

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE DARKNESS IN CHRIST'S EYES: THE INCARNATIONAL THEOLOGY OF DIVINE
UNION IN ANGELA OF FOLIGNO'S *MEMORIAL*

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I first became interested in the women mystics at the age of seventeen, when my favorite religion teacher (Sister Mary Leanne) assigned our class the task of reading the biography or

autobiography of any woman in history. I studied the enormous list of recommendations until one caught my eye...St. Thérèse of Lisieux's *Story of a Soul*. I confess that what struck me was the "St." in front of her name. Despite growing up Catholic and attending a Catholic high school, I had no idea that the saints had written anything, that we possessed their writings, or that people studied them. My seventeen-year-old self jumped at the chance to read what I thought would be a how-to manual on becoming a saint. But what I found was far more complex, more compelling, more human, more real. I decided to study theology at Loyola Marymount University, where Dr. Charlotte Radler introduced me to the medieval mystics and Dr. Douglas E. Christie instilled in me a love of the Christian contemplative tradition. My time at Loyola Marymount University was one of the happiest of my life and I am grateful for every single professor, administrator, campus minister, and friend who helped me realize my dream of pursuing graduate studies.

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Abstract

Angela's rich Christology and Trinitarian theology unfold in the context of her reflection on divine union. For Angela, union with God is a participation in the incarnation of Christ and ultimately in the Trinity itself. I argue that Angela's understanding of Christ's hypostatic union and the Trinitarian unity-in-distinction provides her with the theological framework to describe her own union with God. These theological concepts allow her to understand divine union as a state of profound mutuality between God and the soul in which the distinctiveness of each nature seems to become permeable. Angela's humanity and God's divinity share individual characteristics that would not otherwise be attributed to them. God shares in the human experiences of poverty, suffering, and contempt, while Angela's humanity shares in the transcendent darkness of the divine. The divine shares in human passibility (while paradoxically remaining impassible); while the human being is able to share in God's very self (*theōsis*). The astounding mutuality between the soul and God in Angela's theology sometimes seems to stretch the boundaries of orthodoxy, but Angela's understanding of divine union always maintains the distinctness of human and divine. Rooted in Chalcedonian Christology, Angela preserves God's impassibility while allowing him to share in the suffering, poverty, and contempt of Cross. Similarly, Angela's understanding of *theōsis* upholds her human distinctness even when she is immersed in the divine darkness and standing amid the Trinity.

Abbreviations

- CW Angela of Foligno. *Angela of Foligno: The Complete Works*. Translated by Paul Lachance, Paulist Press, 1993.
- IL Angela of Foligno. *Il Libro Della Beata Angela Da Foligno: Edizione Critica*. Edited by Ludger Thier and Abele Calufetti, Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Quas, 1985.
- M Angela of Foligno. *Memoriale*. Edited by Enrico Menestò, Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2013.
- LLT Centre Traditio Litterarum Occidentalium, CETEDOC, and Université catholique de Louvain. *Library of Latin Texts: CLCLT*. (Turnhout, Belgium): Brepols.

INTRODUCTION: Angela of Foligno's Franciscan Context

Angela of Foligno was a thirteenth century laywoman, wife, mother, Franciscan tertiary, and mystic who was born in 1248 and died in 1309. Most of what scholars know about her life comes from her writings.¹ Together with her scribe, known only as Brother A., Angela composed a book containing her spiritual visions and experiences called the *Memorial*. Additional writings recorded by thirty-nine scribes were later compiled in another document known as the *Instructions*. Together, these books are known as the *Liber* of Angela of Foligno. These two works give us a glimpse into the inner life of a woman who was known during her lifetime as *doctrix disciplinae Dei* (teacher of the discipline of God)² and who has been called *magistra theologorum* (master of theologians), *santa della trascendenza di Dio* (saint of the transcendence of God), *donna dell'eccesso* (woman of excess), and *figlia dell'estasi* (daughter of ecstasy).³

¹ There are two contemporaneous accounts about Angela that confirm her existence but offer little biographical information. The first is Ubertino da Casale's mention of her in the prologue of his *Arbor vitae crucifixae Jesu*, in which he praises Angela for transforming his spiritual life. The second is a chronicle that records Angela's visit to the Poor Clare monastery in Spello. See D.M. Faloci-Pulignani, "La Beata Angela da Foligno: Memorie e Documenti," *Miscellanea Francescana* 25 (1925): 75–132.

² *CW*, 318. *IL*, 742.

³ *M*, xiii.

Angela's rich Christology and Trinitarian theology unfold in the context of her reflection on divine union. For Angela, union with God is a participation in the incarnation of Christ and ultimately in the Trinity itself. I argue that Angela's understanding of Christ's hypostatic union and the Trinitarian unity-in-distinction provides her with the theological framework to describe her own union with God. These theological concepts allow her to understand divine union as a state of profound mutuality between God and the soul in which the distinctiveness of each nature seems to become permeable. Angela's humanity and God's divinity share individual characteristics that would not otherwise be attributed to them. God shares in the human experiences of poverty, suffering, and contempt, while Angela's humanity shares in the transcendent darkness of the divine. The divine shares in human passibility (while paradoxically remaining impassible); while the human being is able to share in God's very self (*theōsis*). The astounding mutuality between the soul and God in Angela's theology sometimes seems to stretch the boundaries of orthodoxy, but Angela's understanding of divine union always maintains the distinctness of human and divine. Rooted in Chalcedonian Christology, Angela preserves God's impassibility while allowing him to share in the suffering, poverty, and contempt of Cross. Similarly, Angela's understanding of *theōsis* upholds her human distinctness even when she is immersed in the divine darkness and standing amid the Trinity.

The dissertation is divided into an introduction with seven chapters. The introduction and first three chapters examine Angela and her *Memorial* in their historical context: the introduction examines the wider Franciscan movement in the thirteenth century while chapter one dives more deeply into Angela's Umbrian context, exploring the rise of lay penitents and the Franciscan Third Order, a brief history of Foligno in the thirteenth century, and a short biographical sketch of Angela's life based on the *Memorial* and other contemporary sources. Chapter two focuses on the

Memorial itself, examining the manuscript history of Angela's *Liber* and exploring issues of authorship. Angela dictated the text to Brother A., who often inserts himself into the narrative. Because of this, some scholars have challenged the assumption that Angela is the primary author. However, I argue that the text as an example of collaborative authorship that gives us some insight into Angela's thought and experience. Chapter three looks at the steps of the *Memorial*, which Angela presents as a mystical itinerary, but often turns into a work of autohagiography.

Chapters four through six contain the main argument: that Angela understands divine union as the mutual interpenetration of human and divine in which God shares in human poverty, suffering, and contempt while the human being shares in the divine life of the Trinity. Chapter four examines how Angela understands her union with Christ as a fusion of their suffering bodies. As a faithful penitent, Angela engaged in the traditional spiritual practices of her time, especially *imitatio Christi* and meditating on Christ's passion. However, her experience of Christ's agony exceeds what can be achieved through either *imitatio* or *meditatio*: it is instead *compassio*, suffering with and as Christ. Christ reveals the experience of his passion to Angela so that she can truly suffer with him. The culmination of Angela's experience of the passion occurs in the sixth supplementary step in which Angela and Christ's suffering bodies become indistinguishable. Angela's fusion with Christ's humanity through compassionate co-suffering leads to her transcendent union with the Trinity in darkness. The agony of Christ on the cross is the gateway or passageway to the abyss of the Trinity. Chapters five and six examine the mutual interpenetration of human and divine that Angela describes in the seventh supplementary step. In chapter five, I examine Angela's assertion that God shares in the human experience of the poverty, suffering, and contempt of the cross. I refer to Angela's belief in God's suffering as divine (im)passibility because she describes God's suffering while paradoxically insisting that he remains

impassible. I argue that Angela's divine (im)passibility is rooted in her Christological understanding of the hypostatic union and Chalcedonian orthodoxy, which allows the profound unity of the human and divine natures in the person of Christ while maintaining the distinctiveness of each nature. In chapter six, I examine Angela's understanding of divine union in the seventh supplementary step, in which she seems to be so closely united to God that she becomes a part of the Trinity (which I refer to as *theōsis* or deification). Yet, unlike some of her contemporaries, Angela does not argue that the soul is completely indistinct from God, nor does she have any concept of the annihilation or preexistence of the soul in God. I argue that Angela's Christology and Trinitarian theology allow her to maintain her own distinctiveness despite the profound language and images that she uses to describe her union with God. Finally, in the seventh chapter, I examine Angela in the context of other vernacular mystical writers. I compare her thought to that of Hadewijch of Antwerp, Marguerite Porete, and Jacopone da Todi, demonstrating that Angela has a place among the premiere vernacular theologians of her time.

To understand the life and work of this remarkable woman, it is necessary to become familiar with her historical and theological context. As a Franciscan tertiary, Angela was deeply influenced by St. Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan movement. I have chosen to present a brief overview here of the lives of Francis and Clare of Assisi, a history of the order in the decades after Francis's death, and a description of the theological and political controversies within the Franciscan order. My discussion of Angela's Franciscan context continues in chapter one, where I discuss some of the larger trends in lay piety at the time, particularly the lay penitential movement and the Franciscan Third Order. I also discuss the historical context of the Italian communes, especially Angela's hometown of Foligno.

The Franciscan Movement

Francis of Assisi

No other medieval saint was more important in the life of Angela of Foligno than Francis of Assisi. In the *Liber*, Angela goes on pilgrimage to visit the relics of St. Francis in Assisi several times. Angela often prays to St. Francis and he appears in her dreams and visions, even influencing her initial conversion.⁴ Angela becomes a Franciscan tertiary and embarks on a life of penance modeled after that of Francis. During her first pilgrimage to Assisi, God compares his love for Angela with his love of Francis.⁵ In total, Francis is mentioned twenty-five times in the *Memorial*. But who was Francis of Assisi, and how did his movement influence Angela of Foligno?

Francesco Bernardone was born in Assisi in 1181 or 1182 and died in 1226. The son of a wealthy cloth merchant, he went from being an extravagant young man who wanted to be a knight to a homeless vagabond who radically changed the religious life of Europe. There is a lot of modern controversy over what scholars call the Franciscan Question. The controversy centers around the texts written about Francis in the decades after his death. Attempting to find a definitive portrait of Francis, scholars argue over which texts are the earliest, most unbiased, and most reliable sources on his life.⁶ There were multiple *vitae* of St. Francis published within forty years of his death. In the Chapter of Paris of 1266, the friars voted to give Bonaventure's *vita* of Francis, the *Legenda maior*, precedence over other *vitae*.⁷ This is significant because it is likely the portrait of Francis that Angela would have been familiar with, since her conversion to Franciscan penitential life occurred after 1266.

⁴ CW, 124. *IL*, 132. *M*, 4.

⁵ CW, 141. *IL*, 184. *M*, 42.

⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., "On the 'Franciscan Question'" *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 168.

⁷ "General Introduction," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al. (New York: New City Press, 1999), 1:13.

Although it makes sense to privilege Francis's own writings over what others wrote about him, Francis's writings have been largely ignored by scholars until the latter half of the twentieth century.⁸ Even medieval Franciscan writers such as Bonaventure and Duns Scotus do not quote Francis's writings apart from the *Later Rule* and *Testament*. This may be due to the fact that Francis's writings betray his limited education and the simplicity of his vocabulary.⁹ However, recent scholars, such as Augustine Thompson, have attempted to uncover the "historical Francis," paralleling similar attempts to reconstruct the "historical Jesus."¹⁰ Thompson in particular attempts to build a more authentic portrait of Francis's life that focuses primarily on his own writings and bypasses the political and theological agendas of the authors who write about Francis.¹¹ Central to Thompson's 2012 biography of Francis is the idea that no reporter gives us raw facts.¹² Every piece of writing about Francis is biased in some way, even Francis's own writings. There is no uninterpreted Francis. All medieval reports of his life were written for a specific purpose and audience.¹³

Thompson is upfront about his guidelines for sorting through the different sources on Francis's life. He identifies six influences on the way an author constructs a report on Francis: 1) internal politics of the Franciscan Order, 2) growing institutionalization, 3) older hagiographic models, 4) theological considerations, 5) persistence of elements from earlier sources, and 6) personal spiritual or religious preferences of the author or collector.¹⁴ Historians must take these influences into account when reading a report of Francis's life. Thompson argues that in general,

⁸ "General Introduction," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint*, 1:13.

⁹ "General Introduction," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint*, 1:13.

¹⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., "On the 'Franciscan Question,'" 154.

¹¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 154.

¹² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 169.

¹³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 155.

¹⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 169.

the historian should favor earlier sources over later ones.¹⁵ When one report is the source of the other, the original is to be preferred. If one text is allegorized and the other isn't, then the bare text is to be preferred. When a story lacking in miraculous elements is later reworked into a miracle, the unmiraculous version is more trustworthy.¹⁶ Thompson recommends that a historian reject a report of Francis's life when it 1) seems to score points in the later Franciscan controversies, 2) seems to be crafted to communicate some particular theological position, 3) tells us directly what the story means (such interpretations are self-evidently the author's), or 4) suggests no real development in Francis's ideas after his conversion.¹⁷

While Thompson's portrait of Francis is extremely well-researched, I have chosen to adjust some of his rules when presenting my portrait of Francis because my goal is not so much to present the "historical Francis," but rather the Francis that Angela would have been familiar with and that influenced her spiritual life. However, I still want to give an accurate account of Francis's life and teachings, so I will identify the biases and agendas of the reports when relevant. The four sources that I have focused on are the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano (1228–29), the *Legend of the Three Companions* (1241–47), *The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul* (or the *Second Life of St. Francis*), also by Thomas of Celano (1245–47), and *The Major Legend of Saint Francis* (*Legenda Maior*) (1260–62). The most important are the *Life of Saint Francis* by Thomas of Celano and Bonaventure's *Legenda Maior*, for reasons that I elaborate on below. Although the *Legend of the Three Companions* and the second life of Thomas of Celano are later texts, they are

¹⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 169.

¹⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 170.

¹⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 170.

useful because they contain accounts of Francis written by his early disciples after Crescentius of Jesu ordered all the brothers to send him in writing whatever they could recall of Francis's life.¹⁸

Thomas of Celano's first life is significant not only because it is the earliest *vita* and one of the most reliable, but also because it was the source of the liturgical texts used to celebrate the Divine Office and Mass on the feast day of St. Francis.¹⁹ While it is difficult to prove that Angela read any of the *vitae* of St. Francis, it is highly likely that she encountered accounts of Francis's life while praying the Divine Office and celebrating Mass on his feast day. The *Legenda Maior* is significant because it was written to reconcile tension that had emerged in the order after the death of St. Francis and was the order's preferred biography after the Council of Paris in 1266. Therefore, if Angela had read a *vita* of Francis, it was likely the *Legenda Maior*. In my short overview of the life of St. Francis and the foundation of his *Fratres Minores*, I will refer to Francis's own writings, the four sources cited above, and Augustine Thompson's new biography of Francis. I will also discuss the expansion of the Franciscan order and the infighting between the Conventual and Spiritual Franciscans, a conflict with which Angela was not only familiar, but also that affected the dissemination of her *Liber* in the decades after her death.

Early Life

For Francis's early life, I have mainly decided to use Thompson's biography as a source because there is little information given in the accounts of Francis's life on his childhood and the information that is given is suspect because it conforms to biblical and hagiographical tropes.²⁰

Francis was born in Assisi to Pietro di Bernardone and his wife Pica. Compared to the nearby cities

¹⁸ "Legend of the Three Companions," *Francis of Assisi—The Founder: Early Documents*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al (New York: New City Press, 1999), 2:61.

¹⁹ "The Liturgical Texts," *Francis of Assisi—The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:311.

The Divine Office of St. Francis, written by Julian of Speyer, and the Legend for Use in the Choir by Thomas of Celano were widely used by Angela's time.

²⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 174—175.

of Perugia and Foligno, Assisi was a small town of little military or economic importance. However, Pietro managed to establish a successful business with the help of his wife's substantial dowry, which included their city home and five tracts of land in the country.²¹ His family was wealthy; when assessed, Francis's family home was in the top third of houses in the neighborhood.²² However, his family was not part of the nobility nor did they have a surname. It is likely that Francis had siblings, but the records that survive mention only his older brother Angelo.²³ Little is known about Francis's youth: as a boy he was likely sent to school at the hospital of San Giorgio, where he received a limited education that gave him a rudimentary knowledge of Latin and allowed him to contribute to the family business.²⁴ At some point, Francis learned enough French to be able to sing popular songs and carry on simple conversations, perhaps from business travel to France or through family business contacts that visited Assisi.²⁵ At age fourteen, Francis worked as an apprentice in his father's business and joined the *societas iuvenum*, a social fraternity for young men of means in Assisi.²⁶ He is described in the *Legend of the Three Companions* as courteous and generous.²⁷

At twenty-two years old, Francis fought as a mounted soldier in the communal militia of Assisi against Perugia. The militia suffered a bloody defeat and Francis was imprisoned for over a year.²⁸ Prison was difficult for Francis, and when he was released in late 1203, his mental health had greatly deteriorated. The first *Life* of Thomas of Celano says that the young man was "worn

²¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 6.

²² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 5.

²³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 6.

²⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 8.

²⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 8.

²⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 9.

²⁷ "Legend of the Three Companions," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:68.

²⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 10.

down by his long illness.”²⁹ Thompson believes that Francis may have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder or some other mental illness commonly found in soldiers who have survived horrible experiences in war.³⁰ Francis may have seen friends or companions killed in the bloody battle. After Francis returned home from prison, his behavior became increasingly erratic. In 1205, he decided once again to go to war, but he only got as far as Spoleto before changing his mind.³¹ Francis’s hagiographers, perhaps in an attempt to explain his chaotic behavior, describe his failed military venture as the moment of his conversion. Thomas of Celano’s first *Life* states that it began with a severe illness and culminated in a vision Francis received when he set off to go to war for the second time.³² The *Legend of the Three Companions* and Thomas of Celano’s second *Life* both suggest that Francis’s conversion occurred when he stayed the night at Spoleto before traveling to Apulia to participate in the war. They describe a dream that convinced Francis to follow God, rather than the earthly lord he planned to serve in the military campaign.³³ While that may make for a romantic story, Francis’s behavior at this time remained erratic and conflicted. He had not yet acquired the peace that he found after his conversion.

In Foligno, Francis sold his horse, arms, and finery and walked back to Assisi. He tried to go back to his old life, but things were not the same. He did not enjoy his old friendships and the dinner parties held by the *societas iuvenum* the way he used to.³⁴ He lost interest in the family business and stopped coming to work in the shop. He withdrew into himself and perhaps experienced the self-loathing and guilt that other veterans report after the trauma of war.³⁵

²⁹ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:184.

³⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 10.

³¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 11.

³² Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:185—187.

³³ “The Legend of the Three Companions,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:245.

³⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 12.

³⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 12.

Whatever the explanation, Francis was in crisis and chose remedies that were common in his time: the penitential acts of almsgiving, prayer, and bodily mortification and pilgrimage to Rome.³⁶ When he returned from Rome, Francis sought solitude for prayer in the forest and in caves. He also received some solace from praying before the crucifix at San Damiano.³⁷ By 1205, Francis became a freelance penitent or *conversus* attached to San Damiano.

Francis's parents were bewildered by his behavior and worried when he seemed to disappear. Pietro went looking for him and found him living in destitution at San Damiano.³⁸ Francis's hagiographers have portrayed Pietro in a negative light. However, Thompson argues that Pietro was likely a loving father trying to help his son but struggling to understand his distress.³⁹ The first Life of Thomas of Celano reports that when Pietro found Francis at San Damiano, "he was touched inwardly with sorrow of heart and deeply disturbed by the sudden turn of events."⁴⁰ This is likely a fairer interpretation of Pietro's reaction than the other hagiographies. Pietro tried to force Francis to return, but Francis hid from him for over a month. When Francis finally came out of hiding, he was emaciated and filthy. People thought he had gone mad.⁴¹ Pietro tried locking Francis up to bring him to his senses, but Francis escaped back to San Damiano when Pietro left Assisi on business.

Pietro realized that his son was probably out of his mind and moved to protect the family business, which was funded by Pica's substantial dowry.⁴² It is unclear if Francis understood what was at stake. The hagiographers portray Pietro as angry over the money Francis got from the sale

³⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 12–13.

³⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 13.

³⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 14.

³⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 14.

⁴⁰ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:190.

⁴¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 14.

⁴² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 15.

of his horse and alms in Foligno, but the first *Life* of Thomas of Celano, the oldest and most reliable source on this issue, identifies the real issue as the inheritance of Pica's dowry.⁴³ Francis and Angelo were supposed to inherit the dowry after Pica's death. But Francis would probably squander or give away the inheritance, thus crippling the family business.⁴⁴ Pietro took Francis to court, but the case was remanded to Bishop Guido because Francis's status as a penitent made him an ecclesiastical person.⁴⁵ Guido urged Francis to renounce his claim to his inheritance and depend on God alone, which Francis did on the spot. Stripping off his clothes and returning them to his father, Francis was reported to have said, " From now on I will say freely: 'Our Father who art in heaven,' and not 'My father, Pietro di Bernardone.' Look, not only do I return his money; I give him back all my clothes. I will go to the Lord naked."⁴⁶

Although renouncing his family's wealth allowed him the freedom to pursue a life of penance, Francis did not identify this as the moment of his conversion. Rather, in his Testament, Francis wrote, "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world."⁴⁷ Francis identifies the moment when he ministers to the lepers as the moment of his conversion. The true penance for Francis was not found in poverty or in the traditional penitential practices of almsgiving or bodily mortification, but in showing mercy to those that he found physically ugly

⁴³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 185; Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:193.

⁴⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 15.

⁴⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 15.

⁴⁶ Thomas of Celano, "Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:245.

⁴⁷ Francis of Assisi, "The Testament," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:124.

and repugnant. It was a radical spiritual reorientation—what was once repulsive became the source of spiritual joy and beauty. The first *Life* of Thomas of Celano states that Francis lived among the lepers and “served all of them with great love. He washed all the filth from them and even cleaned out the pus of their sores.”⁴⁸ It could be that in showing love and mercy to the lepers, Francis felt the love and mercy of God.⁴⁹

The *Legend of the Three Companions* states that when Francis once saw a leper outside of the gates of Assisi, he overcame his disgust, kissed the leper’s hand, and gave him alms. A few days later, Francis visited the hospice of the lepers, gathered them together, kissed each one, and gave them alms.⁵⁰ This descent into the abjection by kissing lepers is mirrored in Angela of Foligno’s text describing an incident in which she gave alms to lepers on Holy Thursday. After washing the hands and feet of the lepers, Angela and her companions drank the water they used. She states that “the drink was so sweet that all the way home, we tasted its sweetness and it was if we had received Holy Communion.”⁵¹ Angela additionally says that a “small scale of the leper’s sores” became stuck in her throat. Treating the scale as if it were the eucharistic host, her conscience would not permit her to spit it out, so she attempted to swallow it as she would a host.⁵²

Early Brotherhood

After his conversion experience, Francis lived as hermit and penitent.⁵³ In addition to ministering to the lepers, Francis also engaged in manual labor, especially repairing the church of San Damiano. Beyond these activities, Francis had no clear objective or form of life and did not intend to start a religious order. But in 1206, Francis’s first follower, Bernard of Quintavalle asked

⁴⁸ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:195.

⁴⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 188.

⁵⁰ “The Legend of the Three Companions,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:74.

⁵¹ *CW*, 163. *IL*, 240–242. *M*, 78–80.

⁵² *CW*, 163. *IL*, 242. *M*, 80.

⁵³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 22.

Francis if he could join him. After this, the sources about the early brotherhood begin to differ, revealing the agenda of the hagiographers. The first *Life* of Thomas of Celano and *Legenda Maior* have Francis preaching early on and drawing men to follow him.⁵⁴ But Thompson writes that there is no evidence Francis had any interest in preaching at this point and he only reluctantly took up preaching after he was ordered to by Pope Innocent III.⁵⁵ The second *Life* of Thomas of Celano and the *Legend of the Three Companions* emphasize that Francis drew his followers by example.⁵⁶ By April 1208, Francis had attracted another man named Peter, who came from an impoverished background.⁵⁷

The arrival of followers was such a surprise to Francis that he did not know what to do. He went to the church of San Nicolo di Piazza and asked the parish priest to perform a *sortes biblicae*,⁵⁸ a popular lay practice that involved opening the Bible at random three times to find a verse that would reveal God's will.⁵⁹ The three verses that were picked out became the foundation of the Franciscan way of life: 1) “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mark 10:21, NRSV) 2); “Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money—not even an extra tunic” (Luke 9:3, NRSV); 3) “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24, NRSV). The *Legenda Maior* replaces Luke 9:3 with Matthew 10:10:

⁵⁴ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:202; Bonaventure, “*Legenda Maior*,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, Ed. Regis J. Armstrong, 2:543.

⁵⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 27.

⁵⁶ “The Legend of the Three Companions,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:85; Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:254—255.

⁵⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 22.

⁵⁸ The first *Life* of Thomas of Celano mentions Francis hearing Mark 10:21 (“Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”) in a sermon and doesn't include *sortes biblicae*. Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:203.

⁵⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 22; “The Legend of the Three Companions,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:86; Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:254; Bonaventure, “*Legenda Maior*,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:544.

"they may not keep gold or silver or money in their belts, nor have a wallet for their journey, nor may they have two tunics, nor shoes, nor staff" (NRSV).⁶⁰ The replacement is likely made to justify the provision in the Franciscan rule that does not allow friars to touch money, but Thompson points out that Francis was definitely handling money because he bought building supplies to repair San Damiano and other churches.⁶¹

According to Thompson, Francis meditated on the three Gospel passages for a year before he decided to seek Church approval.⁶² It seemed to him that the command to give everything up and take up the cross demanded that he abandon his own will and subject himself to God's will alone.⁶³ However, he wanted Church approval to ensure that his way of life was truly from God, so the brothers set off to Rome to seek the approval of Pope Innocent III.⁶⁴ Innocent III was known for trying to reconcile heretical preaching groups and encourage lay evangelization. He had recently approved a group of lay Humiliati and two bands of former Waldensians (the Poor Catholics and the Reconciled Poor), so he likely assumed that Francis's group was seeking permission to preach.⁶⁵ Pope Innocent approved Francis's form of life (the three verses in the *sortes biblicae*) and instructed Francis to preach penance to all.⁶⁶ The command to preach unsettled Francis not only because he and his brothers had absolutely no experience with speaking in public,

⁶⁰ Bonaventure, "Legenda Maior," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:542.

⁶¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 21.

⁶² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 24.

⁶³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 24.

⁶⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 24.

⁶⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 26.

⁶⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 27; Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:212; "The Legend of the Three Companions," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:96; Thomas of Celano, "Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:256; Bonaventure, "Legenda Maior," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:548—549. The second *Life* and *Legenda Maior* add a parable that Francis told about a rich king who betrothed a poor woman as well as a dream that they claim Pope Innocent had of Francis holding up a crumbling Lateran basilica on his shoulders. The second *Life* doesn't mention the pope's command to preach penance to all.

but also because Francis had “never conceived of himself as telling people, even his two followers, what to do.”⁶⁷ The brothers did not begin preaching for several years.⁶⁸

After returning from Rome, the brothers settled in a dilapidated shed in Rivo Torto, which was close to the leprosarium where they worked.⁶⁹ The biographical sources on Francis emphasize that the brothers begged for food⁷⁰, but Francis only ever mentioned begging as an alternative to manual labor if those who hired the brothers refused to pay them. They lived primarily by day labor.⁷¹ However, it soon became clear that a larger space was needed for the brothers to sleep in. They also needed a Church where the brothers could pray and sing the Divine Office. After making enquiries, Francis rented Santa Maria degli Angeli, known as the Porziuncula, from the Benedictine monks on Monte Subasio.⁷² From there, the brothers would travel from town to town working and caring for lepers.

Growth of the Order

Early biographers of Francis state that vast numbers of men came to join Francis in the first few years, but by 1212, the Franciscan movement was still an odd band of penitents in the *contado* of Assisi.⁷³ The brothers began preaching throughout Italy, but Francis would send them out with no preparation. Francis admitted anyone who asked to enter, but there was no established formation or novitiate for new recruits nor was there training in Scripture or preaching for established brothers.⁷⁴ Francis himself had trouble adapting to his new role as a leader. In the

⁶⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 27.

⁶⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 29.

⁶⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 29.

⁷⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 27; Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:220; “The Legend of the Three Companions,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:88; Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:252.

⁷¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 29.

⁷² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 31.

⁷³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 39.

⁷⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 41.

summer of 1211, he tried to leave the brothers and go to the Holy Land, but a storm thwarted him.⁷⁵ According to Thompson, the years from 1213–16 are the most obscure of Francis’s life. The biographies mention his preaching, prophecies, and miracles,⁷⁶ but Francis was likely uncomfortable with his newfound reputation for holiness.⁷⁷

In 1217 the brothers, now called *Frates Minores* or Lesser Brothers, decided at their general council that they would preach to all nations. More than half of all the existing brothers were sent on preaching missions all over the world.⁷⁸ There was no preparation or administrative division of provinces—many of the brothers were sent to places where they did not speak the language.⁷⁹ Francis himself decided to set out for France and met Cardinal Hugolino of Ostia on the journey.⁸⁰ Hugolino was shocked that Francis had left his remaining followers in Assisi without a leader and commanded him to go back immediately. Francis obeyed and invited the cardinal to participate in the order’s general councils.⁸¹ By 1218, reports came back from the missions and the news was discouraging. The brothers had no formal rule or letters of recommendation and were often rejected by the ecclesiastical authorities where they attempted to preach.⁸² The brothers asked Hugolino for help, so he procured a papal letter of recommendation certifying the brothers’ orthodoxy. Francis, however, was firmly against any papal privileges and the friars had to go behind his back.⁸³

⁷⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 45.

⁷⁶ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:234–247; Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:260–280; Bonaventure, “Legenda Maior,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:555–558.

⁷⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 43.

⁷⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 58.

⁷⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 59.

⁸⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 60.

⁸¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 60.

⁸² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 65.

⁸³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 66.

Francis finally realized his goal to go to the Holy Land in the late summer of 1219, during the fifth crusade. He traveled to Damietta, where the crusader army was laying siege to the sultan of Egypt, Malik al-Kamil.⁸⁴ Al-Kamil wanted to negotiate peace with the crusaders and offered to give them Jerusalem, money to reconstruct it, and several castles in the vicinity in exchange for leaving Egypt.⁸⁵ But the crusaders were divided on whether or not to accept the terms and it was during these negotiations that Francis crossed enemy lines to speak to the sultan. No contemporary Arab author mentions the encounter, which is not surprising because the sultan was not a stranger to Christian missionaries. Al-Kamil had previously attended a debate between Muslims and Christians and was generally not opposed to religious debate.⁸⁶ Indeed, there were many Christians living in Egypt who were protected (*dhimmi*)—they were required to pay extra taxes, but were free to practice their religion.⁸⁷ The encounter made a deep impression on Francis and the Franciscan movement: preaching to the unbelievers is encouraged as an integral part of Franciscan life in the *Regula non bullata*.⁸⁸ Although Francis failed to convert the sultan, he was treated with respect and made it safely back into the crusader camp. Francis then went to Syria, where a Franciscan community had been established only two years prior.⁸⁹

While in Syria, Francis received disturbing news from home. The friars who he had left in charge had decided to prohibit the consumption of meat even on non-fast days and they also placed a limit on dairy products.⁹⁰ This may not seem particularly important to the modern reader—most

⁸⁴ John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan: The Curious History of a Christian-Muslim Encounter* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 4.

⁸⁵ John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 4—5.

⁸⁶ John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 6.

⁸⁷ John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 5.

⁸⁸ John Tolan, *Saint Francis and the Sultan*, 7.

Chapter XVI is devoted to “those going among the Saracens and other non-believers.” See Francis of Assisi, “The Earlier Rule,” *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:74.

⁸⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 70.

⁹⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 70.

religious orders in the Middle Ages required their members to abstain from meat. But for Francis, it was a problem because it contradicted the Gospel command to eat whatever is put before you (Luke 10:8). One of the hallmarks of Francis's spirituality was Gospel literalism: when the Gospel says not to take two tunics, Francis insisted that the brothers follow that command to the letter. Furthermore, the dietary changes were made so that the friars would avoid criticism and comparisons with other orders who completely abstained from meat. But Francis believed that following the Gospel literally involved opening oneself to these criticisms. The problem was that the brothers were not willing to endure the humiliation of being criticized.⁹¹

When Francis returned in the spring of 1220, he was shocked at some developments that had happened in his absence, especially in regard to procuring papal privileges.⁹² Just as he had done when he found himself in charge of the first brothers, Francis went to the Pope and asked for someone to consult him about the political aspects of the order. Pope Honorius gave him Cardinal Hugolino,⁹³ who immediately began to implement the changes that Francis wanted. In the fall of 1220, Francis surprised the brothers when he announced that he wanted to retire. He originally appointed Peter of Cataneo as his replacement, but when Peter died several months later, he chose Brother Elias.⁹⁴ The idea was for Francis to return to the life of a lesser brother and to be an exemplary brother, a model of humility and obedience, rather than a leader and founder.⁹⁵

By 1220, the Franciscan movement had become more diverse: it included priests, missionaries, preachers, and some well-educated friars. Manual labor was no longer one of the defining characteristics of Franciscan life. The brotherhood was growing, but it was still governed

⁹¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 73.

⁹² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 74.

⁹³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 74.

⁹⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 80.

⁹⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 80.

by a form of life that only had verbal approval from the long-dead Innocent III. The movement needed a rule in order to be established as an official religious order.⁹⁶ Francis began writing the rule in the fall of 1220 and completed the *Regula non bullata* or Earlier Rule in 1221.⁹⁷ Francis's work on the Earlier Rule belongs in the context of the reforms that began in 1220, especially the establishing of regional superiors and the papal order *Cum Secundum Consilium* issued by Honorius III to establish a novitiate consisting of a year of training for new friars.⁹⁸ Francis wanted to organize and regularize his followers so that they would be more autonomous and less dependent on him. Francis revised the Earlier Rule and in 1223 the Later Rule or *Regula bullata* was approved by Honorius III in the bull *Solet Annuere*.⁹⁹ The Franciscan movement was now an established religious order.

Francis's Later Years and Death

With Elias as vicar and the new Rule, Francis wanted to devote himself to acting as a model for the brothers.¹⁰⁰ But as Francis became increasingly sick, most likely from the malaria he contracted while in the Middle East, his direct involvement in the order diminished and his caretakers began to speak for him on matters of the Order.¹⁰¹ By the summer of 1224, Francis's health was in rapid decline.¹⁰² He decided to go on a retreat on Mount La Verna, which the order had received as a gift from Count Orlando of Chiusi in 1213.¹⁰³ The *Legenda Maior* states that Francis, seeking the will of God, performed another *sortes biblicae*. Each time Francis opened the Gospels, he found a

⁹⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 77.

⁹⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 91.

⁹⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 92.

⁹⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 107.

¹⁰⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 107.

¹⁰¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 108.

¹⁰² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 113.

