listener.

words on the part of the subject.[540] This introduced a not entirely undesired sense of secrecy and of the extraordinary. Yet it also provoked jealousy and mistrust in other members of the community. Furthermore, as Garber has shown, mystical or contemplative practice found favour over other duties which were essential to the cohesion and sustainability of the convent.[541] Secondly, it will be argued that the rituals of liturgical and sacramental practice underpin the regular life described in Adelhausen. Such ritualised activity is absorbed into and appropriated by the vitae, emerging in the narrative firstly in the direct assumption of rituals, such as the Eucharist, and their associated objects, actions and objectives, and secondly in the understanding of spaces as sacred, ritually significant, and/or communally associated with the presence of God.

Ritual acts participate in binding and structuring communities, according to Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy 'symboliz[ing] and celebrat[ing] the most important values' of a community.[542] They are both based around, and help to define, perpetuate and strengthen the things which the community considers to be significant. Ways of speaking can also become structured, controlled and ritualised, aiming, for example, as Bohdan Szuchewycz puts it, to shape the 'social construction of a communal spiritual message.'[543] In formalising the process of revelation which follows the mystical experience, the narrative recognises and places value on this experience, whilst in shaping its ritual form making it (and its value) public and communal. Thus it can also utilise this valuable experience as a communal asset.

Recorded as physically difficult, and both emotionally and spatially isolating, the ecstatic experience of the Adelhausen sisters might certainly be interpreted as leaving them at the fringes of their community, between a personal spiritual state and the community and context

[540] See, for example, Bardo Weiss, *Die deutsche Mystikerinnen und ihr Gottesbild: das Gottesbild der deutschen Mystikerinnen auf dem Hintergrund der Mönchstheologie* (Paderborn, 2004), p. 17–117.
[541] Garber, *Feminine*, pp. 61–104.
[542] Bernard Cooke and Gary Macy, *Christian Symbol and Ritual: An Introduction* (Oxford, 2005), p. 3.
[543] Bohdan Szuchewycz, 'Evidentiality in Ritual Discourse', *Language and Society*, 23 (1994), 389–410, p. 391; Don Handleman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 41.

in which they lived.[544] As markers of community, used to show passage and progress, to foster the coherence of groups during times of difference or attack, ritualized acts, which T. J Scheff argues, arise in response to 'recurring sources of collective distress', come to participate in communal life.[545] Used actively to redefine a difficult situation, rituals, Gary Brock suggests, offer a 'passage from instability to stability,' an idea which will be considered here in terms of the mystic relating or revealing their experience to a third party.[546] Furthermore, not only might ritualized speaking be engaged to structure the process of revelation, rituals are also typically employed to negotiate power, for example in the investiture of a Prioress.[547] Ritualized acts posit a form in which the attending parties witness and in witnessing accept the result of the process. In the Adelhausen situation, the mystic is empowered, sometimes to the extent that it overwhelms both mystic and community, through unique access to divine insight. This power is addressed in the process of revelation established in the text, through which the equilibrium of power (in this case possession of knowledge) is redressed in the exchange of knowledge for belonging or inclusion. Douglas Marshall argues that 'co-presence [in rituals] results in de-individuation.'[548] The particular process of revelation established in the Adelhausen text places emphasis on the role of the witness and presence in communal space, as will be demonstrated by means of several examples, which illustrate different facets of space, rite and relationship within the narrative. This emphasis, which is implicitly indicative of the group belonging, creates a 'framework for catharsis', through which the formerly isolated mystic is offered the opportunity formally

[544] Hamburger, *The Visual*, p. 104, suggests that holy women were set in liminal spaces 'at the boundary of enclosure.'
[545] T. J. Scheff, *Catharsis in Healing, Ritual and Drama* (Berkley, 1979), p. 119; See also Victor Turner, 'Dramatic Ritual/ Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology', *The Kenyon Review*, 11 (1979), 80–93, p. 83; David Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics and Power* (New Haven, 1988), pp. 42–46.
[546] Gary Brock, 'Ritual and Vulnerability', *Journal of Religion*, 29 (1990), 285–295, p. 288; Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monica Vizedom and Gabrielle Caffee (Chicago, 1960).
[547] Brooke and Macy, *Christian Symbol*, p. 21; see also Anthony J. Blasi, 'Ritual as a Form of Religious Mentatility', *Sociological Analysis*, 41 (1985), 59–71, p. 61; Handleman, *Models and Mirrors*, p. 25.
[548] Douglas Marshall, 'Behaviour, Belonging, Belief', Sociological Theory 20 (2002), 360–380, p. 362; also Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York, 1965), p. 26; Victor Turner, *Revelation and Divination in Ndemba Ritual* (London, 1979), p. 22.

to re-enter the community between extreme experiences.[549]

I: Seeing Virtue: Mystical Experience as Communal Confession

The *vita* of Elisabeth of Vackenstein makes use of the value and meaning provided by the structure and objects of the Eucharist, to depict Elisabeth's ritualized witness of her community, and her mystically-enhanced confession of the sisters. Typical for the structure of the Adelhausen *vitae*, the account opens with Elisabeth's distinguishing trait, in this case 'die gnade, dass sú alle tage úber die súnder ergoss also vaste, das si dicke den priester irte vff dem altar' (the grace, that she wept so greatly every day for sinners, that she confused the priest on the altar).[550] These two themes, Elisabeth's relationship to the sins of others and her besting male clerical figures, frame the narrative of her spiritual life. Her story begins with an explanation that Elizabeth had come to doubt her dedication to St Katherine over other holy figures. She is calmed when, whilst in prayer before St Katherine's altar, the saint answers Elisabeth's unspoken fear, saying, 'du solt wissen das mich Gottes sun vom himmel eret. Und wer mich und andere heilige eret, das den Got ewiglich wil eren' (You must know that God's son honours me from heaven. And whosoever honours me and other Holy people, God will honour for eternity).[551] Katherine then commands that Elisabeth come to the same place, before the altar on the Feast of St Katherine, eight days hence. Faithfully returning as instructed, Elisabeth sees a procession led by two maidens bearing candles, followed by the Virgin sheltering a novice beneath her cloak, with St Katherine and Mary Magdalene behind her. The Virgin then declares that the novice is dead, and that she will 'füren in fúr min

[549] Scheff, *Catharsis*, p.122; Victor Turner, 'Social Dramas and Stories about them', *Critical Enquiry*, 7 (1980), 141–168, p. 151.
[550] 'Chronik', p. 156. Jaron Lewis, *By Women*, p. 12, suggests that the graces at the beginning of each account are 'stereotypical' and could 'easily be exchanged with another sister'. I would argue for a close concurrence between these graces and the account of each nun.
[551] 'Chronik', p. 156.

kindes anlitz' (lead them before my child's face). The story continues with Elisabeth's description that Katherine 'trůg eine búchssen und einen wunniclichen löffel in der hant. Und gieng fúr sich in dem chor und gab ieglicher swester uss der búchssen nach ir begirde und nach ir wirde' (carried a box and a wonderful spoon in her hand. And she went in person into the Choir and gave each sister [something] from the box according to her desire and her worth).[552]

The object of the box and the motif of Katherine using the spoon are suggestive of feeding, alluding to the ciborium holding the Host and the perfomative elements of the rite of the Eucharist, which would have been celebrated on the occasion of a Feast, such as that of St Katherine.[553] Yet in this instance, the 'Eucharist' is stimulated by Elisabeth's pious fear and her obedience in listening to Katherine and returning to the altar as commanded. Moreover, as she watches the holy procession move into the choir, she processes with them through her sight, and indeed Mary's promise that she would lead the faithful novice in death before Christ, is echoed in the interaction between St Katherine and Elisabeth, through which Elisabeth finds herself before Christ in the 'Eucharist'. In her vision, Elisabeth is gifted awareness of two parallel processions: that in which Mary leads the deceased novice before Christ and a second in which St Katherine is leading Elisabeth to the 'Eucharist' offered to her sisters. This introduces two different but overlapping spaces, that of the eternal, Christ in heaven, and that of the temporal, which briefly aligns with the eternal in the sacramental space of the 'Eucharist'. Through this parallel, Elisabeth not only gains knowledge of the true nature of the Eucharist but also insight into the future benefit of participating in the sacrament, namely entry into heaven and life with Christ.

[552] Ibid. p. 156
[553] This feast is celebrated on November 25th; on ciboria, see Achim Timmermann, *Real Presence: Sacramental Houses and the Body of Christ, c.1270–1600* (Turnhout, 2009), p. 25.

In response to Elisabeth's devotion and in affirmative answer to her question regarding the value of devotion to St Katherine, Elisabeth is offered a foretaste of the heavenly. Moreover, the reward of the mystical 'Eucharist' offered to Elisabeth is in turn distributed, as St Katherine physically gives each nun their reward from her box according to their desire and worth (nach ir begirde und wirde). This spreading ripple of divine validation not only of Elisabeth but also her community clearly demonstrates the efficacy and communal value Elisabeth's practice of devotion to St Katherine. Elisabeth's piety facilitates her witness of the virtue of her community, with the spiritual success of each sister physicalised in the act of Katherine's offering from her box, a performance to which Elisabeth is the sole and intended audience.[554] In ritual form, inner virtue (and value) is displayed and approved before Elisabeth as her reward. Yet although it is Elisabeth's personal vision, this honour is strongly tied to her community, and indeed this private gift is made communal through her act of witnessing, her reward made greater in its mystical and verbal provision for her sisters. In this context, one sister's virtue is tied to that of her convent.

This ritualised Eucharistic gift-giving leads directly into a further mystical experience. Elisabeth is described as experiencing that 'also wart ir geist ussgezucket von dem libe vff fúr die Drivaltikeit, und wart also vereinbert mit Got' (her spirit was plucked from the body up before the Trinity, and so was united with God). It is upon release from this state, represented in the physical perception that the spirit is out of the body and physically raised towards the divine, that Elisabeth experiences difficulty:

[554] On the use of objects to restrict contemplation and control the perception of religious women, see Penny Galloway, 'Neither miraculous nor Astonishing: The Devotional Practices of Beguine Communities in French Flanders', in Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne eds., *New trends in feminine spirituality: the holy women of Liège and their impact* (Turnhout, 1999), pp. 107–128.

> Do die selbe swester sele wider zů dem libe kam, do erschutte sich die sele ab dem libe, dz der lib uffschoss von der statt, untz in das cappittel. Do kam eine swester und truchte si nider, untz das si zů ir selben wider kam.
>
> As the same sister's soul returned once again to her body, the soul shook itself from the body, so that the body shot up from that place and to the chapter. Then a sister came and pressed her down, until she came to herself again.

The association of *unio* with physical side-effects was not uncommon, Angela of Foligno, for example, was left bed-bound.[555] However, the interaction between Elisabeth and the anonymous nun which follows in this instance is fascinating. Initially, the unnamed nun's task is to comfort and care for a body undergoing a physically traumatic event. Yet through this act, she too is enabled to partake marginally in a mystical opportunity through contact and witness of another's *unio*, despite not having experienced it herself, drawing upon both the need for this communal provision and the associated value of the mystical insight. In seeing and holding the body affected by ecstasy, this nun both participates in and provides a witness to Elisabeth's mystically granted act of witnessing. It is this ecstasy-free nun who completes the cycle of affirmation which provides the community with access to their visionary reward. These actions offer guidance and reassurance to those in the community whose experience of faith was less extreme, asserting that their aid in supporting those in holy fervour was a valid and holy task in itself, which moreover offered the possibility of association with ecstatic experience firstly through the body and then through the revelation. In her care for Elisabeth during the traumatic transition between the mystical sphere and convent reality, the anonymous sister witnesses and can validate the mystical Eucharist and

[555] Angela of Foligno, *Memorial*, second supplementary step, see this thesis, p. 94.

consequent *unio*.[556] It is this sister who forms the bridge between the mystical and the everyday, imagined to press Elisabeth physically into communal space once more and, by the validation of her touch and witness, allowing the successful transfer of insight between these two spaces which re-admits Elisabeth into her community.

Elisabeth's subsequent mystical experiences continue to place emphasis on seeing and witnessing within the community. Following the *unio* described above, she receives a special gift:

> Und hatte ouch darnach ein halb jare, welen mensche si me sach, so erkande si wol, in welher wirde er vor got wz. Das seite si eime bichter. Do hieß er si, das si sich vor got zuge und Gott bete, das ers ir abneme, si wurde anders töbig. Das tet si, und dem selben bichter seite si eine súnde, die enhatte er nie gebichtet. Und zů einem mol sach si ouch der swestren wirdi, und sach eine swester die hies swester Irmi. Die hat ein sunnen in der hende, die wz breiter denne aller der chor, und zwo andere die warent ouch usser der masse breit; und darnach durch den chor jegliche swester ein kertzen oder einen sternen in der hant, dar nach ir wirdi was.
>
> And also after that for half a year whichever other person she saw she could recognise their worth before God. She told this to a confessor. Then he told her she should come before God and ask that he remove this (ability) otherwise she would go mad. She did this and then told the very same confessor of a sin to which he had never confessed. And at once she could also see the sisters' virtue and saw a sister named Irmi. She had a sun in her hands which was wider than the whole choir and two others which were also extraordinarily wide. And after this (she saw) throughout the choir every sister with a candle or a star in her hand, according to her virtue.

[556] Mary Giles, 'Holy Theatre/ Ecstatic Theatre', in Bartlett ed., *Vox Mystica,* pp. 117–128, p. 119, p. 127, underscores the communal dimension of catharsis provided by ecstatic theatre.

It is the presence of the fallible confessor in this episode which ties all of Elisabeth's experiences together. His doubt over her latest mystical gift, the ability to see every person's spiritual virtue, reveals the implicit potential for doubt about all mystical experience, and reasserts the value of the framing function of ritual action and space. Elisabeth's free and unregulated ability to see virtue is worrying to her confessor, who believes it will make her mad. A comparison with the Adelhausen account of Metzi of Waltershoven, driven to incessant wailing by her lifetime of mystical intimacy with God, suggests that the confessor's concern about madness was not unfounded.[557] Though never explicitly rejected, Elisabeth's new ability is certainly not portrayed as good and it is considered better to pray for such a dubious gift to be removed, which demonstrates how the value of spiritual gifts was in their perception as much as their form.[558] Countering her confessor's doubts, Elisabeth turns her gift upon him and, presumably to his deep embarrassment, reveals to him one of his own un-confessed sins, in a moment which reflects discussions of the validity of impious priests.[559] Elisabeth's reply is definitively affirmed through the sight of her sisters' virtue in a physical form held in their hands. This creates a visual form of confession, by means of which Elisabeth is enabled to see her sisters' souls more clearly than any confessor, untainted by earthly words.[560] In this mystical episode, she is a witness to the piety of her own community, allowing the sisters to bypass the confessor (temporarily) in light of his sin.[561]

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[557] König, p. 176.
[558] See Nancy Caciola, 'Mystics, Demoniacs and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 142 (2000), 268–306, p. 269.
[559] Peter Dinzelbacher and Renate Vogeler, eds., *Leben und Offenbarungen der Wiener Begine Agnes Blannbekin (1315)* (Göppingen, 1994); discussed, for example, by Bonaventure, see Michael Robson, 'Saint Bonaventure', in G. R. Evans ed., *The Medieval Theologians* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 187–200.
[560] 'Chronik', p. 157. The 'star' and 'sun' forms of this virtue perhaps echo the crystal embellishments in devotional and liturgical objects, for example in the chest of Marian statues, which Jacqueline E. Jung argues called attention to the viewing process, and that this transparency called to mind the monastic quality of obedience, see 'Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts: the Exuberant Bodies of the Katharinental Visitation Group', in Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger, eds. *History in the Comic Mode* (New York, 2007), pp. 223–236, p. 226, p. 232.
[561] A different balance between mystical experience and the sacrament of confession is struck for Elsbeth Stagel, see David F. Tinsley, 'The Spirituality of Suffering in the Revelations of Elsbeth von Oye', *Mystics Quarterly*, 21 (1995), 121–147, p. 127.

Elisabeth is able to serve her community through her experience in several ways, offering them not only a Eucharist but also a confession which completely precludes clerical participation, relying instead on the divine intervention to which Elisabeth is granted access through her devotion. Yet, it is important to note that the priest is not rejected.[562] Initially, Elisabeth is totally obedient to him, and only able to overrule his authority through God's intervention, by which she turns the tables in order to confess the priest of his sins. In doing so, Elisabeth, through God, performs a further service in support of and for the benefit of her community by identifying the priest's unconfessed sin. Humbly partaking in the rite of confession, Elisabeth is led into a related confession of her community which validates both her insight and their piety as well as joining mystic and her community at a time in which she is distanced from them, through participation in familiar ritual undertaken, if not consciously by all, nonetheless together.

Elisabeth's account depicts how her private fears stimulate a series of interactions with her community, shaped by familiar sacramental ritual. Moreover, when Elisabeth's divine inspiration is challenged, the narrative employs the orthodox structure of ritual to demonstrate her validity. Indeed, the two mystical rituals of Elisabeth's *vita*, her observation of St Katherine's distribution of the Eucharist and her own vision of the piety of the sisters in the form of held light, mirror each other, ultimately offering performances through which the piety of the convent is divinely judged. In this, the *vita* demonstrates a clear interest in seeing and being seen, suggesting both that the sisters were watching each other, and that spiritually directed observation, such as witnessing which resulted in the revelation of piety, was encouraged in order to foster community.[563] Elisabeth's gifts make public that which is private, channelling the value of personal success in piety into the wider community. The

[562] See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on the Body and Gender in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991), p. 103; Folini, *Katharinental and Töss*, p. 303.
[563] Hamburger, *The Visual*, p. 37, notes that the convent was 'an environment in which sight itself was an encouragement to sin.'

narrative of her spiritual life, which begins with her internal doubt, concludes with a mystical validation that firmly situates Elisabeth with her community. Indeed, in being recorded in textual form, Elisabeth's experience, like the others recorded, is further embedded into the life and assets of the convent.[564] Through the appropriation of communal rites within the mystical experience, the narrative intimates that, although their origin might be in the great piety of a single individual, these experiences too were of the whole community.

II: Mystical Trauma, Communal Witness

Like that of Elisabeth, Adelheit Geishörnlein's mystical experience, as recorded in the Adelhausen sister-book, is bound to her convent life through use of the rituals of that community and through the witness of a fellow sister.[565] Here, ritual is drawn into mystical experience in order to re-frame personal desire though a process of witness. Central to Adelheit's most dramatic experience is the assertion that she 'begerte steteklich, das si Gott hie lúterte, das si in kein fegfúr kam' (desired constantly, that God would cleanse her here, so that she would not go to purgatory), an emphasis on purification which re-emerges in her mystical encounter.[566]

In response to a 'gar grosse begirde vil jare' (very great desire for many years) to know how the disciples felt as the Holy Spirit came to them at Pentecost, Adelheit is granted a mystical answer:

> Und zů einem male, do stůnd si vor dem fronalter, und hatte sunderlich begirde darnach. Und unser Herre der erfulte ir begirde, des si so lange hatte begert, und kam der stralen eine uff si, und die süssigkeit und das wunder, dz do von ir wart, das was

[564] See Van Engen, 'Communal Life', p. 125.
[565] 'Chronik', p. 165.
[566] Ibid., p. 166.