¹⁰³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 49.

passage that described the passion of Christ.¹⁰⁴ Francis meditated on the passion throughout his stay on La Verna. It was there that Francis received his famous vision of the six-winged seraph whose arms and feet were affixed to a cross.¹⁰⁵ The *Legenda Maior* identifies the six-winged seraph as Christ and states that when Francis realized it was Christ affixed to the cross, his soul was pierced “with a sword of compassionate sorrow.”¹⁰⁶ Immediately, marks began to appear on Francis’s feet and hands. The sources describe Francis’s stigmata in exactly the same graphic way:

His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the middle by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner part of his hands and on the upper part of his feet, and their points protruding on opposite sides. Those marks on the inside of his hands were round, but rather oblong on the outside; and small pieces of flesh were visible like the points of nails, bent over and flattened, extended beyond the flesh around them. On his feet, the marks of the nails were stamped in the same way and raised above the surrounding flesh. His right side was marked with an oblong scar, as if pierced with a lance, and this often dripped blood, so that his tunic and undergarments were frequently stained with his holy blood.”¹⁰⁷

Through the stigmata, the interior reality of Francis’s identification with Christ becomes externally manifested through the wounds in his hands, feet, and sides. The early Franciscans interpreted the stigmata as a sign that Francis was an *alter Christus*. Thomas of Celano says it best when he states that “I consider blessed Francis the holiest mirror of the holiness of the Lord, the image of his perfection.”¹⁰⁸ Angela was also inspired by this event in Francis’s life. Although she was not a stigmatic, it could be argued that Angela’s radical compassion for Christ’s suffering was a kind of spiritual reception of the stigmata; she united herself to the pain of Christ so completely that, while she didn’t bear his wounds on her body physically, she nevertheless suffered with him

¹⁰⁴ Bonaventure, “Legenda Maior,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:631.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” in *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:263; Bonaventure, “Legenda Maior,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:632.

The second life only mentions Francis trying to conceal the stigmata. See Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:334.

¹⁰⁶ Bonaventure, “Legenda Maior,” *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:632.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” in *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:264.

¹⁰⁸ Thomas of Celano, “Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul,” in *Francis of Assisi- Founder*, 2:263.

interiorly. For example, the small pieces of Francis's flesh described here are similar to Angela's meditation on the bits of Christ's flesh that had been driven into the wood of the cross by the nails.¹⁰⁹ Although the nail marks do not appear on Angela's body, they nevertheless pierce her soul. As a scribe in the *Instructions* put it, Angela was given the grace of "feeling the pain of the Crucified."¹¹⁰ All of the sources confirm that Francis tried to conceal the stigmata from the brothers for the rest of his life.¹¹¹ The *Legenda Maior* states that Francis would tell the brothers "My secret is for myself,"¹¹² which is remarkably similar to what Angela tells the scribe in Instruction III when he presses her for more details about one of her visions: "My secret is mine."¹¹³

After experiencing the stigmata, Francis's health declined. He went to Assisi where he was cared for by the sisters of San Damiano.¹¹⁴ There, Francis began to say farewell to the brothers by writing his "Letter to the Entire Order."¹¹⁵ In it, he raises the issues and concerns that were the most important to him: He exhorted that all priests who celebrate Mass should show all possible reverence for the Eucharist, he extolled the dignity and exalted nature of the priestly vocation and instructed the brothers to use only the cleanest linens and vessels to celebrate the Eucharist.¹¹⁶ In the spring, he left San Damiano for Rieti to seek medical treatment for his eye.¹¹⁷ Before leaving, he wrote the "Canticle of Exhortation," his farewell address to Clare and her sisters.¹¹⁸ By this

¹⁰⁹ CW, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48

¹¹⁰ CW, 247. *IL*, 494. Latin text: "Quod scilicet anima illa benedicta formatur de novo in quemdam statum continui actus transformationis in Deum et in Dei infinitissimum lumen et in dolorosi Crucifixi sentimentatum sibi hactenus inexpertum."

¹¹¹ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:265; Thomas of Celano, "Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:334—335; Bonaventure, "Legenda Maior," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:633.

¹¹² Bonaventure, "Legenda Maior," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:633.

¹¹³ CW, 248. *IL*, 496. Latin text: Secretum meum mihi.

¹¹⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 119.

¹¹⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 120.

¹¹⁶ Francis of Assisi, "Letter to the Entire Order," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:116—121.

¹¹⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 125.

¹¹⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 125.

point, Francis was nearly blind, hardly able to eat, and his eyes were severely inflamed, causing pain and sensitivity to light.¹¹⁹ He was a difficult patient, often refusing food and medicine.¹²⁰ By June 1225, he was unable to walk and had to be carried on horseback. Unfortunately, the medical treatment in Rieti had no effect at all.¹²¹ In April 1226, Francis's caregivers decided to take him to Siena for further medical treatment, but this was also ineffective.¹²² In Siena, he began to vomit blood and his condition became critical.¹²³

By the summer, Francis's condition improved, but then started to worsen again. He asked Elias to take him back home to Assisi.¹²⁴ The citizens of Assisi sent knights to take Francis to the bishop's palace. They were worried that if Francis died elsewhere, they would lose control of the relics.¹²⁵ Francis dictated his "Testament," his final message to the brothers. In it, he exhorts them to respect churches, priests, and the Eucharist—the issues that were dearest to Francis's heart.¹²⁶ He also commands the brothers to be careful about only accepting buildings that fit with their vocation of poverty and forbids them to seek papal letters or privileges.¹²⁷ He closed by saying that the Testament isn't a new rule, but an admonition to observe the Rule in "a more Catholic way."¹²⁸ In September of 1226, Francis asked to be taken to the Porziuncula to die.¹²⁹ As his condition worsened, he was clothed in sackcloth, placed on the floor, and sprinkled with ashes

¹¹⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 126.

¹²⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 127.

¹²¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 128.

¹²² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 129.

¹²³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 130.

¹²⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 130.

¹²⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 131.

¹²⁶ Francis of Assisi, "Testament," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:125—126.

¹²⁷ Francis of Assisi, "Testament," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:126.

¹²⁸ Francis of Assisi, "Testament," *Francis of Assisi- The Saint: Early Documents*, 1:127.

¹²⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 136.

while the Passion of Christ from John's Gospel was read over him. Francis died that night on October 3rd, 1226.¹³⁰

Clare of Assisi and The Poor Ladies of San Damiano

Clare di Favarone di Offrediccio came from a wealthy and noble family in Assisi.¹³¹ In 1212, Brother Ruffino came to Francis and told him that Clare wanted to meet him.¹³² Clare was eleven years younger than Francis and was only eighteen years old in 1212 when they met.¹³³ Her parents didn't know about the meeting, but she was escorted by a chaperone, Bona di Guelfuccio, while Francis brought along with him Brother Phillip Longo of Arti.¹³⁴ They had several clandestine meetings in which Francis urged her to take up a life of penance. The plan was for Clare to leave the world as Francis had done.¹³⁵ On Palm Sunday in 1212, Clare met Francis at the Porziuncula with her sister Pacifica. There, Francis cut her hair and gave her a habit like that of the brothers, but with a veil.¹³⁶ Clare made her profession of religious obedience for life directly to Francis.¹³⁷

Francis suddenly faced a new problem: what should he do with his first female disciple? Francis arranged for her to stay with the Benedictine nuns of San Paolo near Bastia until a more permanent solution could be found.¹³⁸ Clare's family challenged her decision, but Clare showed them her shaven head, which helped them realize that her decision was permanent.¹³⁹ Francis moved her to the Benedictine convent of Sant'Angelo of Panzo, which was under the jurisdiction

¹³⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 138.

¹³¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹³² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹³³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹³⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹³⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 46.

¹³⁶ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

¹³⁷ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

¹³⁸ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

¹³⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

of the abbot of Subasio, to whom the Porziuncula belonged. At Sant'Angelo of Panzo, Clare was joined by her sister Agnes, again without parental consent.¹⁴⁰ The family arrived with soldiers to take both women home by force, but Clare talked her father down.¹⁴¹ Within a few months, Francis moved them to San Damiano and they formed the first convent of the female Franciscan movement in 1212.¹⁴² Francis gave the sisters a form of life, which was very much like the form of life used by the brothers.¹⁴³ But from this point until his last illness in 1224, Francis disappears from Clare's life. Clare was left to supervise the growth of the Poor Ladies of San Damiano and defend their call to live a life of absolute poverty alone.¹⁴⁴ Clare's insistence on the privilege of poverty was concerning to ecclesiastical authorities, who wanted to make sure that the sisters had the basic necessities of life. Gregory IX renewed the privilege in 1228 but made sure that it was restricted to San Damiano only. He insisted that the other houses be properly endowed, like other monasteries.¹⁴⁵

There was an urgent need for the sisters to be self-sufficient. Even though Francis promised Clare that he and his brothers would always care for the Poor Ladies,¹⁴⁶ the arrangement by which the brothers of the First Order would provide for the Sisters of the Second Order was breaking down.¹⁴⁷ As the First Order grew, they did not want the responsibility. The situation was dire and

¹⁴⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

¹⁴¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 47.

¹⁴² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 48.

¹⁴³ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 48.

¹⁴⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 48.

¹⁴⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order from its Origins to the Year 1517* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1968), 205.

¹⁴⁶ "The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and Her Sisters," Francis promised them: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as I have for them. See Francis of Assisi, "The Form of Life Given to Saint Clare and Her Sisters," in *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*, Trans. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap. and Ignatius C. Brade, O.F.M. (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), 44.

¹⁴⁷ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 206.

many houses of the Poor Clares, including San Damiano, were in great penury.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, Clare would not surrender the privilege of poverty, even if it meant starving to death. Attempts were made to wear her down to make some concessions so that her monastery could be more materially secure, but Clare would not compromise. Even when the pope visited her on her deathbed in 1253, she remained firm.¹⁴⁹ Although Clare was uncompromising in her poverty to the end, however, other houses of sisters were required to hold property to support themselves.¹⁵⁰

Clare devoted the end of her life to writing her Rule. In 1247, Pope Innocent IV wrote a second Rule for the Poor Ladies, but that also did not have the same intense commitment to poverty that Clare desired.¹⁵¹ The only way to ensure that her commitment to poverty would be passed down to her sisters was to write her own rule. It was approved in 1252 by the Protector of the Poor Ladies, Cardinal Rainaldo di Segni.¹⁵² Two days before her death in 1253, Clare received word of the papal bull *Solet annuere* which gave final approval. The document was brought to her deathbed and according to an annotation added to the parchment at a later date, she kissed it many times.¹⁵³

Clare's rule was modeled after the Rule of 1223 that Francis had written for the Order of Friars Minor. However, Clare insisted on a stricter interpretation of poverty. She writes:

Just as I, together with my sisters, have been ever solicitous to safeguard the holy poverty which we have promised the Lord God and the Blessed Francis, so, too, the Abbesses who shall succeed me in office and all sisters are bound to observe it inviolably to the end: that is to say, they are not to receive or hold onto any possessions or property acquired through an intermediary or even anything that might reasonably be called property, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and the proper seclusion of the monastery; and this land is not to be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁸ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 206.

¹⁴⁹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 207.

¹⁵⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 207.

¹⁵¹ Clare of Assisi, "The Rule of Saint Clare," *Francis and Clare*, 209

¹⁵² Clare of Assisi, "The Rule of Saint Clare," *Francis and Clare*, 210.

¹⁵³ Clare of Assisi, "The Rule of Saint Clare," *Francis and Clare*, 210.

¹⁵⁴ Clare of Assisi, "The Rule of Saint Clare," *Francis and Clare*, 218; Claire d'Assise, *Écrits*, Trans. Marie-France Becker, Jean François Godet, Thaddée Matura (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 144. Latin text: "Et sicut ego semper sollicita fui una cum sororibus meis sanctam paupertatem quam Domino Deo et Beato Francisco promisimus custodire, sic teneantur abbatissae quae in officio mihi succedent et omnes sorores usque in finem

Her refusal to use intermediaries of any kind made the rule much stricter than that of the Friars Minor. If anyone lived the true Franciscan ideal other than Francis, it was Clare. Her fasting was so severe that Francis and the local bishop had to intervene and force her to eat at least half of a small roll each day. She wore the roughest clothing and slept on the floor.¹⁵⁵ Angela practiced these forms of extreme asceticism, but preferred the independence of the Third Order to the clausturation of the Second. A fourteenth-century chronicle records that Angela visited the Poor Clare monastery in Spello, but that is the only evidence of her interaction with the nuns.¹⁵⁶

The Rule of 1221 and the Regula Bullata of 1223

The Rule of 1221, or *Regula non bullata*, was started in 1220 after Francis returned from his journey to the Middle East. The basis of the document was the form of life, or three Gospel verses, which had been approved by Innocent III in 1209, but it was expanded to meet the demands of a larger order. The Rule of 1221 was accepted by the friars at the General Chapter, but it was not confirmed by a papal bull.¹⁵⁷ A second rule was requested at the Pentecost Chapter of 1222 and Cardinal Hugolino pressured Francis to change or omit a great deal of the Rule of 1221.¹⁵⁸ The Earlier Rule was a personal expression of Francis's character, but it was too homiletic, too disorganized, and too sketchy to serve as a constitution.¹⁵⁹ Francis went into seclusion in the hermitage at Fonte Colombo for final revisions of the 1221 document. The result is what is known

inviolabiliter observare, videlicet in non recipiendo vel habendo possessionem vel proprietatem per se neque per interpositam personam, seu etiam aliquid quod rationabiliter proprietas dici possit, nisi quantum terrae pro honestate et remotione monasterii necessitas requirit; et illa terra non laboretur, nisi pro horto ad necessitatem ipsarum.”

¹⁵⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 36.

¹⁵⁶ Faloci-Pulignani, D. M., “La Beata Angela da Foligno: Memorie e Documenti,” *Miscellanea Francescana* 25 (1925): 115.

¹⁵⁷ This is why the Rule of 1221 is sometimes referred to as the *Regula non bullata*.

¹⁵⁸ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 54.

¹⁵⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 102.

as the Later Rule or the *Regula bullata*, which was approved in 1223.¹⁶⁰ The 1223 rule is shorter, and many of the homiletic and spiritual exhortations were removed. It was confirmed in 1223 by the papal bull *Solet annuere*.¹⁶¹

Some of the passages that were central to the Rule of 1221 were omitted in the Rule of 1223. Cardinal Hugolino persuaded Francis to remove the passages stating that friars should take nothing with them on their journeys¹⁶² and that they must go everywhere on foot.¹⁶³ Also gone are the words “*et sint minores*” or “*frates minores*” from the chapter pertaining to the work of the friars¹⁶⁴ and the description of the friars rejoicing that they live among the poor and despised as Christ did.¹⁶⁵ Even the gospel decree of Christ that postulants should renounce all their worldly goods is modified so that “if they are unable to do this then their good intention shall suffice.”¹⁶⁶ The Rule of 1223 is much shorter, but in the last sentence, Francis managed to exhort his brothers to stay true to his ideals, writing that the brothers should “observe the poverty and the humility and the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁶⁷

Most of the infighting among the friars was the result of four “growing pains” that the order suffered as it became larger: poverty, privilege, priesthood, and study.¹⁶⁸ The Later Rule is stricter on poverty than the Earlier Rule: loopholes that allowed brothers to accept cash alms for lepers and the sick were closed. Ministers instead were to rely on “spiritual friends” when they need to care for the sick.¹⁶⁹ Spiritual friends became an institutionalized means of controlling substantial

¹⁶⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 102.

¹⁶¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 103.

¹⁶² Francis of Assisi, “Earlier Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. xiv, 120.

¹⁶³ Francis of Assisi, “Earlier Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. xv, 121.

¹⁶⁴ Francis of Assisi, “Earlier Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. vi, vii, 113, 114.

¹⁶⁵ Francis of Assisi, “Earlier Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. xiv, 120.

¹⁶⁶ Francis of Assisi, “Later Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. ii, 139.

¹⁶⁷ Francis of Assisi, “Later Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. xii, 145.

¹⁶⁸ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 53.

¹⁶⁹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 106; Francis of Assisi, “Later Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. iv, 140.

resources, but in 1223 the term referred not to the brothers' legal agents, but rather acquaintances on whom they could rely for help.¹⁷⁰ The Later Rule also maintains a manual labor requirement but drops the concession that the brothers can have personal tools.¹⁷¹ Begging is more heavily emphasized in the Later Rule, and it is assumed that all friars will practice it primarily as a self-abasement and spiritual discipline, not merely as a substitute for manual labor.¹⁷²

Francis's position on privileges was also problematic for a larger order. He consistently advocated that his friars take the lowest place, even naming his orders the *Fratres Minores*. He was a man "without any rights or claims on society."¹⁷³ He worked in the fields to support himself, cared for lepers and the lowest members of society, and only preached with the consent of the secular clergy. However, as time went on, many in the order (especially priests and more educated friars) saw preaching as their main task. This put them into almost constant conflict with the secular clergy, who resented the friars for taking away their parishioners. The easiest solution was to seek permission of bishops or the Pope to preach without obstacle from the secular clergy, but Francis saw this as a privilege to which the friars had no right. As the number of priests and intellectuals entering the order grew, conflicts between the clergy and lay brothers also became more common.¹⁷⁴ The *Regula bullata* left preaching open to all friars, but some provisions work against lay brothers preaching. For example, superiors have veto power over preaching by lay brothers.¹⁷⁵

The final issue was that of study. Not only were more priests joining the *Fratres Minores*, but there was also an influx of students and learned men who wanted to combine poverty and simplicity of life with study so that they could be effective preachers. But from the beginning,

¹⁷⁰ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 106.

¹⁷¹ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 106; Francis of Assisi, "Later Rule," *Francis and Clare*, cap. v, 140.

¹⁷² Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 106; Francis of Assisi, "Later Rule," *Francis and Clare*, cap. vi, 141.

¹⁷³ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 53.

¹⁷⁴ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 106.

¹⁷⁵ Augustine Thompson, O.P., *Francis of Assisi*, 104; Francis of Assisi, "Later Rule," *Francis and Clare*, cap. ix, 143.

Francis was against this. Thomas of Celano records that Francis said, “if an 'eminent cleric' were to join the Order, he should in some way renounce even learning, so that having renounced even this possession, he might offer himself naked to the arms of the Crucified. 'Learning,' he would say, 'makes many hard to teach, not allowing them to bend something rigid in them to humble disciples.’”¹⁷⁶ Francis opposed learning, then, not only because it would prevent the friar from living his vow of poverty (since education requires not only books, but paper, ink, quiet spaces in which to think, read, and write, etc.) but also because it would keep the friars from truly being *minores*, humble and subservient to all. Francis summed up his thinking on learning in his *Testament*, in which he wrote that the ideal friar is “simple and subject to all” (*idiotae et subditi omnibus*).¹⁷⁷

From Elias to Bonaventure

The issues of poverty, privileges, priests, and study would continue to divide the Franciscan order. Its Minister Generals were tasked not only with governing a growing international organization, but also with harmonizing the contentious factions that threatened to split the order. Not only was there disagreement over how to implement poverty within the order, but there was also tension between laymen and priests, conflict with the secular clergy, competition with the Dominican Order, and even issues of heresy. The Ministers General attempted to solve these difficulties and unite the order, with limited success. I will briefly discuss the challenges of the most important Minister Generals from Elias to Bonaventure.

Elias was the Minister General when Francis died in 1226. His policy was “to make the Order of Friars Minor the most renowned body in the Church, and Assisi a center of pilgrimage

¹⁷⁶ Thomas of Celano, "Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder, Documents*, 2:371.

¹⁷⁷ Francis of Assisi, "Testament," *Francis and Clare*, 155; Francis of Assisi, "Testamentum Seraphici Patris Nostri Francisci," *Via Seraphica: Selected Readings from the Early Documents and Writings Pertaining to Saint Francis and the Franciscan Order*, Ed. Placid Hermann, O.F.M. (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1959), 26.

for the whole world. He was anxious...to make the Order more static and secure.”¹⁷⁸ He did this by promoting the cult of St. Francis with great fervor. Elias was responsible for building the great church in Assisi to house the remains of St. Francis and for commissioning the first *vita* by Thomas of Celano. But he was also heavily involved in the politics and infighting of the order and was concerned with preventing a group of clergy and academics from seizing control. He strengthened the position of lay friars in the order by appointing them to positions of authority over priests.¹⁷⁹ But these policies were not embraced by all. The grand architecture of the new church in Assisi distressed many friars, as did the excesses of Elias’s private life. He used horses, kept servants, employed his own cook, and ate fine foods.¹⁸⁰ He was also considered an oppressive ruler. He worked to consolidate power for the Minister General by diminishing the power of the Provincial Ministers who were the members of the General Chapters. He also appointed laymen as Provincial Ministers so that he controlled half the chapter.¹⁸¹ Friars resented the visitors he sent to ensure that poverty was observed in the various communities of the order, especially since Elias himself did not practice poverty.¹⁸²

A group of academics including Alexander of Hales, John of La Rochelle, and Haymo of Faversham decided to come together and appeal to the pope.¹⁸³ Gregory IX called a General Chapter in 1239 and relieved Elias of his office. Unfortunately for the Franciscan Order, Elias’s story did not end there. First, he angered the new Minister General (Albert of Pisa) by visiting the Poor Clares at Cortona, in breach of the Rule which prohibited the brothers from entering the

¹⁷⁸ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 96.

¹⁷⁹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 99.

¹⁸⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 100.

¹⁸¹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 98.

¹⁸² John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 98.

¹⁸³ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 101.

women's monasteries.¹⁸⁴ When he was commanded to stop, Elias refused and sought refuge with emperor Frederick II. Moorman notes that "in doing so, he came under the general excommunication which had been pronounced against all those who consorted with the emperor, and Gregory added a personal excommunication against Elias himself."¹⁸⁵ Elias's excommunication was a huge scandal for the order. It was only lifted when he finally recanted and confessed on his deathbed in 1253.¹⁸⁶ Elias had the misfortune of offending everyone. Those who wanted the order to more strictly adhere to poverty felt that the new church and convent in Assisi betrayed Francis's ideals, while educated priests resented his favoritism towards lay Franciscans.

David Burr notes that during Elias's tenure, a "double focus" had formed in the order.¹⁸⁷ There was an eremitical group, largely led by the early disciples of St. Francis, who sought to live out their vision of the primitive Franciscan life, including absolute poverty. These he identifies as Proto-Spirituals. The second was a group of *litterati*, "engaged in preaching, pastoral ministry, and education...[and] encouraged if not forced by its activities to temper that primitive Franciscanism."¹⁸⁸ This group would slowly emerge as the victor in the order's internal struggles. But Burr notes that Francis's earliest disciples lived a long time, allowing them to "reshape their memories of Francis into something that spoke to their own reading of subsequent events. It also gave them time to pass those memories on to another generation of Franciscans who would themselves adjust the memories to fit their own views."¹⁸⁹ And thus, the seeds of the Spiritual Franciscans were born. However, it took a while for the Spirituals to be considered a distinct

¹⁸⁴ Francis of Assisi, "Later Rule," *Francis and Clare*, cap. xi, 143.

¹⁸⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 102.

¹⁸⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 103.

¹⁸⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century after Saint Francis* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 13.

¹⁸⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 13.

¹⁸⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 13.

movement. Burr notes that the term “Spiritual Franciscans” was not used until 1310, a year after Angela’s death, and was not used widely until the 1320s.¹⁹⁰

Under Albert of Pisa, the pursuit of learning and the acceptance of privileges (particularly the privilege to preach) was encouraged, to the delight of the *litterati* and the clerical party. Soon the Franciscans had an impressive presence in the great universities. The first Franciscan house to organize lectures was in Bologna. Apparently, the endeavor was so successful that in 1236, the pope appealed to the townspeople for additional funds to help them build a larger convent that could house a school of theology. In Oxford, the friars won the admiration of Robert Grosseteste, a prominent theologian and layman who eventually became a lecturer at the new Franciscan school of theology, and greatly increased its academic reputation.¹⁹¹ In Paris, the friars attracted many students to the order as well as some of the leading doctors of the university, including Haymo of Faversham and Alexander of Hales.¹⁹² Anthony of Padua was a famous lecturer and preacher at the university founded in Padua in 1222.¹⁹³ The *litterati* became so successful that they were able to elect the scholar Haymo of Faversham as Minister General in 1239.¹⁹⁴ Although he only led the friars for four years, he promoted a “union between the simple life of poverty and the study of theology.”¹⁹⁵ He encouraged study and preaching and ensured that control of the order was in the

¹⁹⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, viii.

¹⁹¹ R.W. Southern, *Robert Grosseteste: The Growth of an English Mind in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 4.

¹⁹² These three theologians were also essential in establishing the reputation of the Franciscan school at the University of Paris. Alexander of Hales, with other theologians including John of La Rochelle, produced the *Summa Halensis*, a massive text of 3,408 questions that were collaboratively authored between 1236 and 1245, in an attempt to lay down a distinctly Franciscan intellectual tradition for the very first time. See Lydia Schumacher, "Introduction," *The Summa Halensis: Sources and Context* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 1–3.

¹⁹³ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 93.

¹⁹⁴ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 107.

¹⁹⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 107.

hands of priests and not lay friars. Moorman notes that Haymo prevented lay brothers from holding any office within the order.¹⁹⁶

Haymo was succeeded by Crescentius of Iesi, a doctor of medicine and a lawyer. Moorman states that he had “little patience with those who wanted the Order to consist only of beggars and tramps.”¹⁹⁷ He expected obedience from the friars and cracked down on any dissent within the order, including a group that sought to complain to the pope about worldly excesses under Crescentius’s generalate. When he learned of their plan, he ambushed and punished the brothers severely.¹⁹⁸ (Burr notes that we should be suspicious about how widespread the insurrection was, since the fullest account of the incident is found in Angelo Clareno’s writings nearly a century after the events described.)¹⁹⁹ Innocent IV felt that Crescentius’s policy of harshly repressing opposition risked creating a schism in the order. Crescentius was relieved of office and replaced by John of Parma, a man loved by all, who the pope hoped could unite the order.

John of Parma studied at Paris and was therefore a scholar as well as a great lover of poverty. Moorman states that he tried to heal divisions: he “wanted the friars to play their part in the intellectual life of Europe and to promote sound learning; but at the same time he pleaded with them never to lose their poverty nor to forget that they were an order of ‘minors.’”²⁰⁰ However, Barr urges caution once again, since again the only account we have is from Angelo Clareno.²⁰¹ Angelo presents John as an ideal Franciscan. He spent the first three years of his generalate visiting the many communities in the order, traveling on foot, clad in a single inexpensive tunic, arriving

¹⁹⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 107.

¹⁹⁷ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 108.

¹⁹⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 22.

¹⁹⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 22.

Angelo Clareno was one of the leaders of the Spiritual Franciscans and his strong views colored the way he interpreted events of the past.

²⁰⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 112.

²⁰¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 20.

unannounced, and eating what was put before him.²⁰² However, John stepped down in 1257 and appointed Bonaventure as his successor. Angelo posits two reasons for this: that he was accused of the heresy of Joachitism and that he felt that it was useless to continue because he could not bring the order back to regular observance of the Rule.²⁰³

By the time John of Parma became Minister General, the theology of Joachim of Fiore was spreading throughout the Franciscan order. Joachim had died in 1202, when St. Francis was still a young man. According to Bernard McGinn, he left a “rich legacy of biblical commentaries and treatises centering on predictions of the imminence of the Antichrist and the coming end of the second *status* of history, the time ascribed to the second person of the Trinity.”²⁰⁴ Joachim posited three stages of history, or *status*. The first was the Age of the Father, which included the Old Testament and the growing obedience of mankind to rules created by God. In the Age of Son, orders of *virii spirituales* would preach against the Antichrist and lead the church into the third *status*, the Age of the Holy Spirit, when the “Holy Spirit would be poured out more fully upon a perfect contemplative church.”²⁰⁵ Francis was incorporated into this apocalyptic framework of history, identified as the angel of the sixth seal from Revelation 7:10, “‘ascending from the rising sun and having the seal of the living God,’ that is, the marks of the stigmata upon him.”²⁰⁶

McGinn posits that John of Parma became too controversial to serve as the Minister General when one of his former students at the University of Paris, Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino, produced an edition and commentary of Joachim’s writings. In it, he stated that the Franciscan way of life would bring on the third *status*, which he predicted would occur in 1260. The secular

²⁰² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 29.

²⁰³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 29—30.

²⁰⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism—1200-1350* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 73.

²⁰⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 73.

²⁰⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 73.

priests at the university of Paris condemned this work and “all mendicant orders as heretics and agents of the Antichrist.”²⁰⁷ Gerardo was condemned as a heretic and imprisoned for life.²⁰⁸ Although the pope stood behind the mendicant orders in the controversy, John was forced to step down because of his own Joachite leanings, and handpicked Bonaventure as his successor.

Bonaventure, who was only thirty-six at the time, became, of course, a towering figure in the history of the Franciscan movement. Known as the *doctor seraphicus*, Bonaventure’s theological works include *De reductione artium ad theologiam*, the *Collationes in Hexaemeron*, and the *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*.²⁰⁹ But he was also a hagiographer (in the *Legenda maior*) and a devotional writer of great emotional power (in the *Lignum vitae* and the *De triplici via*).²¹⁰ McGinn writes that Bonaventure’s theology synthesized “all the major streams of earlier Western mysticism—Augustinian, Dionysian, Gregorian, Cistercian, Victorine.... But [it] did more than just summarize and synthesize earlier Western mystical traditions. It transformed them.”²¹¹ For example, Bonaventure put Augustine’s intellectual model of the Trinity together with Richard of St. Victor’s social model, creating a balance between God as self-subsisting mind and self-giving love.²¹² The result is that God as mind achieves perfection in self-presence; God has no need of the world, therefore the world is radically contingent. The threat of pantheism posed by God pouring himself out into creation is thus eliminated.²¹³ But because God is love, he also achieves

²⁰⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 73. It makes sense that the secular clergy were particularly incensed at all mendicants, including the Dominicans who never took up Joachitism. They accused the mendicants of stealing their parishioners and burial rights, which was a main source of income for the secular clergy.

²⁰⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 73.

²⁰⁹ For English translations of these works, see Bonaventure, *Bonaventure*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Press, 1978); Bonaventure, *Conferences on the Six Days of Creation: The Illuminations of the Church*, trans. Jay M. Hammond (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2018)

²¹⁰ For English translations of these works and other devotional works, see Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure*, Trans. José de Vinck (Patterson, N.J.: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1960).

²¹¹ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 93.

²¹² Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 119.

²¹³ Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 119.

perfection in communion. Therefore, God flows out into the world and expresses himself through creation. The world is deeply related to God because he pours forth his being in creatures. The pouring of God into creation means that every creature is a vestige of God and every rational creature is also an image of God.²¹⁴ In his theology of creation, Bonaventure was likely influenced by Francis of Assisi, who popularized a view of nature that looked upon the created world as a reflection of the Creator.²¹⁵

McGinn writes that Bonaventure understood the Trinity and Christology as part of a metaphysics of emanation, exemplarity, and consummation (or reduction). God the Father is the *fontalis plenitudo* that emanates not only into the Son and the Holy Spirit but also into the entirety of creation.²¹⁶ Emanation requires exemplarity, or the “expression or manifestation of the hidden source which is, by that very reason, the exemplary cause of all else.”²¹⁷ God is the exemplary cause of all things, but on an even deeper level Bonaventure posits a primordial exemplarity of the *Verbum* in the Trinity.²¹⁸ For Bonaventure, the Word is “God knowing himself as the ‘expressive likeness of all things’ (*similitudo expressiva omnium*), a role he is able to take on precisely insofar as he is the Father’s perfect expression.”²¹⁹ As the perfect expression or exemplarity of both the Trinity and creation, Christ the Word is the metaphysical center between God and creation. Consummation or reduction, the return back to the *plenitudo fontalis*, is achieved through the Word, who is both the metaphysical center or medium and mediator of mankind.²²⁰ But for Bonaventure, consummation also involves the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit is the bond of love

²¹⁴ Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 120.

²¹⁵ Christopher M. Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 128.

²¹⁶ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 88—89.

²¹⁷ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 89.

²¹⁸ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 90.

²¹⁹ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 90.

²²⁰ Bernard, McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 91.

between the Father and Son, the Spirit is a kind of intermediary between the individual soul and the return offered by the incarnate Word.²²¹

But Bonaventure's thought had the greatest impact on Franciscan spirituality when he applied his metaphysical understanding of the Trinity and Christology to the role of St. Francis. McGinn writes that "since the universe is the expression of the Trinity produced through the *Verbum increatum*, and since the *Verbum incarnatum* expresses himself best in dying for humanity on the cross, then Francis, as the ideal expression of the crucified Jesus, is the exemplar of our journey, or reduction, back to God.... *Il Poverello* is more than just another saint—he is the 'mirror of sanctity and the exemplar of all evangelical perfection.'" ²²² This is seen in the *Legenda maior* when Bonaventure uses scripture verses in reference to Christ: "Like the morning star in the midst of clouds, by his resplendent rays he guided into the light those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, and like the rainbow shining among clouds of glory he made manifest in himself the sign of the Lord's covenant."²²³

But Bonaventure's theology should not distract us from the important political influences he exerted over the Franciscan order in his time as Minister General from 1257–74. The first task he undertook was to deal with the accusations of heresy against John of Parma and Gerardo di Borgo San Donnino. The latter was imprisoned for life, while the former was exiled to a hermitage in Greccio.²²⁴ But Bonaventure's greatest political legacies are his Constitutions of Narbonne and Exposition of the Rule. Before the Constitutions of Narbonne, the statutes approved at General Chapters were disorganized and not uniformly implemented. Bonaventure decided to embark on

²²¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 92.

²²² Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 93.

²²³ Bonaventure, "Legenda Maior," *Francis of Assisi- The Founder: Early Documents*, 2:526.

²²⁴ Moorman notes that the source that records John's punishment is written by Angelo Clareno and may have been exaggerated. John of Parma was apparently able to leave Greccio, since he died as a missionary to the Middle East. See John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 146.

an overhaul and codification.²²⁵ The Constitutions encouraged simplicity and poverty in every aspect of life. They limited new building, decreed that churches must be of simple design, and mandated that vestments must be plain and not silk. They also set clear guidelines about the prohibition on receiving money. Friars were not to have bowls put out for money while they preached, they were not permitted to beg from strangers, they could not demand money as a penance in confession, they should not try to extract money from people making wills, and they were not to bury anyone on Franciscan land unless refusal would cause scandal.²²⁶ And they established uniformity of habit, regular fasts, periods of silence observed by all, and guidelines for regular visitations to ensure that all statutes were being followed. What made the Constitutions unpopular with the Spiritual Franciscans was that they made it very difficult for laymen to enter the order.²²⁷ Furthermore, because lay brothers were not to be permitted to enter, convents had no one to tend to the kitchen and gardens. Therefore, the Constitutions also establish guidelines for the hiring of servants.²²⁸

Bonaventure also wrote an *Exposition of the Rule*,²²⁹ in which he combined the three Rules of St. Francis with the papal bull *Quo elongati*. The ideal for Bonaventure, as it was for Francis, was abject poverty (*nudissima paupertas*).²³⁰ However, poverty needed to be defined. Bonaventure adopted Gregory IX's distinction between *dominium* (ownership) and *usus* (use). Bonaventure elaborated by adding that the friar must never use more than what is necessary, must be prepared

²²⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 148.

²²⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 149.

²²⁷ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 149.

²²⁸ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 150.

²²⁹ In his "Testament," St. Francis expressly forbids adding glosses to the Rule or to his Testament. For Francis, poverty was to be understood literally and simply. But the fact that Bonaventure composed such an exposition points to the fact that not all friars understood poverty in the same way.