> also groβ, das si uff fůr und zwirbelt um den altar, und schoβ ir das blůt zu munde und zů nasen us. Und ein swester stůnd nidena in dem cor, die hies swester Luggi, und sach wie si um den altar zwirbelt, und darnach gieng si zů ir, und bat si von hertzen, das si ir seite, wz es meinte, dz si also um den altar was gefaren. Und si wolte es ir kum sagen. Aber si wolte si nút erlassen, si müsste es ir sagen.[567]
>
> And one time, she was standing before the Lord's altar, and felt an especial desire for it [to know how the disciples felt at Pentecost]. And the Lord fulfilled her desire, which she had desired for so long, and one of the beams [of light] came upon her, and the sweetness and the wonder, which came to her through this, was so great, that she rose up and whirled about the altar, and blood shot out from her mouth and her nose. And a sister stood below in the choir, she was called sister Luggi, and saw how she whirled about the altar, and afterwards she [Luggi] went to her and begged her with all her heart to tell her what it meant that she had moved about the altar in this way. And she did not want to tell her. But she did not wish to give in, so she had to tell her.

Bold, dramatic, spontaneous: Adelheit's action does not initially appear to reflect any ritual of the medieval Church. However, the conjunction between stimulation, space and action indicate that Adelheit's mystical experience has been influenced by sacramental practice, and that her own actions interact meaningfully with the rituals that formed a large part of her daily life.[568]

Adelheit's experience of ritual begins as she stands before the front altar and meditates on the Pentecost. Adelheit is then raised above the altar, where she begins to spin, moving around

[567] Ibid., p. 166.
[568] Folini, *Katharinental und Töss*, p. 296, suggests that such *imitatio* within the sister-books provided a depiction of correct contemplation of devotional images.

the altar, at which point blood shoots from her nose and mouth. After this it seems she returns to the ground, and here Luggi, who has seen everything, asks her what has occurred.

There are four physical aspects which bind this experience to the familiar rituals of a Dominican convent, namely the location in the choir over the altar, Adelheit's spilling of blood, and Luggi's position and role as observer. Although employed in an unusual way, these elements create an expectation of ritual and thus also of the possibilities of behaviour, process and consequence. In this context, the allusion to ritual intimates the presence and approval of God.

The mystical episode takes place at an altar, which is a clearly established site of ritual interaction with God within the convent.[569] The altar would have been the focal point of its liturgy, of many private prayers and most importantly of the Eucharistic Mass.[570] By locating her direct experience of the divine at a physical location which housed the divine, in the form of the Eucharist, Adelheit relates her own actions to that of her community and those established by the Church. She is physically boosted in spiritual authority by her proximity to the physical mass of the altar, touched by the divine in the Eucharist and in the relics close by, as well as physically supporting her orthodoxy through the theological significance of relics: as the altar becomes active through its relics, so she becomes active through the altar.[571]

[569] On the role of space, see for example Beyer, 'Whence Collective Ritual?', p. 816–817.
[570] Hamburger, *The Visual*, p. 44; on the Eucharist in the sister-books, see Zimmermann, 'Die Nonnenviten', p. 568–580.
[571] Marguerite Ragnow, 'Ritual Before the Altar: Legal Satisfaction and Spiritual Reconciliation in eleventh-century Anjou', in Joëlle Rollo-Koster ed., *Medieval and Early Modern Ritual: Formalized Behaviour in Europe, China, and Japan* (Leiden, 2002), pp. 57–80, p. 68. Éric Palazzo, 'Relics, Liturgical Space and the Theology of the Church', in Martina Bangoli, ed., *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics and Devotion in Medieval Europe* (Baltimore, 2010), pp. 99–110, p. 99.

Raised above the altar, Adelheit assumes an irregular position for any person, either nun or priest.[572] As a body however, she resembles most closely that of Christ, in the form of the Eucharistic wafer which would be lifted high above the altar for the nuns to observe during mass, or the crucifix often high up behind the altar, positioned for meditative purposes.[573] In ritual terms, height both signifies position in a hierarchy of power and allows witnesses to see action, again implying importance. In being raised above the altar, Adelheit both takes the position normally occupied by the Eucharistic wafer and is placed in a position of significance, importance and power in ritual terms.

Taken in context, blood spilled above an altar seems to reference the Eucharist, and in turn the blood shed by the crucified Christ. [574] This association becomes stronger when taken together with the previous reading of Adelheit's likeness to the elevated host or crucifix. This association continues in the violence of her unnatural spinning movement, which mirrors in a way the violence of the crucifixion, and most clearly in the shooting of blood from the nose and mouth.[575] In this sense the ritual has clear, Eucharistic overtones. Indeed, the shedding of blood in sacrifice is an important Old Testament image of a pact sealed between man and God, such as in the story of Abraham and Isaac, a pact and image repeated in Christ's death.[576]

Observing the event, Luggi takes the position of a nun during the Mass, watching the host elevated. As a first-hand, and indeed the only, witness to Adelheit's mystical episode, the record of Luggi's perception of events is important. Whilst Luggi is presented as interested in

[572] This may also reflects prayer exercises, see Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, p. 60; Carolyn S. Jirousek, 'Christ and St John the Evangelist as a Model of Medieval Mysticism', *Cleveland Studies in the History of Art*, 6 (2001), 6–27, p. 15.
[573] A crucifix appears, for example, in the *vitae* of Gruonburg of Kastelberg and Geri Tüchlin, 'Chronik', p. 167, p. 185; on the crucifix in other sister-books, see Noll, 'Zu Begriff, Gestalt und Funktion des Andachtsbildes', p. 305.
[574] See Bynum, *Fragmentation*, p. 131.
[575] Adelheit's shooting blood may reflect severe ascetic practice, see Ochsenbein, 'Leidenmystik', p. 355.
[576] Gen. 22:1–19; Timmermann, *Real Presence,*, p. 27, the story of Abraham's sacrifice was sometimes inscribed on ciboria.

Adelheit's experience, not rejecting what she has observed outright, neither does she understand it completely, needing to question Adelheit in order to discern the full implication of the action. In particular, she seems fascinated by the manner of Adelheit's movement, as 'darnach gieng si zů ir, und bat si von hertzen, das si ir seite, wz es meinte, dz si also um den altar was gefaren' (and afterwards she went to her, and begged her from her heart, that she tell her, what it meant, that she had moved about the altar in this way), indicative of an awareness of Adelheit's odd location and actions. Here, the expectations built by the familiar ritual space come into conflict with Adelheit's movements, raising questions for the audience represented within the narrative by Luggi. Moreover, as acts used to foster cohesion, offering or denying power, rituals also come with a 'danger of non-performance', because failure to participate also denies access to the power and/or value implicitly part of the ritual as well as potential exclusion from the group.[577] In this case, Luggi's response in approaching and questioning, suggests a reaction to the possibly confusing references to ritual within Adelheit's mystical experience (space, height, blood, even Luggi's being 'compelled' to watch). Equally, Adelheit's decision to reveal suggests her recognition of the compulsion inherent to the situation. There is a choice implicit in the narrative's presentation of the situation, between non-participation, which would lead to exclusion, and participation, conversely leading to the creation of value, the offer of power and the mystic's reinsertion within the group.

The interaction between Luggi and Adelheit which follows appears to underscore the role of the witness, the narrator stating that, 'si wolte si nút erlassen, si müsste es ir sagen' (she insisted on it, she had to tell it to her), a declaration which expresses a sense of the pressure or urgent need to speak of the mystical experience. As in the case of Elizabeth's anonymous witnessing sister-companion, it is the non-mystical Luggi who provides Adelheit with an eye-

[577] Boyer and Lièнard, 'Whence Collective Ritual?', p. 822.

witness and an immediate opportunity to share the intimacy of her insight with the community.[578] Like Elizabeth, Adelheit is raised beyond her control during her ecstasy, suggesting a divinely facilitated temporary removal from the norms of temporal existence. Upon leaving this state, it is Luggi, specifically described as *nienda* (down; in the lowest place) in the choir, who approaches Adelheit for information, something which seems to place emphasis upon the distance and inaccessibility of the floating Adelheit during her mystical episode.[579] Through Luggi's approach and questions, the mystical nun is reconnected with the temporal community, represented in Luggi.

Adelheit explains to Luggi that, 'were das blůt nút von mir geschossen, daz mir nút entlibung were worden, ich wer in der selbe stund tod, wann die nature wz ze kranke gegen der úbrige froyde, und der süssigkeit, die in mir was' (167.30: if the blood had not shot out from me, so that I had not escaped the body, I would have died within the same hour, because nature was too weak to withstand the enormous joy and sweetness which was in me). The mystic's understanding of her experience suggests the loss of blood is healing in nature, an emergency measure to preserve her life, which echoes the medical practices of bloodletting.[580] Yet this forceful loss of blood also recalls the deep desire for God's cleansing, 'das si Got hie lutere' (that God cleanse her here) for which Adelheit is identified at the beginning of her *vita*. A similar account of mystical blood expulsion occurs in the account of the widow Adelheit of Brisach, who is purged of her non-virginal blood overnight in a wine press, which will be discussed further below.[581]

Whilst Adelheit Geishörnlein's experience makes no mention of virginity, there remains an underlying suggestion of a change from sinful impurity to virtue. The explanation recorded in

[578] On the problems of speech for religious women, see Gail Ashton, *The Generation of Identity in Late Medieval Hagiography: Speaking the Saint* (London, 2000), pp. 103–137.
[579] Grimm's dictionary (Leibzig, 1854–1955), vol. 7, p. 742, gives one definition of 'nieden, nidene' as in der tiefe, an der unteren Stelle.'
[580] Bettina Bildhauer, 'Blood in Medieval Cultures', *History Compass*, 4 (2006), 1049–1059, p. 1049.
[581] See this thesis, p. 195.