²³⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 152.

to beg, and must be prepared to work.²³¹ However, that work does not have to be manual. For Bonaventure, the chief work of the friars was preaching and the spiritual direction of souls.²³² This is consistent with Bonaventure's emphasis on study and preaching during his generalate.

Did the policies enacted by Bonaventure through the Constitutions of Narbonne and the Exposition of the Rule represent a change in policies from the previous tenure of John of Parma? The Spiritual Franciscans, sometimes writing decades later, felt that Bonaventure betrayed the ideals of poverty and simplicity.²³³ They felt that under John of Parma, a real effort had been made to accommodate the more intransigent friars as well as those who wanted to adhere more strictly to the ideas of poverty. But under Bonaventure, there was greater security and stability in the order, and with it came more prestige and privilege. The typical friar was no longer a wandering evangelist, but a well-educated priest, trained in theology.²³⁴ However, some scholarship, such as Rosalind Brook's study of early Franciscan government, reveals that there was no radical shift in direction between the generalate of John of Parma and that of Bonaventure, from a generalate friendly to the point of view of the Spiritual Franciscans to a generalate that supported the Community or Conventual Franciscans.²³⁵ This position makes sense because many of the statutes in the Constitutions of Narbonne were largely made up of legislation passed in General Chapters before Bonaventure became Minister General. In other words, the policies Bonaventure enacted were not new. Furthermore, the movement towards a clerical order of preachers that practiced a poverty consistent with their duties began decades before Bonaventure. David Burr also notes that Bonaventure's Constitutions did not relax standards but instead tightened them.²³⁶ He points out

²³¹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 152.

²³² John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 153.

²³³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 32—33.

²³⁴ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 154.

²³⁵ Rosalind B. Brooke, *Early Franciscan Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 258—284.

²³⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 35.

that the obstacle Bonaventure constantly struggled against was not a dissident group of friars wanting to practice a primitive form of the Rule (i.e., the Spiritual Franciscans), but laxity. Therefore, Bonaventure had more in common with the Spiritual Franciscans than they gave him credit for. Burr argues that for Bonaventure, poverty was “not so much an absolute that prevents friars from performing such duties as it is a flexible standard defined by the role one is called upon to play.” Burr also remarks that the Spiritual Franciscans were not anti-learning and had more in common with Bonaventure on the subject of studies than they did with Francis.²³⁷ Finally, Burr opposes a modern narrative in which Bonaventure’s generalate is “represented as a final attempt to defend the *via media* against those centrifugal tendencies that would tear the order into two opposing factions after his death.”²³⁸ There is simply no evidence that the Spiritual Franciscans were active in the time of Bonaventure.

The Spiritual Franciscans

It is unclear exactly when the conflict between the Community, or Conventual Franciscans, and the Spiritual Franciscan first began. The term “spiritual” was used sporadically and only adopted as a label for rigorist Franciscans in the first decade of the fourteenth century.²³⁹ Although there was tension almost from the beginning over how to live out the ideal of poverty, the Spiritual Franciscan movement began in the 1270s and 1280s when a group of friars was censured in the Marches of Ancona. But who were the Spirituels and what were their grievances? David Burr has posited that what we refer to as “Spiritual Franciscans” were actually diverse groups of rigorists who lived mainly in Italy and southern France. Although they had distinct views, Burr identifies several elements they had in common, including “the feeling that Franciscan leaders were

²³⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 37.

²³⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 35.

²³⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, vii.

impeding observance rather than demanding it; apocalyptic speculation (including assertion of a role for Francis and of the decline in the order); and cultivation of the contemplative life.”²⁴⁰ In this brief introduction to the Spiritual Franciscans, I will survey the three major figures of the movement—Angelo Clareno, Peter John Olivi, and Ubertino da Casale—and determine the extent to which the Spiritual Franciscans may have influenced Angela’s *Liber*.

According to Burr, the Spiritual groups in Italy and in southern France had distinct differences. Italian rigorists, in general, were more critical of changes in the order during the thirteenth century, looked to Francis’s Testament and the prophecies of Brother Leo as authoritative documents, and were more willing to consider radical solutions to the conflict, such as splitting the order.²⁴¹ Southern French Spirituels, on the other hand, were less critical of the thirteenth century changes, more likely to view the Rule, Franciscan legislation, and papal documents as authoritative (as opposed to the extra-legal Testament and Leo sources), and wanted to reform rather than split the order.²⁴² When we examine why these groups were ultimately declared heretical, it becomes clear that the primary issue was not the practice of poverty.

Traditionally, scholars have identified the Spiritual Franciscans as the faction that sought stricter expressions of poverty while the Community or Conventual Franciscans were in favor of a laxer form of life. But Burr refutes this, writing: “A long honorable tradition of interpretation from Ubertino da Casale and Angelo Clareno in the fourteenth century through Joseph Koch in the twentieth argues that poverty was the real issue, and that the rest, all the philosophical and theological issues, represented nothing more than a flanking attack on the poverty dispute.... Popular as this line of thought has been, there is no evidence for it and some against it.”²⁴³ Burr

²⁴⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 49.

²⁴¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 73.

²⁴² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 73.

²⁴³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 51.

argues that both Spiritual and Conventual Franciscans advocated reforms and stricter guidelines. Therefore, the cause of the conflict between the two groups is the “philosophical and theological issues” that have traditionally been ignored. While these issues are diverse, many come down to the fundamental issue of obedience to authority.

Angelo Clareno and Anconan Rigorists in the 1270s

When the Franciscan General Council was meeting in Lyon in 1274, a rumor began to circulate in the Marches of Ancona that Gregory X was going to issue a papal bull requiring Franciscans to own property.²⁴⁴ Burr writes that even though the story proved false, it created a conflict over whether one should obey one’s vows or the pope when the two seemed at odds.²⁴⁵ While most of the friars decided that they would obey the pope, others declared that they would never accept such a decree. These friars, including Angelo Clareno, were sentenced to life imprisonment.²⁴⁶ The friars were imprisoned until Raymond Geoffroi became Minister General in 1290. According to Angelo’s account, Raymond visited Ancona and asked why the brothers were imprisoned, since he could not find a crime specified in the sentence. He was informed that they were imprisoned for “excessive zeal in the observance of poverty.”²⁴⁷ Raymond wished that the whole order could be guilty of such a crime and released the imprisoned rigorists. However, he also recognized that they would not be welcomed back with open arms, so he sent them to Armenia. It is not clear how many dissidents there were and if their views were widespread.

Angelo and his fellow rigorists lived in Armenia until they were forced back to Italy by the hostility of other Franciscans in the area.²⁴⁸ They appealed to Raymond Geoffroi for help and he

²⁴⁴ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 44.

²⁴⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 44.

²⁴⁶ It is difficult to know when they were sentenced. David Burr argues that it was after 1278 (45).

²⁴⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 45.

²⁴⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 45.

pointed them in the direction of Celestine V, who had recently been elected pope.²⁴⁹ A hermit renowned for his asceticism, Celestine V was very sympathetic to the plight of Angelo and the other friars. He established the brothers as the Poor Hermits of Pope Celestine and allowed them to keep the Franciscan rule and observe it with great rigor.²⁵⁰ But Celestine's papacy was extremely short-lived. A poor administrator, he abdicated five months into his reign and was replaced by Boniface VIII. Because a pope had never abdicated before, Boniface was anxious to consolidate his power and legitimacy. He repealed almost all of Celestine's legislation, including the establishment of the Poor Hermits. Angelo and the other rigorists fled to Greece to avoid persecution.²⁵¹ However, some decided to stay and contested the legitimacy of Boniface VIII's papacy. Boniface quickly cracked down on these dissidents, using inquisitors to silence anyone who rebelled against his ecclesiastical authority.²⁵² It is worth noting that Angelo Clareno did not agree with the rigorists who rejected Boniface VIII's papacy, demonstrating that the Spiritualist movement contained diverse and often divergent viewpoints. Angelo was also not inclined to Joachitism like other Spiritual Franciscans. Instead, he preferred the prophecies of Brother Leo and St. Francis concerning the decay and eventual renewal of the order.²⁵³

Angelo Clareno left Greece and traveled to Avignon in 1311 to answer charges of heresy. Although he was ultimately acquitted, he continued to be persecuted until his death. In 1317, Angelo wrote to John XXII asking permission to observe the Franciscan rule outside of the Franciscan order.²⁵⁴ Not only was the request denied, but John XXII issued the bull *Sancta romana*

²⁴⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 69.

²⁵⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 69.

²⁵¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 70.

²⁵² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 71.

²⁵³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 49.

²⁵⁴ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 280.

which attacked those who “claimed to operate on the basis of a privilege from Celestine V.”²⁵⁵ After this, Angelo left Avignon and took refuge in the Benedictine abbey of Subiaco, where he wrote the majority of his works, including his *Chronicle or History of the Seven Tribulations of the Franciscan Order*, his commentary on the rule, and numerous letters.²⁵⁶ After sixteen years of peace, John XXII in 1334 wrote to the inquisitor Simone da Spoleto and asked him to arrest Angelo.²⁵⁷ In danger yet again, Angelo fled to Naples, where he died in 1337.²⁵⁸

Peter John Olivi

Peter John Olivi (1248–98) was a Franciscan from the south of France who became a famous scholar and theologian. He is perhaps best known for his promotion of the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore and his role in the *usus pauper* controversy. As the order grew, provisions for basic necessities of the friars needed to be made. The Rule of 1223 allowed for “spiritual friends” to acquire necessities for brothers who are ill or in need: “I firmly command all the brothers that they in no way receive coins or money, either personally or through an intermediary. Nonetheless let the ministers and custodians alone take special care to provide for the needs of the sick and the clothing of the other brothers through spiritual friends.”²⁵⁹ As mentioned, Gregory IX later distinguished *dominium* (ownership) from *usus* (use).²⁶⁰ The friars used but did not own what the spiritual friends provided. Innocent IV later expanded the idea to allow “spiritual friends” to acquire not only the necessary but also the convenient and transferred ownership of everything the friars used to the Holy See.²⁶¹ Nicholas III later distinguished between *usus juris* and *usus facti* in

²⁵⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 281.

²⁵⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 281.

²⁵⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 300.

²⁵⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 301.

²⁵⁹ Francis of Assisi, “Later Rule,” *Francis and Clare*, cap. iv, 140.

²⁶⁰ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 118.

²⁶¹ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 117.

the 1279 bull *Exiit qui seminat*. This stated that the friars have no use of right, meaning they are not entitled to any of the goods they use, but have use in fact, which means that they are to use whatever is necessary (including what is necessary for the pursuit of wisdom).²⁶² The *usus facti* should be restrained so that the friars maintain the ideal of poverty.²⁶³ *Usus pauper* is the restrained or restricted use of goods so that the friars only use what is necessary.

At first glance, there is nothing controversial about *usus pauper*; all sides thought Franciscans were obligated to maintain the restricted use of goods.²⁶⁴ The controversy was not in *usus pauper* itself, but in its relation to the vow of poverty. If the vow of poverty required *usus pauper*, then the friar would break his vow if he did not practice it perfectly. For Olivi's opponents, breaking the vow in any form was a mortal sin. Therefore, including *usus pauper* in the vow of poverty was spiritually dangerous because the promise would inevitably lead friars into mortal sin.²⁶⁵ They wanted a "precise line" beyond which a friar violated the vow of poverty. Ownership provided that clear line. *Usus pauper*, on the other hand, was a "fuzzier" concept.²⁶⁶ As Burr points out, "Precisely how limited does such use have to be in order to qualify? How rough or thin must a garment be?"²⁶⁷

Olivi solved this problem by distinguishing between determinate and indeterminate vows. Vows such as ownership or chastity were determinate vows with clear defining lines. Indeterminate vows, such as *usus pauper*, vary according to the circumstance.²⁶⁸ This was hardly a controversial point of view, since Bonaventure also argued that poverty was flexible according

²⁶² John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 180.

²⁶³ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 180.

²⁶⁴ Kevin Madigan, *Olivi and the Interpretation of Matthew in the High Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 65.

²⁶⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 52.

²⁶⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 52.

²⁶⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 52.

²⁶⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 52.

to circumstance. Moreover, for Olivi, a single violation of *usus pauper* was not a mortal sin. That is because, for him, “the vow is less a promise to do a series of specific things than a promise to embark on a certain path towards an envisaged goal.”²⁶⁹ *Usus pauper* was therefore the ideal, which each friar would strive to live out to the best of his ability. If a friar uses more than what is necessary, he only sins venially rather than mortally. Burr notes that this solution was too ambiguous for Olivi’s contemporaries.²⁷⁰ It also presented a threat to the vow of obedience. If *usus pauper* is included in the vow of poverty, then a friar might conceivably be in a situation where he has to choose between obeying a superior or obeying his vow of poverty. Burr puts the situation in stark terms: “If vowing poverty also meant vowing *usus pauper*, however, every Franciscan who felt that his house was run too laxly had to ask himself whether it was run *so* laxly as to demand protest and then disobedience on his part. A number of them eventually decided that the answer was ‘yes.’”²⁷¹ Therefore, while the order encouraged friars to practice *usus pauper*, they did not feel able to include it in the vow of poverty. But I want to emphasize that this had nothing to do with lax standards; the issue was with the technical consequences of making it a vow.

In any case, between the *usus pauper* controversy and his Joachimism, Olivi came under scrutiny. Nicholas IV, the first Franciscan pope, wrote to the Minister General, Raymond Geoffroi, and asked him to look into “certain brothers who seemed to introduce schism into the province of Provence, condemning the state of the other brethren and considering themselves to be more spiritual than the others.”²⁷² This is one of the first times that the term “spiritual” is used to label a particular group of brethren. Although Raymond was sympathetic to the rigorists, he had to comply. Olivi was spared, but only when he appeared before the General Chapter in 1292 and

²⁶⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 52.

²⁷⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 58.

²⁷¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 65.

²⁷² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 67–68.

explained his point of view. He was not required to deny that *usus pauper* was part of the vow of poverty, but rather to acknowledge that Franciscans were bound to it only in the sense defined by Nicholas III in *Exiit qui seminat* and to promise not to support anyone holding the opposite view. Burr notes that this was not difficult for Olivi, since both he and his opponents had been claiming the support of the bull all along.²⁷³ Olivi successfully managed to rehabilitate his reputation and was even appointed lector in the order's stadium at the convent in Santa Croce, one of the order's most important convents.²⁷⁴ Other brothers were not so lucky and were punished for fomenting schism within the order. This is interesting because it implies that the rigorists in southern France were not a "monolithic unit." Some of them were so extreme that Olivi was willing to distance himself from them. For example, Olivi did not support rebelling against the pope and spoke harshly of those who did not acknowledge the legitimacy of Boniface VIII.²⁷⁵

Olivi remained in good standing with the order, teaching and preaching until his death in 1298. But in 1299, the Franciscan General Chapter met and condemned his writings and anyone who used his books.²⁷⁶ Burr posits that they turned against him because his work was associated with the rigorists in southern France, who were perceived to be stubborn, arrogant, and contemptuous of their brothers. But the severity of Olivi's condemnation seems excessive. He was accused of all sorts of errors, from his views on Franciscan bishops and burial of the dead to his understanding of the divine nature, the sacraments, and even of affirming that Christ was alive when his side was opened by the lance.²⁷⁷ While his views on Franciscan bishops and burial of the dead were issues that had to do with poverty, most of the charges were not. While resurrecting

²⁷³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 68.

²⁷⁴ Kevin Madigan, *Olivi and the Interpretation of Matthew*, 71.

²⁷⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 70.

²⁷⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 88.

²⁷⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 151.

some of Olivi's errors for condemnation at the Council of Vienne in 1311, Raymond of Fronsac and Bonagratia of Bergamo especially objected to his "false and fantastic prophesies concerning the church," especially "calling the church a great whore and dogmatizing many other things in disparagement of the church."²⁷⁸ It appears that his Joachitism was a bigger issue than his views on *usus pauper*.

Ubertino da Casale

Ubertino was a student and disciple of Olivi when he studied at the University of Paris. Although he adopted Olivi's Joachitism, he had no great love of the academy and felt that his time at the university did not benefit him spiritually. Burr states that this is typical of the "pervasive Italian spiritual distrust of education."²⁷⁹ As a young man, Ubertino was blessed to have many spiritual mentors in his life. He met an elderly John of Parma in Greccio, where he had been exiled for almost fifty years.²⁸⁰ He met and greatly admired various lay mystics, including Pier Pettinagno, a comb-maker in Siena with a great reputation for holiness; Angela of Foligno; Clare of Montefalco; and Margaret of Cortona.²⁸¹ He notes that his meeting with Angela was particularly transformative.²⁸² However, in 1303 his rigorism got him into trouble with his brothers in Perugia. He appealed to Benedict XI, but was sent to La Verna, where he wrote his *Arbor vitae*.²⁸³ In this work, Ubertino takes Olivi's Joachitism to the next level. Not only does he identify Francis as the angel of the sixth seal, but he also gives John of Parma the role of calling down judgment on the

²⁷⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 151.

²⁷⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 46.

²⁸⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 46.

²⁸¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 47.

²⁸² For an account of his meeting with Angela, see D.M. Faloci-Pulignani, "La Beata Angela da Foligno: Memorie e Documenti," *Miscellanea Francescana* 25 (1925): 113—114.

²⁸³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 97.

great whore.²⁸⁴ While Olivi placed the mystical Antichrist in the future, Ubertino identifies the Antichrist as Boniface VIII and Benedict XI and denies the legitimacy of Boniface's papacy.²⁸⁵

Ubertino often took the views of his mentor Olivi to their most extreme expression. For example, while Olivi argued that Franciscan bishops should continue to observe poverty, Ubertino questioned whether Franciscans should be bishops at all.²⁸⁶ Ubertino dismissed papal declarations, including *Exiit qui seminat*, the bull Olivi used to justify his views in the *usus pauper* controversy. While Olivi critiqued the excessive use of Aristotle among scholastic theologians, Ubertino rejected the entire Franciscan educational program.²⁸⁷ He also differed from Olivi in that he had the Italian tendency (shared with Angelo Clareno) to cite the Testament and the Brother Leo sources rather than papal bulls or the Franciscan Rule. He also believed, along with Angelo, that Francis abdicated his position as head of the order because he saw where it was going and devoted his life to prophesying about how much worse it would get.²⁸⁸ Burr notes that Angelo and Ubertino both believed there was historical and ideological continuity between Francis and themselves.²⁸⁹ For both, the conflict between the Spiritual Franciscans and Community was present from the beginning of the order. Therefore, they were open to possibilities, such as splitting the order, that would have been unthinkable for Olivi. However, like Olivi, Ubertino remained in the order and wrote a defense of the rigorist position for the Council of Vienne.²⁹⁰ He was also involved in the controversy over Christ's poverty and maintained that Christ and his apostles possessed what they

²⁸⁴ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 98.

²⁸⁵ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 98.

²⁸⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 99.

²⁸⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 99.

²⁸⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 99.

²⁸⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 100.

²⁹⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 115.

needed to survive “according to the law of nature and of common fraternal charity” in his *Treatise on the Highest Poverty Practiced by Christ, His Apostles, and Apostolic Men*.²⁹¹

In 1317 the conflict came to a head when sixty-four Spirituals from Narbonne and Béziers arrived at Avignon to plead their case to the pope. John XXII was not sympathetic to their views and issued the bull *Quorundam exigit*, which condemned the Spirituals because their “blind, uninformed scrupulosity has led them to withhold obedience on the pretext that they are following their consciences.”²⁹² To illustrate the point, he mentions the shabby habits they wore that were too short and tight. Since previous papal declarations made the choice of clothing the decision of their superiors, it was disobedient to wear a different habit from the rest of the order.²⁹³ The sixty-four brothers were brought before the inquisitor Michael of Cesena and asked whether they would accept *Quorundam exigit*. Twenty-five refused. When questioned by Michel Le Moine, twenty of them recanted and “were forced to abjure their errors in the very places where they had formerly preached them.”²⁹⁴ One of the remaining five recanted at the very end and was imprisoned for life. The remaining four were burnt at the stake.²⁹⁵

After this, matters became even worse for the Spiritual Franciscans. John XXII issued *Quia nonnunquam*, in which he refused to assume ownership of the things Franciscans used.²⁹⁶ He refused to appoint procurators that would take care of property and goods on behalf of the order.²⁹⁷

²⁹¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 270.

²⁹² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 196.

²⁹³ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 196.

²⁹⁴ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 205.

²⁹⁵ In the bull *Gloriosam ecclesiam*, John XXII accuses the Spiritual Franciscans of five errors: 1) There are two churches, one carnal led by the pope and the other spiritual. 2) Priests can no longer confer the sacraments validly because they are too sinful (the error of Donatism). 3) They denounce all oaths as sinful, like the Waldensians. 4) A sinful priest is unable to confer the sacraments. 5) Like the Manicheans and Montanists, they see the gospel as being fulfilled in the first time in them, “declaring that the promise of the Holy Spirit has been fulfilled in them rather than in the apostles at Pentecost—and thus that the gospel has been opened to them alone.” (David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 199—200.)

²⁹⁶ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 275.

²⁹⁷ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 275.

Essentially, he forced the Franciscans to own their own property. John thought “that it was nonsense to claim that one could consume goods without holding dominium over them. It was silly to insist that every bean, every egg, and every piece of bread given to and eaten by every Franciscan in the world actually belonged to the pope.”²⁹⁸ In 1323, he issued another bull on the poverty of Christ. In *Cum inter nonnullos*, he declared that it was heretical to affirm that Christ did not own anything either privately or in common. It would also be heretical to assert that Christ and his disciples had no right to use, sell, or exchange the things that they had.”²⁹⁹

These events were a huge blow to Ubertino. The pope saw Ubertino as an obstacle to his goal of disciplining the dissidents. In 1318, he offered to allow Ubertino to rejoin the Franciscans or become a Benedictine in the Abbey of Gembloux.³⁰⁰ Ubertino chose the latter. However, Ubertino continued to meddle in Franciscan issues, such as the debate over the poverty of Christ. In 1325, John XXII ordered his arrest, but he was never apprehended; it is unclear what happened next, or how he died.³⁰¹

Angela and the Spiritual Franciscans

There is nothing in her text itself that definitively proves that Angela was on the side of the Spirituels. Although poverty was important for Angela, Burr notes that “her praise of those who observe the rule fully never turns into a condemnation of those who do not.”³⁰² Therefore, while her ideas might align with those of the Spiritual Franciscans, the *Liber* is hardly a polemic written by the Spiritual Franciscans against the Community, as Jacques Delarun has argued.³⁰³ Much has

²⁹⁸ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 275.

²⁹⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 276.

³⁰⁰ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 262.

³⁰¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 277.

³⁰² David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 340.

³⁰³ Jacques Dalarun, “Angèle de Foligno a-t-elle existé?,” *Publications de l’École Française de Rome* 204, no. 1 (1995): 59–97.

also been made of the idea that the *Liber* was controversial. It does not appear to have been disseminated much shortly after her death and the text is very careful to hide the identity of all parties, including Angela herself. However, Burr argues that her work was not suspect because of her connection to the Spiritual Franciscans, but because it seemed “perilously close to the stance identified with the *spiritus libertatis* or heresy of the free spirit.”³⁰⁴ The free spirit heretics allegedly asserted that the soul can become one with God to the point where it shares in the divine prerogatives, including freedom from the moral law.³⁰⁵ Robert Lerner has questioned the existence of any organized group of free spirit heretics and suggests that the so-called heresy was merely the result of the Church’s exaggerated fear of antinomianism.³⁰⁶ Angela condemns this point of view, and though her vision of God in darkness or standing in the midst of the Trinity (which would have evoked suspicions of indistinct union) were common in other writings associated with the free spirit heresy (such as Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls*), there were other women mystics, such as Hadewijch, who also describe indistinct union with God.

It is also unlikely that Angela’s *Liber* was viewed as suspicious primarily because of its associations with the Spiritual Franciscans because the parts of the text that explicitly mention them, such as the *Approbatio* and the Epilogue, were written after her death. The *Approbatio* mentions Cardinal John Colonna, who was associated with the Spirituales and incurred the condemnation of Boniface VIII.³⁰⁷ The Epilogue reads like a piece of Spiritual Franciscan propaganda, but we do not know what Angela would have made of its description of her:

³⁰⁴ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 343.

³⁰⁵ See Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 56; Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 1; “The Council of Vienne,” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, trans. Norman P. Tanner (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 383 (Decree 28).

³⁰⁶ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit*, 61.

³⁰⁷ *CW*, 123.

God raised up a woman of lay state who was bound to worldly obligations, a husband and sons, possessions and wealth, who was unlearned and frail. By means of power divinely infused in her through the power of the cross of Christ, God and man, she broke these worldly bonds and ascended to the peaks of gospel perfection. By the holy foolishness of the cross, she renewed the wisdom of gospel perfection, she showed us the way of Jesus Christ. This way had become overgrown and obliterated, and the high and mighty had told us, by their words and deeds, that it could not be followed. But Angela showed us not only that Jesus' way was possible and easy, but also that it leads to the highest delights for virtuous souls.³⁰⁸

The phrase “gospel perfection” and the mention of the “high and mighty” who said that the way of the Gospel (i.e., the way of absolute poverty) could not be followed are clear indicators that this passage was written by a Spiritual or someone sympathetic to their cause. Barr suggests that, from the available evidence, some Spiritual Franciscans viewed Angela as a symbol of their cause. However, it does not follow that the Spirituales influenced the *Liber* or that Angela took sides.³⁰⁹

Having elucidated Angela of Foligno's Franciscan context, the next part of the dissertation will examine Angela's life and writings. In chapter one, I will describe Angela's lay religious context, including the lay penitent movement and the Franciscan Third Order of Penance, of which she was a member. I will then focus on what can be gleaned about Angela's life from her *Liber*. In chapter two, I will investigate the manuscript history of Angela's *Memorial* and the question of authorship. Angela dictated the text in her native Umbrian to Brother A., who translated her words into Latin and copied them down while she spoke. Therefore, it can be described as a collaboratively written text, with multiple voices and perspectives that must be taken into account.

³⁰⁸ *CW*, 317. *IL*, 740. Latin text: “Suscitavit Deus mulierem saecularis status, mundo obligatam, biro, filiis et rebus et divitiis irretitam, scientia simplicem, viribus impotentem; quae, virtute sibi divinitus infusa, per virtutem crucis Christi Dei et hominis, vincula mundi rupit, apicem perfectionis evangelicae ascendit, et per sanctam stultitiam crucis Christi perfectorum sapientiam renovavit, et obliteratedam viam boni Jesu, quam excelsi gigantes tam per verba quam per opera inobservabilem asserebant, non solum possibilem ostendit et facilem, sed etiam summas delicias animae virtuosae ostendit.”

³⁰⁹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 342.

Finally, I will examine Angela's attempt at writing a mystical itinerary and will delve into the twenty-six steps in greater detail.

CHAPTER 1: The Life of Angela of Foligno

To introduce the context of Angela's life and writings, I will first discuss the lay penitent movement and the Franciscan Third Order of Penance. These movements were important to Angela because she became a lay penitent after her conversion and shortly afterward joined the Franciscan Third Order. I will then discuss what political and religious life was like in Foligno during Angela's time. Subsequently, I include a biographical sketch of Angela's life, including her conversion, pilgrimage to Assisi, the writing of the *Memorial*, her inner life during the writing of the Memorial, and finally her mentorship of her spiritual sons and the writing of the *Instructions*.

Lay Penitents and the Franciscan Third Order of Penance

The Lay Penitential Movement

The lay penitential movement was the result of urban expansion and economic growth in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The emergence of crafts, guilds, and a professional class meant that the laity were becoming more educated and desired to participate more in the religious movements of the time.¹ Before the twelfth century, medieval religion was predominantly monastic. André Vauchez sees the emergence of the *conversi*, laymen who joined monasteries and mainly performed manual labor, as the beginning of lay involvement.² Giovanna Casagrande concurs, noting that the Vallombrosan, Cistercian, Carthusian, Grandmontine, and Premonstratensian orders all began to admit *conversi*. Even rectories, hospitals, and churches began to use *conversi*.³ But thirteenth-century penitents “went further, claiming that it was possible to lead authentically religious lives while carrying on their trades, unaffiliated with any community of regular or secular clergy.”⁴ These penitents stayed at home, continued their work and marriages, but committed themselves to a deeper and more rigorous spiritual life.

The penitential movement attracted laypeople to lead “a religious life without submitting themselves to the rigid structure of monastic or canonical orders.”⁵ They could remain in the world without living in a worldly manner. Penitential groups and confraternities drew laymen and women who were looking for more autonomy than a religious order would give them. But what did it mean

¹ CW, 35.

² André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, trans. Margery J. Schneider (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 119.

³ Giovanna Casagrande, “Il Terz'ordine e la beata Angela. La povertà nell'ordine della non-povertà”, *Angela da Foligno, terziaria francescana: atti del Convegno storico nel VII centenario dell'ingresso della beata Angela da Foligno nell'Ordine francescano secolare (1291-1991)* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1992), 18.

⁴ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 119.

⁵ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 119.

to be a penitent? Vauchez writes that “penance did not mean simply repenting of one’s sins and carrying out the sacrament of penance...What it meant was taking literally the word of Christ: ‘Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 4:17). Indeed, it was not simply a question of preparing for this kingdom, but of actually entering it during earthly life, a step which was manifested by a radical change in one’s conduct and by the renunciation of sin.”⁶ The apocalyptic undertones of the penitential movement were consistent with the spirituality of the age. For example, the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore attracted both clerics and laypeople. There was a general feeling that the Kingdom of God was imminent.

Vauchez also notes that the flagellant movement, which began in 1260, illustrates another important aspect of the penitential movement: “ascetic conformity with the person of the Son of God, which was based on a belief in the redemptive value of physical suffering.”⁷ Lay penitents in fact cultivated suffering and renunciation through fasts, hair shirts, flagellation, chastity, and other practices. I will elaborate further on the medieval understanding of pain in chapter three. But it is worth noting here that again, up until this point, these practices were confined to the monastic elite. The fact that laypeople began to adopt these practices hints not only at the democratization of the spiritual life. For the first time, laymen and women had the audacity to affirm “the sanctifying nature of all human and social conditions.”⁸ In the hierarchy of states of life, laypeople (especially married laypeople) were consistently put at the bottom. Now, for the first time, the laity did not see their inferior status as an impediment to holiness. They insisted that God is present in everyday life, in work, and in civil commitment (*Dio lo si ritrovava, come mai prima, presente nella vita quotidiana, nel lavoro e nell’impegno civile*).⁹

⁶ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 122.

⁷ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 123.

⁸ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 120.

⁹ Luciano Radi, *Angela da Foligno e l’Umbria mistica del secolo XIII* (Padova: Messaggero di S. Antonio, 1996), 14.

Once a man or woman joined a penitential order or confraternity, they enjoyed some privileges of the ecclesiastical state while maintaining their lay status. For example, Paul Lachance writes that penitents made a simple profession, different from the perpetual vows professed by those in religious communities. They were able to wear distinctive clothing, as long as it was simple and of plain colors (Franciscan penitents wore gray). They attended Mass regularly and were required to say the canonical hours. While the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 made it necessary for the faithful to go to confession and receive communion once per year, those in penitential orders were required to go three times per year. They kept more rigorous fasts and were encouraged to perform charitable acts, such as service to the poor, sick, and lepers. They were prohibited from attending dances or spectacles and were expected to abstain from conjugal relations during certain feasts of the liturgical year. Unmarried women and widows were required to be perpetually continent. Members of penitential orders were not permitted to bear arms and were required to abstain from oaths. All were called to be peacemakers in society.¹⁰ Most penitents lived in their own homes rather than in religious communities; unmarried women often lived in their parents' homes while widows, such as Angela, often lived in the houses of their deceased husbands with other penitents.

The desire for lay autonomy was not always well-received by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and some of the first groups of penitents, such as the Waldensians, were declared heretics. The Humiliati, mainly composed of Italian penitents, were perhaps the first penitential group to receive ecclesiastical approval. Vauchez notes that the Humiliati were popular “among artisans who wanted to continue to practice their craft while living a religious life.”¹¹ The group was so innovative that it was viewed by the hierarchy with suspicion. The Humiliati were at first declared

¹⁰ *CW*, 35.

¹¹ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 120.

heretics in 1184 by Lucius III, but Innocent III reversed this sentence in the thirteenth century. Innocent was a shrewd and practical man who knew that such a movement was inevitable. Rather than declaring every lay association heretical, he decided to grant the Humiliati ecclesiastical status. From then on, they were split into three orders: two orders of clerics and laymen leading a monastic form of life, and a third of laymen who remained in the world subject to a *propositum*, or program of life.¹² This meant that the Humiliati were no longer a strictly lay movement. But the structure given by Innocent III ensured that laypeople had an approved outlet for religious enthusiasm while at the same time allowing him to maintain oversight.

The Church was wary of lay movements because both the Waldensians and Cathars had been judged heretical.¹³ Lay movements always posed a danger of heresy, especially among the uneducated, who could be easily swayed. At first, the Franciscans and Dominicans were hesitant to take Third Orders of penitents under their wing.¹⁴ But the Franciscans were required to do so when Nicholas IV issued his papal bull *Supra Montem* in 1289, which Lachance calls the “*Regula bullata* of the Franciscan penitents.”¹⁵ This decree established the Franciscan Third Order of Penance and provided them with a *propositum*. While many scholars praise the mendicants for promoting lay piety, Vauchez takes a dimmer view. He notes that Franciscan and Dominican Third Orders essentially “monasticized the laity” by requiring them to say the divine office, observe monastic fasts, etc.¹⁶ In other words, despite more lay participation in the spiritual life of the church, the ideal of holiness remained the monastic ideal.

¹² André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 120.

¹³ Giovanna Casagrande, “Il Terz'ordine e la beata Angela. La povertà nell'ordine della non-povertà, 18.

¹⁴ *CW*, 35.

¹⁵ *CW*, 34.

Angela's profession was within a few years of the 1289 bull.

¹⁶ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 120.

The Franciscan Third Order of Penance

When Francis and his brothers appeared before Innocent III in Rome, he told them to “go...preach penance to all.”¹⁷ This was the mandate that Francis and his brothers spread across Europe. Scholars debate the exact moment when the Third Order of Penance was founded. From the beginning, Francis attracted people from all walks of life to his vision of poverty and penitence. Thomas of Celano writes that people would beg Francis for guidance after hearing him preach, so he gave them a norm of life and pointed the way of salvation:

Thus in a short time, the appearance of the entire region was changed and, once rid of its earlier ugliness, it revealed a happier expression everywhere.... Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration to come to Saint Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership.... He is without question an outstanding craftsman, for through his spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching. Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life and those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation.¹⁸

It is not clear what form of life Francis gave these first penitents. However, two letters of exhortation from St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance were found in 1900 by Paul Sabatier.¹⁹ These letters, sometimes called the *Memoriale propositi*, were the first guidelines that Francis gave to lay people who wished to follow his path of penance. The first reads as an ode to the life of penance, warning the brothers and sisters of the fate of those who do not perform penance. Francis writes, “Oh, how glorious it is, how holy and great, to have a Father in heaven! Oh how holy, consoling, beautiful and wondrous it is to have such a Spouse!”²⁰ These bursts of enthusiasm reveal that, for Francis, to do penance meant, first and foremost, to love God.²¹ The

¹⁷ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," in *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, 1:212.

¹⁸ Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis," in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, 2:216--217.

¹⁹ Francis of Assisi, "The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful (Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance)" and "The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful," *Francis and Clare*, 62, 67

²⁰ Francis of Assisi, "The First Version of the Letter to the Faithful," 63.