Adelheit's voice within the narrative, that her nature was too weak to contain the excesses of mystical joy and sweetness she experienced, is illuminating. It suggests that her vessel-like body has been so physically packed with divine insight, that the temporal, and by implication sinful, blood has been forced out. This image recalls the apostles being filled by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, her stimulation for the experience. Placed above the altar, this divinely instituted loss of blood, spurred by her deep and long-held desire, becomes Adelheit's sacrificial lamb, sealing her personal *unio* with God.[582] Indeed, the image of this loss of blood as related to an agreement with God, here to mark Adelheit's 'new' pseudo-virginal form, has a fascinating resonance with the rite involved in a woman's entry to the religious life, in which she would have to mark the book of profession and place it upon the altar.[583] The conclusion of the episode further supports the transformation through this ritual, suggested by the blood sacrifice and ritualised contract with God, with the narrator confirming that Adelheit's soul has been redeemed. Through her mystical Eucharist in which she becomes one with Christ the host, she is able to join the group of the saved, 'gesichert lange vor irme tode des ewigen lebennes' (secured eternal life long before her death).[584]

Adelheit's 'ritual', is both ritual and a ritual 'undone', in which recipient, both of sacrament and of redemption, is aligned with celebrant and Redeemer. Her actions reference the practice and theology of the rituals of the Eucharist, whilst fulfilling her great personal desire to be able to join Christ and His apostles through their historical experience. Passively elevated, like the host, her blood is 'sacrificed' for her community, who will benefit from the knowledge of her piety and God's blessing upon the convent. Reflecting the theology and symbolism of Christ washing away the sins of the world through his blood, Adelheit is

[582] See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007)
[583] Nancy Bradley Warren, 'The Ritual for the Ordination of Nuns', in Miri Rubin ed., *Medieval Christianity in Practice* (Princeton, 2009), pp. 318–322, p. 319.
[584] 'Chronik', p. 167.

cleansed through her expulsion of blood. And ultimately, just like the crowd responding to Peter's words after Pentecost, she is declared saved.[585] Through the process of her mystical episode, she is ritually cleansed by her own pious desire and emerges, physically changed, with the knowledge that her soul will not enter purgatory.

Present as witness, Luggi continually reminds the reader of the connection between these two women in their shared community, despite the personal nature of Adelheit's desire and her being singled out as a saved soul before her death. In this example, the success of Adelheit's many years of private, fervent and pious desiring is transformed for communal benefit through the ritualised process of mystical revelation: physically, in that her blood is sprayed over the choir, and theologically, in that she can explicate her own exegesis of her experience to her primary 'reader' or witness, Luggi. In this way Adelheit's personal reward diffuses through the convent. Through her approach to Adelheit's mystical space, and through her pious questioning, Luggi may provide the path through which Adelheit and her experience are brought under control and drawn into the community once more. In the act of companionship after the mystical act Luggi metaphorically 'pulls' the mystic 'down' again into the communal space, in questioning she draws out valuable insight of the divine which will be of value to the convent. In this process of stabilising the mystic and making the mystical accessible, it is Luggi who completes the ritual which Adelheit has experienced.

III: Between Communal and Mystical identity: Rites of Integration

The *vita* of another sister named Adelheit, this time Adelheit of Brisach, similarly to that of sister Adelheit Geishörnlin, offers an account of her ritualised transformation through mystical experience, employing the spaces of the community and sacramental rite to defend

[585] Acts 2 2:41-47

her spiritual validity in the face of accusation. It opens with the declaration that she is someone of whom extraordinary things are seen and said, ‘dz man wunderliche dinge von ir horte und sach’, emphasising her good reputation within the community, perhaps placed in contrast to Adelheit’s poor opinion of herself and implying that the ritualised action of mystical experience was also being utilised to negotiate perceptions of the individual within the community.[586] That she was a more unusual member of the convent, is suggested by the first episode recorded in her vita, a mystical marriage:

> An dem donrstage ze nacht, so gieng si mit vnsers Herren marter als emsklich vmbe, dz si in die krancheit kam das si morgens an dem fritag niemer zuo messe möhte kommen noch vff. Darumb wart si strafberlich bereffet von den bredieren ze cappittel, vnd angesprochen fúr ein ketzerin. So gieng si vs dem cappittel mit fröhlichem muote springende vnd singende: ‘Laudate Dominum omnes gentes’ vnd lúffent ir denne nach alle die jungen kint, die in dem closter warent, vnd hulffent ir singen. Si solte ouch einest zuo vnserm Herren gan, da sich der convent bewart. Vnd do si in den crútzgang kam, do gedacht si, zuo welhre hochzit si solte gan, do si vnd Got vereinberet soltend werden, vnd stozzete ein búttene da, da leinde si sich an vnd knúwete nider vnd wolte Gotte dancken. Da úbershluog si die bútten vnd bedachte si alle sament. Dar vnder wart si verzucket. Vnd wart vereinbert mit Gotte, das si kam zuo dem kusse. Vnd lag da vntz zuo vesperzite.[587]
>
> On Thursday night she grappled with our Lord’s martyrdom so eagerly, that she fell into illness and in the morning could no longer rise for mass. For this reason she was censured by the preachers in the chapter, and accused of being a heretic. So she went out of the chapter house in joyous spirits jumping and singing, ‘Laudate Dominum

[586] ‘Chronik’, p. 154.
[587] Ibid., pp. 154–155.

> omnes gentes' and all the young children who were in the convent ran after her and helped her to sing. She was also meant to go once to our Lord, when the convent took communion. And as she entered the cloister, she contemplated to which wedding she was going, in which she and God were to be made one, and knocked over a vat there, leant against it and knelt down and wished to thank God. Then she knocked over the vat and [was] covered [by] it completely. And under there she was suddenly taken away. And she was made one with God, so that she came to the kiss. And she lay there until vespers.[588]

The description suggests that this is a dramatic event, not only for Adelheit, but for the community. Adelheit becomes so ill from her intense contemplation of Christ's martyrdom, that she is unable to attend mass. Yet, as demonstrated by Adelheit's appearance before an assembly of preachers in the Chapter to be accused of heresy, it seems that the community, or at least the friars, did not automatically trust ecstatic spirituality. Adelheit's joyful reaction also seems strange, and the heresy charges against her become the stimulus for an impromptu procession with children following her to the cloister, which echo the ritual practice of the bridal party processing into the city to the church before the wedding.[589] Alone once more, in contrast to the public space of the cloister, Adelheit is united with God and receives this kiss of union. This is clearly an intense state as she first knocks over the vat and then, once with

[588] The Latin citation is Ps 116:1, which was as during the Vespers of Easter Saturday (amongst other occasions). This might imply that the incident took place on Easter Saturday, heightening the significance of Adelheit's illness on Good Friday, and collapse on Easter Saturday. However, it would be unusual not to mention such a significant Feast, though the psalm may have been drawn in through association with Adelheit's contemplation on the Lord's martyrdom.

[589] Karl Heinz Spiez, 'Kommunikationsformen im Hochadel und am Königshof im Spätmittelalter', in Gerd Althoff, ed., *Formen und Funktion öffentlicher Kommunikation im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 2001), pp. 261–290, p. 267; a procession would also accompany the anchorite to the anchorhold, something perhaps mirrored in Adelheit's 'entombment' under the vat, see Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Lay Women and their Biographers in the Thirteenth Century', in Mulder-Bakker ed., *Living Saints of the Thirteenth Century* (Turnhout, 2011), pp.1–43, p. 23; also E. A. Jones, 'Ceremonies of Enclosure: Rite, Rhetoric and Reality', in Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure* (Cardiff, 2008), pp. 34–49, p. 39; Gertude Jaron Lewis, 'Music and Dancing', p. 168, describes this procession as a 'non–liturgical and rather undignified' personal expression.

God, lies on the ground until vespers.[590] A contrast is created between the noise and flamboyance of the external procession, the disruption of the vat throwing and the stillness (and hidden-ness) of Adelheit on the ground in the cloister, beneath a vat.[591]

Yet despite the climactic union of the kiss with Christ, this is not where the episode ends, the narrative describing the events which follow as part of the same experience:

> Und ir siechmeisterin sůchte si also wite das closter waz. Und kunde ir nút vinden. Und do zů vesperzit wart, do entsprach si ir uss der búttende: 'Berchte, ich bin hie,' und in dem brunste seite si ir alles, das ir wider faren wz.[592]
>
> And the infirmarian searched far and wide in the convent. And she could not find her. And when it came to be time for Vespers, she (Adelheit) called to her from inside the vat: 'Berchte, I am here', and in that state of fervour she told her everything which had happened to her.

That the text specifies that it was the infirmarian who went searching for her, implies that Adelheit was understood to be in some way ill, perhaps unsurprising after her bizarre reaction to the accusations of heresy. Emphasis is also placed on the fact that Adelheit could not be found despite thorough search of all the grounds of the convent, implying that she has, for the period between the chapter-meeting and vespers, been spiritually, if not bodily, absent from the convent, during her state of mystical union.[593] This helps to underline why what follows, namely re-discovery, revelation and witness, is necessary. Adelheit has been identified as unwell and as non-present in the convent, vulnerable and excluded. Her cry from under the vat is a signal of readiness, willingness and need to rejoin the community to which she

[590] Reminiscent of Angela of Foligno's *unio* in Assisi, *Memorial*, first supplementary step, see second chapter of this thesis, p. 107.
[591] This odd location is hard to explain, though may be due to humility. Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 72, explores enclosed spaces as locations of women's spirituality.
[592] 'Chronik', p. 155.
[593] On spiritual divergence within the communal setting, see Tinsley, 'The Spirituality of Suffering', p. 131.

belongs.[594] Afterwards, Adelheit is described as revealing her experience to Berchte whilst *in brunste*, possibly conveying an after-effect of ecstasy, suggesting the process of being found once again, (re-)located in the convent space and the act of revelation provide an intermediary step between mystical state and temporal life. The account only comes to an end once Adelheit has completed her revelation, seemingly normalized once more through the process of sharing her experience.

In its dramatic contrasts between noise and silence, presence and absence, positive and negative, the narrative recalls the heights and depths associated with mystical experience of God, but this flow is re-framed for the confines of a convent community, in the use of space and witness. The process is brought to a close only through the provision of testimony to another nun, through allowing another to be a witness to private experience of the divine. Where Adelheit, or rather her orthodoxy, has been questioned and doubted in the chapter-house, it is accepted once more in the cloister (the nuns' space). In between these two, Adelheit's most precious experience, her marriage to God, occurs with her temporal body in a vat, a lowly place, which separates her from others. Ultimately, her experience is brought to the attention of the community as she returns spiritually to the cloister, seeking attention by calling out, and is physically moved into the light when Berchte discovers Adelheit when the mystical nun is hidden in the overturned vat. Her identity is determined by Christ, not the clergy, a role which exists internally within the cloister and the community it represents rather than the chapter house.

A second experience addressing identity offers an explicit response to Adelheit's concerns over her life before entering the convent. Adelheit is troubled by her status as a widow,

[594] Gsell, 'Das fließende Blut', p. 471, discusses the role of the body in placing the mystic as on the boundary of two orders.

feeling ‘groß leid vm den magtuom, wan si wz ein wittwe vnd weinde tag vnd nacht vm den magtuom’ (great distress concerning maidenhood, as she was a widow and wept day and night about her maidenhood).[595] After many years like this, Adelheit is told by an angel that God will answer her prayers, saying, ‘Wolluff, Got wil dich erhören, also vere es múglich ist’ (Be comforted, God will answer your prayer, as much as it is possible).[596] It seems that Adelheit is then drawn into an ecstatic state, during which she is physically changed by God:

> Vnd [der engel] fuerte si in den lufft, da warent ouch ander engel, die hatten ein trotten vnd leiten si darin vnd trotteten si also sere, das si duochte, das in irme libe niena troppff bluotes blibe. Vnd sprachen do zuo ir: ‘Alles das bluot das in dir gesúndet hatt, daz hand wir vss dir getrottett vnd sollen dir megde bluot ingiessen vnd solt megden also glich werden als du iemer maht, aber du enmaht nút maget werden.’
>
> And [this angel] took her up into the air, where there were also other angels, who had a winepress and put her into it and pressed her so hard, that she thought that in her body not one drop of blood remained. And then they said to her: ‘All the blood that has sinned in you, we have pressed out of you and will pour in virgins’ blood and you shall become as virgin-like as you can be, though you can never become a maiden.

As stated above, this mystical episode shows Adelheit’s transformation from widow to pseudo-virgin.[597] Adelheit is portrayed as deeply burdened by her sexual history, and the way both her body and identity are changed through this experience fulfils her greatest desires. Her transformation, however, is a multi-staged process. She is first cleansed through her own penance of tears. The purpose of the experience openly declared by the Angel. Her sin, which is at the core of her fear, her status and her isolation, is imagined as physical and visible in

[595] ‘Chronik’, p. 155.
[596] Ibid. p. 155.
[597] Transformation through ‘crucifixion’ is also important to Elsbeth von Oye, see Ochsenbein, ‘Die Leidenmystik’, p. 364.

the form of her blood. This is dramatically and utterly removed from her, so that not one drop remains. Adelheit is then filled up with virgin's blood, her body quite literally being re-formed into something physically different to her previous body, and spiritually re-designated as not sullied.[598] Interestingly, the narrative makes explicit that she is not made into a virgin and indeed that this is not possible, further suggesting that Adelheit is offered her own, unique and tailored spiritual 'body', which does not ignore but rather takes into account her turn from earthly marriage, penance and new piety.[599] Moreover, used to represent a crucifixion, the winepress in Adelheit's experience posits her blood-pressing as a mirror of the crucifixion.[600] This indicates both Adelheit's faithful *imitatio christi* (even more so in that God grants this opportunity of *imitatio* to her in response to her piety) and that she is re-born, resurrected, through the process.[601] As Christ's blood was imagined to be shed for the sins of humanity, so Adelheit is offered the personalised and intimate opportunity to mirror her Lord and shed her own sinful blood to follow Him. The episode thus portrays Adelheit's ritualised progress from sadness and fear caused by previous sin, to a divine recognition of her successful penance of tears and the reward of the new body she so desired. She approaches the experience with humility and repentance, her sacrifice is proclaimed as accepted by the Angel, she is broken and given a new body and a new matching spiritual state by God.

Yet, in a pattern similar to that demonstrated in the cases of Elizabeth of Vackenstein and Adelheit Geishörnlin, the mystic's experience is not considered complete within the narrative until it has been ritually shared:

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[598] Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, p. 163.
[599] Ashton, *The Generation of Identity*, p. 73, explores the way in which the attacking the body creates a 'space' for a holy identity.
[600] See Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Violent Imagery in Late Medieval Piety', GHI Bulletin, 30 (2002), 3–36, p. 12; James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in the Late Middle Ages: A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Narrative* (Kortrijk, Belgium, 1979), p. 85; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* p. 313.
[601] On changed blood as renewal for Elsbeth von Oye, see Gsell, 'Das fließende Blut', p. 466.

> Vnd do si wider kam zuo ir selben, do lag si in bluot besöppfet, vnd do früge wart, da gieng ein leygeswester da fúr, die hies Irnbrug vnd pflag der siechen. Die růffte sie an, das si ir ze helffe keme vnd ir das gewande wüsche. Die sprach vff ir warheit, dz si ein grossen zuber blůtes darvon wüsche, si wissete aber nút wie es ir widerfaren wz. Danach gerow es si vil úbel, das si es ie gewůsch, das si es nút zů eim zeichen in dem gewande liess, wann si seite ir erst da nach, wie ir beschechen was.
>
> And when she came to again, she lay soaked in blood, and when it was matins, a lay-sister came by her, she was called Irnbrug and served the sick. She [Adelheit] called to her [Irnbrug], that she come to help her and wash her gown for her. She spoke upon her truth that she washed a great bucket of blood from it, but she did not know how it had happened to her. After that she [Irnbrug] deeply regretted that she had washed it, and that she had not left it upon the gown as a sign, because she [Adelheit] had only told her afterwards, how it had happened to her.

Witnessing is again presented as the necessary conclusion in the communal process of mystical experience.[602] Isolated from the community through her perception of her sinfulness, Adelheit's spiritual validity is affirmed in God's answer to her desire, physically lifting her out of the negative situation and remaking her body. Upon re-entering the temporal world in a new state, it is necessary for the changed Adelheit to re-negotiate the terms of belonging and hierarchy within her community. Again, the separation instituted through the exceptionality of the mystical gift is ended through the participation of another nun, in this case lay-sister Irnbrug, in a rite of revelation. By participating in this ritualised process, it is Irnbrug who has the first access to the physical results of the episode, the blood which has been pressed out of Adelheit by the angels, and then the experiential reward, Adelheit's

[602] Dominican scepticism towards dream visions may have influence the need for physical evidence, see Haas, *Gottleiden*, p. 115.

verbal account of her mystical experience. It appears to be Irnbrug and not Adelheit who recognises the communal value of the experience, and realises that the bloody gown provided valuable evidence of Adelheit's holiness and changed body.[603] Providing both physical assistance and witness, Irnbrug offers Adelheit the opportunity to share her private reward with the community, releasing its potential value. As comprehending witness, Irnbrug relieves Adelheit of the burden of pride or knowledge allowing her to maintain humility and modesty.

Narrating both Adelheit's mystical marriage and the re-making of her body, mystical experience is not portrayed as able to stand alone, incorporating a witness in order to complete the episode. In neither instance does the witness see the episode itself, only the results. Their function appears three-fold: to find the mystic, to calm the mystic and to receive their testimony. In a similar way to the example of Elizabeth of Vackenstein and her elevation of confession between sisters, the giving of testimony after an experience can also be seen as a form of positive confession internal to the community, the revelation of spiritual rewards for the individual which honour the community as a whole. It is through the process of confession, which appears to have been viewed as a route to communal judgement, that the process of mystical experience is completed.

The narrative of Adelheit of Brisach's *vita* is not alone in utilising aspects of ritual to provide assurance and validation in response to a negative perception of a mystic, either her own or that of her colleagues, in relation to her community. Surrounded by sisters blessed with the ability to weep as part of their contemplation, it appears that Anna Turnerin also began to feel

[603] Blood as sign of revelation, see Gsell, 'Das fließende Blut', p. 464.

excluded. Anna observed ‘das unmessige weinen [...] das die swesteren taten’ (the abundant weeping [...] which the sisters performed) and becoming distressed that she could not cry as ‘die enmöchte von nature nút weinen’ (it was not in her nature to cry), developed ‘groz begirde, dz si ouch möchte weinen’ (great desire to be able to cry as well). Anna’s reaction highlights the emotional aspect to spirituality within a convent community, her desire clearly born out of her perception of those surrounding her, also underlining the role of the community as an example to each other.