²¹ Raffaele Pazzelli T.O.R., *St. Francis and the Third Order* (Chicago: Francis Herald Press, 1982), 121.

second letter gives more guidelines and directives for those following a life of penance. But like the first, the second is quite intimate, revealing the solicitude Francis felt for his lay penitents.

Francis exhorted the penitents to confess their sins to a priest and to receive the Body and Blood of Christ regularly and worthily, to love their neighbors as themselves, to have charity and humility, and to give alms since “this washes our souls from the stains of our sins.”²² He also told them to fast and abstain from vices and sins as well as from any excess of food or drink.²³ Francis was also anxious that the penitents “be Catholics,” that they visit churches frequently, venerate and show respect for the clergy regardless of their personal sinfulness, and be administered sacraments only by priests.²⁴ Here, he probably referred to the belief of some Waldensians that laymen could preach or administer the Eucharist.²⁵

Francis’s other guidelines concern the virtues that the penitents should cultivate. He writes that we must “deny ourselves and place our bodies under the yoke of service and holy obedience.”²⁶ He urges them to be servants of all others and to “show mercy to each of his brothers,”²⁷ to be “simple, humble and pure. And let us hold ourselves in contempt and scorn.”²⁸ He advises them to be *minores* like himself and his brothers: “We must never desire to be over others; rather we must be servants and subject to every human creature for God’s sake.”²⁹ He ends the letter with a description of the delights of the way of penance and the horrible fate that awaits those who do not follow it.³⁰ Casagrande points out that this portion of the letter is significant

²² Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 68—69.

²³ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 69.

²⁴ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 69.

²⁵ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 69. Raffaele Pazzelli T.O.R., *St. Francis and the Third Order*, 118.

²⁶ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 70.

²⁷ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 70.

²⁸ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 70.

²⁹ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 70.

³⁰ Francis of Assisi, “The Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful,” 72.

because in it, Francis does not distinguish between clerical and lay or religious and secular. The only hierarchy he mentions is that of good and bad Christians. At least in this letter, he abolishes the traditional hierarchy placing laypeople at the bottom. Francis felt that the possibility of salvation was open to everyone, regardless of status. Anyone can be a good Christian if they follow the guidelines of his letter. Anyone who does penance will be saved.³¹

The other important aspect of the letter is discussed by John Moorman, who points out that the guidelines are pedestrian and unheroic. There is no call to a life of renunciation, no appeal to dispose of superfluous wealth, or even to perform works of charity to those outside of the fellowship.³² Casagrande notes that poverty is not mentioned at all in the letter, and was likely not required of Franciscan tertiaries.³³ It is likely that the guidelines don't require anything heroic because this would make it extremely difficult for a layperson to follow the rule. A married man with a wife and children could not renounce all of his worldly goods and leave his family destitute. Instead, Francis focused on interior virtues because they can be attained by anyone in any situation or state of life. Although some of the tertiaries would have preferred for the letter to call for heroic deeds and renunciation of property, it democratizes salvific penance.

While the intimacy of the letter suggests that Francis cared about the members of the Third Order, nothing is said about the connection between the penitents and the friars.³⁴ There were no assurances that Francis and his brothers would continue to care for the tertiaries, as he promised

³¹ Giovanna Casagrande, "Il Terz'ordine e la beata Angela. La povertà nell'ordine della non-povertà," 20.

³² John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 43.

³³ Giovanna Casagrande, "Il Terz'ordine e la beata Angela. La povertà nell'ordine della non-povertà," 22.

The only aspect of the letter that might hint at poverty or the renunciation of good is the description of the man on his death bed who gives all his worldly goods to friends and relatives and does not use it to people he has defrauded or deceived. (*Francis and Clare*, 73) But this has more to do with making reparations/doing penance for the wrongs one has committed than it has to do with the renunciation of property at the end of one's life. Angela seems to have thought that the way of penance required her to renounce her possessions, but it is not required in either the letters or the final Rule of the Franciscan Third Order of Penance. (Giovanna Casagrande, "Il Terz'ordine e la beata Angela. La povertà nell'ordine della non-povertà," 31.)

³⁴ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 43.

to Clare and her sisters. In fact, after his death, the Third Order became a kind of millstone around the friars' necks. Moorman states that, like the Second Order, it was a "cause of some embarrassment."³⁵ The friars did not want to be responsible for the tertiaries (or the Poor Clares for that matter) because it would hinder them from doing their own work. A text attributed to Bonaventure states that any relation with the tertiaries would be disastrous because the friars would be responsible if a tertiary were in trouble, in debt, or in prison. If a female tertiary went astray, people would blame it on the friars.³⁶ However, Nicholas IV seemed to force the friars to take responsibility for the tertiaries in his 1289 bull *Supra Montem*. The bull not only provides a Rule for the tertiaries but also states that they must apply to the friars "to nominate one of their members, whose duty it shall be to give advice and counsel to the brethren and sisters."³⁷ Thus, the friars were required to take on the spiritual direction of the tertiaries.

However, recent scholarship largely disputes the existence of a Franciscan Third Order before *Supra Montem*. Even after the formal establishment of the Third Order, scholars such as Alison More have argued that professing the 1298 rule did not necessarily mean that the person or group had any affiliation (or desire for affiliation) with the Franciscan Order. Many of the female lay penitents of the late Middle Ages (Angela of Foligno, Margaret of Cortona, Umiliana de' Cerchi, Clare of Rimini, Catherine of Sienna, and others) have historically been associated with the mendicant orders. But these institutional affiliations are anachronistic and often fictional: some women were described as Franciscan or Dominican tertiaries even though they lived before the third orders were formally established (the Franciscan Third Order in 1298 and Dominican Third

³⁵ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 216.

³⁶ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 218.

³⁷ John Moorman, *A History of the Franciscan Order*, 217.

Order in the early fourteenth century).³⁸ Associating lay penitent women and beguines with regulated religious orders became a matter of survival after the burning of Marguerite Porete at the stake in 1310 and the condemnation of the beguines at the Council of Vienne in 1312.³⁹ Groups of beguines and lay penitents adopted the rule of the Franciscan Third Order (promulgated in the papal bull *Supra montem* in 1298), but did so in order to gain the appearance of orthodoxy, not because they had an authentic relationship with the Franciscan order or affinity with Franciscan spirituality.⁴⁰ While it is possible that penitents who had a genuine connection with the Franciscan order, like Angela of Foligno, could have sincerely professed the 1298 rule,⁴¹ the use of the rule did not necessarily indicate membership in the Franciscan order. Indeed, with Angela there is no evidence that she formally entered an order.⁴² These sources caution us to examine the complex circumstances that drove lay penitents to ally themselves with the mendicant orders.

Foligno in Angela's Time

Foligno lies in a fertile valley in the Umbrian region of central Italy, situated between two rivers, the Topino and the Menotre, both tributaries of the Tiber.⁴³ It was strategically placed at the crossroads of several trade routes connecting the cities of Ancona, Florence, and Pisa, among others.⁴⁴ It was a modestly sized town, with a population of about two thousand by the end of the

³⁸ Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 5; Mary Harvey Doyno, *The Lay Saint: Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150-1350* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 8.

³⁹The Council of Vienne was summoned from 1311–12 by pope Clement V, mainly to deal with complaints against the Templars. The papal degree *Ad Nostrum* condemned the beguines and beghards, lay groups of men and women who pursued the *vita apostolica* together but did not take vows, with antinomian heresy. See Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 333–34; Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 78–84. I discuss the condemnation of the beguines, antinomianism, and Council of Vienne in chapter 6, on p. 260–63.

⁴⁰ Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 44.

⁴¹ Angela's conversion occurs in 1285, which makes it possible that she professed the 1298 rule.

⁴² Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 42.

⁴³ *CW*, 42.

⁴⁴ *CW*, 42.

thirteenth century.⁴⁵ The nearest city is Assisi, which lies only twenty-one miles north of Foligno. Geographically, it was close to the hermitages in the Umbrian valley and the Marches where Francis's early disciples Giles (d. 1262), Rufino (d. 1270), and Leo (d. 1271) still lived during Angela's lifetime.⁴⁶ Though it was not as large as Milan, Florence, or Pisa, Foligno was still involved in many political disputes with other cities. In this section, I will provide a short political history of the region as well as the city's economic and religious expansion.

Cities were important in Roman Italy, but the invasion of the Lombards in the late sixth century meant a decline in cultural and administrative cohesion.⁴⁷ During the Carolingian period, some political coherence began to reemerge in northern and central Italy. Regions were often controlled by local seigneurs and bishops. But economic growth, an increase of birth rates, and the rise of a middle class reinvigorated cities and towns.⁴⁸ The Italian communes, sworn associations of men seeking to establish power over a city-state, began to emerge by the twelfth century. Although they often presented themselves as representatives of the people, much like the Roman senate in ancient times, the reality was that the communes were controlled by oligarchies mainly composed of noble families and the very wealthy. Malcolm Barber writes that the communes of Italy generally shared three characteristics: they were governed by elected consuls who held office for brief periods, the center of power was the urban unit, and almost all were supported by a *contado*, the agricultural regions beyond the city limits that provided food, resources, tax revenue, and soldiers for the commune.⁴⁹ The communes were effective, but unstable. Because their power lay in the agreement between citizens, anyone of means could gather support and initiate a regime

⁴⁵ CW, 42.

⁴⁶ CW, 42.

⁴⁷ Malcolm Barber, *The Two Cities: Medieval Europe 1050-1320* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 229.

⁴⁸ Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 229.

⁴⁹ Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 235, 239.

change. Barber notes that “the communal oath of mutual dependence had enabled its members to act in concert and this oath remained at its core, repeated each time the consuls or ruling body were changed.”⁵⁰ Administrators holding communal offices were also required to take oaths. The importance of oath-taking in the Italian communes meant that those who were prohibited from taking oaths, such as Franciscan tertiaries, were often in conflict with the civil authorities.

As the Italian city-states prospered, they had to worry about outside threats as well as internal instability. The Holy Roman Emperor and the Pope had vied for power in Italy since the eighth century. In 751, Pope Zachary agreed that Pepin should be crowned the Holy Roman Emperor instead of the Merovingian king Childeric III, who at this point was merely a figurehead. In gratitude, Pepin conquered the Lombards in northern Italy and offered the territory to the Pope in an agreement known as the Donation of Pepin.⁵¹ Therefore, both the Holy Roman Emperor and Pope felt they had a political claim over the Italian city-states. In 1152, Frederick Barbarossa ascended the imperial throne and tried to reassert his authority over the Italian communes.⁵² However, many cities resisted, and war broke out throughout the peninsula. Threatened by Frederick’s military incursion, the Pope asserted his own political claim. Soon the city-states were divided into factions: the Guelfs supported the Pope, while the Ghibellines supported Barbarossa and his heirs.⁵³ Foligno was part of the Ghibelline faction. The counts of Antignano, who controlled the commune, supported the emperor and even hosted the young Frederick II.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 236.

⁵¹ Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 229.

⁵² Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 229.

⁵³ Malcom Barber, *The Two Cities*, 233.

⁵⁴ Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," *Angela da Foligno, terziaria francescana: atti del Convegno storico nel VII centenario dell'ingresso della beata Angela da Foligno nell'Ordine francescano secolare (1291-1991)*, (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1992), 274.

Because of their ties with the Holy Roman Empire, the Antignano family were chosen as the representatives of Foligno in the Umbrian federation of proponents of the Empire.⁵⁵ In 1240, Frederick II returned to Foligno and set plans in motion to make it the center of the imperial federation, including building city walls and an imperial palace.⁵⁶ However, the hopes of the counts of Antignano were dashed when Frederick II suffered defeat at Parma in 1248 and died two years later.⁵⁷ The Antignano family was forced to beg forgiveness from Innocent IV, who pardoned the city. But, Perugia, part of the Guelf faction that supported the pope, viewed Foligno as a competitor since they both attracted traffic through major trading routes. Taking advantage of Foligno's weakness, Perugia laid siege to the town for seven weeks. In 1254 Foligno was forced to accept a humiliating peace agreement.⁵⁸ Foligno rebuilt its walls, but it suffered a series of disasters in the 1270s and 1280s, a period of war, discord, and constant turbulence.⁵⁹ In 1279, an earthquake devastated the Umbrian valley, war with Perugia broke out over trade in 1282–83 and again in 1287–89,⁶⁰ and a horrible windstorm (Sensi calls it a hurricane) ravaged the city and destroyed crops in 1282.⁶¹ Ferré puts Angela's conversion and the death of her family at 1288, making it likely that she was influenced by the wars and natural disasters of the time period.⁶²

The religious makeup of Foligno also demonstrates that it was a hotbed of religious enthusiasm. Luciano Radi writes that the Franciscans were in Foligno during Francis's lifetime. In 1258, the Hermits of St. Augustine started construction on their new church. The Dominicans built

⁵⁵ Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," 275.

⁵⁶ Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," 276.

⁵⁷ Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," 276.

⁵⁸ Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," 277.

⁵⁹ Luciano Radi, *Angela da Foligno e l'Umbria mystica del secolo XIII*, 25.

⁶⁰ Luciano Radi, *Angela da Foligno e l'Umbria mystica del secolo XIII*, 25.

This was around the time of Angela's conversion to the religious life.

⁶¹ Luciano Radi, *Angela da Foligno e l'Umbria mystica del secolo XIII*, 26. Mario Sensi, "Foligno all'incrocio delle strade," 278.

⁶² M.J. Ferré, "Les Principales dates de la vie d'Angèle de Foligno," *Revue d'histoire franciscaine* 2 (1925): 21–34.

theirs in 1285. The Servants of Mary (Servites) were called to the city by the bishop and were housed in S. Giacomo church. There were at least four Augustinian monasteries: at Valle Verde, Suor Giuliana, S. Giovanni Battista, and Todiscore. Lay groups were also active; the lay community of S. Maria de Caresta and the community of S. Caterina became monastic groups affiliated with the Poor Ladies of San Damiano in 1260 and 1267, and S. Maria de Caritate transferred to the old monastery and hospital of S. Claudio in 1237.⁶³ There were also many lay penitents, including Pietro Crisci, a wealthy man who became a hermit. Angela mentions him in the eighteenth step when she talks about selling her country villa, saying that she used to “make fun of a certain Pietruccio, but now I could not do otherwise than follow his example.”⁶⁴

Biographical Sketch

Angela of Foligno was born in 1248 and lived a full life as a wife and mother before her conversion at the age of thirty-seven. In the twenty-five years before she died in 1309, Angela gained a reputation for holiness and gathered a group of followers, mostly Franciscan friars and pious laypeople. Most of what we know from her life comes from her *Liber*, which has been described as “the premier text of all Franciscan women mystics.”⁶⁵ In the following biographical sketch, I will discuss Angela’s conversion in 1285, the pilgrimage to Assisi, the creation of the Memorial, Angela’s inner life (including her focus on poverty and the passion of Christ), and finally Angela’s relationship with her spiritual sons who gathered around her as her disciples towards the end of her life.

⁶³ Luciano Radi, *Angela da Foligno e l’Umbria mystica del secolo XIII*, 29.

⁶⁴ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18. Latin text: “Et prius faciebam trufas de Petrucio, sed postea nullo modo poteram facere aliud.”

⁶⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 141.

Conversion

Angela records very little about her life before her conversion. Her writings suggest that she came from a wealthy background—she tells Brother A. that she turned her back on worldly goods, such as her best garments, fine food, and her fancy headdress.⁶⁶ Angela also records that she sold her country villa and other pieces of land and gave the proceeds to the poor,⁶⁷ suggesting that she either came from or married into a family of means. We know she was a wife and mother because she describes the loss of her husband and sons, as well as of her own mother.⁶⁸ Although the details of her education are unknown, it is likely that she could read in Latin and the vernacular.⁶⁹ Scholars are less certain about her ability to write, although some have argued that she was literate (able to read and write in Latin) because the *Instructions* contains letters that Angela read and responded to in Latin without any mention of a scribe or secretary.⁷⁰

Angela's conversion took place in 1285 at the age of thirty-seven.⁷¹ She states that she became aware of her sinfulness and desired a confessor.⁷² She prayed to St. Francis and he appeared to her later that night, saying, "Sister, if you had asked me sooner, I would have complied with your request sooner. Nonetheless, your request is granted."⁷³ The following morning, she confessed to the chaplain of the bishop in the cathedral of St. Felician. There are two common misconceptions about Angela's conversion in some of the early scholarship on Angela. The first is that the priest that Angela confessed to was Brother A. However, there is no textual or historical

⁶⁶ CW, 126. IL, 138. M, 8.

⁶⁷ CW, 126. IL, 138. M, 8.

⁶⁸ CW, 126. IL, 138. M, 8.

⁶⁹ CW, 16. IL, 26. M, xvi.

⁷⁰ CW, 16. Also see Andreoli, Sergio D., "La Beata Angela Era Analfabeta," *Gazzetta di Foligno* (1978): 5.

⁷¹ M.J. Ferré, "Les Principales dates de la vie d'Angèle de Foligno," 21—34.

⁷² CW, 124. IL, 132. M, 4.

⁷³ CW, 124. IL, 132. M, 4. Latin Text: "Soror, si citius rogasses me, citius fecissem tibi; sed quod petisti est tibi factum."

evidence that suggests that Brother A. and the confessor at St. Felician are the same person.⁷⁴ The second misconception is that Angela had committed a grave sexual sin, such as adultery. The text does suggest that Angela had a serious sin on her conscience, since she decided on the spot to confess, but worried that her sin was so grave that only the bishop could absolve her.⁷⁵ However, scholars such as Paul Lachance and Thier and Calufetti note that whatever Angela was worrying about, it did not cause public scandal in her community: “*non pare trattarsi di una condotta notoriamente scandalosa.*”⁷⁶

Although Angela says very little about her family, she does mention that they did not embrace her conversion. She writes that living with her husband was difficult because it was “bitter for me to put up with all the slanders and injustices leveled against me.”⁷⁷ Likewise, she describes her mother as “a great obstacle to me.”⁷⁸ However, this conflict with her family came to a resolution when they all died in a short amount of time.⁷⁹ Angela does not specify how they died, but scholars have speculated that it occurred in the 1280s and could have been the result of illness, war, or natural disasters: Foligno had an earthquake in 1279, a windstorm in 1282 that destroyed crops and resulted in a three-year famine, and was at war with Perugia in 1282–83 and 1287–89.⁸⁰

Most readers are shocked by Angela’s attitude about the death of her family. She states that she “had prayed to God for their death” and “felt a great consolation when it happened.”⁸¹

⁷⁴ Sensi, Mario, “Fra Berardo Arnolti Il ‘frater Scriptor’ Del Memoriale Di Angela?,” *Angèle de Foligno: Le Dossier* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1999), 134--35.

⁷⁵ *CW*, 124. *IL*, 132. *M*, 4

⁷⁶ *CW*, 82. *IL*, 27.

⁷⁷ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 138. *M*, 8. Latin text: “amarum erat mihi quando dicebatur mihi iniuria vel quando fiebat mihi iniuria.”

⁷⁸ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 138. *M*, 8. Latin text: “erat mihi magnum impedimentum.”

⁷⁹ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 138. *M*, 8.

⁸⁰ Sensi, Mario, “La Beata Angela nel contesto religioso folignate,” *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)*, ed. P. Clement Schmitt, O.F.M. (Perugia: Serafica Provincia di San Francesco O.F.M. Conv., 1987), 40, 45.

⁸¹ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 138. *M*, 8. Latin text: “rogaveram Deum quod morerentur, magnam consolationem inde habui scilicet de morte eorum.”

Although it may seem like Angela did not care about her family, Barbara Newman points out that Angela's attitude towards the death of her family is a common hagiographical trope known as maternal martyrdom.⁸² She writes that "maternal martyrdom is especially common in the vitae of Italian tertiaries and other urban widows, partly because the loss of children could be assimilated into the Franciscan ideal of poverty, partly because the dowry system made it difficult for these widows to keep their children in any case."⁸³ Losing one's children was thus transformed, particularly in Italy, into a symbolic anecdote to show that the saint imitated Christ's poverty even to that point. It was also a form of imitating Mary, who lost her only son to death.

After the death of her family, Angela was free to live the life of a medieval penitent. She made her simple profession and likely became a member of the Franciscan Third Order of Penance. She sold most of her properties and lived with a spiritual companion named Masazuola.⁸⁴ Shortly after her profession, Angela made a pilgrimage to Rome to ask St. Peter to obtain from Christ the grace of practicing "perfect poverty (*perfectam paupertatem*)."⁸⁵ She then traveled to Assisi where she prayed to Francis that she might feel Christ's presence, observe the rule of St. Francis, and remain truly poor to the end.⁸⁶ Her pilgrimage to Assisi was an important turning point, not only for the intensity of her mystical experiences, but also for the creation of the *Memorial*. It is in Assisi that she first met Brother A. and sowed the seeds of their future collaboration.

⁸² Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) 84.

⁸³ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 87.

⁸⁴ In most manuscripts of the *Memorial*, Angela's companion is simply named M. or Ma. However, in the Trivulziana manuscript, written in the end of the fourteenth or beginning of the fifteenth century, she is called Masazuola. See *CW*, 23.

⁸⁵ *CW*, 139. *IL*, 178. *M*, 36.

⁸⁶ *CW*, 139. *IL*, 178. *M*, 36.

Pilgrimage to Assisi

According to her writings, at the crossroads between Spello and Assisi, the Holy Spirit came to Angela and promised that the Trinity would enter into her and stay with her throughout her pilgrimage until she entered the church of St. Francis for a second time. The words that God shared with Angela on her journey to Assisi are intimate and tender; they echo the language of the *Song of Songs*. For example, in the Song of Songs, the Lover speaks directly to the Beloved and calls her “my love, my fair one...my dove”⁸⁷ as well as “my sister, my bride.”⁸⁸ Similarly, God calls Angela “my dear and sweet daughter, my delight, my temple...my daughter and my sweet spouse”⁸⁹ in the *Memorial*. When Angela doubted that God would ever speak to her, he assured her that she wouldn’t be able to stop listening to his voice on the pilgrimage.⁹⁰ And when Angela worried that his loving words would make her vain, God challenged her to produce a vain thought.⁹¹ Angela decided to test God’s words in order to prove that she was not being deceived. She tried to look at the vineyards around her, but everywhere she looked, God would say “This is my creation.” Since the Latin text is “*Ista est mea creatura*,”⁹² it is unclear whether God refers to the vineyard (the feminine *vinea*) or to Angela herself. The text is deliberately ambiguous because as God was speaking to Angela and entering her soul, the boundaries of her being were expanding. Thrust into the heart of the Trinity, Angela saw that all things were within her as they are in God. God told her, “If everyone in the world somehow came along with you, you would not be able to

⁸⁷ *Song* 2:10, NRSV.

⁸⁸ *Song* 4:9, NRSV.

⁸⁹ *CW*, 139–140. *IL*, 180. *M*, 38. Latin text: “*Filia mea, dulcis mihi, filia mea, delectum meum, templum meum...Filia et sponsa dulcis mihi.*”

⁹⁰ *CW*, 140. *IL*, 180. *M*, 38.

⁹¹ *CW*, 140. *IL*, 180. *M*, 38.

⁹² *CW*, 140. *IL*, 180. *M*, 38.

speak to them as distinct from you because everyone in the world is already with you.”⁹³ The Latin is even more expansive. It states that “the whole world is already with you,” implying not only people but also all created things are with Angela.

Like Francis of Assisi, Angela was highly aware of the presence of God in creation and in the people around her. For example, when Angela experienced a vision of the fullness of God, she “beheld the fullness of God in which I beheld and 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.”⁹⁴ Seeing God present in all things, Angela cried out, “This world is pregnant with God!”⁹⁵ As God drew Angela into himself throughout her spiritual journey, she often expressed her feeling of connection to all things, as if her being was expanding to encompass all of creation. For example, when she received communion, God told her, “Wherever I am the faithful are also with me.”⁹⁶ Angela perceived that this was true because she noticed that she “was everywhere he was.”⁹⁷ Since God is everywhere, then it followed that Angela is as well. This blending and permeability of boundaries between self, other, God, and creation occurs also in the *Instructions*. In a letter to one of her spiritual sons, Angela writes that God “shows me almost everything in you, inside and out, so that with a new and indescribable joy, I am made an entirely new person in you, so much so that I cannot take my eyes off you.... This love is so intense that I ask [God] who produced it to

⁹³ CW, 140. *IL*, 180–182. *M*, 40. Latin text: “Si totus mundus venire modo tecum, tu non posses modo eis loqui, quia tecum venit totus mundus.”

⁹⁴ CW, 169-170. *IL*, 262. *M*, 90. This is the first time Angela mentions the word “abyss.” In the *Instructions*, she often characterizes God as an infinite abyss. Latin text: “videbam unam plenitudinem Dei in qua comprehendebam totum mundum, scilicet ultra mare et citra mare et abyssum et mare et omnia. Et in omnibus praedictis non discernebam nisi tantum potentiam divinam.”

⁹⁵ CW, 170. *IL*, 262. *M*, 90. Latin text: “Est iste mundus praegnans de Deo!”

⁹⁶ CW, 217. *IL*, 396. *M*, 180. Latin text: “Ubicumque sum ego, sunt fideles mei mecum.”

⁹⁷ CW, 217. *IL*, 396. *M*, 180. Latin text: “inveniebam me ubicumque ipse erat.”

moderate it, because it seems to me that I am no longer myself but you.”⁹⁸ For Angela, love expands the self and creates permeable borders between the self and other. This is perhaps most prominently seen in her meditation on the passion of Christ, in which Angela suffered with him through a process I will call radical compassion.

When Angela finally reached Assisi and genuflected at the entrance of the Church for the second time, she saw a stained-glass window of Christ holding St. Francis. God told her, “Thus I will hold you closely to me and much more closely than can be observed with the eyes of the body.”⁹⁹ Although God’s words to Angela seem like those that would pass between two lovers, the image of Christ holding St. Francis is a very maternal image. The window, still extant, portrays Christ with his arms on the shoulders of a child-sized St. Francis. Directly next to that image is the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child with one hand on his shoulder. The visual parallel suggests that Christ loves Francis the way the Virgin Mary loves her child. The maternal aspect of the image may be why God repeatedly calls Angela “sweet daughter” as well as “sweet spouse.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *CW*, 271, *IL*, 580. Latin text: “Videtur mihi quod ostendat mihi quasi quidquid est in te et interius et exterius, ita quod cum nova laetitia et ineffabili et omnino alia sum facta in te, in tantum quod oculos meos super te levare non possum...iste amor est ita intensus, quod rogo illum qui fecit quod temperet eum, quia videtur mihi quod non sum mea sed tua.”

⁹⁹ *CW*, 141, *IL*, 184, *M*, 42. Latin text: “Ita te astrictam tenebo et multo plus quam possit considerari cum oculis corporis.”

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, 140, 141, *IL*, 182, *M*, 40.

I do not suggest here that the maternal aspect image of Christ with St. Francis precludes an erotic interpretation of Angela’s ongoing dialogue with God throughout the pilgrimage to Assisi. As scholars such as Karma Lochrie and Amy Hollywood suggest, the medieval imagination was able to make room for both the maternal and the erotic, often at the same time. For more information on this, please see p. 146–53 of chapter three.

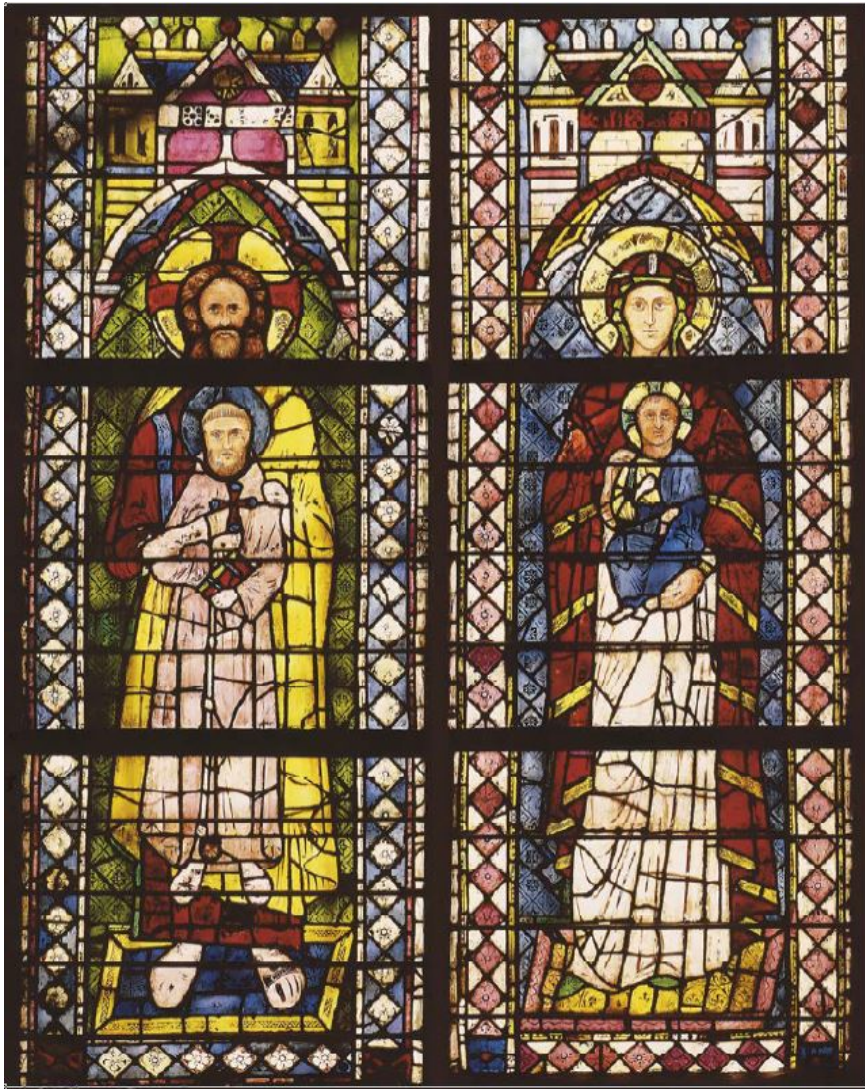


Figure 1: Christ holding Francis and Mary holding Christ. Basilica Superiore, Assisi, c.1276. Photograph by Gerhard Ruf, Archivio Sacro Convento, Assisi.

Immediately after God finished speaking, he gradually withdrew his presence from within Angela's soul. At this point Angela began screaming, although unintelligibly: "Love still unknown, why do you leave me?"¹⁰¹ Brother A. was present at the church, and filled with embarrassment and indignation, told her that she should never dare come to Assisi again.

¹⁰¹ CW, 142. *IL*, 184. *M*, 42. Latin text: "Amor non cognitus, et quare scilicet me dimittis?"

Creation of the Memorial

Shortly afterwards, Brother A. was sent to Foligno, where he decided to meet with Angela and investigate her screaming. Angela agreed to tell him what had happened but made him promise not to tell anyone she knew.¹⁰² Brother A. states that he was worried that Angela had been seized by an evil spirit, so he “made a strong effort to arouse her suspicions because I myself had so many.”¹⁰³ He writes that he “compelled her” (*coegi*) to tell him everything. Brother A. admits that Angela began to tell him everything because she feared that she could be deceived, since she “did not yet have the degree of clarity and perfect certitude which she had later.”¹⁰⁴ At first, Brother A. wrote “briefly and carelessly, jotting down notes on a small sheet of paper as a sort of ‘memorial.’”¹⁰⁵ But “it was revealed to Christ’s faithful one” that he should use a “large copy book” instead of a small sheet of paper.¹⁰⁶ Even so, Brother A. writes that he “only half believed her,” so he chose to write on “two or three blank pages.” Of course, this was not sufficient, and he had to make a “copy book of quality paper” in order to record the *Memorial*.¹⁰⁷

Once he started writing, Brother A.’s doubts were quickly assuaged. He laments that Angela’s words were so beautiful and sublime that he often did not understand them. Brother A.

Lachance’s English translation seems to have a superfluous “still.” The phrase should be “love unknown” not “love still unknown.” Although the difference seems minor, there are some theological implications which I explore on p. 165.

¹⁰² *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32.

¹⁰³ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32. Latin text: “Valde conatus fui reddere ei illud suspectum quia et ego illud suspectum habebam tunc.”

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32. Latin text: “Et ipsa, quia non erat adhuc in gradu clarissimae et perfectissimae certitudinis sicut postea fuit.”

¹⁰⁵ *CW*, 136. *IL*, 166. *M*, 30. Latin text: “Et minus plene et negligenter incoepi scribere, quasi proquodam mihi memoriali, in una carta parvuncula.”

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, 136. *IL*, 166–168. *M*, 30. Latin text: “Et illi fideli Christi revelatum fuit et dictum...quod ego non unam cartam parvunculam sed quaternum magnum acciperem ad scribendum.”

It is interesting that Brother A. states that God revealed to Angela that he would need a large copy book. Perhaps he did not say that Angela said it herself because saying something like that directly might have been perceived as a challenge to his authority.

¹⁰⁷ *CW*, 136. *IL*, 168. *M*, 30. Latin text: “Sed quia ego non credidi bene, scripsi in duabus vel tribus cartulis quas in libello meo potui vacuas reperire; postea vero coactus feci quaternum de bambicino.”

admits to difficulties writing down Angela's dictation, and notes that he often had to omit parts of her account.¹⁰⁸ However, he insisted on only writing when Angela was present with him, in order that he copy her words exactly, without adding a single word of his own.¹⁰⁹ Of course, Brother A. does add his own words; the entirety of chapter two is told from his perspective. It is therefore difficult to tell how much of the account is truly Angela's. I will examine issues of authorship and Brother A.'s trustworthiness as a scribe in chapter three. However, we can credit Brother A. with good intentions. He viewed his work as transcribing the words of God and always "took the trouble beforehand to confess my sins" so that if he asked Angela a question, divine grace would help the answer come out in an "orderly way."¹¹⁰ He took his responsibility of recording God's words and action within Angela's soul very seriously. Brother A. also acknowledges his deficiency as a scribe and notes that he was doing his best under trying circumstances. Brother A. would meet with Angela on a bench in the church of St. Francis in Foligno.¹¹¹ Because meetings between men and women were viewed with suspicion, Brother A.'s superiors opposed his work and at one point the "guardian and provincial strictly forbade" him to write.¹¹² Nevertheless, they were able to finish the *Memorial* in a period of four years, from 1292–96.

Angela's Inner Life in the Memorial

Since I will go through the stages of Angela's mystical itinerary later, in this section I will examine Angela's spiritual life in a thematic, rather than sequential way. Angela's inner life is rich and multifaceted. However, there are some themes that stand out in the *Memorial*, specifically

¹⁰⁸ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172. *M*, 32.

¹⁰⁹ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 172. *M*, 32.

¹¹⁰ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172–174. *M*, 34. Latin text: "Et studui aliquando confessionem praemittere peccatorum meorum, recognoscens a divina gratia esse quod, de quacumque re Deus mihi inquirere inspirabat, ordinate terminabatur."

¹¹¹ *IL*, 45.

¹¹² *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34. Latin text: "Et quia multum murmurantes fratres fecerunt mihi a guardiano et etiam cum reprehensione a ministro firmiter prohiberi."

poverty and the passion of Christ. Angela's emphasis on poverty is consistent with her status as a member of the Franciscan Third Order of Penance and her affinity with Franciscan spirituality. She also emphasizes the passion of Christ throughout the *Memorial* and engages in compassionate meditation on his sufferings, a common practice among the devout.