Anna was certainly spurred into action, devotedly contemplating on the gift of tears, her pious dedication finally coming to fruition when ‘zuo einem male, do si an ihr andacht wz, da tett si ires ernstes als vil darzuo, daz ein trechen fúr daz ouge kam’ (on one occasion, as she was at her contemplation, she did this so seriously, that a tear came to her eye).[604] Thus it can be seen that through the spiritual practice of her community and through her own pious work that Anna is rewarded with a mystical encounter, the narrative emphasising that *mit demselben*, that is to say just as she produced a tear, ‘do kam si von ir selben, und wz ir wie zwen engel kemen von himelrich und brachten ein guldin beren und enfiegen den trachen darin, und trůgent in uff und brachten in fúr unseren Herren’ (then she came from herself, and it seemed to her as if two angels came from heaven and brought a golden cup and caught the tear in it and (then) carried it up and brought it before our Lord).[605] Responding to Anna’s own feeling of unworthiness, and her apparent physical lack in comparison to the other nuns, the value of her seemingly less successful act of contemplation - the single tear rather than her colleague’s years of copious weeping - is given divine affirmation through her

[604] On convent life as the work of a *militia Christi*, see Alois Haas, *Mystik als Aussage*, p. 280.
[605] See Kimberly Joy-Knight, ‘Si puose calcina a’ propri occhi’, The Importance of the Gift of Tears for Thirteenth-Century Religious Women and their Hagiographers’, in Eilina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (New York, 2012), pp. 136–155.

experience.[606] Anna is able to witness as her tear is ceremonially gifted to God. This mystically witnessed ritual of gift-giving both makes visible and elevates the value of Anna's single tear in several ways. Angels are sent to carry Anna's gift, the heavenly aspect of the bearers suggesting that their status reflects or befits that of the gift. Moreover, it is of significance that the gift is held in a golden cup. Firstly, the object, the description of it as made out of precious metal, and the two perhaps decorative 'angels' who surround it are suggestive of a reliquary, a connection that implies Anna's holiness and the efficacy of her tear.[607] Yet the cup also forms a link to the chalice used in the rite of the Eucharist. Thus, Anna's experience offers a mirror image of the Eucharist, through which a nun is able to offer her pious tears to God in the chalice rather than, as would be expected, God offering his gift of blood in that same object. The ritual association of the object further underlines the importance and value of her tear, and signifies that this piety is also recognised and valued by God himself. Moreover, Anna is witness to the way in which her tear travels between the temporal sphere of her hard work at contemplation, and the eternal heavenly realm in which God exists. In Anna's experience, the pious devotion that finds visible form in her tear, is physically borne to the God for whom it was meant and indeed to whom all such devotion was directed. In this way, the divine answer to Anna's piety provides for her whole community.

In form the cup or chalice offers a visual link to the celebration of communion, holding the blood of Christ.[608] Through this Eucharistic association, the chalice is linked to the concept of

[606] The texts of prayers used by Dominican nuns encourage mystical contemplation. The direction for praying *Ave Maria* in MS cgm 73 echoes Anna's experience in that it depicts a brother praying for twenty years to see Christ's ascension, see Peter Ochsenbein, 'Mystische Spuren im 'Engelberger Gebetbuch', in Claudia Brinker-von der Heyde and Niklaus Largier, eds., *Homo Medietas: Religiosität, Literatur und Denkformen des Menschen bis in die Neuzeit* (New York, 1999), pp. 275–284, p. 276.
[607] See, for example, Arnold Angenendt, 'Relics and their Veneration', in Bagnoli, ed., *Treasures of Heaven*, pp. 19–28, p. 20, also Palazzo, 'Relics, Liturgical Space and the Theology of the Church' in Bagnoli, ed. *Treasures of Heaven*, pp. 99–110, p. 103.
[608] Timmermann, *Real Presence*, p. 26, suggests that the cup may also have been a *Speisekelch*, or chalice shaped receptacle for the host.

Christ's suffering and sacrifice. It is thus especially meaningful as a vessel to carry tears, which often represented the gift of the understanding of Christ's suffering, a physicalization of spiritual progress. The movement of the cup from Anna to God implies a reversal of the movement of God down to earth in the form of Christ, something which therefore refers back to the relationship between Christ's suffering and Anna's understanding of his suffering, becoming an embodiment of prayer. In this ritualised presentation and acceptance of Anna's piety, it is an object that holds meaning within the communal context which creates a visual path of communication with the divine. In finally forming a tear, Anna has already received a blessing and been spiritually transformed. The rite centred upon the cup is additional to Anna's transformation, providing an open and visible announcement of Anna's holy transformation which is witnessed by the angels.

The relationship between the objects of communal rites and their use in dealing with the problems faced by the cloistered community comes to the fore in the *vita* of Berchte Vinchin, an account which begins by strongly emphasising Berchte's loneliness in the convent as a new arrival, 'do die zum ersten in das closter kam, do wz si in grossem ernste vnd in grosser andacht, vnd hatt nieman, von dem si kein liep hette, vnd das tet ir dick gar we' (when she first came to the convent, she was very serious and very devout, and had no-one, who cared for her, and that hurt her very much).[609] The situation indicates the isolation which was surely a common issue for new nuns joining an established community. For Berchte, this suffering becomes a boon to her piety, as when she turns to her crucifix and 'rette mit ime als ein frund mit dem andern, und clagte ime, wz sie zuo betrübe angie' (spoke with him as one friend to the other, and sighed to him, about what was afflicting her), she is rewarded when the

[609] 'Chronik', p. 174.

crucifix in her cell ‘neiget [...] sin houbet ab dem crutz vff ir wange’ (lowered [...] his head from the cross upon her cheek) and begins to speak with and comfort her.[610]

The solitude this episode conveys is addressed in a second, complimentary mystical experience. Berchte is lying in the infirmary and is believed to be severely ill, ‘also siech, das man wande, si müste sterben’ (so sick, that one believed she was to die). However, unlike the mystical experience of Christ in her cell, this time she is not alone, something to which the narrative calls attention:

> Vnd ein swester lag vor ir vber an eim andern bette, die hies swester Hedwig von Horenberg. Vnd zuo einem male, do kam vnser frowe, vnd giengen zwo jungfrowen vor ir, vnd giengeten in daz siechhuse, vnd stuondent fúr swester Hedwig von Horenberg. Vnd do si ein wile vor ir gestuondent, vnsser frowe vnd ouch dir jungfrowen, do giengen si zuo swester Berchte Vinchen. Vnd unser frowe trůg ein guldin wuneclich nepfelin in der hant, vnd sprach zuo swester Berchten: ‘Trinck uss disem nepfelin, so wirt dir ze hant bas,’ vnd gab ir darus zuo trinken, vn do si erste getranck, do wart ir alles ires siechtagen bůsse vnd vnser frowe gieng wider enweg.[611]
>
> And a sister lay over from her in another bed, she was called sister Hedwig of Horenberg. And one time, our Lady came, and two virgins went before her, and went into the infirmary, and stood before sister Hedwig of Horenberg. And when they had stood a while before her, our Lady and also the virgins, then they went to sister Berchte Vinchen. And our Lady carried a golden, wondrous beaker in her hand, and said to sister Berchte: ‘Drink from this golden beaker, then you will immediately feel better,’ and [our Lady] gave her to drink of the beaker, and as she first drank, so all her illness was made better and our Lady went away again.

[610] Ibid., p. 175.
[611] Ibid., p. 175.

The actions, objects and demeanour of the Marian party lend a sense of ritualisation and sacredness to this scene.[612] Implicitly observed by Berchte, Mary and the two virgins process into the infirmary bearing the golden cup.[613] Berchte's act of watching highlights the procession; however, in doing so it also suggests the value of those whom the procession is approaching: the more highly valued the procession, the greater the honour for the recipients (Hedwig and Berchte). The connection formed between the cup and healing in this scene is even stronger than in the example of Anna Turnerin's tear. Expectations of the salvific properties of the Eucharist and its relationship to salvation history are reinforced through use of Mary as the bringer of the cup, regarded as physically bringing or offering Christ and his healing blood to earth through her motherhood. Although it is the drink which brings about the nuns' healing, the passage underlines the extraordinary and valuable nature of the cup, described both as golden and wondrous, as much as its contents. It is the golden cup, which is a recognisable visual shorthand for communion. The precious object, in bearing the supra-text of the Church's ritualised process of healing and salvation, conveys far more than its basic form both to the intra- and extra-textual audience. Contextualised by the object she carries, Mary's command to Berchte that she 'drink from this beaker' and proclamation that 'then [she] will feel immediately better', is reminiscent of the language and structure of the Eucharistic liturgy, echoing the use of Psalm 115, 'I will take the chalice of the Lord', as an accompaniment to Communion, and the sentiment of the blessing, dating from the eighth century onwards, 'may the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thee unto life everlasting.'[614] The use of such Eucharistic imagery in the context of the infirmary and

[612] Practical tasks were re-imagined as spiritual exercises within the convent, see Hans Joachin Schiewer, 'Uslesen. Das Weiterwirken mystischen Gedankenguts im Kontext dominikanischer Frauengemeinschaften', in Haug and Schneider-Lastin, eds., *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, pp. 581–604, pp. 597–598.
[613] Mary was often depicted as compassionate of suffering and an aid in the healing work of salvation, see Noll, 'Zu Begriff, Gestalt und Funktion des Andachtsbildes', p. 303; Mary's compassion for Christ is also suggestive of the nuns' ailments as a suffering with God, see Carol M. Schuler, 'The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin', *Simolius: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, 21 (1992), 5–28, pp. 9–10.
[614] Josef Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite, its Origins and Development* (London, 1961), p. 495; p. 515.