Poverty

Angela was born only two decades after the death of Francis of Assisi and lived her entire life in the city of Foligno, a mere twenty-one miles from the center of his life and ministry. She was deeply attracted to the Franciscan idea of poverty and was active among the Spiritual Franciscans.¹¹³ Therefore, it is not surprising that poverty would be an important part of her spiritual life. Shortly after Angela's conversion, she experienced an acute sense that Christ was crucified because of her own sinfulness. Imitating St. Francis, who renounced his father's wealth by stripping in the town square, Angela stripped off her clothing, vowed perpetual chastity, and offered each one of her sinful bodily members to Christ.¹¹⁴ Realizing that the physical act must be followed by a spiritual act of renouncing worldly goods and attachments, Angela summarized what this would involve: "forgiving all who had offended me, stripping myself of everything worldly, of all attachments to men and women, of my friends and relatives, and everyone else, and, likewise, of my possessions and even my very self."¹¹⁵ To be truly poor, she had to do more than sell her possessions. Her poverty had to be internal as well as external.

¹¹³ For more information on Angela and the Spiritual Franciscans, see p. 52—5.

¹¹⁴ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 136. *M*, 8.

¹¹⁵ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 138. *M*, 8. Latin text: "Quod parcerem omnibus qui me offendissent et expoliarem me de omnibus terrenis et de omnibus hominibus et feminis et de omnibus amicis et parentibus et de omnibus aliis et de possessione mea et de meis." "

The Passion of Christ

Angela began to look at the cross in the seventh step of her mystical itinerary, and from there Christ's passion became the center of her inner life. Her early experiences of the passion were fragmented and graphic. For example, in the tenth step, Christ showed Angela each of his wounds, from the hairs plucked out of his beard to the blows of the whip on his back.¹¹⁶ In the fourteenth step, Christ appeared to her on the cross and invited her to place her mouth at his side so that she could drink his blood.¹¹⁷ In the first supplementary step, Angela meditates on the "nails, which...had driven a little bit of the flesh of his hands and feet into the wood."¹¹⁸ Desiring to see the flesh that had been nailed into the wood, Angela lay prostrate and cruciform. In this position, she received a vision of Christ's throat or neck, which she describes as exquisitely beautiful. This vision is one of the first in which Angela transitions from the physical passion of Christ to his divine nature. She states that "through this beauty [of Christ's neck] it seemed to me that I was seeing Christ's divinity."¹¹⁹

Angela's later visions of the passion incorporated more narrative elements of the story and focused more on spiritual suffering.¹²⁰ For example, in the fifth supplementary step, Angela received a vision that exceeded what she had heard about the passion from the Gospels. She said that she saw even more than she had ever known or heard of about the passion, including the "hearts impiously hardened against [Christ]," those who wanted to "destroy his name," the "subtle cunning" they used to make designs and plans against him, the rage they felt against him, and the

¹¹⁶ *CW*, 127. *IL*, 138—140. *M*, 10.

¹¹⁷ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142—144. *M*, 12.

¹¹⁸ *CW*, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. Latin text: "Et cogitabam de clavis illis, quos ego audiveram dici quod clavi illi de manibus et pedibus eius carnem portaverunt intus in ligno."

¹¹⁹ *CW*, 146. *IL*, 194. *M*, 50. Latin text: "et erat tanta pulchritudo illius gulae vel gutturis, et quod intelligebam illam pulchritudinem resultare ex deitate."

¹²⁰ I am only speaking here of the first nineteen steps. Angela receives fragmented and graphic visions of Christ's body up to the fourth supplementary step.

“acute and manifold” suffering that he not only bore but also foresaw.¹²¹ These additions to the narrative reveal Angela’s desire to explore all the details of the passion and to insert herself into the narrative as a spectator. She even becomes a participant in the events of the passion when she has the vision of lying with Christ in the sepulcher on Holy Saturday.¹²² Angela is also given insight into the acute pain in Christ’s soul. In these visions, Angela felt Christ’s pain with him: “my pain, then exceeded by far any that I had ever experienced. That my body could not sustain me then should not be cause for wonder, for at that point I could feel no joy.”¹²³ Like Christ, she was afflicted both physically and spiritually in her soul. Her spiritual suffering becomes so intense in the sixth supplementary step that she repeats the cry of Christ on the cross: “My son, my son, do not abandon me, my son!”¹²⁴ I will discuss Angela’s focus on spiritual pain in more depth in chapter four.

Compassionate meditation on Christ’s suffering was a common practice in the Middle Ages. According to Amy Hollywood, medieval meditation was a mental process:

that generates emotion, which in turn facilitates the act of memorialization. The beginning of the meditative life for monastics, Franciscans, and the lay audiences for whom Franciscans often wrote (among them Angela of Foligno) lies in the inculcation of guilt (and with it contrition), which leads to further acts of meditation (including, for the Franciscans, actions imitative of Christ) through which that guilt is expiated.¹²⁵

¹²¹ *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290–292. *M*, 110. Latin text: “Christus videbat omnia corda impietate obstinata contra se; et videbat omnia membra cum grandi sollicitudine destruere nomen suum, et quomodo de eo habebant magnam memoriam ad eum destruendum; et videbat omnes subilitates quas faciebant contra se Filium Dei; et videbat omnia consilia et multitudinem consiliorum et iras illas grandissimas eorum, et videbat omnes apparatus et omnes cogitationes quas faciebant quomodo possent eum magis crudelius affligere, quia crudelis poenalitas passionis suae fuit multa; et videbat omnes poenalitates et iniurias et verecundias—et anima mea videbat plus de passione sua quam ego volo dicere.”

¹²² *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 112–114.

¹²³ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: “Tunc fui in tanto dolore maiori quam unquam fuerim experta vel habuerim; quod si corpus meum hic deficit non est admirandum, adhuc enim non possum habere laetitiam.”

¹²⁴ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 349. *M*, 142. Latin text: “Fili mi, fili mi, non me dimittas, fili mi!”

¹²⁵ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 71.

Lachance notes that during Angela's lifetime, emphasis on the "pathetic elements of Christ's humanity" was fostered by devotional literature.¹²⁶ Many devout men and women were attracted to meditation on Christ's passion, which Lachance defines as a "imaginative representation" or reenactment of the passion in prayer.¹²⁷

However, Angela's compassion for Christ went beyond imagining the passion with the senses and experiencing mere sympathy for his suffering. What distinguishes Angela's compassionate meditation from that of other medieval practitioners is the radical nature of her practice. She did not just meditate on the passion of Christ to elicit feelings of sympathy, love, guilt, or contrition; she desired to experience suffering *with* Christ (*com + passio*). Therefore, she not only *saw* the events of Christ's passion in her meditations and visions, but also *felt* Christ's pain interiorly. I will refer to this practice of entering into the passion of Christ as radical compassion.

In the sixth supplementary step, Angela endured the most painful period of her inner life, in which she experienced Christ's abandonment on the cross. Just as Christ's sufferings were ineffable, Angela's bodily ailments were "beyond any kind of comparison."¹²⁸ The image she uses to describe the suffering of her soul is as shockingly violent as the torture of crucifixion: "she found herself incapable of finding any other comparison than that of a man hanged by the neck who, with his hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air."¹²⁹ Under this pressure the virtues that Angela assiduously cultivated throughout her life suddenly departed.

¹²⁶ *CW*, 41.

¹²⁷ *CW*, 41.

¹²⁸ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 338. *M*, 140. Latin text: "quas multo plures sine comparatione dicebat esse."

¹²⁹ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 338. *M*, 140. Latin text: "nullam sciebat assignare similitudinem aliam nisi de homine suspenso per gulam, qui, ligatis manibus post tergum et velates oculis, suspensus per funem remanisset in furcis et viveret, cui nullum auxilium, nullum omnino sustentamentum vel remedium remanisset."

Angela found herself tormented by demons to the point of despair. At times she was so filled with rage that she began to injure her body: “I cannot restrain from horribly beating myself and I raise welts on my head and various parts of my body.”¹³⁰ Abandoned by the God she loved so deeply, Angela cried “My son, my son, do not abandon me my son.”¹³¹ She echoes the cries of Christ on the cross when he feels abandoned by the Father. Brother A. reports that Angela’s endured this horrific suffering for two years. But the torments of the sixth supplementary step were followed by the experience of seeing God in a transcendent darkness. In the seventh supplementary step, Angela is united to God so completely that she sees herself standing in the midst of the Trinity. All of her previous experiences are transcended.

Angela and her Spiritual Sons

After Angela and Brother A. finished the *Memorial* in 1296, Angela gained a reputation for sanctity and drew disciples, both clerical and lay. Her focus shifted from recording her experiences of the divine to teaching and guiding her “spiritual sons.” Although Angela gives spiritual instruction in the *Memorial*,¹³² in the *Instructions* her teachings are much more pronounced. Because the *Instructions* contains thirty-six separate texts written by different and unknown scribes, it is almost impossible to discern Angela’s authentic voice. Nevertheless, the *Instructions* can shed light on the relationship between Angela and her disciples and at the very least reveal how her teachings were interpreted.

¹³⁰ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 340. *M*, 140. Latin text: “Aliquando non possum tenere me quod non horribiliter percutiam me, et tumefeci mihi aliquando caput et alia membra.”

¹³¹ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: “Fili mi, fili mi, non me dimittas, fili mi!”

¹³² Brother A. records several of Angela’s teachings in the *Memorial*: that all can and must love God (*CW*, 153. *IL*, 214. *M*, 60–62.), that there is no excuse for rejecting the Divine Doctor (*CW*, 155. *IL*, 218. *M*, 64.), and how those who descend to follow the cross ascend to a place at the heavenly banquet (*CW*, 159. *IL*, 232. *M*, 72.). She also answers questions posed to her by Brother A. and the friars in his community (*CW*, 165–167. *IL*, 246–254. *M*, 82–86.) and enumerates seven ways in which God comes into the soul. (*CW*, 187–192. *IL*, 312–322. *M*, 120–130.)

Angela appears to have been wary of sharing her spiritual life after the *Memorial*. One scribe noted that she was reticent to speak of the divine gifts and spiritual experiences she received. He noted that Angela “was in the habit of saying, ‘My secret is mine.’”¹³³ In Instruction IV, the same scribe persuades Angela to talk about one of her visions, in which Christ appeared and blessed her spiritual sons. The vision reveals the motherly love she felt towards the group of friars who gathered around her towards the end of her life. Angela saw a multitude of sons appear around Jesus. One by one he embraced each of them with great love. Angela describes how Christ’s “hands drew each one’s head close to himself as he made them kiss the wound at his side.”¹³⁴ She adds that “it was totally impossible to express the deep and tender love for his sons, which shone in the eyes of the blessed face of the God and man Jesus Christ as he embraced them and pressed them to his sacred wound.”¹³⁵ Shortly afterwards, Angela received a vision of the Virgin Mary embracing her spiritual sons. In this vision, she saw the purification of all her sons according to three degrees: a general purification of every fault, a special purification granted only to a few, and a third that “gives such an extraordinary beauty that she absolutely refused to tell me anything about it, except that it was indescribable.”¹³⁶ Obviously unsatisfied with her answer, the friar pushed Angela to describe the third degree of purification. In exasperation, Angela finally exclaimed, “What do you want me to say? My sons seem to be so transformed in God that it is as if I see nothing but God in them, in both his glorified and suffering state, as if God had totally

¹³³ *CW*, 248. *IL*, 496. Latin text: “consuevit semper dicere: Secretum meum mihi.”

¹³⁴ *CW*, 246. *IL*, 492. Latin text: “Ad vulnus lateris osculandum cum mandibus eorum stringes capita applicabat.”

¹³⁵ *CW*, 247. *IL*, 492—494. Latin text: “Dixit autem omnino ei esse impossibile exprimere evisceratum amorem, qui relucebat in aspectu oculorum illius benedictae faciei Dei et hominis Jesu Christi super istos filios, et in amplexu et applicatione ad sacrum vulnus.”

¹³⁶ *CW*, 249. *IL*, 500. Latin text: “In tertia autem est tantus excessus quod omnino nihil poteram habere ab ea dicente ipsa quod omnino est ineffabile.”

The three stages Angela mentions are reminiscent of Pseudo-Dionysius’ purgative, illuminative, and unitive stages. For more information on the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Angela, see p. 159—167.

transubstantiated and absorbed them into the unfathomable depths of his life.”¹³⁷ If an accurate representation of her thought, this statement is the closest Angela comes to describing an indistinct union between the soul and God.

Angela’s motherly concern for her sons was also expressed in trying to make peace between the Spiritual and Conventual Franciscans. Although Angela’s natural sympathies most likely lay with the Spiritual Franciscans, she urged the friars to be humble and meek like Christ. Referring to the controversy about the *usus pauper*,¹³⁸ Angela notes that Christ did not say “‘Learn from me to despise the world and to live in poverty,’ although he lived in very great poverty and wished that his disciples live the same way...He said simply: ‘Learn from me because I am meek and humble of heart.’”¹³⁹ Angela taught that humility is the most important virtue. Without it, living in perfect poverty would be meaningless.¹⁴⁰ Rather than arguing amongst themselves, Angela urged the friars to instead imitate the meekness and humility of Christ. In Instruction V, she explicitly states that humility will stop infighting among the friars: “You will no longer be prone to disputes and quarrels, Instead, like the suffering God-man, you will be like the deaf who do not hear, the mutes who do not speak; and you will become a true member of the body of Jesus Christ, who, according to the word of the apostle, was not in the habit of getting into quarrels.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ *CW*, 249. *IL*, 500. Latin text: “Quid vis ut dicam? Ipse videntur transformati in Deum sic quod quasi nihil in eis aliud video quam Deum, nunc gloriosum nunc passionatum, ita quod istos videtur totaliter in se transsubstantiasse et inabysasse.”

¹³⁸ See the Introduction p. 45–49 for a definition of *usus pauper* and the controversy between the Spiritual and Conventual Franciscans.

¹³⁹ *CW*, 252. *IL*, 506–508. Latin text: “Non dixit ‘Discite a me mundum spernere et in paupertate vivere,’ quamvis ipse in paupertate maxima vixerat et in ea suos discipulos vivere voluerit...sed oc solum dixit: Discite a me quia mitis sum et humilis corde.”

¹⁴⁰ *CW*, 252. *IL*, 508.

¹⁴¹ *CW*, 254. *IL*, 512. Latin text: “Et tunc ad lites et contentiones non eritis ita proni, sed potius eritis cum Deo homine passionato sicut surdi non audientes et sicut muti qui aperire nequeunt ora sua; atque ita eritis veracia membra corporis Jesu Christi, quorum consuetudo est secundum apostolum non contentionibus deservire.”

Angela exhorts the friars to be mute and deaf so that they cannot hear or speak insults and thus will avoid quarrels like Christ.

The *Instructions* also mention Brother A., Angela's most important spiritual son, once, shortly before his death in 1300.¹⁴² If accurate, there is a beautiful story in Instruction XXVI in which, while Brother A. celebrates Mass at the Portiuncula, God tells Angela "you will have sons, and all of them will receive this blessing, for all my sons are yours, and yours, mine."¹⁴³ After they returned to Foligno, God confirmed the message during Brother A.'s last Mass.¹⁴⁴ As she received communion, God told her, "This intimate son of yours will be a source of great joy for you; I confirm the eternal blessing I gave him. I am the one who takes away sins; none but I can do so. I have removed from him the guilt and the penalty."¹⁴⁵ She told Brother A. immediately after he finished Mass. When he heard the words, he "took off his capuche, bowed his head, and wept."¹⁴⁶

Angela died on January 4th, 1309; her death is recorded in Instruction XXXVI and the Obituary. The Epilogue reveals how much Angela's disciples revered her and her teachings, as the anonymous author calls her a "teacher in the discipline of God" (*doctrix disciplinae Dei*).¹⁴⁷ After her death, Angela's *Liber* was compiled and disseminated throughout Europe. Although efforts to canonize her began almost immediately after her death, Angela was not beatified until 1701. She was finally canonized only in 2013.

¹⁴² *CW*, 411, note 139.

¹⁴³ *CW*, 284. *IL*, 628. Latin text: "Tu habebis filios, et istam benedictionem habeant omnes, quia omnes filii mei sunt tui, et tui sunt mei."

¹⁴⁴ *CW*, 411, note 139.

¹⁴⁵ *CW*, 284. *IL*, 630. Latin text: "De isto intimo filio tuo multum laetaberis; et ego confirmo benedictionem aeternalem quam dedi sibi. Et ego sum qui tollo peccata, et nullus potest auferre peccata nisi ego; et ego abstuli ab eo culpam et poenam."

¹⁴⁶ *CW*, 284. *IL*, 630. Latin text: "Extraxit sibi caputium et inclinavit caput et lacrimatus est."

¹⁴⁷ *CW*, 318. *IL*, 742.

CHAPTER 2: The Memorial: History and Authorship

In order to introduce the reader to Angela's writings, I first provide a detailed manuscript history of the *Liber* in which I discuss the various critical editions of Angela's work, redaction theories that attempt to explain the differences seen in the manuscripts, new developments in codicological and paleographical research, and my decision to focus on the *Memorial* rather than the *Liber* as a whole. I then examine the problem of authorship of the *Memorial*. Since the work was dictated to a friar who openly admits to his incompetence, how can we trust that the words are Angela's rather than her scribe's? Can we even say that Angela is the author of the *Memorial*? Is the theology present in the text her own—could it be fabricated or at the very least influenced by Brother A.? In this section, I will argue that the *Memorial* should be read as a collaboratively authored work and that scholars must approach the text with some caution and suspicion due to the complex power dynamics between Angela and Brother A.

Manuscript History of the *Liber*

Angela's *Liber* has a complex manuscript and redaction history that has been the subject of much scholarly debate. The book is composed of two texts: the *Memorial*, written by Angela and Brother A., and the *Instructions*, a collection of thirty-nine separate texts of differing and often unknown origin. In the twentieth century alone, five critical editions have been published, none of which are considered authoritative. The most recent is Ludger Thier and Abele Calufetti's 1985 critical edition. However, Enrico Menestò published a critical edition of only the *Memorial* in 2013.¹ In this section, I will briefly examine the critical editions of Angela's *Liber*, discuss Thier and Calufetti's dual redaction theory as well as Menestò's critique and alternate theory, and discuss some recent developments in codicological and paleographical research. I will conclude by providing a rationale for my decision to focus almost exclusively on the *Memorial* in this dissertation.

Critical Editions of the *Memorial*

There are twenty-eight extant manuscripts of the *Liber*, including seventeen in Latin, eight in Italian, and three in Spanish, ranging from the fourteenth to the fifteenth century.² Thier and Calufetti organized them into seven families.³ The first and second are the most important, not only because they are the source of Thier and Calufetti's dual redaction theory, which I will discuss shortly, but also because all critical editions of Angela's *Liber* have relied on manuscripts from

¹ In this dissertation, I have used the 2015 edition of Menestò critical edition of the *Memorial*.

² Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," *Angela da Foligno, terziaria francescana: atti del Convegno storico nel VII centenario dell'ingresso della beata Angela da Foligno nell'Ordine francescano secolare (1291-1991)* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 1992), 162.

The Madrid codex (Biblioteca Nacional 9020), which Thier and Calufetti place in the third family, is dated to the fourteenth century. The fact that Angela's works were disseminated so early in Spain makes it possible that they were known by later spiritual writers such as Francisco de Osuna and Teresa of Avila.

³ *IL*, 51–73. Menestò disagrees with Thier and Calufetti's organization of the twenty-eight manuscripts because they organize them by structure, i.e., according to what parts of the *Memorial* and *Instructions* the manuscripts include or exclude. Menestò does not believe that they sufficiently explore the relationships between the manuscripts and finds it problematic that they group vernacular and Latin texts together.

those two families. The first includes five manuscripts of Belgian origin and the second includes eight manuscripts of Italian origin (including the Assisi and Subiaco codices).

The earliest “critical edition” is Angela’s entry in the *Acta Sanctorum*, an encyclopedia of saints’ lives organized by feast day and compiled by the Bollandists in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Angela’s entry contains the “*Vita auctore Arnaldo Ordinis S. Francisci*,” which is most likely based on manuscripts in the first family. The *vita* is a disjointed version of the *Liber* that leaves out large sections of the text. Thier and Calufetti write that it is “*un mosaico dottrinale e mutilo degli scritti di Angela*.”⁴ Ernest Hello’s 1868 critical edition is likewise considered problematic because it is based on the structure used by the *Acta Sanctorum*. The five critical editions published since the turn of the twentieth century have relied on both families of manuscripts. Paul Doncoeur’s edition *Le livre de la bienheureuse soeur Angèle de Foligno du tiers ordre de S. François*, published in 1925, is mostly based on the Assisi codex (ms. 342, Biblioteca Comunale of Assisi) but also used the Subiaco codex as its guide for the *Instructions* (ms. 112, Biblioteca Monasterio S. Scolastica).⁵ Ferré used the Assisi codex in his *Le livre de l’expérience des vrais fidèles* (published in 1927), not only because it is the earliest extant manuscript, but because he believed it to be based on an original exemplar: “*Nous révèle...qu’il fut copié sur un texte revu et authentique pour la reproduction, sur un exemplar...un texte officiellement authentiqué des oeuvres d’Angèle*.”⁶ Faloci Pulignani’s *L’autobiografia e gli scritti della beata*

⁴ *IL*, 77. English text: “a doctrinal mosaic and mutilation of Angela’s writings.”

⁵ Enrico Menestò, “Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela,” 163.

Both manuscripts are from the second family of texts.

⁶ M.J. Ferré, *Le Livre de l’expériences des vrais fidèles*, (Editions E. Droz, 1927), xxvii-xxviii. Thier and Calufetti have dated the Assisi codex to 1314–81. Ferré is correct to assume that the Assisi codex is based on an exemplar, but Dominique Poirel has recently argued that several of the extant manuscripts may have been copied from the same exemplar, which was ambiguous enough to cause the differences between manuscripts, especially with regard to the number and order of the *Instructions*. See Dominique Poirel, “Le Liber d’Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu,” *Revue d’histoire des textes*, n 32 (2002), 235. English text: “It reveals to us...that it was copied on a revised and authentic text for reproduction, on an exemplar ... an officially authenticated text of Angela’s works.”

Angela da Foligno was published in 1932 and based on the Subiaco codex.⁷ Ludger Thier and Abele Calufetti's 1985 critical edition of *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno* took all twenty-eight manuscripts into account, but focused mainly on the first and second family. Enrico Menestò's 2013 critical edition of the *Memorial* corrected some of the errors from Thier and Calufetti, which I will discuss in the section on Menestò's critique of the dual redaction theory.

Thier and Calufetti's Dual Redaction Theory of the Memorial

Lacking the original document written by Angela and Brother A., scholars have attempted to determine which manuscript is closest to the original version. However, there are two versions of the *Memorial* that Thier and Calufetti believe represent two redactions of the same text: a shorter text represented mainly in manuscripts of Belgian origin, and a longer text represented mainly in manuscripts of Italian origin. They posit that the shorter text was the first, or minor, redaction, while the longer text was the second, or major, redaction.⁸ According to Thier and Calufetti, the minor redaction derives from how Brother A. recorded the *Memorial*.⁹ They point to the passage in which Brother A states that he started "by briefly and carelessly jotting down notes on a small sheet of paper as a sort of 'memorial.'"¹⁰ He then wrote on "two or three blank pages I found in my book."¹¹ Of course, these pages were not sufficient to record Angela's story and he later had to make "a copy book of quality paper."¹² Thier and Calufetti posited that the story of Angela's pilgrimage to Assisi was written in the "two or three blank pages," before Brother A. started using the large copy book. They argue that Brother A. kept the sheets of paper with his larger copy book

⁷ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 163.

⁸ *IL*, 108.

⁹ *IL*, 108.

¹⁰ *CW*, 136. *IL*, 166. *M*, 30. Latin text: "Et minus plene et negligenter incoepi scribere, quasi proquodam mihi memoriali, in una carta parvuncula."

¹¹ *CW*, 136. *IL*, 166. *M*, 30. Latin text: "Scripsi in duabus vel tribus cartulis quas in libello meo potui vacuas reperire."

¹² *CW*, 136. *IL*, 168. *M*, 30. Latin text: "Postea vero coactus feci quaternum de bambicino."

and that they were eventually lost.¹³ Since the story of the Assisi pilgrimage is only missing in the first group of manuscripts of Belgian origin, Thier and Calufetti argue that the first family of manuscripts record Brother A.'s original notebook, after the sheets describing the pilgrimage to Assisi were lost but before he expanded the text.¹⁴

They also cite as further evidence that Brother A. says that after the first nineteen steps, he summarized Angela's ten steps into seven supplementary steps.¹⁵ Thier and Calufetti argue that "*solo quando si ha davanti a se il materiale, lo si puo dividere.*"¹⁶ They note that only in the major redaction are the supplementary steps divided into seven parts. Therefore, that must have been something Brother A. added to the original manuscript.¹⁷ They further argue that the fifth chapter, which contains the third supplementary step, is proof that there are two redactions, because the second or major redaction is influenced by the idea of "*filius legitimus*" or legitimate son, a traditional theme in Franciscan literature, especially among the Spirituals.¹⁸ Thier and Calufetti argue that third supplementary step in the major redaction is restructured according to the idea of special or legitimate sons and is therefore an idea that was added to the minor redaction.

One might be skeptical of the dual redaction theory because the longer Italian manuscripts are temporally and geographically closer to Brother A.'s initial manuscript, but the origins of Angela's *Liber* are more complicated. Menestò notes that the *Liber* did not circulate freely after Angela's death. In fact, an annotation on the Assisi codex reads, "*Iste liber fuit michi datus pro incognito et ego nondum potui perquirere quid sit.*"¹⁹ Menestò points out that this level of caution

¹³ *IL*, 108.

¹⁴ *IL*, 109.

¹⁵ *IL*, 109. Originally, Angela divided her mystical itinerary into thirty steps, which Brother A. turned into twenty-six.

¹⁶ *IL*, 109 English translation: "Only when you have the material before you can you divide it."

¹⁷ *IL*, 109.

¹⁸ *IL*, 109.

¹⁹ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 173. English translation: "This book was given to me by someone unknown and I have not yet been able to seek out what it is."

“would have had no reason to exist if the reading of the work had not become semi-clandestine; the *Liber* soon became...a suspicious testimony, at the outer limits of orthodoxy, also considering Angela's relations with Cardinal Giacomo Colonna, excommunicated by Boniface VIII.”²⁰ Here Menestò refers to the *Approbatio* that appears on many of the extant manuscripts and states that the *Liber* had been approved by Cardinal Colonna “before he suffered disgrace at the hands of the sovereign pontiff,”²¹ as well as by “eight well-known lectors” of the Order of Friars Minor.²²

The *Approbatio* demonstrates the same cautiousness as the anonymous owner of the Assisi codex. It notes that the eight lectors were well qualified: “one was a lector for many years in the convent in Milan, where the house of studies is located; four held the post of minister in the administration of the Province of St. Francis, two others were inquisitors for many years in this said Province and another was custodian in various custodies.”²³ Just in case those qualifications were not enough, the *Approbatio* adds that “moreover, three other friars, capable and intelligent enough to be lectors, examined it, as well as many other trustworthy friars, men known for their modesty and spiritual life. None of these saw any sign of false teachings in this book—on the contrary, they treat it with humble reverence, and cherish it most dearly, like a holy book.”²⁴ The

²⁰ Enrico Menestò, “Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela,” 173. Italian text: “Una cautela che non avrebbe avuto motivo di essere se la lettura dell'opera non fosse diventata semiclandestina; il Liber divenne ben presto...una testimonianza sospetta, al limite dell'ortodossia, visti anche i rapporti di Angela con il cardinale Giacomo Colonna, scomunicato da Bonifacio VIII.”

²¹ *CW*, 123. *IL*, 126 Latin text: “antequam cum summo pontifice in scandalum incideret.”

David Burr critiques the suggestion that Angela's *Liber* was a work of propaganda written by or endorsed by the Spiritual Franciscans. See David Burr, *Spiritual Franciscans*, 336, 343. He views it far more likely that Angela's work came under suspicion for being associated with the heresy of the Free Spirit, or *spiritus libertatis*, movement, a group (that probably only existed in the minds of the inquisitors who punished dissidents) that suggested that the soul could reach a point where it would be unable to sin and could engage in immoral behavior with impunity. See *CW*, 98. Lachance notes that Angela chastises this group in Instruction II and that it was common practice for mystics and visionaries to do so.

²² *CW*, 123. *IL*, 126. Latin text: “per octa famosos lectores.”

²³ *CW*, 123. *IL*, 126.

²⁴ *CW*, 123. *IL*, 128. Latin text: “Viderunt autem tres alii fratres, multum intelligentes et sufficientes pro officio lectoriae, nec non et plures alii fratres fide digni, viri utique modesti et multum spirituales, quorum nullus in aliquo ea redarguit, sed potius humiliter venerantur et tamquam divina carius amplectuntur.”

fact that Angela's *Liber* was viewed with suspicion in Italy (the friars mentioned in the *Approbatio* are all from the Italian peninsula) means that it may have been easier to circulate in more distant places. In other words, it is not completely outlandish for Thier and Calufetti to suggest that the Belgian manuscripts represent an earlier version of the *Liber* that was taken out of Italy.

Enrico Menestò's Critique of the Dual Redaction Theory

The first critique of the dual redaction theory was Menestò's article "*Problemi critico-testuali nel 'Liber' della beata Angela*," published in 1992. Although he respects the work of Thier and Calufetti, Menestò believes that their critical edition is "*un'occasione perduta*" or a lost opportunity.²⁵ He not only objects to their dual redaction theory, but also makes several critiques that he subsequently remedies in his 2013 critical edition of the *Memorial*. Menestò disagrees with Thier and Calufetti's classification of the manuscript tradition. He writes that they divided the manuscripts into seven families based on the "*somiglianza formale del testo*" or formal similarities of the text.²⁶ Instead, Thier and Calufetti should have examined the kinship relations between the manuscripts and taken into account whether the manuscripts are written in Latin or the vernacular.²⁷ He also notes that there is some confusion about which manuscripts the two used. He writes, "*All'inizio del paragrafo dedicato alla tradizione manoscritta scrivono: «I manoscritti che servirono in varia misura a questa edizione sono classificabili in sette famiglie» Che vuol dire «che servirono in varia misura»? Significa che qualche manoscritto è stato usato ed altri no? Oppure che talvolta si è seguito un testimone e talvolta un altro?»*"²⁸

²⁵ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 162.

²⁶ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 170.

By "formal similarities" Menestò means the structure and order of the *Memorial* and *Instructions*.

²⁷ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 170.

²⁸ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 176. English translation: "At the beginning of the paragraph dedicated to the handwritten tradition, they write: 'The manuscripts that served in varying degrees in this edition can be classified into seven families.' What does 'that served in varying degrees'

Furthermore, according to Menestò, the *Instructions* in the 1985 edition are not reliable because they are based on a comparison of codices of unequal authority and value and because the *stemma codicum*, which graphs the relationships between the manuscripts, is flawed.²⁹ He also objects to the spelling used in the text. He writes: “*Gli editori non hanno minimamente esitato a normalizzare le forme grafiche e fonetiche, ripristinando dittonghi, eliminando fenomeni particolari di vocalismo e di consonantismo e altre anomalie proprie dell'ortografia medievale.*”³⁰ In his own critical edition of the *Memorial*, the Latin preserves the original vernacularisms and different spellings.

But Menestò's main concern with the 1985 critical edition is its dual redaction theory. While he agrees with Thier and Calufetti that there are two redactions (*È indubbio che ci si trova davanti a due redazioni dello stesso testo*),³¹ he does not believe that the minor redaction predates the major. The first issue he has with the dual redaction theory is that Thier and Calufetti conflate Brother A.'s redaction of the text with subsequent redactions of transmission or tradition.³² The differences between the major and minor redactions are not due to Brother A.'s revisions but rather are the result of changes made to the manuscripts by later copyists. He also notes that if Brother A. made two redactions, then the close relationship between Angela's dictation and the recording of her words would be compromised.³³ In the *Memorial*, Brother A. insists that he only wrote in Angela's presence and that the text reflects Angela's original dictation. Since Brother A. could

mean? Does it mean that some manuscripts have been used and others not? Or that sometimes one witness followed and sometimes another?”

²⁹ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 177.

³⁰ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 177. English translation: "The editors have not hesitated in the least to normalize the graphic and phonetic forms, restoring diphthongs, eliminating particular phenomena of vocalism and consonantism and other anomalies typical of medieval spelling."

³¹ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 172. English translation: "There is no doubt that we are faced with two redactions of the same text."

³² Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 172.

³³ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 172.

only write one version of the text while directly taking dictation from Angela, the presence of a second redaction means that he would have made additions and interventions at a later date. This directly contradicts Brother A.'s account of the writing of the *Memorial*.³⁴

Menestò's alternate theory is quite persuasive. He argues that the version Brother A. wrote is in fact the major redaction. He writes that the "*la minor non sarebbe altro che una redazione posteriore estratto/riassunto della prima, dovuta all'iniziativa di chi voleva limitare all'essenziale e soprattutto 'pulire' la narrazione dell'esperienza mistica di Angela.*"³⁵ When Menestò states that the minor redaction attempts to "clean" Angela's mystical experience, he means that the (later) redactors make the text less theologically risky. To illustrate this point, he uses the example of the seventh supplementary step. In the first family of Belgian manuscripts, the minor redaction, Angela's vision of seeing God in darkness and her vision of herself lying in the midst of the Trinity are absent.³⁶ Therefore, the clear goal of the minor redaction is to "*evitare ogni possibile ambiguità e fraintendimento sul piano...dell'ortodossia.*"³⁷ This theory is bolstered by the fact that Angela's text, apparently viewed with suspicion, was disseminated slowly. Menestò writes that "*sembra dunque certo che furono proprio i timori, che pesavano su Angela e sul suo Liber, ad indurre qualcuno a ridurre e per così dire a 'purgare' l'opera.*"³⁸ Emore Paoli later establishes a connection

³⁴ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 172. I find this to be Menestò's least persuasive argument. Brother A. already makes various interventions in the text, as I describe in chapter three. It would not be surprising if he was not as faithful to Angela's dictation as he claims to be.

³⁵ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 172. English translation: "the minor would be nothing more than a later editorial extract / summary of the first, due to the initiative of those who wanted to limit the narrative of Angela's mystical experience to the essential and above all to 'clean' it."

³⁶ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 173.

³⁷ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 173. English translation: "To avoid any possible ambiguity and misunderstanding on the plane...of orthodoxy."

³⁸ Enrico Menestò, "Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela," 174. English translation: "It therefore seems certain that it was precisely the fears that weighed on Angela and her *Liber* that induced someone to reduce and so to speak to 'purge' the work."

between the shorter Belgian manuscripts of the *Memorial* and the *devotio moderna*,³⁹ a late fourteenth century vernacular religious movement that originated in the Low Countries. Groups of the modern devout formed households organized as communes and adopted a lifestyle centered on devotion. They refused to take vows, marry, or possess property and often criticized the corruption and moral laxity of professed religious.⁴⁰

Recent Developments in Codicological and Paleographical Research

In his article, “Le Liber d’Angèle de Foligno: Enquête sur un *Exemplar* disparu,” Dominique Poirel writes that it is possible to “retracer son histoire, d’abord en aval, des manuscrits jusqu’à nous, puis en amont, des manuscrits jusqu’à leur archétype; ainsi offre-t-elle la chance, dans quelques cas privilégiés, de remonter par-delà les remaniements du texte et grâce à eux jusqu’à la genèse même du texte édité.”⁴¹ In other words, through the analysis of the diverse manuscripts, it is possible to arrive at remnants of the original text or exemplar.⁴² Poirel’s promising work is compelling because it may allow a limited glimpse into the original manuscript of the *Liber*. Such work has large repercussions not only for literary studies, but also theological analyses. The closer we can come to the authentic text, the better we can evaluate the thought of Angela and Brother A. In order to conduct such an analysis, Poirel states that it is important to distinguish between:

- 1) The anomalies of the original, which can be explained by the chaotic way in which Angela’s words were pronounced, translated and transcribed by her secretary, and in certain cases then discussed between them and reworked.

³⁹ Emore Paoli, “Le due redazione del Liber: Il perché di una riscrittura” in *Angèle de Foligno: Le Dossier* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1999), 68—70.

⁴⁰ John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1.

⁴¹ Dominique Poirel, “Le Liber d’Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu,” *Revue d’histoire des textes*, n 32 (2002), 226. English translation: “to retrace its history, first downstream, from the manuscripts to us, then upstream, from the manuscripts to their archetype; thus it offers the chance, in a few privileged cases, to go back beyond the modifications of the text and thanks to them to the very genesis of the edited text.”

⁴² Dominique Poirel, “Le Liber d’Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu,” 226.

- 2) The blunders of the copyist inadvertently altering the text.
- 3) The corrections of this same copyist, trying to repair the anomalies of his model, whether original or accidental.
- 4) Deliberate interventions, either by the copyist himself or by another character rereading after him, explained by the more or less avowed desire to transform the text, for reasons which can be very diverse: ideological censorship, doctrinal correction, stylistic polishing, adaptation to a certain audience, insistence on a point deemed important, for example the Franciscan context of the Memorial.⁴³

A thorough examination of these issues in the twenty-eight extant manuscripts reveals that there is no direct dependence between any of the manuscript traditions. Instead, Poirel argues that the individual scribes of the Belgian, Assisi, St. Isidore, Rieti, Milan, and Subiaco codices copied from a lost exemplar.⁴⁴ The fact that the manuscripts are so different suggests an ambiguous original.⁴⁵ Poirel suggests that the ambiguity stemmed from the revision process used by Brother A. and Angela. In the *Memorial*, Brother A. states that he would read back what he had written and consult with Angela. Poirel notes that the result was most likely a heavily corrected manuscript, which may have caused confusion later.⁴⁶ Poirel also argues that the lost exemplar probably included Brother A.'s manuscript with an unbound copy of the *Instructions* (unbound because they were probably rearranged, added to, and reworked over time).⁴⁷ This would account for the large number of variances between manuscripts of the *Instructions*.

Focus on the Memorial

My decision to focus on the *Memorial* is motivated by caution. The manuscript history of the *Instructions* is still being intensely debated by scholars. As Menestò notes, the only data regarding the *Instructions* that appear to be safe are the plurality of the editors and the

⁴³ Dominique Poirel, "Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu," 230-231.

⁴⁴ Dominique Poirel, "Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu," 234-235.

⁴⁵ Dominique Poirel, "Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu," 234.

⁴⁶ Dominique Poirel, "Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu," 261.

⁴⁷ Dominique Poirel, "Le Liber d'Angèle de Foligno: enquête sur un exemplar disparu," 261.

inauthenticity of many of the instructions.⁴⁸ Since I am tracking a theological disposition in Angela's thought, it is important that the texts I examine can be authentically traced to her. In the following chapters I occasionally reference some instructions, but I only quote from those that have not been proven inauthentic and that maintain theological consistency with Angela's thought in the *Memorial*. When additional scholarship is published that helps establish the authenticity or inauthenticity of all thirty-nine instructions, I can embark on a larger examination of Angela's theology in the *Instructions*.

Authorship of the Memorial

There is very little biographical information on Angela present in the *Memorial*—and, indeed, the only other extant reference to her during her lifetime is in the prologue of *The Tree of the Crucified Life of Jesus*, in which Ubertino of Casale records her name, his meeting with her, and his transformation by her spiritual counsel.⁴⁹ Because we know so little about Angela, some scholars have even wondered whether she could have been fabricated by Brother A. Jacques Dalarun, for example, published an article entitled, “Angèle de Foligno a-t-elle existé?”⁵⁰ Although most scholars believe that Angela did, in fact, exist, Dalarun still has a point. Most of the biographical details about the woman who Brother A. calls *fidelis Christi*, “the faithful one of Christ,” remain a mystery. The earliest extant manuscript of Angela's *Liber* (the Assisi Codex) identifies her only as “L.” A fourteenth century addition to the Assisi codex gives her book the title *Liber sororis Lelle de Fulgineo de tertio ordine sancti Francisci*⁵¹. Lelle is the diminutive of

⁴⁸ Enrico Menestò, “Problemi critico-testuali nel «Liber» della beata Angela,” 168.

⁴⁹ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 313.

⁵⁰ Jacques Dalarun, “Angèle de Foligno a-t-elle existé?,” *Publications de l'École Française de Rome* 204, no. 1 (1995): 59–97.

⁵¹ David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans*, 336.

Angela in Italian.⁵² The paucity of information on the historical Angela, and Brother A.'s many interjections throughout the narrative, stimulate many questions. Is Angela truly the author of the *Memorial*? How much of the work was influenced by her scribe, Brother A.? How much should we trust Brother A. when he states that he is recording Angela's words?

While scholars continue to debate the trustworthiness of Brother A.'s account of the composition of the *Memorial*, most agree that it is a collaborative text, meaning that Brother A. and Angela worked together on its production and content. In the following two sections, I will first lay out the evidence for viewing the *Memorial* as a collaboratively authored text and discuss some of the tension between Angela and Brother A. that complicates their collaborative authorship. Finally, I will examine some differences between American and Italian scholarship on the issue of Brother A.'s trustworthiness. I argue that scholars should reflect on the power disparity between Angela and Brother A. (not only their interactions in the text but also their educational and cultural backgrounds) when trying to identify Angela's voice in the text. But while it may be possible to retrieve Angela's voice partially, the reality is that scholars do not have access to her unfiltered thought. Thus, any reconstruction of her theology will, in some sense, be artificial. When I speak of Angela's theology, I am referring to my own reconstruction of her thought.

Reading the Memorial as a Collaborative Text

Modern conceptions of authorship presuppose a text with an individual creator. However, in the Middle Ages, many texts were produced collaboratively, due to the complexity of the task of writing and the relatively few individuals who were able to write in Latin. The use of scribes and dictation were extremely common. Most extant texts written by women were in fact collaborative documents—women dictated their visions and experiences to a confessor or spiritual

⁵² Catherine M. Mooney, "Angela of Foligno," in *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Margaret Schaus (New York: Routledge, 2006), 21.

director who usually assumed the roles of scribe, editor, translator, and disseminator. For example, Elizabeth of Schönau dictated her visions to her brother Eckbert, Hildegard of Bingen used multiple scribes of both sexes, and Mechthild of Magdeburg's *The Flowing Light of the Godhead* was compiled and edited by her confessor Henry of Halle. This means that many texts authored by medieval women come to us through intermediaries. While the presence of a scribe or other intermediary should inspire readers to approach a text with caution, it does not necessarily lead to questions about the authorship of a text. For example, Thomas Aquinas too used many scribes, but no one doubts his authorship of the *Summa Theologica*. Similarly, no one seriously doubts Hildegard's authorship of *Scivias* or Catherine of Siena's authorship of her *Dialogues*.

If the use of scribes is not inherently suspicious, why are so many scholars quick to doubt Angela of Foligno's authorship of the *Memorial*? The answer probably lies in Brother A.'s constant interjections, found throughout the text. Brother A. frequently interrupts the narrative to talk about his difficulty transcribing Angela's words, to ask Angela questions, and even to editorialize. He frequently draws attention to himself as the one recording Angela's words. Almost every new vision begins not with Angela's voice narrating the events, but with the *frater scriptor* who heard and recorded the words. The frequent changes in narrative voice draw attention to the presence of the scribe. At times the text has Angela speaking in the first person, while at other times her experiences are told in the third person, drawing attention to the fact that she is dictating the text. Even seemingly innocuous phrases, such as "this is what she said to me," remind the reader that Angela is always speaking through Brother A. The "brother scribe" is also open about his difficulty transcribing Angela's words, his self-described incompetence, and the fact that when

he reads what he has written back to Angela she is often displeased with the result.⁵³ All of these stylistic factors make questions about authorship not just more likely but inevitable.

However, when we view authorship of texts as normatively collaborative (as opposed to in a modern single-author model), then Angela and Brother A.'s voices in the narrative do not appear discordant. Rather, they form part of a conversation, in which Angela, Brother A., and sometimes even God reflect together on Angela's experiences. Bernard McGinn writes that "the best model for approaching the issue of the relation between men and women in late medieval mysticism is that of an overheard conversation, rather than that of an argument or confrontation."⁵⁴ This is the best way to approach the *Memorial* as well. A collaborative authorship model allows for the complexity of an overheard conversation; it allows multiple voices and perspectives to be held in tension by the text. While Angela and Brother A. do not always agree, their relationship is overall one of mutual respect and cooperation. I argue that by understanding the *Memorial* as a collaborative work, we can account for both Angela and Brother A.'s contributions to the composition of the text.

One of the first clues that we are dealing with a collaborative text comes in Brother A.'s description of the writing and revision process. For example, Brother A. writes that, "I would add nothing of my own, not even a single word, unless it was exactly as I could grasp it just out of her mouth as she related it. I did not want to write anything after I had left her."⁵⁵ Although Brother A.'s assertion that he only wrote exactly what came out of Angela's mouth is false,⁵⁶ it is still

⁵³ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34.

⁵⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 17.

⁵⁵ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32. Latin text: "Nihil possem addere de meo nec unam dictionem tantummodo nisi recte sicut ab ipso ore referentis poteram capere, nolebam aliquid scriber postquam recedebam ad ea."

⁵⁶ In fact, Brother A. immediately contradicts himself by saying: "I wrote in the third person, although she always spoke to me concerning herself in the first person. But, in order to go faster, I sometimes left my text in the third person, and I have not yet corrected it" (*CW*, 137. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34). Latin text: "Et illud quod ego scripsi in tertia persona, ipsa dicebat semper, loquendo de se, in prima persona, sed accidebat mihi quod ego scribebam in tertia

noteworthy that he preferred to write exclusively in Angela's presence. In fact, they spent so much time together that Brother A.'s fellow friars became suspicious of their relationship. He writes that "they murmured so strongly against me that as a result the guardian and the provincial strictly forbade me to write, and the latter even reprimanded me."⁵⁷ Because Angela was there during the composition of the *Memorial*, Brother A. was able to include her in the revision process. For example, Brother A. states that "I always reread to her what I wrote, repeating it many times, so that I would be sure to take down only her very own words."⁵⁸ When he read the text back to Angela, he often received mixed results. For example, the scribe recounts, "one day after I had written as best I could what I had been able to grasp of her discourse, I read to her what I had written in order to have her dictate more to me, and she told me with amazement that she did not recognize it."⁵⁹ We know that he repeatedly read what he wrote back to Angela because he mentions her criticism of the text on at least five separate occasions.⁶⁰ In the text's epilogue, Brother A. stresses once again that "I always reread to her what I wrote, repeating it many times, so that I would be sure to take down only her very own words."⁶¹ It seems that Brother A. and Angela collaborated not only in the writing of the *Memorial* but also in its revision. This is

persona propter festinationem et adhuc non correxi illud." Clearly, he did not write everything that came out of Angela's mouth verbatim. Mooney also points out that this statement is additionally false because he translates Angela's words into Latin. See Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 41.

⁵⁷ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 174. *M*, 34. Latin text: "Et quia multum murmurantes fratres fecerunt mihi a guardiano et etiam cum reprehensione a ministro firmiter prohiberi."

⁵⁸ *CW*, 218. *IL*, 400. *M*, 182. Latin text: "Unde et quae scripseram semper sibi relegi et iteravi pluries, ut tantummodo ponerem propria verba sua."

⁵⁹ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 172. *M*, 32. Latin text: "Dum ego scribebam rect sicut a suo ore capere poteram, relegenti sibi illa quae scripseram ut ipsa alia diceret ad scribendum, dixit mihi admirando quod non recognoscebat illa."

⁶⁰ *CW*, 137, 138, 156, 179, 217.

⁶¹ *CW*, 218. *IL*, 400. *M*, 182. Latin text: "Unde et quae scripseram semper sibi relegi et iteravi pluries, ut tantummodo ponerem propria verba sua."

significant because it means that Angela was able to shape the content and structure of the work along with Brother A.⁶²

We can also deduce that the *Memorial* is a collaborative text from the multiplicity of narrative voices. The *Memorial* begins and ends, not with Angela's voice, but with Brother A.'s. In addition, his voice repeatedly interrupts Angela's narrative throughout the text with questions, observations, and comments about the writing process. John Coakley has pointed out that there are two "levels" of the narrative of the *Memorial*. "The first level is the voice of the friar who, describing the circumstances and substance of his interactions with Angela, addresses himself directly to the reader. The voice of Angela, then, conveying her 'experience and doctrine,' speaks at a second level of the narrative in the sense that she addresses her narrative not to the reader, but rather to the friar himself, putatively in the course of those interactions that are the subject of his own narrative.⁶³ Formally, therefore, his narrative contains hers within it."⁶⁴ The *Memorial* is thus a narrative within a narrative. Brother A.'s prologue and epilogue are, in fact, his interruptions. It is clear, that although Brother A. frequently describes himself as *frater scriptor*, he was not "a

⁶² Brother A. did not always listen to Angela's criticisms. For example, when he is banned from meeting with her by his superiors, he arranges for a young boy to copy a vision that Angela had of the crucifixion. Even though Angela preferred to have it destroyed, Brother A. exercised his authority and included it in the *Memorial*: "It was written so badly that when Christ's faithful one heard it reread to her, she told me that I should destroy it rather than transcribe it in such a state. But since I did not have the time to go over it with her and to correct it, I translated it just as it was into Latin, adding nothing...because I did not understand it." (*CW*, 179. *IL*, 288. *M*, 108.)

⁶³ There is also a third level, in which God speaks directly to Angela. Angela and Brother A. take this third level very seriously. Both view God as a co-author of the *Memorial*. Brother A. goes to confession so that he can receive divine grace when he questions Angela so that her answers will be more organized. (*CW*, 138, *IL*, 174. *M*, 34.) They both take great care to report God's words as Angela experienced them. Likewise, at the end of the narrative, Angela tells Brother A. that God will put his seal to the text, saying "Everything which has been written is in conformity with my will and comes from me." (*CW*, 217-218. *IL*, 398-400. *M*, 180. Latin text: "Totum illud quod scriptum est, totum scriptum est secundum voluntatem meam et a me venit, idest a me processit.") Angela may have dictated it and Brother A. may have written it down, but for them, God is the true author of the *Memorial*.

⁶⁴ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 116.

mere conduit putting to page another's dictation."⁶⁵ In fact, as a collaborative co-author, Brother A. heavily influenced the structure and content of the *Memorial*.

Brother A. influences the structure of the *Memorial* not only by editing the number of steps in its mystical itinerary, but also by positioning himself in the narrative so he inflates his prominence in Angela's spiritual life. In the beginning of the *Memorial*, Brother A. states that Angela originally conceived of "thirty steps or transformations which the soul makes as it advances on the way of penance."⁶⁶ However, instead of dividing Angela's experiences into thirty steps, Brother A. first lists nineteen steps (which took place before they met) and later details seven supplementary steps (which took place after they met)—twenty-six in total. Even though Brother A. writes that he is careful not to change anything Angela has said, it appears that he did not listen to her ideas about the structure of the work. He also changes the narrative to give greater prominence to the Assisi pilgrimage, where he first meets Angela. Not only does he tell the story twice—once from his point of view and once from Angela's—but the description of the Assisi pilgrimage is also one of the longest chapters in the *Memorial*. According to Mooney, Brother A.'s restructuring of the work revolved too heavily around his role in Angela's spiritual life. She writes that, "the first nineteen steps are clearly demarcated from the last seven...because he inadvertently exalts all of Angela's experiences subsequent to his entrance into the intimate details of her spiritual life."⁶⁷ The problem with emphasizing the spiritual progress that Angela made after they met is that Brother A. glosses over the first nineteen steps, even though they contain important spiritual insights. Mooney also suggests that Brother A. engineered the structure of the narrative to revolve around his perspective: "He inadvertently casts the day he intruded into her inner

⁶⁵ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 40.

⁶⁶ *CW*, 124. *IL*, 132. *M*, 4. Latin text: "Dixit quaedam fidelis Christi quod colloquendo de Deo cum socia assignaverat triginta passus vel mutationes quas facit anima, quae proficiscitur per viam paenitentiae, quas inveniebat in se."

⁶⁷ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 56.

thoughts as the central turning point in her experience, and he correlates the beginning of their writing relationship with what he represents as the genesis of her most significant religious experience.”⁶⁸ In other words, the order of the steps in the *Memorial* may have been colored by Brother A.’s desire to be perceived as an important part of Angela’s spiritual journey. We must be sensitive to how his conscious and unconscious biases undeniably shape the narrative.

Brother A. also influences the content of the *Memorial* by encouraging Angela to doubt, asking theological questions, emphasizing visions, and by his incompetence as a scribe. Angela’s doubt about the origin of her experiences becomes a major theme of the *Memorial*. Angela is constantly worried that her experiences come from the devil rather than from God. For example, she states: “Since I doubted that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had entered into me, unworthy as I am, and imagined that perhaps this had been said to deceive me, it was then repeated to me several times: ‘It is indeed the Trinity that has entered into you. Ask Brother A. again how this could be possible.’”⁶⁹ Even though Angela receives such a powerful experience of God, she worries about being deceived. God assures Angela that the experience is authentic and even recruits Brother A. to set her mind at ease. But Angela’s concerns about the origins of her experience may have been originally instigated by Brother A. For example, we find out in chapter two (shortly before Angela narrates her account of the Assisi pilgrimage), that Brother A. purposefully tried to inspire fear and doubt in Angela:

Amazed as I was and suspicious that it might come from some evil spirit, I made a strong effort to arouse her suspicions because I myself had so many. I advised her and compelled her to tell me everything so that I could consult with some wise and spiritual man who would have never heard of her. I told her that I wished to do this so that she could in no way be deceived by an evil spirit. I strove to inspire fear in her by showing her by examples

⁶⁸ Catherine M. Mooney, “The Authorial Role of Brother A.,” 57.

⁶⁹ *CW*, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. Latin text: “Et cum ego de hoc dubitarem, scilicet qualiter Pater cum Filio et Spiritu Sancto venisset in me ita indignam, et cogitarem ne forte posset hoc mihi dici ad deceptionem, tunc pluries iteratum est mihi et dictum hoc, scilicet: Trinitas venerat in te; unde dicebatur mihi ‘quaere ab eo quomodo potui venire.’”

how many persons had been deceived, and consequently how she could be similarly deceived. Because she did not yet have the degree of clarity and perfect certitude which she had later—as will be found the writings which follow—she began to reveal the divine secrets to me and I wrote these down.⁷⁰

This passage reveals that it was *Brother A.*—Angela’s collaborator—who encouraged Angela to doubt her experiences, almost bullying her into revealing them to him. He purposely made Angela fear deception so that he could record her experiences of the divine. Therefore, Brother A. not only influenced Angela to continually doubt herself and her visions, but also frames the entire writing process as an attempt to verify the legitimacy of Angela’s experiences. Although Brother A. eventually believes that these are divinely inspired, the seeds of doubt that he sowed in Angela at the beginning of their interaction never completely go away. Angela reports having doubts during almost every step except for the last, when she finally has total certainty.

Brother A. also influences the content of the *Memorial* by asking theological questions of Angela. We know that Brother A. consistently asked questions not only because he repeatedly refers to his questions in the text but also because he describes his ritual for doing so. He writes that “I took the trouble beforehand to confess my sins, convinced that it was a gift of grace if, on whatever subject God inspired me to question her, the answer came in an orderly way.”⁷¹ It is interesting that Brother A. not only thought of Angela’s words as divinely inspired, but also went to confession so that with God’s grace he could get more logical answers out of her. Brother A.’s questions are usually about theological matters, which is to be expected of a friar who possessed

⁷⁰ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32. Latin text: “Quod ego stupens et suspectum illud habens ne forte posset esse ab aliquo maligno spiritu, valde conatus fui reddere ei illud suspectum quia et ego illud suspectum habebam tunc. Et consului et coegi eam quod totum diceret mihi et quod ego volebam illud scribere omnino, ut possem consulere super illo aliquem sapientem et spiritualem virum qui nunquam eam cognosceret. Et hoc dicebam me velle facere ut ipsa nullo modo posset ab aliquo malo spiritu esse decepta. Et conabar incutere sibi timorem et dicere sibi exempla quomodo multae personae iam exstiterunt deceptae, unde et ipsa similiter poterat esse decepta. Et ipsa, qui non erat adhuc in gradu clarissimae et perfectissimae certitudinis sicut postea fuit, sicut reperietur in ista scriptura qua sequitur, coepit mihi scribenti manifestare secreta divina.”

⁷¹ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 174. *M*, 34. Latin text: “Et studui aliquando confessionem praemittere peccatorum meorum, recognoscens a divina gratia esse quod, de quacumque re Deus mihi inquierere inspirabat, ordinate terminabatur.”

formal theological training. The question that he asks in the first supplemental step is important enough that I have chosen to quote it in full:

One day I, brother scribe, and the unworthy writer of these divine words, was asking her how it was possible that she had been told, as related in the preceding revelation, ‘I am the Holy Spirit,’ and a little later, ‘I am the one who was crucified for you.’ After I had asked her this, she went back home. Later, she met me again and answered in these terms: Once back home, I began to ponder, for I was having some doubts about what you had asked me—and when doubts are raised about my experiences, I too am seized by doubts, because I see myself as completely unworthy of them. And while I was in that moment of doubt I was given the following suggestion: ‘Ask him, namely Brother A., to explain why you were told “The Trinity has already come into you.” Repeat to him that it has indeed already come and ask him to explain how this is possible.’ For my part, I was given to understand that although the Trinity had entered into me, it was no less in heaven and had not left it. Since there was so much that I still did not understand, nor did it seem to me that I had yet received a full and intelligible answer to my questions, the voice added, ‘Tell Brother A. that when these words were said to you “I am the Holy Spirit,” and later, “I am the one who was crucified for you,” at the moment the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had entered into me, unworthy as I am, and imagined that perhaps this had been said to deceive me, it was then repeated to me several times: ‘It is indeed the Trinity that has entered into you. Ask Brother A. again how this could be possible.’ Then I was also told that in this exchange, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were speaking to me; and that, or so it seemed to me, I was being told that the Trinity was at once one, and a union of many. Then, as a further explanation, the example of the sun was well as other examples were presented to me, but I rejected these, for when I hear such great things I push them aside fearfully because I feel unworthy of them. What I wanted was that God would make me actually feel that on this point, the presence of the Holy Trinity in me, I could not be deceived.⁷²

⁷² *CW*, 144—145. *IL*, 190—192. *M*, 46—48. Latin text: “Quadam vice ego frater, qui indignus scripsi verba ista divina, feci sibi istam interrogationem dicens, quomodo dictum fuerat ei in ista praecedenti revelatione ‘Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus,’ et parum postea dictum est ei ‘Ego sum qui fui crucifixus pro te.’ Et post istam interrogationem ipsa fuit reversa domum. Et postea reversa ad me respondit mihi ita dicens: Postquam fui reversa domum coepi cogitare quia ego habebam dubium de illo quod interrogasti, quia quando dicitur mihi aliquid dubii ego dubito, quia video me omnino indignam. Et dum ego dubitarem facta est mihi responsio ita dicens: Quaere ab eo, scilicet fratre A., quia illud quod fuit tibi dictum iam venit in te, scilicet Trinitas. Dicas ei ‘iam venit, iam venit in te, quaeras quomodo potuit venire.’ Et dabatur mihi intelligere quod, quamvis venisset in me, tamen erat in caelo et non discendebat de caelo. Et cum ego non intelligerem adhuc et non videretur mihi quod intelligibiliter vel plene respondisset mihi, tunc addidit dicens: Dicas ei quando tibi fuerunt dicta illa, scilicet ‘Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus’ et postea dictum est ‘Ego sum qui fui crucifixus pro te,’ tunc in te erat Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Et cum ego de hoc dubitarem, scilicet qualiter Pater cum Filio et Spiritu Sancto venisset in me ita indignam, et cogitarem ne forte posset hoc mihi dici ad deceptionem, tunc pluries iteratum est mihi et dictum hoc, scilicet: Trinitas venerat in te; unde dicebatur mihi ‘quaere ab eo quomodo potuit venire.’ Et dicebatur mihi quod tunc in illa locutione erat Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus; et videtur mihi quod tunc dicebatur mihi quod Trinitas erat res una simul adunata. Et dabatur mihi exemplum de sole et aliud exemplum dabatur mihi; sed ego repellebam, quia quando tam magna dicuntur mihi ego repello, times quia non sum digna. Vellem quod Deus daret mihi sentimentum, quia ibi non possum decipi.”

Brother A. is confused about Angela's vision because the same voice identifies itself as the Holy Spirit and later "the one who was crucified for you." Brother A.'s question elicits another vision, which Angela receives after she goes home. God suggests that the two statements are compatible because Angela was told that "the Trinity has already come into you." Perhaps knowing that Angela would not understand the nuances of Trinitarian theology, God tells her to ask Brother A. about it. This passage reveals not only that Brother A.'s questions shape the content of his discussions with Angela, but also that his questions can affect her visions and experiences of the divine. This passage is also significant because it reveals how Angela practices theology in a different way than Brother A. Brother A. desires to rationally understand the mystery of the Trinity revealed in Angela's experience. However, when God begins to explain the Trinity to Angela through the analogy of the sun⁷³ and other undisclosed examples, Angela rejects them because of her unworthiness. Instead, Angela desires to *feel* with absolute certainty that the Trinity is within her. Brother A. initially questions Angela's experience of the Trinity because it does not conform to his theological expectations. Angela has to clarify that the statements the voice made in her vision were possible because the voice was the Trinity. She also had to state explicitly that the Trinity "was no less in heaven and had not left it" to convince Brother A. that she understood that the divine was omnipresent. Although these theological explanations seem to set Brother A.'s

⁷³ The reference to the sun as a Trinitarian analogy is fascinating. Angela states that it is God who teaches her with these examples. Angela learns theology much in the same way that Catherine of Siena learned to write—she is taught by God himself. However, the analogy of the sun was first used by Tertullian in chapter thirteen of *Against Praxeas* in order to demonstrate that the Father and Son are two separate Persons yet consubstantial: "For also the sun's beam, when by itself, I shall call 'the sun' but when naming the sun, whose beam it is, I shall not immediately call the beam 'the sun.' For though I make two suns, yet the sun and its beam I shall count as two objects, and two manifestations of one undivided substance, in the same sense as <I count> God and his Word, the Father and the Son." It was used repeatedly by Christian theologians for centuries. See Tertullian, *Tertullian's Treatise Against Praxeas*, ed. Ernest Evans (London: SPCK, 1948), 148. The same analogy was used by theologians for centuries afterward. Although we don't know how Angela first encountered this analogy (perhaps in a sermon, vernacular or liturgical text, or perhaps even through Brother A.), her reference to it suggests that she had some basic theological knowledge, even if she ultimately prefers experiential knowledge of the divine.

mind at rest (at least, he does not ask follow-up questions), they do not satisfy Angela's search for divine knowledge, which is more experiential.⁷⁴ She has to feel the Trinity within her to know that it is authentically the divine and not a deception.

Brother A. records many other theological questions that he and his fellow friars asked Angela. For example, Brother A. asks her how God can be known in creatures⁷⁵ and how the body of Christ could be simultaneously present on every altar at once.⁷⁶ His colleague, Brother E. of the Marches, asked a question about the plans of divine wisdom that Angela felt foolish praying about.⁷⁷ The vision she receives in answer to his question seems to be a rebuke of those who would ask presumptuous theological questions. Brother A. and his fellow friars ask fewer questions after this rebuke, although at one point, Angela correctly guesses a question that Brother A. and his companion had on the road from Lombardy. God gives her a surprisingly dense answer to the age-old questions "Lord, why did you create man, and after you did, why did you allow us to sin? And why did you allow so much suffering to be inflicted upon you for our sins, when you could have just as well made it possible that without any of it we could be just the same as we are, be able to please you, and be endowed with as many virtues?"⁷⁸ Unfortunately, Brother A. attributes the

⁷⁴ In a similar passage, Brother A. writes: "On another occasion, I, brother scribe, asked her how the body of Christ could be simultaneously on every altar at once. She responded that she had received an answer concerning this point from God, who had told her: 'It is through the divine power, which the Scriptures speak about, but which cannot be understood in this life. Those who read about it in the Scriptures have some understanding of it, and those who have personal experience of me understand it even more'" (CW, 166 *IL*, 250. *M*, 84. Latin text: "Item alia vice petivi ab ea ego frater scriptor, quomodo Corpus Christi poterat esse simul in omni altari. Et ipsa dixit mihi, quod de hoc habuerat responsionem et dictum erat ei a Deo ita: Hoc est pro potentia divina; quae potentia non potest comprehendi in hac vita, de qua loquitur Scriptura; et illi qui legunt eam intelligunt parum, et illi qui sentiunt de me intelligunt plus"). When asked another theological question by Brother A., Angela again demonstrates that experiential knowledge is superior to rational knowledge.

⁷⁵ CW, 165. *IL*, 248. *M*, 83.

⁷⁶ CW, 166. *IL*, 250. *M*, 84.

⁷⁷ CW, 167. *IL*, 252. *M*, 84–86.

⁷⁸ CW, 177. *IL*, 280. *M*, 106. Latin text: "Domine, quare fecisti creationem hominum, et postquam fecisti, quare permisisti quod peccaremus? Et quare permisisti tibi fieri tantam passionem pro peccatis nostris, cum tu posses optime facere quod sine omnibus istis fuissetis et placuissemus tibi, et habuissemus tantumdem virtutis sicut habemus cum istis praedictis?"

miraculous answer to God and not to Angela herself. By the seventh supplementary step, Angela seems less enthusiastic about answering theological questions. Brother A. begins to question her about a topic discussed by Augustine and his disciples, namely “whether the saints are, or will be, standing up in heaven.”⁷⁹ While Brother A. is still asking his question, Angela is swept up into ecstasy and no longer understands what he is saying.⁸⁰ Regardless of her feelings about their interrogation, the fact that Brother A. and his fellow friars took time to ask these questions and record Angela’s often lengthy responses demonstrates that they genuinely admired Angela and felt her capable of understanding complex theological issues. Even though she lacked a formal education, her claim of access to God through prayer gave her theological insight beyond what could be learned through formal education.

Throughout the narrative, Brother A. also asks follow-up questions that reveal his preoccupation with aspects of Angela’s experience that correspond with the traditional elements of female piety, especially the emphasis on Eucharistic devotion and divine visions. For example, when Angela has a vision of Christ’s neck and throat, she compares it to the body of Christ in the Eucharist.⁸¹ Brother A. seizes on this opportunity to ask her about her experience with the Eucharist. He writes: “I questioned and compelled her to tell me everything she had ever seen in this vision of the body of Christ. Under pressure from me, she began to talk: ‘Sometimes I see the host itself just as I saw that neck or throat [of Christ], and it shines with such splendor and beauty that it seems to me that it must come from God; it surpasses the splendor of the sun.’”⁸² It is likely

⁷⁹ *CW*, 203. *IL*, 356. *M*, 152. Latin text: “Quomodo sancti stant vel stabunt in caelo.”

⁸⁰ *CW*, 203. *IL*, 356. *M*, 152. Latin text: “Et dum ego inquirebam, et illa fidelis Christi subito in ipsa hora fuit levata mente, et non videbatur intelligere verba mea.”

⁸¹ *CW*, 146. *IL*, 196. *M*, 50. Latin text: “Quaesivi et coegi eam quod diceret mihi quidquid unquam viderat in Corpore Christi. Et illa sic coacta coepit dicere et dixit: Aliquando video ipsam hostiam, sicut vidi ipsam gulam sive guttur, cum tanto splendore et cum tanta pulchritudine, quae videtur venire divinitus plus quam sit splendor solis.”

⁸² *CW*, 146. *IL*, 196. *M*, 50.

that Brother A. pressures Angela to talk about her Eucharistic visions because he wants the content of the *Memorial* to conform to the stereotype of traditional female sanctity more than it otherwise would. On another occasion, Brother A. also pressures her to reveal a Eucharistic vision:

After I had given her communion, before her departure, I pressed her to tell me if God had granted her a special grace. She responded as follows: Before receiving communion, just as I was about to do so, I was told: 'Beloved, the All Good is within you, and you come to receive the All Good.' And then it seemed to me that I saw the almighty God. I, brother scribe, asked her if she had seen something with any form. She said that she had not. But I pressed her further, and she responded: I saw a plenitude, a beauty wherein I saw the All Good.⁸³

Although Angela uses the language of sight (she “sees” the almighty God), her experience of the All Good is not primarily visual. The All Good, for Angela, is primarily something that she feels and understands (a plenitude and a beauty). However, Brother A. fixates on the visual element because visionary experience was understood to be a mandatory aspect of traditional female sanctity.⁸⁴ His interest in Angela’s visions may be explained by the fact that they filled a gap in his own spiritual experience.

Both Mooney and Coakley suggest that Brother A. is interested in visions because they signified an access to the immediate presence of God that he would have lacked as a male cleric. Coakley writes that while excluded from priestly authority, women stereotypically had access to “deeply affective elements of faith, the Spirit that blows where it will, the immediate presence of

⁸³ *CW*, 185—186. *IL*, 306—308. *M*, 120. Latin text: “Et postquam communicaveram eam, antequam reverteretur, quaesivi ab ea sollicite quod diceret mihi si aliquam gratiam ei fecisset Deus. Et illa dixit ita: Antequam communicarem et quando veni ad communicandum, dicebatur mihi istud: Amata, omne bonum est in te, et omne bonum vadis ad recipiendum. Et tunc, ut videbatur mihi, videbam Deum omnipotentem. Et ego frater scriptor quaesivi si ipsa videbat aliquid secundum formam aliquam. Et ipsa respondit dicens: Non videbam secundum formam aliquam. Et mihi fratri inquirenti adhuc sollicite, respondit dicens: Videbam unam plenitudinem, unam pulchritudinem, ubi videbatur omne bonum.”

⁸⁴ Of course, I do not mean to suggest that only women experienced visions in the late Middle Ages. Both men and women recorded visionary experiences, but by the thirteenth century, male visionaries became less common. Men could and did receive visions, but it was not considered a prerequisite for them to be holy. In contrast, visions were an integral (though stereotypical) part of female sanctity.

God.”⁸⁵ The visions of these women had the “potential to symbolize, and to provide for [men], even if only vicariously, what remained beyond that [priestly] authority—what men themselves wanted but found to lie beyond their grasp.”⁸⁶ Mooney similarly states that, “In the Italian context, where visionary experiences are especially pronounced in male hagiographic texts about women (in contrast to male hagiographic texts about men)...writers delight in contrasting unlearned women’s ineffable visionary knowledge with mere human knowledge.”⁸⁷ For Mooney, women were often seen by their male confessors as “sources of supernatural knowing”⁸⁸ that they lack. Therefore, a case can be made that Brother A. focuses on Angela’s visions precisely because they are a characteristic of female piety—unlikely to receive visions himself, Brother A. could at least experience the presence of God vicariously through Angela.