Berchte's grave illness further suggests the sacrament of the Last Rites, communion given to a person in order to absolve them of sin before their death. [615] In this experience, however, both nuns are healed by Mary.

An interplay between witnessing and the relationship of the nuns is at the heart of this scene, the narrative stressing that this mystical episode was shared by two sisters. Indeed, the description of the position of Hedwig's bed in relation to that of Berchte implies the importance of the nuns' ability to observe one another and provide witness to the remarkable gift each is offered by Mary. Moreover, the whole incident is also implicitly witnessed by the two virgins who accompany Mary. The act of mutual observing also seems to play a role in the healing of the two nuns, as Mary and the virgins pause before each bed, indicating a time of mutual viewing. Indeed, once the holy retinue have departed, the two nuns confess their mutual act of witness:

> Dis sach swester Hedewig von Hornberg, die da vor ir vber lag. Vnd do vnser frowe enweg kam, da gie si zuo swester Berchte. 'Wie ist úch?' Da sprach si: 'Ich bin aller dinger genesen, die frowe, die bi uch wz, die wz ouch bi mir, vnd gab mir vsser eim guldinen nepfelin ze trinken daz bester tranck, das ie getruncken wart, vnd doch do ich es erst getranck, do wart mir buos aller miner arbeit.[616]
>
> Sister Hedewig of Hornberg saw this, who was lying over across from her. And when our lady had gone away, she went to sister Berchte. 'How are you?' Then she said: 'I am healed of all things, the lady who was with you, she was also with me, and, from a golden cup, gave me the best drink to drink that was ever drunk, and once I drank it, I was absolved of all my suffering.

[615] See Ronald K Rittgers, *The Reformation of Suffering: Pastoral Theology and Lay Piety in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2012), pp. 21–24.
[616] 'Chronik', p. 175.

Ending on this note, the narrative underlines the sisters' support of each other. It is through Hedwig's approach to Berchte and her question, which also seems to be an act of caring for the other nun whom she knew to have been unwell, that their shared experience is revealed. In receiving the answer to her question from Berchte, Hedwig is also rewarded not only in receiving Berchte's revelation of this clearly miraculous experience, but also because Berchte reveals that she was a witness to Hedwig's own mystical experience. Through Mary's mystical intervention, the sisters are not only healed but brought together in support of each other. [617] Furthermore it also shows Berchte to be no longer isolated, as she had been at the beginning of her *vita*. The two nuns have participated in the same ritual, have seen one another equally rewarded by Mary, implicitly both having shared the same chalice, and ultimately can share their experience through mutual witness. This is quite an apt metaphor both for communal life and for the conception of the Christian Church: a community which drinks from the same healing cup, Christ, and should be bound together through mutual witness of God.

In a sense, the foundation of the monastic life in the thirteenth century was the perpetual act of dialogue between temporal humanity and God, in prayer, praise and, particularly in the Dominican order, teaching and learning facilitated through the collection and copying of manuscripts and itinerant preaching. Liturgical practice and the sacraments of the Church, particularly in the context of Adelhausen the rite of confession and Eucharistic Communion, formed the nexus of this dialogue with the Divine, designating structures, spaces and routines for the real presence of the divine within temporal existence, facilitating and framing acts of negotiation. Yet within the convent the nuns were also clearly in dialogue with each other: perpetually navigating the communal situation, they needed to deal with insecurities, both

[617] See for example Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010), p. 162; Rachel Fulton, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800–1200* (New York, 2002), p. 277.

personal and communal, and, moreover, to balance the relationship between individual identity and communal hierarchy. The ways in which nuns were often visibly and physically singled out through their forms of contemplation or mystical gifts, for instance in tears, blood loss or levitation, certainly played into this negotiation, raising questions of belonging, introducing insecurities and jealousies, and creating problems in the vacillation between isolation and participation.

This study of the depiction and function of ritual within the Adelhausen sister-book has brought to the fore a careful balance between ordinary and extraordinary, spiritual gift and professed duty, a subtle equilibrium reflected in the liturgical rituals of the convent, which both occurred (in some form) every day, but equally always encapsulated the ineffable presence of the divine. It is clear that the sister-book gathers together a group of accounts which are not intended to form a record of the history of daily life in a convent, precisely because each *vita* is selected on the basis of a depiction of a spiritual expression which is out of the ordinary. The text is an intentionally crafted narrative and thus depicts, at least in some ways, a constructed fiction. Nonetheless the Adelhausen sister-book points to, and moreover seeks to address, the difficulties as well as, if not as much as, the virtue and value of a spiritually vibrant community history. In (re-)presenting and in authorising this mystical past, the narrative repeatedly returns to the familiar framework of the rituals which were so central to the life and cohesion of the convent community. Using the expectations of ritual contexts, personal mystical experiences, such as Adelheit Geishörnlein's spinning episode, are informed and validated. Rites, such as Adelheit of Brisach's mystical marriage are employed to redress questioned identity. The interaction between the communal familiarity of rite and space, together with the elevation of witnessing are further still used in order to overcome exclusion, and to re-integrate both individual and insight into the convent community, mystics even depicted as physically moved between a mystical space and that of the convent.

Participating, mystically, in rituals with the community, as Elizabeth von Vackenstein does in the St Katherine Eucharist, the individual and their experience are embedded into the communal context, able mystically to provide for them in a spiritual continuation of normal communal practice.

Finally, this chapter has argued that the element of re-discovering the mystic, caring for them and gathering their revelation is re-imagined within the narrative as the necessary final element of a process of mystical witness without which the process is considered incomplete. This is strongly bound to the idea of witness or audience established in ritual practice, through which the positive affirmation of the observer finally empowers or negates the effectiveness of the ritual act. Within the mystical episode, the mystics are rewarded by ritual and their privilege of participating in divine insight though their extra-ordinary sight. In the ritualised process of mystical revelation, the witness completes the wholeness of the experience, and is privileged through the elevation of their role, accessing the ecstatic through this form of participation. In this manner the ecstatic experience, which is one of distance often even portrayed as physical, either in the sister's elevation or her being 'missing', does not remain isolating, but is imagined as concluded within the community. Through this process, constructed within the narrative, and in which the construction of the narrative itself participates, the spiritual value of the gift of ecstatic experience and the learning of mystical insight is provided for communal benefit.

Ritual in the sister-book seeks to anchor extreme experience within the community, the mystic's pious, personal and private *begirde*, which stimulates her reward, transformed into communal *wúrdi*.

Conclusion: Community, Constructed texts and Creative ritual in Late Medieval Mystical Narratives

At the core of this investigation are the questions of how and why the numerous Church rituals depicted within the narratives of late medieval spirituality were recorded in mystical texts. Many scholars have pointed to the importance of liturgical and sacramental practice within the spiritual lives of women in the Late Middle Ages, yet the significance of such action within the narratives recording this spiritual form has been less thoroughly explored. This thesis, however, has demonstrated that ritual practices, which were so central to religious lives both professed and unprofessed, play a significant part in the construction of theology and identity within the texts which depict mystical experience. Indeed, it is significant that both mystical narratives and the rituals of the Church were formed within, and in communication with, communities, both temporal and heavenly. Seeking in various instances to teach, impress, understand and bind together, ritual acts are employed in dialogue with a social group and with the divine. The closer examination of four mystical narratives in this thesis has shown that ritual was employed in various creative and purposeful ways within such texts.

Although there are areas of overlap, the depiction and function of ritual within the four texts emerge in many different ways. In the case of Agnes Blannbekin, the spiritual role imagined for her within the text is closely bound to questions about the celebration of the sacraments. Whilst mystical rites are occasionally depicted within the narrative to define and present divine affirmation of Agnes' spiritual identity, in most of the cases in which Agnes is portrayed within a ritual her insight provides an opportunity to assuage doubts regarding the sanctity of the sacraments. Agnes is shown to sense the presence of God when others cannot, and to see behind the sacramental practice into its theological and salvation historical foundation. In turn, the expectation of the sacred in the sacrament also affirms Agnes'

connection to the divine, and provides the foundation upon which she can speak in humility but with authority. Agnes' insight is presented as an authorisation in support of the work of the friars, just as she is linked to orthodoxy through her association with this group. Depicted in a similar way in both Agnes' *Vita* and the Adelhausen sister-book, sacred space - for Agnes the church and altar, for Adelhausen the choir in particular - is revisited many times. In using the spaces as locations for mystical experience, the texts anchor the revelations within the expected spaces of divine interaction of their communities.

In contrast, however, the Adelhausen account creatively integrates other members of the convent community within the process of ecstatic experience on far more equal terms than Agnes' *Vita,* Mechthild's *FL* or Angela's *Memorial*. Although witnessing is central to all four narratives, the sister-book presents the witnessing of one nun's mystical experience by another sister as irrevocably ritually connected, essential stages of the same process. The value of the rewarded piety, demonstrated by a nun's receipt of mystical contemplation, is understood as incomplete when it remains as a private experience. Such experiences are portrayed as even being of potentially dubious communal value, depicted as traumatic for individual and community. This negative slant is framed as being overcome by correct witnessing, a rite imagined in the text, through which the value of mystical experience can be brought into the community. In the convent, ritual provides space for the divinely sanctioned seeing and being seen, through which holy insight is transferred into the communal memory.

For Angela, too, ritual and the physical space associated with Church rite provide an orthodox stage upon which the extraordinary, unexpected and challenging aspects of her relationship with God can be witnessed. Yet in the *Memorial*, unlike the Adelhausen account, whilst doubts regarding Angela and her dramatic experience are addressed and reframed through this use of public, witnessed ritual, in the Basilica episode, the distinction between Angela, as mystic, and her circle, seems deliberately maintained through the medium of the

ritualised experience. Moreover, the structure of thirty steps of penance which underpins the whole *Memorial* gives the narrative's depiction of spiritual development a sense of ritual. Whilst this is not an exact rite, analysis of the individual ritualised episodes within it indicates a formal progression in Angela's role and connection to God, which is conveyed through her relationship to the sacraments.