Finally and perhaps most importantly, Brother A. influences the content of the *Memorial* through his own stated incompetence. Brother A. repeatedly mentions his failings as a scribe, starting in the prologue when he states that, “in the pages that follow, there is an incomplete, very weak and abridged, but nonetheless true description of [Angela’s experience and teaching].”⁸⁹ According to Brother A., he had difficulty recording Angela’s experience in part because he had difficulty understanding her words. He states, “I wrote [the divine secrets], but I had so little grasp of their meaning that I thought of myself as a sieve or sifter which does not retain the precious and refined flour but only the most coarse.”⁹⁰ Brother A. seems only capable of recording Angela’s

⁸⁵ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 3.

⁸⁶ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power* 3.

⁸⁷ Catherine M. Mooney, “The Authorial Role of Brother A.,” 52.

⁸⁸ Catherine M. Mooney, “The Authorial Role of Brother A.,” 53.

⁸⁹ *CW*, 124. *IL*, 130. *M*, 2. Latin text: “quae minus plene et multum diminute et detruncate, in veritate tamen, in verbis sequentibus describuntur.”

⁹⁰ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170. *M*, 32. Latin text: “De quibus in veritate ita parum capere poteram ad scribendum, quod ego cogitavi et intellexi quod eram sicut cribrum vel setaccia quae subtilem et preciosam farinam non retinet, sed retinet magis grossam.”

words when he understand them. As a result, many of the words he did not understand were not recorded. This means that the content of the *Memorial* has been filtered through the understanding and comprehension of Brother A. On the one hand, Brother A. is very open about the limitations of the text. Indeed, he records a lot of Angela's criticism of his writing. For example, Angela tells him, "'your words recall to me what I told you, but they are very obscure. The words you read to me do not convey the meaning I intended to convey, and as a result your writing is obscure.' And another time she said: 'You have written what is bland, inferior, and amounts to nothing; but concerning what is precious in what my soul feels you have written nothing.'"91 These criticisms demonstrate that Angela's voice is mediated to us through an allegedly incompetent Brother A.

On the other hand, it is difficult to tell whether Brother A.'s insistence that he is inadequate to the task92 is an honest admission of his deficiencies as a scribe or if it is merely an example of a modesty trope, prominent in hagiographic literature. If he truly felt that the text was weak and deficient, then he should be open to amending it based on Angela's criticism. However, there is no evidence that he tries to remedy her concerns. Although open about many other aspects of the writing process, Brother A. never once states that he changed the text in response to Angela's criticism. In fact, he seems to ignore her objections altogether. For example, Angela did not want Brother A. to include the dictation taken by a young boy (*puero parvulo*93) or novice when Brother A. was temporarily barred from meeting with her because it was so badly written.94 Brother A. ignores her objections and includes it anyways. The fact that Angela's concerns may have been

91 *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34. Latin text: "Per ista verba recordor illorum quae dixi tibi, sed est obscurissima scriptura, quia haec verba quae legis mihi non explicant illa quae portant, ideo est obscura scriptura. Item alia vice dixit ita: Illud quod deterius est et quod nihil est scripsisti, sed de pretioso quod sentit anima nihil scripsisti."

92 *CW*, 138. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34.

93 *IL*, 288. *M*, 108.

94 *CW*, 179. *IL*, 288. *M*, 108.

ignored is a good reminder that although the text was collaboratively written, Brother A., with the final word, had much more power over the content, structure, and style of the text than Angela did.

Perhaps Brother A.'s worst failing is that he omits parts of Angela's account. He repeatedly states throughout the *Memorial* that he does not add anything to Angela's words because he doesn't understand them.⁹⁵ But he also states that, while he did not change Angela's words, he often omitted them: "what caused me no little pain and concern was that many of her words which seemed to me worthy of being written I had to omit in my haste, because of my inadequacy as a scribe, and out of my fear of my brothers who opposed my work."⁹⁶ Brother A. is open about the many times that he cuts short or omits Angela's words. For example, Brother A. abridges Angela's explanation that God is the love of the soul and merely summarizes what she said.⁹⁷ During Angela's colloquy on the Divine Doctor, she objects that her words were more numerous and expressive than the ones that Brother A. recorded.⁹⁸ Another time, when Angela expounds on her parable of the nobleman whose house is burned to the ground, Brother A. admits that "he did not pay attention to this example. Out of haste, and because it was very long, I cut short this beautiful instruction and divine doctrine."⁹⁹ While these admissions add some credibility to his account of the writing process, Mooney makes a good point when she writes that "the critical reader must consider carefully the extent to which Brother A.'s lack of understanding may have influenced his presentation of Angela's own narrative."¹⁰⁰ It is true that Angela's words in the *Memorial* are

⁹⁵ *CW*, 138, *IL*, 174. *M*, 34.

⁹⁶ *CW*, 138. *IL*, 174. *M*, 34. Latin text: "Dolor tamen mihi et sollicitudo non modica remanebat, eo quod multa quae intelligebam esse digna scribe omittebam tunc quando scribebam propter festinantiam meam et insufficientiam mei scribentis et propter timorem fratrum contradicentium."

⁹⁷ *CW*, 154. *IL*, 216. *M*, 62.

⁹⁸ *CW*, 156. *IL*, 222. *M*, 66.

⁹⁹ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234-236. *M*, 76. Latin text: "Sed istud de exemplo parum curavi. Ego frater scriptor istam longam et pulchram praedicationem et doctrinam divinam detruncavi et abreviavi propter festinationem quia erat multum longa."

¹⁰⁰ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 41.

mediated through Brother A., and therefore we do not have access to Angela's authentic voice, experience, or teachings. For the purposes of this dissertation, when I speak of Angela's theology, I am talking about my artificial reconstruction of her thought based on the text of the *Memorial*. I do not make any claim to represent Angela's authentic, but ultimately inaccessible, voice.

However, Brother A.'s lack of understanding is not entirely negative. His need to understand Angela's experiences before putting them into words leads to a collaborative theological endeavor. As Angela's experiences become more ineffable, the "voice of God recedes from its central place in the narrative."¹⁰¹ Particularly when Angela experiences God in darkness, she no longer receives the words and images that she describes in the previous steps. It is in the later steps that Angela "tries to find words to impress its very ineffability upon the friar."¹⁰² In the later stages of Angela's experience, Brother A.'s questions and lack of understanding help Angela refine her own teaching on the inexpressibility of God. Brother A., pushes her to find a way to express the "concept of inexpressibility" so that he is able to understand her.¹⁰³

In the later steps, Brother A. often resists an idea that Angela expresses, forcing her to clarify her thoughts. For example, Brother A. resists Angela's statement that the deeper one's experience of the divine, the less one can say about God. Angela responds by telling him that if he had the same experience of God that she had, he would not be able to preach, but could only say, "go with God, for of God I can say nothing."¹⁰⁴ Brother A.'s lack of understanding or reticence to believe Angela's teaching allows her to further develop her theology of divine inexpressibility. For Coakley, both Angela and Brother A. develop a kind of collegiality as they share the task (and the ultimate failure) of expressing the inexpressible. Through this collaboration and collegiality,

¹⁰¹ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 125.

¹⁰² John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 125.

¹⁰³ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 125

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, 192. *IL*, 324. *M*, 130. Latin text: "Ite cum Deo, quia de Deo nihil vobis possum dicere."

Angela “comes to the heightened perception of the transcendence of God that, for all her powers, places her not in a world apart from [Brother A.] but rather at his side, grasping with him for words.¹⁰⁵” This is a particularly poignant portrayal of the theological collaboration of Angela and Brother A. At the boundaries of human language, they grasp for words together in their shared effort to express the inexpressible.

Despite the abovementioned collegiality, the roles each author played in the composition of the text were not equal. As the scribe, Brother A. had the opportunity not just to record Angela’s words but also to change or omit them. As I quoted above, the *frater scriptor* describes himself as a sieve that does not retain the precious and refined flour but only the coarsest pieces,¹⁰⁶ suggesting that his writing fell short of the sublimity of Angela’s words due to the divine subject matter. The metaphor of the sieve is apt. The content that passes through Brother A.’s filter is carefully curated. Some of it may authentically be Angela’s, but it is difficult to discern which portions of the text allow Angela’s actual thought and experience to filter through. It is best to keep in mind Dominique Poirel’s words: “Between Angela’s own spoken words and the discourse as reported by Brother A., a fivefold change occurred with respect to medium, language, gender, social status, and education. When he put Angela’s words into writing, not only did Brother A. translate them from her Umbrian dialect into Latin, but he also transposed them from the world of an illiterate laywoman into the male, clerical, and university culture of a Franciscan religious, with every distorting prism one can imagine.”¹⁰⁷

Some scholars, such as Catherine Mooney, have tried to separate the authentic voice of Angela from that of Brother A. through theological analysis. Mooney’s essay “The Authorial Role

¹⁰⁵ John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 127.

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 190. *M*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ Dominique Poirel, “The Death of Angela of Foligno and the Genesis of the *Liber Angelae*,” *Textual Cultures of Medieval Italy*, Ed. William Robins, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 267.

of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno's Revelations" is significant because it tries to reclaim the voice of female authors from the influence of their male collaborators. She writes: "If scholars are to say anything definitive about women's lives and spirituality—if they are, in short, to give them a 'voice'—then an attempt must be made to disentangle their voices from those of their male scribes and editors."¹⁰⁸ Mooney claims that it is possible to "speculate more knowledgeably about the individual voices of Angela of Foligno and Brother A. by carefully weighing the plentiful evidence of Brother A.'s authorial role against major motifs of the text that appear to belong more singularly to Angela."¹⁰⁹ By separating the theological concerns of Brother A. from those of Angela, Mooney asserts that it is possible to identify some of Angela's authentic theological positions.

However, Mooney is cautious in attributing themes or theological positions to Angela. She writes that "delineating precisely the boundaries of each author's contribution to such a collaborative effort is not only impossible, it also ignores the nature of medieval religious authorship which frequently lacked the individualist cast so evident in modern writing."¹¹⁰ Mooney is right that scholars will never be able to delineate the exact positions of Brother A. versus those of Angela. But it is also true that some themes in the *Memorial* seem more important to Brother A. than they are to Angela. For example, Mooney herself points out that complex theological questions, visions, and penances/physical suffering are significant to Brother A., who brings them up frequently, but are rarely if ever mentioned by Angela.¹¹¹ While scholars may never completely disentangle each author's precise contribution to the text, analyzing different themes as well as

¹⁰⁸ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 34.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 58.

¹¹⁰ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 56.

¹¹¹ Catherine M. Mooney, "The Authorial Role of Brother A.," 51–53.

tensions and power disparities in the relationship between Angela and Brother A. can help distinguish the viewpoints of Brother A. from those of Angela.

It is worth noting that both Brother A. and Angela ultimately affirm that the *Memorial* is “true,” despite its flaws and omissions. Angela tells Brother A. in the epilogue that even God approves of their text: “God, she said, even told her ‘Everything which has been written is in conformity with my will and comes from me, that is, issues forth from me...I will put my seal to it.’”¹¹² Despite Brother A.’s omissions and poor transcriptions, both Angela and God affirm that what is contained in the *Memorial* is true. Although neither Angela nor Brother A. explain what they mean by “true,” perhaps the *Memorial* can be compared to an impressionist painting. If you stand too close to an impressionist painting, it is almost impossible to make out the object being rendered amid the chaotic brush strokes. However, when you take a few steps back, what was once a mess of brush strokes becomes an identifiable object. That object is not rendered on the canvas as an exact replica of reality; it isn’t a photograph. Nevertheless, the viewer is still able to identify the shape, color, and contours of the object. Similarly, the *Memorial* does not give us the exact mystical utterances that Angela spoke to Brother A. Rather, the *Memorial* faithfully renders the general message of Angela’s experiences and teachings just as the shapes in the water of a Monet painting generally resemble water lilies. The words are true, not in a literal or photographic sense (i.e., the exact words that God spoke to Angela), but in the sense that they claim to authentically communicate the message that God sent through Angela. Brother A.’s influence in the structure and content of the *Memorial* demonstrate that he is not just a scribe. It is truly a collaborative work, influenced just as much by the concerns and failings of Brother A. as those of Angela.

¹¹² *CW*, 218. *IL*, 398—400. *M*, 180. Latin text: “Et etiam dixit mihi ipse Deus ita dicens: ‘Totum illud quod scriptum est, totum scriptum est secundum voluntatem mean et a me venit, idest a me processit...Ego sigillabo illud.’”

Italian and Anglophone Scholarly Perspectives on Brother A.

During the course of my research on Angela, I noted some surprising differences between Italian and Anglophone scholarship. For example, while most Anglophone scholars refer to the *frater scriptor* of the Memorial as “Brother A.,” most Italian scholars refer to him as “Arnaldo.” When reading Italian scholarship on Angela, it is helpful to keep in mind that Italian scholars are more likely to accept traditions passed on about the *Memorial* (such as the scribe’s name) and are more likely to trust in Brother A.’s honesty about the writing process. While there are Anglophone scholars who uncritically attribute almost total authorship of the text to Angela as well as Italian scholars who question Brother A.’s account of the writing process, for the most part this difference between Italian and Anglophone scholarly literature on Angela holds true. Since the majority of the scholarship referenced thus far in my section on the *Memorial*’s authorship has been from Anglophone scholars, in this section I will briefly examine some Italian scholarship and identify some important differences.

Since the two most cited critical editions of the Memorial are compiled and translated by Italian scholars, I will begin by examining Thier and Calufetti’s 1985 critical edition of *Il Libro della Beata Angela da Foligno* as well as Menestò’s 2015 critical edition of the *Memoriale*. Thier and Calufetti’s valuable critical edition was an excellent and well-written piece of scholarship. Even though their theory of the major and minor redactions were later disproved, it was still a revolutionary idea in its time. However, their introduction seems unusual because they demonstrate considerably more sympathy for the difficulties Brother A. encountered while trying to record Angela’s words than their English-speaking counterparts. For example, in the introduction, Thier and Calufetti describe Brother A.’s work as “*un lavoro fine e di estrema*

difficoltà.”¹¹³ They mention that Angela had trouble choosing the appropriate language as her experiences became increasingly sublime: “*Alla stessa dettatrice mancava sempre più il termine confacente, perché la verità che contemplava si ritraeva elevandosi continuamente.*”¹¹⁴ They also describe Angela’s original thirty-step mystical itinerary as “*non ordinato e discontinuo.*”¹¹⁵ While Angela mentions that her words fall short of the reality of her experiences or that what she says is blasphemy, I am not aware of an instance in the text where she is unable to come up with an appropriate term. Likewise, Brother A.’s twenty-six steps do not seem any more or less ordered than Angela’s original thirty. But according to Thier and Calufetti, Brother A., the “*paziente e oggettivo redattore,*”¹¹⁶ was forced to take Angela’s unruly thirty steps and reorder them into twenty-six (nineteen plus and seven supplementary). While Angela’s experience was undoubtedly difficult to record (especially when Brother A.’s superiors were suspicious of his relationship with Angela), Thier and Calufetti characterize Brother A.’s task as monumental: “*Il lavoro del frater scriptor doveva svolgersi attraverso un intrecciarsi di difficoltà, che gli costarono la pazienza di Giobbe.*”¹¹⁷ While surely both Angela and Brother A. had to deal with difficulties and misunderstandings, it seems excessive to compare Brother A. to Job.

Thier and Calufetti also appear to take Brother A.’s trustworthiness at face value. This can be explained at least partly by the date of publication. The first substantial critique of Brother A.’s role in the authorship of the text is Mooney’s 1994 article “The Authorial Role of Brother A. in the Composition of Angela of Foligno’s Revelations,” examined above. However, Thier and

¹¹³ *IL*, 35. English translation: “a subtle work of extreme difficulty.”

¹¹⁴ *IL*, 35. English translation: “The same one giving dictation increasingly lacked the appropriate term, because the truth she contemplated withdrew, continually rising [beyond her reach].”

¹¹⁵ *IL*, 44. English translation: “not ordered and discontinuous.”

¹¹⁶ *IL*, 44. English translation: “patient and objective redactor.”

¹¹⁷ *IL*, 44. English translation: “The work of the *frater scriptor* took place through an intertwining of difficulties, which cost him the patience of Job.”

Calufetti are particularly uncritical of Brother A.'s role as a scribe. They not only believe Brother A. when he states that he did not write a single word that was not Angela's, but they also portray the times that Brother A. gets things wrong in an overly sympathetic light. For example, they write, "Arnaldo è fedele alla frase e alla parola...E quando Angela gli obietta...egli, umile, se ne assume la colpa, ammettendo di non poter esprimere col suo povero discorso il pensiero della Beata."¹¹⁸ Not only is Brother A. a faithful scribe, according to Thier and Calufetti, but he is also humble when criticized. This perspective seems to wash over the omissions that Brother A. makes in the text as well as his own admission that he is incompetent and inadequate to the task. Rather than hold Brother A. to account for these deficiencies, Thier and Calufetti attribute Brother A.'s difficulties to the ineffability of mystical experience: "le contemplazioni più alte, ai limiti estremi dell'umana comprensione, superano la normale capacità dei vocaboli."¹¹⁹

Menestò's critical edition, in addition to correcting the error of the dual redaction theory proposed by Thier and Calufetti, is also slightly more critical of Brother A. Unlike other Italian scholars, Menestò refers to Brother A. as *frater A.* rather than "Arnaldo." However, Menestò also assumes that Brother A. is, for the most part, honest about the writing process. At the beginning of his introduction to the critical edition of the Memorial, Menestò points to the complex authorship of the *Liber*. He writes that it is "un *corpus* di testi scritti non da lei, ma che la tradizione trasmette sotto il suo nome."¹²⁰ The fact that Menestò does not attribute authorship of the text directly to Angela, but to "a tradition transmitted under her name," is both remarkable and accurate. Brother A. tells us that Angela dictated the *Memorial*, but we only have his (rather unreliable)

¹¹⁸ *IL*, 45. English translation: "Arnaldo is faithful to the phrase and the word ... And when Angela objects to him ... he, humble, takes the blame for it, admitting that he cannot express the thought of the Blessed with his poor speech."

¹¹⁹ *IL*, 46. English translation: "The highest contemplations, at the extreme limits of human understanding, exceed the normal capacity of words."

¹²⁰ *M*, xiii. English translation: "a corpus of texts written, not by her, but that tradition transmits under her name."

word for it. The provenance of the *Instructions* is even more dubious, as there are many scribes and almost all of them are unidentified. It is also noteworthy that even though Menestò is not especially sympathetic towards Brother A. and even points out his elementary Latin, noting that the text is “scritta da frate A., francescano...che trascrive parola per parola in un latino elementare e insicuro quello che lei dettava nella sua parlata folignate.”¹²¹ Menestò is careful not to idealize Brother A. as Thier and Calufetti do in their 1985 critical edition.

However, Menestò still sees the text unequivocally as Angela’s true words and experience. He writes that, “Il *Memoriale* contiene—ripeto—il resoconto dell’esperienza interiore di Angela, del succedersi delle vicende intime, del brulicare di visioni dove tutto è vertigini, estasi, metamofosi, moltiplicazioni, gioie infinite e aridità, sommità e abissi, luci e tenebre. Angela è l’autrice orale, la voce di Cristo, in Cristo e per Cristo di quella esperienza.”¹²² Although Menestò is by no means uncritical of the authorial role of Brother A., nevertheless he reads the *Memorial* as an account of Angela’s authentic inner experience, rather than an account of that experience mediated by Brother A. Although one might prefer a more nuanced approach, this assertion is common in Italian scholarship on Angela.

However, Menestò goes a little too far when he writes that the *Memorial* is written directly from Angela’s mouth: “Nel *Memoriale*, dunque, tutto è raccontato, per bocca della protagonista, come un susseguirsi di vicende intime, come un continuo interiorizzare la presenza divina.”¹²³ Although Menestò is usually careful about his language, his statement that the text is “from the

¹²¹ *M*, xiv. English translation: “written by the Franciscan Brother A., who transcribes word for word in an elementary and insecure Latin what she dictated in her Folignan vernacular.”

¹²² *M*, xix-xx. English translation: “The *Memorial* contains—I repeat—the account of Angela’s inner experience, of the succession of intimate events, of the swarm of visions where everything is dizziness, ecstasy, metamorphosis, multiplications, infinite joys and aridity, summits and abysses, lights and darkness. Angela is the oral author, the voice of Christ, in Christ and for Christ of that experience.”

¹²³ *M*, xxiii. English translation: “In the *Memorial*, therefore, everything is told through the mouth of the protagonist as a succession of intimate events, as a continuous internalization of the divine presence.”

mouth of the protagonist” is not accurate even on the text’s face. Brother A. interrupts Angela’s first nineteen steps to narrate, in his perspective, the events of the Assisi pilgrimage. The story is told twice; after he narrates the events of the pilgrimage that he witnessed, he then records Angela’s narrative of the same events. Similarly, in the sixth supplementary step, Brother A. adds to the narrative, writing some of his own observations of Angela’s suffering. Brother A. does more than write the prologue and conclusion—he shapes the narrative in important ways, as I detailed in the previous section on collaborative authorship. Menestò’s lack of precision here is no doubt meant to emphasize the intimate nature of Angela’s revelations, but it is also typical of the way that many Italian scholars are reticent to acknowledge the collaborative authorship of the *Memorial*.

CHAPTER 3: Angela of Foligno's Mystical Itinerary? Tracing the Steps of the *Memorial*

The *Memorial* is a text that defies classification. It contains elements of a mystical itinerary, a hagiography, a spiritual autobiography, and at times even a sermon or theological treatise. At first it appears that the text is primarily a mystical itinerary because it begins with thirty steps or “transformations” (*mutationes*) of the soul,¹ which Brother A. changes to twenty-six steps.² The first few steps seem to describe the path of the soul in general, but Angela's personal experience quickly takes over the narrative and the itinerary is set aside. In this section, I will examine how the steps of *Memorial* correspond to the different genres and purposes of the text. From the prologue, it is evident that in the eyes of Angela and her scribe that God sought to use Angela's experience and teachings as a verification of the incarnation and “to increase the devotion of the

¹ Mario Sensi posits the interesting possibility that Angela may have been influenced by John Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, since his ladder contains 30 steps. Angelo of Clareno translated Climacus's works when he was in Greece and Angela may have heard about the text. Mario Sensi, “Foligno all'introcio delle strade,” 285.

² *CW*, 124. *IL*, 132. *M*, 4.

people.”³ But it is left unclear whether the intent is for people to imitate Angela’s mystical path or attain the same specific and unique experiences in the same order. Therefore, while the text does guide the reader to greater spiritual awareness, it is probably best described as, to use Kate Greenspan and Richard Kieckhefer’s neologism, an autohagiography, the autobiographical account of a holy person that follows the style, themes, and tropes of hagiographic literature and aims at moral emulation rather than mystical imitation.⁴ However, the underlying goal of the mystical itinerary never completely dissipates from the narrative. Desiring to guide the reader closer to God, Angela uses language “transformationally,” that is, not only to describe her ecstatic experiences but also to produce a similar moral, if not mystical consciousness in the reader.⁵

Steps One to Nineteen

The first nineteen steps appear at the beginning of the *Memorial* and give the reader the impression that what follows will be a mystical itinerary. However, Brother A. writes in the second chapter that he and Angela began the text with her pilgrimage to Assisi. And far from starting off with the intention of writing a mystical itinerary, Brother A. set out to write a simple account of the events that occurred in Assisi so he could consult with a wise man to ensure that Angela was not being deceived or possessed by a demonic spirit.⁶ Yet, Angela’s story was so extraordinary and compelling that Brother A. quickly needed a larger copy book. I believe that the plan to write a mystical itinerary was, at the very least, developed after Brother A. saw the potential in Angela’s

³ *CW*, 124. *IL*, 128—130. *M*, 2. Latin text: “Et hic nuper per aliquam suorum fidelium ad devotionem suorum praedictam experientiam et doctrinam fecit aliquantulum indicare.”

⁴ See Kate Greenspan, “Autohagiography and Medieval Women’s Spiritual Autobiography,” in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1996); Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 4.

⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), xvii.

⁶ *CW*, 137. *IL*, 170—172. *M*, 32.

story to inspire and edify others. Angela and her companion originally came up with thirty steps,⁷ but Brother A. reorganized Angela's account into twenty-six and seven supplementary steps. The first few are general enough to be consistent with the genre of mystical itinerary, but the intimate nature of Angela's account soon overwhelms the narrative and the steps become too specific and personal to use as a general guide for the soul's ascent to God.⁸ Although the idea of the work as a mystical itinerary is never entirely left behind, the text becomes a deeply personal account of Angela's union with the suffering God-man.

In the beginning of the *Memorial*, Angela describes in great detail the pain of contrition and the penitential process of atoning for one's sins. In the first three steps, the soul grieves without feeling love as it becomes aware of its sinfulness, confesses, and performs penance in satisfaction for its sins.⁹ The emotional pain caused by contrition is described in detail in steps four through seven. In the seventh step, Angela still feels the same grief as in the previous steps, but she is given the grace of beginning to look at the cross.¹⁰ In the eighth step, she describes herself entering deeper into the mystery of the cross, something that was extremely painful because she felt as if she had crucified Christ.¹¹ This becomes a turning point in her spiritual journey where she channels her own emotional pain into *imitatio Christi*, to the point of acting out physically the moral poverty that she felt interiorly. She states that the "perception of the meaning of the cross set [her] so afire that, standing near the cross, I stripped myself of all my clothing and offered my whole self to him.

⁷ *CW*, 124. *IL*, 132. *M*, 4.

⁸ For example, if we compare the *Memorial* to Beatrice of Nazareth's *Seven Manners of Loving God*, it is clear that the personal aspect of Angela's account overshadows any attempt to discern the guidelines of each step. Although Beatrice's treatise was also based on personal experience, it does not refer explicitly to personal events but instead describes the seven stages generally, so that it could apply to any soul. The *Memorial* is simply too specific to Angela to be considered a useful mystical itinerary. See Roger de Ganck, *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), 289-307.

⁹ *CW*, 124-125. *IL*, 132-134. *M*, 4-6.

¹⁰ *CW*, 125. *IL*, 136. *M*, 8.

¹¹ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 136. *M*, 8.

Although very fearful, I promised him then to maintain perpetual chastity and not to offend him again with any of my bodily members, accusing each of these one by one.”¹² Angela’s sense of her own sinfulness is so great that in her eyes she is nothing before God. Stripping before the cross, she acts out that interior poverty and rededicates each of her sinful body parts to Christ.

It is also important to note that Angela’s radical gesture was a hagiographical trope. Not only does Angela’s stripping present her as an *alter Franciscus*—Francis of Assisi was famous for renouncing his father’s wealth by stripping off his clothing in the public square—but it also evokes the theme of nakedness prominent in hagiographical literature. Lachance mentions the commonly used phrase *nudus nudum Christum sequi* (naked following the naked Christ).¹³ While the adage originated with Jerome, it became particularly important to the Franciscans, who associated nudity both with their founder St. Francis and with the kind of radical poverty that the order sought to practice. Lachance notes other prominent sources that repeat the adage: James of Vitry uses it in connection with the early beguine Marie d’Oignies, Bonaventure explores this theme in his *Apologia Pauperum*,¹⁴ and it was especially prominent among the Franciscan Spirituals, with whom Angela associated in Foligno.¹⁵ What is interesting about this episode of stripping is that Angela subsequently re-interiorizes this external gesture mere sentences later. Angela states, “I would need to strip myself in order to be lighter and go naked to it. This would entail forgiving all who had offended me, stripping myself of everything worldly, of all attachments to men and women, of my friends and relatives, and everyone else, and, likewise of

¹² *CW*, 127. *IL*, 136. *M*, 10. Latin text: “Sed in ista cognitione crucis dabatur mihi tantus ignis quod, stando iuxta crucem, expoliavi me omnia vestimenta mea et totam me obtuli ei. Et quamvis cum timore, tamen tunc promisi ei servare perpetuam castitatem et non offendere eum cum aliquo membrorum, accusando ei omnia membra singulariter, scilicet quodlibet membrum per se.”

¹³ *CW*, 367, note 10.

¹⁴ Bonaventure, “Defense of the Mendicants,” in *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint*, trans. José de Vinck (Paterson, N.J.: St. Antony Guild Press, 1966), 4:139 (7.15).

¹⁵ *CW*, 367, note 10.

my possessions and even my very self.”¹⁶ Perhaps because she felt the act of physically stripping was immodest, or because she generally prioritizes the soul over the body in her thought, Angela turns the physical act of stripping into an allegory of the steps the soul has to take to attain spiritual poverty. However, she highlights the separateness of the physical and spiritual acts of stripping by placing them in different steps—her physical stripping occurs in the eighth step while the spiritual acts of stripping are described in the ninth step, implying that the spiritual act is a sign of a more advanced stage.

Angela also turns her own emotional pain into both *imitatio Christi* and *imitatio Mariae* in the ninth step. After describing what the sinner would have to give up in order to embrace Christ’s poverty, Angela states that if she divests herself of these things then she would be free to give her heart to Christ.¹⁷ Like many ascetics before her, Angela understands poverty as freedom. Poverty meant renouncing wealth, family ties, and anything worldly.¹⁸ However, when Angela describes giving up friends and relatives, readers are often surprised at how literal this becomes in her account. She states that “Moreover, it came to pass, God so willing, that at that time my mother, who had been a great obstacle to me, died. In like manner, my husband died, as did all my sons in a short space of time. Because I had already entered the aforesaid way, and had prayed to God for their death, I felt a great consolation when it happened. I thought that since God had conceded me this aforesaid favor, my heart would always be within God’s heart, and God’s heart always within me.”¹⁹ Most modern readers find this passage abhorrent, and this attitude pervades a lot of the

¹⁶ CW, 126. IL, 138. M, 8. Latin text: “si volebam ire ad crucem expoliarem me ut essem magis levis, et nuda irem ad crucem, scilicet quod parcerem omnibus hominibus et feminis et de omnibus amicis et parentibus et de omnibus aliis et de possessione mea et de meipsa.”

¹⁷ CW, 126. IL, 136. M, 8.

¹⁸ CW, 125. IL, 134. M, 6.

¹⁹ CW, 126. IL, 136. M, 10. Latin text: “Et factum est, volente Deo, quod illo tempore mortua fuit mater mea, quae erat mihi magnum impedimentum. Et postea mortuus est vir meus et omnes filii in brevi tempore. Et quia incoeperam viam praedictam et rogaveram Deum quod morerentur, magnam consolationem inde habui scilicet de

contemporary scholarly literature on Angela. For example, Peter Dronke writes that “the antinomy between love of family and love of Christ has never been as cruelly—indeed manically—affirmed as by Angela.”²⁰ However, Angela’s alleged cruelty is plausibly explained by the trope of maternal martyrdom, discussed in chapter one.²¹

Although it may seem that Angela is happy about the death of her family, Barbara Newman points out that “behind the topos of willing sacrifice...there lurks a real ambivalence...Angela dwelt on the intense compassion that Christ felt for his mother’s pain, and at a moment of profound desolation, she inverted his own prayer on from the Cross and cried out, ‘My son, my son, do not abandon me.’”²² She also points out that Angela grieves intensely for her mother and children later in the Memorial. After Angela’s pilgrimage to Assisi, she feels the desire to die and states that “the thought of continuing to live was a greater burden for me to bear than the pain and sorrow I had felt over the death of my mother and sons, and beyond any pain that I could imagine.”²³ It is clear that however intensely she wanted to die, Angela did feel pain and sorrow at the death of her mother and children. It is possible that the trope of maternal martyrdom prevented Angela from expressing grief at the death of her family because it required her to model the willing sacrifice of the martyr. Newman writes, however, that Angela “was able to reclaim and redeem her motherhood in a sublimated form, cherishing not only the infant Christ but numerous spiritual sons.”²⁴ If we understand the death of Angela’s family within the trope of maternal martyrdom,

morte eorum. Et cogitabam quod deinceps postquam Deus fecerat mihi praedicta, quod cor meum semper esset in corde Dei et cor Dei semper esset in corde meo.”

²⁰ Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 215.

²¹ See Ch. 1 p. 72.

²² Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 17. 88.

²³ *CW*, 143. *IL*, 186. *M*, 44. Latin text: “Desiderabam mori de hoc mundo. Et vivere erat mihi poena super dolorem mortis matris et filiorum et super omnem dolorem quem possem cogitare.”

²⁴ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 88.

then her consolation at their death need not be read as cruelty alone but can be construed as a sacrifice that her contemporaries might have understood as a sign of her sanctity. Indeed, placing the death of her family in the ninth step, where she describes having to spiritually strip herself to follow Christ, is a clear indicator that their deaths involved indeed pain and sacrifice.

By the tenth step, the characteristics of each stage become almost impossible to identify because Angela's visionary experience completely takes over. The tenth step also reveals that at least in these early stages, Angela linked her own experiences of pain to Christ's in a manner that emphasized mutuality in their relationship. After stripping before the cross and condemning all her body parts in the eighth step, Christ mirrors her act of singling out each body part. Angela states that Christ

appeared to me many times, both while I was asleep and awake, crucified on the cross. He told me that I should look at his wounds. In a wonderful manner, he showed me how he had endured all these wounds for me...He was showing me the sufferings he had endured for me from each of these wounds, one after the other...showing me his afflictions from head to toe. He even showed me how his beard, eyebrows, and hair had been plucked out and enumerated each and every one of the blows of the whip that he had received.²⁵

Christ pointing out each body part, as she had done for him, spurred Angela to greater acts of penance in the eleventh and twelfth steps. Angela's experience of pain was therefore crucial to understanding Christ's crucifixion. Diane Tomkinson points out Angela frequently "chose details consistent with her own life experience to teach about Christ's poverty, suffering and contempt."²⁶ She points out Angela's parable of the man who invites many friends to a banquet. Angela

²⁵ *CW*, 127. *IL*, 138–140. *M*, 10. Latin text: "apparuit mihi pluries dormienti et vigilantem in cruce crucifixus. Et dicebat mihi quod ego respicerem in plagas suas, et mirabilia modo ostendebat mihi quomodo omnia sustinuerat pro me...Et cum ostenderet mihi omnia singulariter et singillatim quae sustinerat pro me...ostendendo a pedibus usque ad caput poenas. Etiam ostendebat pilos barbae et supercilliorum et capitis sibi evulsos et numerabat omnes flagellationes, scilicet assignando singulas flagellationes."

²⁶ Diane Tomkinson, OSF, "'Poverty, Suffering, and Contempt' in the Theology and Practice of Angela of Foligno: Problem or Resource?" in *Her Bright Merits: Essays Honoring Ingrid J. Peterson, OSF* (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012), 117–18, note 16.

interprets this as Christ trying to teach her that virginity, poverty, fever, the loss of sons, tribulations, and the loss of possessions are all sent by God.²⁷ While Angela does not claim that these are her experiences, there is evidence in the Memorial that she endures each of these things. Angela's own experience of suffering and sacrifice is therefore a starting point for her contemplation of Christ's suffering, even though she intentionally avoids discussing her pain in later stages. By the thirteenth step, we see Angela moving away from discussing her suffering or penances. Instead, she engages in imaginative meditations on the suffering of Christ, Mary, and St. John.²⁸ This transition is important because it marks a point in the narrative where Angela focuses almost exclusively on Christ's pain. Sometimes she will describe the delight or pain she experiences in her visions and ecstasies, but from this point on it is clear that the suffering of Christ supersedes her own experience.