Though not in the same way, Mechthild also weaves theology into her narrative through the use of sacramental ritual, in order to support the depiction of her role as pious woman. This occurs, for instance, in her use of the image of the golden penny, which is affirmed as her will in one mystical Eucharist, and her calling to write in a second, later experience of God. The greatest contrast, in terms of the place of ritual, between the *FL* and the other accounts examined is that whilst the women depicted in the other accounts are regularly found within the church setting attending mass, this is not the case for Mechthild. This does not preclude, however, the importance of sacramentality in this text, with clear reference to the rites of the Church and their theological underpinning emerging in Mechthild's contemplation, such as in the object of the chalice. Through the juxtaposition of the expected facets of Church rite, such as the chalice or the mass, with unexpected space or action, for instance her use of the tavern, Mechthild questions the interaction of members of her community with Church rite and demonstrates the power of sacramental ritual. Moreover, in showing this insight into the power of the sacraments and the failings of other religious people, she here indicates her own intimacy with the divine and authority.

This discussion has shown, firstly, that the sacraments and the liturgy were sites where the divine was expected and also that the behaviour associated with these rites was considered an appropriate response to the appearance of God. Whilst women were not allowed to act as

providers of the sacraments, the sphere created through the performance of these rites nonetheless provided a safe space for the reception of the divine. That the basic outline of the rite, in both form and meaning, was both culturally understood and acknowledged as orthodox, could be used to reflect this status and expectation upon a woman situated within the ritual setting. However extreme, unexpected and limitless the experience within a rite might be, the shapeless mystical ecstasy was offered a form, limit and point of reference through the rite to which it was attached. This attachment, this point of familiarity and security, might be in the form of the performance of the rite in itself, for example Angela's attendance of the mass: an object, such as the box in Adelheit's vision of Mary, or a space, such as Agnes' night in the chapel. In each case, whilst the experience of the mystic is unique, the familiarity of the rite and things attached to that rite reassure of the orthodoxy and sacredness of what is being undertaken. It is certainly true that this late medieval form of devotional expression was marked by flexibility in the relationship between penitent soul and God, which is to say, not restricted to particular times, places and forms. The manner in which ritual is employed within the narrative accounts of such experience does, however, act to provide both a frame of reference and an anchor in the orthodoxy of Church practice.

Secondly, ritual enters mystical narratives as a source of knowledge. What becomes clear about the understanding of the sacraments within this context, particularly in the depiction of the Eucharist in the rite of communion, is that it integrates a multi-faceted theology. In the depiction of its celebration, the sacramental rite is shown to create a divine and eternal space into which the mystic is placed and from which the mystic is shown to take their knowledge of the divine. For the mystic, who is allowed through compassion to see the suffering Christ on the cross in the host, and through divine intervention may see Christ in heaven, or the Lamb descend from heaven to the altar to be sacrificed, the ritual moment of the sacrament is equally the moment in which they may see the living, dying, risen and heavenly Christ at

once. This sacramental and heavenly space of knowledge in which the mystic is depicted as situated through their interaction with the ritual furthermore reflects their social and spiritual status as intercessors between divine and temporal. Moreover, in some cases, such as for Angela of Foligno or the anonymous woman in the mass scene of the *FL*, the narrative strongly implies that the virtuous woman's progression in spirituality encompasses a transition to a new holy state, which is assured of recognition within the eternal sphere. In light of this, sacramental space, which is between temporal and heavenly, becomes a space which mirrors the mystics' personal spiritual state.

A critical part of the role which is depicted for these women is the ability to access the strata of ritual - temporal enactment and matters pertaining to it, such as the priest's virtue or the communicant's piety, the presence of God, the historical or current action of God underpinning the act, or the future fulfilment of the divine power of the act for the recipient - as, for instance when Adelheit views her fellow nuns' virtue, or Agnes views the priest's hand glowing. Yet, being depicted with this manner of witness in turn speaks to the understanding of the mystic's role, belonging and authority. Whilst of their temporal community, and offered information of clear value to the people surrounding them, they are simultaneously demonstrated to be not of their community, participating in the ritual not solely on a temporal level but on an eternal or divine level, seeing, briefly, not with an earthly sight but on the level of divine action. Their role as 'between' is encapsulated in their seeing between the spaces of sacramental action.

Lastly, ritual is employed in order to address the problematic aspects of mystical insight, both social and linguistic. The difficulties created by the mystic within their community, as suggested by the depictions of this interaction in the cases examined in this thesis, might be broken into three categories: problems of communicating that which is divine; a lack of definition and delineation of their role and place within the Church hierarchy; finally, a

distance from the community resulting from the extraordinary nature of their experience, a lack of definition of their role in relation to that community and a problematic dynamic within the community due to unexpected or uncontrolled difficult behaviours.

The topic of mystical speaking has been much discussed within the scholarship of medieval mysticism, for example by Alois Haas, Bardo Weiß and Bernard McGinn, particularly in terms of the divine as ineffable and the prohibition of women teaching on theological topics.[618] Using pre-existing structures of Church ritual which convey theological concepts (including scripture) and display them in action and speech, rather than in an overtly scholastic and argumentative form, mystical narrative can certainly be interpreted as theological discussions portrayed through ritual form. However, the texts examined, particularly the *Memorial* and the Adelhausen sister-book also reflect the perceived difficulty of mystic and mystical insight within their community. Whilst it is within the nature of these narratives to acknowledge the value of their subjects' piety and resultant spiritual experience, they also show that this form of spirituality was not without issues - doubt on the part of those around them, deep trauma for the mystic and a certain necessary yet troubling sense of distance from those around them. Between the admiration and veneration expressed towards the mystic, the embodied oddness of these women's lives in comparison to those around them emerges, implying the practical difficulty in living alongside them. Some are made physically incapable through the intensity of their experiences, left bedbound and in need of carers, as are several of the nuns described by Anna, and as implied in the life of Angela. At times they refuse or are unable to speak to their companions (Angela, Anna, Mechthild) yet at other times, bereft or in bodily pain, they cry out continually in a way which appears to have been both disruptive and disturbing to those around them (Angela and Anna in particular). In some sense it appears that these figures are attempting to communicate things to others yet do so in

[618] See introduction to this thesis, p. 19.

a language which is either unfamiliar or distorted, as is the case when Agnes bows before a cellar. Moreover their elevated insight highlights the inadequacies of those around them, like the Adelhausen account of the Dominican sister who refused to leave her kitchen duties to see the host raised, or Agnes' task in placating God's anger at the sinful friar. There is the sense that these holy lives should be a blessing, and indeed the recognition of their spiritual value lies at the heart of why they have been recorded in writing, yet nonetheless the texts retain a sense of the unease, of the awkwardness and the confusion which such abnormality left in its wake.

Depictions of ritual participate in, and are utilised in order to overcome, this dynamic of mystical isolation and communal doubt or confusion in a number of ways. As mentioned, they provide a platform of familiarity, as such offering reassurance and an area of cultural commonality in terms of expectation and symbolism. They also provide certain pre-formed suggestions of attachment and limitation. Thus even when Agnes Blannbekin sees Christ's wounds pouring out blood into chalices in heaven the reference to the rite of the Eucharist remains clear, indicating to her audience from which version of the divine she receives her right to speak and within which Church she has placed her loyalty. Such rituals work within a community context, something which is particularly important when it comes to the way in which they are employed to overcome the third issue identified above, namely the mystic's isolation within their community. Rituals carry an expectation of witness, partially through the theatricality which draws attention, but also importantly by means of the cultural and historical understanding of how they work - a baptism, a mass, a marriage are occasions in which the community comes together to witness something of importance. Thus in utilising rituals, those around the mystic are drawn inwards and asked to relate to them. Secondly, and particularly in the case of Adelhausen, these witnesses are further moulded into the process of

mystical revelation and, through the ritualisation of revelation, given a role within the narrative as integral to the value of the mystical experience itself.

Examining in detail the role which ritual plays in these narratives has demonstrated that depictions of ritualised action are connected with themes and purposes at the heart of each text. So it is that Mechthild's appropriation of ritual forms seeks to authorise and demonstrate the powerful voice of those who have real faith in God within the context of the temporal and eternal Church. In the *Memorial* Angela's spiritual progression is marked by rites of transition which validate her development into a spiritual leader and whose revelation differentiates her from others but also proclaims her task as having a voice to offer this community. Enveloped in the sacramental devotion of Agnes' *Vita* is an interweaving of eschatological and Franciscan purpose, which empowers the spirituality of urban mendicancy. The fictional Adelhausen community re-imagines mystical experience as inclusive and shared, offering support to a convent in the face of difficulty and division. These emerging themes raise interesting questions for further study, for example the extent to which the troubled community of Adelhausen is that of the early fourteenth century, or represents a later community within the Dominican reform movement, or regarding the development of eschatological thought in the Viennese Franciscan community after 1312.

These religious narratives are as carefully constructed as their political counterparts, and, reflecting the rich theology and theology of practice of the liturgy, rituals play a critical role in the way such texts work. Depictions of rite are certainly integrated in the theology of these accounts, but more than this, they speak to the perceived relation of the mystical subject to their community, and the understanding of the social context in which these texts were imagined to be read. Not despite but because of the great value placed upon ritual action, the liturgical and sacramental practices of the Church, the examination of the way in which these acts are depicted has a great deal to offer the understanding of these works.

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