In the thirteenth to fifteenth steps, Angela began to cultivate a compassion, entering into the suffering of the Virgin Mary and St. John during a meditation on the passion. In the thirteenth step, she says she "entered into the sorrow over the passion suffered by the mother of Christ and St. John."²⁹ In the fourteenth step, Angela received a vision in which Christ invites her to drink the blood from the wound in his side.³⁰ Her experiences before this step were mostly visual, i.e. seeing Christ's wounds. But in this vision, Angela participated in the passion, internalizing it through the visceral act of drinking Christ's blood.³¹ After this vision, Angela longed to die in the vilest and

²⁷ *CW*, 159. *IL*, 232. *M*, 72.

²⁸ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 144. *M*, 14.

²⁹ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142. *M*, 12. Latin text: "Intravi per dolorem Matris Christi et sancti Ionnis."

³⁰ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142–144. *M*, 12.

³¹ Caroline Walker Bynum notes that, although blood piety was more prominent in northern Europe, it was an important theme in the writings of some late medieval Italian laywomen, such as Catherine of Siena and Catherine of Genoa. Although blood piety is not as prominent in Angela's work, it does appear in passages like this. Bynum notes that blood piety may have been particularly popular for the laity because they were denied the chalice during communion: "The arguments of theologians and canonists that by concomitance both the body and blood are present in each species often failed to convince the faithful. Demands for the chalice led to the distribution of various non-consecrated cups (the ablutions cup, a chalice filled with wine that had been poured over blood relics,

most violent way possible in order to experience something of the anguish of Christ on the cross. This impulse is often interpreted as a kind of erotic masochism, in which the mystic fantasizes about dying in extremely violent ways or inflicts violence on his or her own body in order to attain pleasure or sexual gratification.³² But a much more likely explanation is that of radical compassion, or co-suffering. Angela wished to suffer in the most horrific way possible, not because suffering gave her pleasure, but because she longed to experience something of what Christ felt in the passion. Since his suffering was infinite, according to Angela,³³ she would have to suffer in the most extreme way imaginable to even approach the tiniest portion of what Christ experienced. In the fifteenth step, Angela returned to the suffering of the Virgin Mary and St. John. She writes that “St. John made me feel this sorrow [of Christ’s passion] to such a degree that it surpassed any I had ever experienced.”³⁴ The radical compassion that Angela practiced in these steps was not the result of her own efforts, although she did initiate the process by meditating on the suffering of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and St. John. Because Christ’s passion was infinite and ineffable, Angela only had access to that experience when it was given to her through grace.

etc.) after or outside mass, perhaps without full disclosure as to what *sanguis Christi* they did or did not contain” (Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond*, [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 5). It is also worth noting that the image of drinking blood from the side of Christ was a common maternal image. Medical science in the Middle Ages thought that breast milk was curdled blood. Angela’s vision could be interpreted as a kind of spiritual breastfeeding. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 132.

³² See Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 216; Laurie A. Finke, “Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision,” in *Maps of Flesh and Light: the Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Laurie A. Finke, “The Grotesque Mystical Body: Representing the Woman Writer,” *Feminist Theory, Women’s Writing* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992); Cristina M. Mazzone, “Feminism, Abjection, Transgression: Angela of Foligno and the Twentieth Century,” *Mystics Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (June 1991): 61–70; Cristina M. Mazzone, “On the (Un)Representability of Woman’s Pleasure: Angela of Foligno and Jacques Lacan,” *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).

³³ For Angela’s view on the infinite and ineffable suffering of Christ, p. 159.

³⁴ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 144. *M*, 14. Latin text: “Et tantum dedit mihi semel sanctus iohannes, quod fuit de maximis quod unquam senserim.”

In the sixteenth through the nineteenth steps, Angela alternated between joy in the divine sweetness and grief over the passion. In the sixteenth step, Angela tasted the divine sweetness (*dulcedine divina*) for the first time when she prayed the Our Father.³⁵ But after this experience of consolation, the Virgin Mary gave Angela the grace to grieve more genuinely over the passion in the seventeenth step.³⁶ Angela was plunged back into grief over the passion and her role in crucifying Christ. She took on greater penances and put all her hopes for deliverance in the passion of Christ.³⁷ One almost feels whiplash at the frequency with which Angela's spiritual state shifts from joy to sorrow. For example, in the eighteenth step, she says that she "felt God so vividly and found such delight in prayer that I even forgot to eat."³⁸

Despite the initial delight Angela felt in prayer, she afterwards reported strange behavior that must have been extremely difficult both for her and those around her. She writes that the fire of love in her head was so intense that if she heard anyone speak of God, she would scream.³⁹ In an effort to show that this reaction was not voluntary, Angela adds that "even if someone had stood over me with an axe ready to kill me, this would not have stopped my screaming."⁴⁰ People around Angela murmured that she was possessed by the devil, and she began to agree with them. Her physical and emotional reaction to the passion was so intense that she would develop a fever and become ill if she saw it depicted, forcing her companion to remove all images of the passion.⁴¹ However, in the nineteenth step Angela received a "great consolation of God's sweetness"

³⁵ *CW*, 129. *IL*, 146. *M*, 14.

³⁶ *CW*, 130. *IL*, 148. *M*, 16.

³⁷ *CW*, 130. *IL*, 148. *M*, 16.

³⁸ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18. Latin text: "Postea habui sentimenta Dei, et habebam tantam delectationem in oratione quod non recordabar de comestione."

³⁹ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 16.

⁴⁰ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18. Latin text: "Et si aliquis stetisset cum securi super me ad interficiendum me, non potuissem abstinuisse."

⁴¹ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18.

(*consolationem magnam de dulcedine Dei*) when praying the Our Father, and felt an even greater consolation when meditating on the humanity and divinity of Christ.⁴² It is in this step that God promised that “the whole Trinity will come into you.”⁴³ Although the nineteenth step ends in a moment of bliss, Angela oscillates between ecstatic joy and painful sorrow throughout the *Memorial* until she reaches the seventh supplementary step.

First Supplementary Step

Because I discuss this step at length in my biographical sketch of Angela, I will keep my analysis brief. The first supplementary step details Angela’s pilgrimage to Assisi. The Trinity entered her soul and left her when she entered the church of St. Francis for the second time. Brother A. was present when Angela began screaming and was embarrassed and offended. The two later met in Foligno, where Brother A. began to write Angela’s story. Although he set out to write a brief account to share with a wise and spiritual man, Brother A. quickly realized that Angela had been given extraordinary graces and began to record her experiences. When Angela came back from Assisi, she felt peaceful and filled with divine sweetness.⁴⁴ She described a mystical marriage (a common trope in hagiographical literature on women saints) in which God said to her: “you are holding the ring of my love. From now on you are engaged to me and you will never leave me.”⁴⁵

After recording this account, Brother A. was curious because Angela told him two things that appeared contradictory. She said that God introduced himself as the Holy Spirit and then later said “I am the one who was crucified for you.”⁴⁶ He asked her how both can be true. Angela

⁴² *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18

⁴³ *CW*, 132. *IL*, 154. *M*, 20. Latin text: “Tota Trinitas veniet in te.”

⁴⁴ *CW*, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 44.

⁴⁵ *CW*, 143. *IL*, 188. *M*, 44. Latin text: “Tu habes anulum mei amoris et es arrata a me et de certero non discedes a me.”

⁴⁶ *CW*, 139. *IL*, 178. *M*, 38. Latin text: “Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus, qui veni ad te.”

CW, 141. *IL*, 182. *M*, 40. Latin text: “Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus, qui intro intus in te.”

CW, 140. *IL*, 182. *M*, 40. Latin text: “Ego sum qui fui crucifixus pro te.”

returned home and God clarified that “when these words were said to you...at that moment the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit had entered into you.”⁴⁷ This explanation was sufficient for Brother A., but Angela was not satisfied with an understanding of the theological facts. Even though God explained to her that the Trinity was “at once one and a union of many,” Angela pushed these explanations aside because she felt unworthy of them.⁴⁸ Instead, she wanted God to “make me actually feel that on this point, the presence of the Holy Trinity in me, I could not be deceived.”⁴⁹ While Brother A. was concerned with making sure that Angela had an orthodox understanding of the Trinity, Angela was worried about being “deceived.” The issue of deception and self-doubt about her worthiness to receive such lofty experiences of God plagued Angela until the seventh supplementary step, when she finally claimed to be unable to doubt.

Amy Hollywood has observed that Christian mystics often go through periods in which they intensely feel the presence of God and periods when God seems totally absent, a phenomenon that she describes as an “anguished dialectic between God’s presence and absence to the loving soul.”⁵⁰ Unlike her northern contemporaries such as Hadewijch of Brabant and Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela did not frequently experience the absence of God. In fact, other than the moment when God withdrew from her soul in Assisi and the sixth supplementary step, God was continually present to Angela.⁵¹ This could be due to her Franciscan worldview: for Angela, God

CW, 144. *IL*, 190. *M*, 46. Latin text: “Quadam vice ego frater, qui indignus scripsi verba ista divina, feci sibi istam interrogationem dicens, quomodo dictum fuerat ei in ista praecedenti revelatione ‘Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus,’ et parum postea dictum est ei ‘Ego sum qui fui crucifixus pro te.’”

⁴⁷ CW, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. Latin text: “Dicis ei quando tibi fuerunt dicta illa, scilicet ‘Ego sum Spiritus Sanctus’ et postea dictum est ‘Ego sum qui crucifixus pro te,’ tunc in te erat Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus.”

⁴⁸ CW, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. This is an example of the humility *topos* common in women’s hagiographic literature.

⁴⁹ CW, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. Latin text: Vellem quod Deus daret mihi sentimentum quia ibi non possum decipi.

⁵⁰ Amy Hollywood, “Suffering Transformed: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Problem of Women’s Spirituality,” in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics* ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 94.

⁵¹ Although Angela continually feels the presence of Christ throughout most of her spiritual life, the way that God’s presence is felt is different according to the stage in her mystical itinerary. In the fifth supplementary step, she distinguishes between seven ways in which God comes into the soul and reveals his presence. CW, 187.

is present everywhere and the whole world is pregnant with God.⁵² I suggest that instead of a dialectic of presence and absence, for Angela we see a dialectic of certitude and self-doubt. Angela wants to believe that her experiences come from God (certitude), but she is cautious because she does not believe she is worthy of divine attention. She doubts her own worthiness to receive such experiences, and thus worries that she is being deceived. For instance, in the example above, Angela pushed aside theological explanations of the Trinity that would explain how the Holy Spirit and the one who was crucified could be within her at the same time. Instead, she wished that God would make her feel that she could not be deceived. Certitude in the divine origin of her experiences was more important to her than even theological correctness. But on the road back from Assisi she received a vision in which God told her: “I give you this sign that I am the one who is speaking and who has spoken to you: You will experience the cross and the love of God within you. This sign will be with you for eternity.”⁵³ God was true to his word and Angela told Brother A. that “I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and even the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross; and feeling all this, my soul melted in the love of God.”⁵⁴ Angela received a spiritual sign from God *assuring* her that the words she heard were of divine origin. Furthermore, God himself told her the sign is supposed to last for eternity. It is difficult to

⁵² *CW*, 170. *IL*, 262. *M*, 90.

⁵³ *CW*, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 42. Latin text: “Do hoc signum tibi quod ego sum qui loquor et qui locutus sum tibi, do scilicet crucem et amorem Dei intus in te, et hoc signum erit tecum in aeternum.”

The Latin “*do scilicet crucem et amorem Dei intus in te*” more literally translate to: “I give you namely the (experience of the) cross and the love of God within in you.

⁵⁴ *CW*, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 42. Latin text: “Et ego statim illam crucem et amorem sentiebam intus in anima mea, et resultabat quod sentiebam illam crucem corporaliter, et sentiendo liquefiebat anima mea in amore Dei.”

I don’t feel that Lachance’s English translation is true to the spirit of Angela’s words. The Latin states: “*Et ego statim illam rucem et amorem sentiebam intus in anima mea, et resultabat quod sentiebam illam crucem corporaliter.*” Lachance renders this: “I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and even the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross.” The phrase “bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross” is ambiguous—it is unclear what that means or what it would entail for Angela. The Latin text is much clearer and should have been translated: “I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and it resulted that I felt that cross corporally/bodily.” This translation makes it clear that Angela had an experience of the bodily sensation of Christ’s passion on the cross, which is consistent with her theology and other experiences she has of the passion.

imagine having doubts after such an experience, but Angela had them repeatedly even after receiving multiple assurances from God.

Although Angela's self-doubts appear to originate from her fear of deception, Brother A. stoked these fears and encouraged her self-doubting. For example, Angela described an experience in which the Blessed Virgin began to speak to her at the elevation of the host during mass. Brother A. interrupted and asked whether Angela had seen something in the body of Christ, as she had in other visions. Angela replied that she did not, but she "truly felt Christ in her soul."⁵⁵ Brother A. pressed her further, asking, "how do you know that this is truly so?"⁵⁶ Although Angela responded that it was beyond doubt, it seems odd that Brother A. continued to make Angela second-guess her experiences when he knew she was vulnerable in this area. It may be that at this point, Brother A. still had doubts himself, or he was trying to elicit more information about the vision from Angela in a clumsy way. Nevertheless, it is important to question how much of Angela's self-doubting was caused, not by her natural disposition, but by Brother A. Would Angela have been this uncertain of the divine origins of her experience if Brother A. hadn't expressed his own worries on the matter? For an examination of this question, I refer back to my discussion of the collaborative authorship of the *Memorial* in chapter two.

The first supplementary step also contains some of Angela's most captivating and visceral experiences of the passion. For example, while meditating on the bits of Christ's flesh that the nails had driven into the wood of the cross, Angela experienced such sorrow that she stretched out her arms on the floor and lay cruciform.⁵⁷ Hollywood notes that this meditation on Christ's fragmented and lacerated body created a "gap between herself as onlooker and the object of her

⁵⁵ *CW*, 158. *IL*, 226. *M*, 70. Latin text: "Et ego frater scriptor quaesivi ab ea si viderat tunc aliquid in Corpore Christi sicut aliquando consequit videre. Et respondit quod non, sed sentiebat veraciter Christum in anima."

⁵⁶ *CW*, 158. *IL*, 226. *M*, 70. Latin text: "Quomodo scis tu ita veraciter esse?"

⁵⁷ *CW*, 145-146. *IL*, 192-194. *M*, 48.

contemplation...Attention to these fragments molds her body into the very cruciform pattern of Christ's torment, suggesting her complete identification with his anguish."⁵⁸ Although she does not use the same terminology, Hollywood is describing Angela's practice of radical compassion. Her meditation on such a specific aspect of the crucifixion led her from "sensible identification with [Christ's] suffering body to the incorporation of that body within her own."⁵⁹ Compassion, for Angela, is not simply a feeling of sympathy that produces sorrow or contrition, but a form of uniting bodies and souls through the experience of shared pain. However, Angela's sorrow was transformed into joy and she was given a vision of Christ's neck or throat, which she describes as so beautiful that she believed she was seeing Christ's divinity.⁶⁰ These two experiences reveal that, for Angela, the suffering humanity of Christ is the pathway by which she is able to access his divinity.

Supplementary Step 2

In this step, Angela received several visions that she regarded as ineffable or inexpressible. She writes that "everything we are trying to say about these experiences reduces it to a mere trifle, because what took place is so different from what can be said about it."⁶¹ In one of these visions, Angela asked God for a tangible sign that it was really him. Instead, God gave her a spiritual sign, which he said would be "continuously in the depths of your soul, and from it you will always feel something of God's presence and be burning with love for him."⁶² God added that she would suffer insults and offenses gladly because of this love. Angela later reflected that "the sign which he left

⁵⁸ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 72.

⁵⁹ Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 72.

⁶⁰ *CW*, 148. *IL*, 196. *M*, 50.

⁶¹ *CW*, 148. *IL*, 200. *M*, 52. Latin text: "Et videtur mihi quod haec omnia dicamus modo quasi pro truffis, qua aliter erat quam posset dici."

⁶² *CW*, 150. *IL*, 206. *M*, 56. Latin text: "Do tibi unum signum magis melius quam illud quod tu quaeris, quod signum erit continue tecum intus in anima tua, et quo semper sentries de Deo et eris calida de amore Dei."

me with and which I feel continually is that the right way to salvation consists in loving Christ and to want to suffer torments for the sake of his love.”⁶³ For Angela, Christ’s love is tangibly revealed through his suffering. Therefore, in order to return that love, she must suffer also.

Angela also received a vision of heaven. Even though she was surrounded by angels and saints, she only desired to look at God. This vision is the first time that Angela refers to God in his divinity as the All Good.⁶⁴ Angela also describes a poignant moment when she was puzzled by God’s love for her. She asked him why he took delight in her when she was “ugly and despicable.” God responded, “Such is the love that I have deposited in you that I am totally unable to remember your faults; my eyes do not see them.”⁶⁵ Angela then says that she “saw that the eyes of God were looking at me and in that look my soul experienced such delight that no one...could say something about it or express it adequately.”⁶⁶ It is interesting that Angela describes the eyes and the loving gaze of God as ineffable already in the second supplementary step. In the seventh supplementary step, she describes seeing ineffable darkness radiating from Christ’s eyes and face.⁶⁷

Third Supplementary Step

In the third supplementary step, Angela revealed herself as a spiritual teacher. In an age when women were not allowed to preach and were generally only permitted to teach other women or children privately,⁶⁸ Angela expanded her thought on the cross and the suffering of Christ. In

⁶³ CW, 151. IL, 208. M, 58. Latin text: “Et hoc signum dimisit mihi, quod sentio continue, quod haec est recta via salutis, scilicet diligere et velle sustinere pro amore suo.”

⁶⁴ CW, 152. IL, 210. M, 58.

⁶⁵ CW, 152. IL, 212. M, 60. Latin text: “Quare habes mihi tantum amorem quae sum ita peccatrix et quare habes tantum delectum in me quae sum ita bruta vel turpis et quae ita toto tempore vitae meae te offendi—et videbam tunc quia nihil unquam feceram boni sine multo defectu—et ipse respondebat: Tantus est amor quem habeo repositum in te quod defectus tuos non recordor et oculi mei non respiciunt illos.”

⁶⁶ CW, 152. IL, 212. M, 60. Latin text: “Et ita sentiebat et videbat quod oculi Dei ita respiciebant eam. In quibus oculis anima recipiebat tantum delectamentum quod nullus homo, nec etiam si descenderet aliquis de illis sanctis qui sunt ibi, posset illud dicere vel manifestare.”

⁶⁷ CW, 205. IL, 362. M, 158.

⁶⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 21.

order to teach such things (and to get Brother A. to put them down in writing), Angela could not use her own spiritual authority. Instead, she presented her teachings as parables (*exemplum*) given to her by God.⁶⁹ *Exempla*, in the Middle Ages, were short anecdotes that preachers often used in their sermons. Many collections of *exempla* have survived, aiding the mendicants in their preaching work while demonstrating the popularity of the genre.⁷⁰ The fact that Angela describes her parables as an *exemplum* suggests that she was conscious of the fact that she was teaching.

In the first *exemplum*, a man invites all his friends to a banquet and sets aside places for those who accept his invitation.⁷¹ Angela asked how the guests come to the table and God responded that they come “by way of tribulation, such as happens to the virgins, chaste, the poor, the long-suffering, and the sick.”⁷² God revealed to Angela that he sends tribulations to those who are his true “sons.” (*filiis*)⁷³ Those who suffer out of love for God “go to the cross to fix their attention and regard upon it, and therein discover what love is.”⁷⁴ This *exemplum* is noteworthy not only because Angela suggests that salvation is achieved by enduring suffering, but also because Angela explicitly identifies the cross with love. The close union (almost equation) of suffering and love is explicitly stated for the first time in this *exemplum*.

The second *exemplum* is a parable about a nobleman whose house is destroyed instead of his person. Angela uses the nobleman as an analogy for the suffering and shame that the divinity took upon itself during the passion.⁷⁵ I will discuss this parable at length in chapter five. Just as he

⁶⁹ CW, 159. IL, 230-232. M, 72; CW 230. IL, 442.

⁷⁰ For more on *exempla*, see Peter von Moos, *Geschichte als Topik: das rhetorische Exemplum von der Antike zur Neuzeit und die historiae im "Policraticus" Johannis von Salisbury*, (New York: G. Olms, 1988).

⁷¹ CW, 159. IL, 230. M, 72.

⁷² CW, 159. IL, 232. M, 72. Latin text: “Et quaerebam ego: Isti vocati qua via venerunt? Et respondebat dicens: Per viam tribulationis, et isti sunt virgines, casti, pauperes, patientes et infirmi.”

⁷³ CW, 159. IL, 232. M, 72.

⁷⁴ CW, 160. IL, 232. M, 74. Latin text: “Vadunt ad crucem et ibi se figunt et respiciunt et ibi cognoscunt amorem.” This quote really reflects the central concern of the *Memorial*: to discover what love is by gazing at the cross.

⁷⁵ CW, 160. IL, 234. M, 74.

did in the second supplementary step, Brother A. stopped writing at a certain point, most likely because he was concerned that it could be interpreted as heretical. He states that he “did not pay much attention to this example” and was omitting it “out of haste.” But as with Angela’s reflection of Christ’s suffering in the second supplementary step, Brother A. kept writing. Now the content he recorded was theologically orthodox: Angela goes on to describe how the soul must die to itself to rise with Christ and that God permits tribulations to befall his true sons as a special grace so that they can “eat with him from the same plate.”⁷⁶ Lachance writes that the theme of Christ’s true spiritual sons dominates the third supplementary step. He suggests that these parables are inspired by Spiritual Franciscan sources. Spiritual Franciscans such as Ubertino of Casale and Jacopone da Todi assert that the legitimate sons of St. Francis are those who follow his Rule more strictly, “especially in regard to poverty.”⁷⁷

After these *exempla*, the text records Angela being asked various questions by Brother A. and his fellow friars. This is noteworthy because it demonstrates that Angela’s spiritual and theological opinions were valued by her community. Brother A. asked her how God can be known in creatures and how the body of Christ could be simultaneously on every altar at once.⁷⁸ Brother Dominic of the Marches asked how one must clearly distinguish what is one’s own and what belongs to others,⁷⁹ and Brother E. of the Marches asked a question about divine wisdom that Angela was unable to pray about. She states that even though she would have liked to know these things, “it seemed to me an act of pride and stupidity to pray to God about them.”⁸⁰ The vision that

⁷⁶ CW, 161. IL, 236. M, 76. Latin text: “Et istis filiis suis districtis Deus permittit magnas tribulationes et hoc facit eis pro speciali gratia, ut comedant in una scutella secum.”

⁷⁷ CW, 372, note 52.

⁷⁸ CW, 165–166. IL, 246–250. M, 82–84.

⁷⁹ CW, 166. IL, 250. M, 84.

⁸⁰ CW, 167. IL, 252. M, 84-86. Latin text: “Tamen videbatur mihi superbiam esse et stultitiam rogare Deum pro illis talibus quae ille volebat scire.”

Angela received is a sharp rebuke to Brother E.'s question. Angela was placed at a table at which she saw divine wisdom and the All Good.⁸¹ Angela states that "it was not permissible and was indeed presumptuous to seek or want to inquire into the plans of divine wisdom.... From then on, when I come across anyone with similar questions, it seems to me that I have to tell them they are in error."⁸² This rebuke must have been effective because afterward the only friar who asked her questions was Brother A.

Fourth Supplementary Step

In this step, Angela describes an experience reminiscent of something one would find in the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*). One day the devil appeared to her as St. Bartholomew and claimed it was his fast day.⁸³ Angela states that he showered both himself and her with praise. She writes that his words "filled my soul with sadness and perplexity. As a result I could no longer pray nor recollect myself."⁸⁴ Although Angela was constantly afraid of deception, in this situation she demonstrated her skill at the discernment of spirits. She was able to tell that the faux St. Bartholomew was trying to deceive her because the encounter left her unable to pray. Although this situation should have reassured both Angela and Brother A. that she was able to know when she was being deceived, it did not have that effect. Angela continued to doubt until she reached the seventh supplementary step. The sluggishness that Angela felt in prayer ended when she went to Assisi and prepared herself to receive communion. God showed her his power and Angela saw "the fullness of God in which I beheld and comprehended the whole of creation.

⁸¹ CW, 167. IL, 252. M, 86.

⁸² CW, 167. IL, 252. M, 86. Latin text: "Videbam quod non erat licitum inquirere et velle scire id quod vult facere divina sapientia...Et ex tunc quando invenio personas illud inquirentes, videtur mihi et intelligo quod errant." The Latin "intelligo quod errant" is better translated: "I understand that they err," rather than "I have to tell them they are in error."

⁸³ CW, 169. IL, 260. M, 90.

⁸⁴ CW, 169. IL, 260. M, 90. Latin text: "Et implevit animam tristitia et vagatione, et fui extra orationem et non poteram me recolligere."

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. And my soul in an excess of wonder cried out: ‘The world is pregnant with God!’”⁸⁵ Despite this wonderful Franciscan vision, in which Angela saw God in all of creation, she was assailed with doubt, illness, and dryness when she returned to Foligno.

After returning home, Angela experienced a period of two weeks when her prayer became dry and she felt abandoned by God.⁸⁶ Although Angela claims to have felt abandoned, this does not seem to be entirely the case because she reports the Virgin Mary and Christ granting her signs and graces during this period. Nevertheless, she still had difficulty praying and going to confession.⁸⁷ The period of dryness ended with a wonderful domestic scene, with Angela washing lettuce. She suddenly heard the words, “How can you consider yourself worthy to wash lettuce?”⁸⁸ Angela immediately recognized it as a deception and retorted, “I am only worthy that God send me immediately to hell, and I am likewise only worthy to collect manure.”⁸⁹ She deprived the demonic insult of its power to hurt her by agreeing with it. Shortly after the episode with the lettuce, Angela heard the words, “it is good that wine be tempered with water.”⁹⁰ It is unclear what the statement might have meant for Angela. Perhaps it made her realize that the wine of her experience (visions, raptures, ecstasies, etc.) had to be tempered by water (the mundane work of prayer). Although the statement didn’t completely rid Angela of her sadness, she states that it

⁸⁵ *CW*, 170. *IL*, 260–262. *M*, 90. Latin text: “Et videbam unam plenitudinem Dei in qua comprehendebam totum mundum, scilicet ultra mare et citra mare et abyssum et mare et omnia. Et in omnibus praedictis non discernebam nisi tantum potentiam divinam, modo omnino inenarrabili. Et anima tunc admirando nimis, clamavit dicens: Est iste mundus praegnans de Deo!”

⁸⁶ *CW*, 171. *IL*, 264-266. *M*, 94.

⁸⁷ *CW*, 171. *IL*, 266. *M*, 94.

⁸⁸ *CW*, 172. *IL*, 268-270. *M*, 96. Latin text: “Quomodo es digna quod tu laves lactucas?”

⁸⁹ *CW*, 172. *IL*, 270. *M*, 96. Latin text: “Sum digna quod statim mitteret me Deus in infernum, et sum digna colligere stercorea.”

⁹⁰ *CW*, 173. *IL*, 270. *M*, 96. Latin text: “Bene est quod vinum temperetur cum aqua.”

“dissipated” (*alleviata*) and “tempered” (*temperetur*) it.⁹¹ These two stories of washing lettuce and diluting wine demonstrate that although Angela’s experience often seems lofty and divine, it was lived out in a domestic context.

The period of despondency and dryness ended when the arm of the crucified Christ embraced Angela’s soul. She writes, “I saw and felt that Christ was within, me, embracing my soul with the very arm with which he was crucified.”⁹² The visions of Christ’s arm and hand continued. For example, Angela states that “my delight at the present is to see that hand which he shows me with the marks of the nails on it.”⁹³ Rather than make her sorrowful, the lacerated body of Christ brought her joy: “all my joy now is in this suffering God-man.”⁹⁴ Perhaps the greatest experience Angela had of the passion at this time is when she entered into Christ’s side wound. She describes a moment when she was at the Piazza Santa Maria and the passion of Christ was presented.⁹⁵ Angela was suddenly drawn into a state of ecstasy in which “the moment when it seemed to me one should weep was transformed for me into a very joyful one.”⁹⁶ Angela states that she lost the power of speech and fell flat on the ground.

Angela’s visions of Christ within her embracing her soul with his crucified arm as well as entering into Christ’s side wound are both images commonly associated with extreme late medieval devotion to the physical suffering of Christ. Scholars have long pointed out that the image of Christ’s side wound was feminized by both men and women in the Middle Ages. Recent

⁹¹ *CW*, 173. *IL*, 270. *M*, 96.

⁹² *CW*, 175. *IL*, 276. *M*, 100. Latin text: “Et videbam et sentiebam quod Christus intus in me amplexabatur animam cum illo brachio cum quo fuit crucifixus.”

⁹³ *CW*, 176. *IL*, 276. *M*, 102. Latin text: “Et delector ita videre illam manum, quam ostendet cum illis signis clavorum.”

⁹⁴ *CW*, 176. *IL*, 278. *M*, 102. Latin text: “Et tota laetitia est modo in isto Deo homine passionato.”

Lachance notes that this is the only time in the *Memorial* when Angela refers to the suffering God-man (*Deo homine passionato*). See *CW*, 376, n. 72.

⁹⁵ *CW*, 176. *IL*, 278. *M*, 102.

⁹⁶ *CW*, 176. *IL*, 278. *M*, 102. Latin text: “Videtur quod tunc fuisset plangedum, et mihi tunc e converso tanta laetitia.”

scholarship has focused on feminist interpretations of the side wound, including examining its role in the philosophy of twentieth century thinkers such as Luce Irigaray, who uses the vulvic image to "valorize the female sex in service of a female imaginary and symbolic."⁹⁷ While I will mostly bypass the discussion of Irigaray because my focus is ultimately on Angela and her understanding of the side wound, Amy Hollywood and Karma Lochrie offer interesting interpretations of the medieval eroticism of the side wound that push back against earlier historical feminist interpretations, such as that of Caroline Walker Bynum. The result of the analysis expands how we conceive of the erotic in medieval texts such as Angela's.

Historical feminist scholarship on the side wound includes the work of Flora Lewis and Caroline Walker Bynum. Lewis situates late medieval devotion to the side wound as part of a larger late medieval tendency "to encompass and anatomize the Passion."⁹⁸ The desire to see Christ's wounds led artists to measure the side wound based on passages in the Gospels and depict it as life size.⁹⁹ *Imitatio Christi* was taken to literal and physical extremes as hagiographers, theologians, and devotional writers emphasized the stigmata as a sign of holiness.¹⁰⁰ This anatomizing tendency can also be seen in the *Memorial* through Angela's focus on the details of Christ's wounded body: the blood flowing from Christ's side wound (which she drinks), the bits of flesh that are nailed to the cross, his crucified arm which embraces her, and the nail marks on Christ's hands.¹⁰¹ Lewis also points out that Christ's wounds were interpreted as feminine images.

⁹⁷ Amy Hollywood, "That Glorious Slit: Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound," *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 171.

⁹⁸ Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion: Gendered Experience and Response," *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H.M. Taylor (London: British Library, 1997), 204.

⁹⁹ Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," 208.

¹⁰⁰ Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," 209.

¹⁰¹ CW, 128, 145, 175, 176. IL, 142-144, 192, 276, 276. M, 12, 48, 100, 102.

For example, the side wound was a maternal image associated with pregnancy and the womb. Pregnant women wielded images of the side wound as talismans that would protect them from death. The image was often incorporated onto birth girdles.¹⁰²



Figure 2: Life-sized depiction of Christ's side wound. *Psalter of Bonne of Luxembourg*. Cloisters Museum, Metropolitan Museum of New York. MS 69.86, fol. 331r.

Angela's vision of entering Christ's side can be interpreted in this tradition of associating the side wound with the womb. But Lewis is careful to clarify that while Christ's wounds and suffering body were interpreted as feminine images, they could also be explored by men as "a site of union between *sponsus* and *sponsa* and also of parturition."¹⁰³ Especially when interpreted as a

¹⁰² Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," 217.

¹⁰³ Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," 204.

site of union between lovers, the side wound was often eroticized. Lewis notes that discomfort with the sexual connotations of the side wound is an important part of the image's history and has led to an unwillingness to engage with it until recently.¹⁰⁴

Carolyn Walker Bynum also writes about the medieval tendency to see the side wound as a maternal image in her book *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, in which she explores the parallelism of Christ's wounds and breasts in medieval texts and art. Because natural philosophers at that time believed that breast milk was transmuted blood, breastfeeding was understood as the mother feeding her child with her own blood.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, the blood that poured out of Christ's side wound was often identified with breast milk, as it allowed Christ to feed the church. In visions or images, men and women drank from Christ's side wound/breast to nourish their souls. The side wound was therefore often associated with Mary's breast as well as with Christ's body, the church, feeding the soul through the Eucharist.¹⁰⁶ When Angela drinks blood from Christ's side in the fourteenth step of the *Memorial*, it is likely that she associated the act with breastfeeding.¹⁰⁷ Christ offers the blood from his side wound for Angela to drink like a mother who offers her breast to her child for feeding.

In *Jesus as Mother*, Bynum also explores the association of the side wound with the womb in the writings of Gueric of Igny, a Cistercian abbot who died ca. 1157.¹⁰⁸ Unlike other Cistercians, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, whose maternal imagery centers around breasts and breastfeeding, Gueric is fascinated with pregnancy and the womb.¹⁰⁹ According to Bynum, he

¹⁰⁴ Flora Lewis, "The Wound in Christ's Side and the Instruments of the Passion," 215.

¹⁰⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987), 270.

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 271.

¹⁰⁷ CW, 128. IL, 142-144. M, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 123.

¹⁰⁹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 123.

uses the image of the soul as a child incorporated into the bowels of God the Father¹¹⁰ and urges his readers not just to fly to Christ but *into* him, through his side wound and into his bowels.¹¹¹ Guericc associates the side wound/womb with warmth and safety. He uses it “as a symbol of fertility, security, and union more than a symbol of separation, suffering, or sacrifice.”¹¹² Angela also uses similar womb imagery when she has her second vision of the side wound. Rather than being nourished by drinking the blood from Christ’s side wound/breast, she states that her soul entered into Christ’s side, where she experienced union with the divine. Angela’s understanding of the side wound as womb is different from Guericc’s, perhaps because she had direct experience of pregnancy and childbirth. Although she speaks of entering Christ’s side as an occasion of joy, the image occurs on the Piazza Santa Maria as a dramatization of the passion was being performed.¹¹³ The context of the vision means that, unlike Guericc, Angela likely associated the side wound/womb with the suffering and sacrifice of the passion, which feeds and gives life to the church, rather than security and comfort.

Despite what seems like the overtly sexual nature of late medieval images of the side wound, Bynum cautions against reading our own notions of gender and sexuality onto medieval texts. For example, she writes that “medieval authors do not seem to have drawn as sharp a distinction as we do between sexual responses and affective responses or between male and female.”¹¹⁴ But scholars such as Amy Hollywood and Karma Lochrie have argued that Bynum’s later work draws the sharp distinction between sexuality and affectivity that she warns against in

¹¹⁰ Bynum notes that “bowels” is a standard womb symbol in psychoanalytic theory. That is beyond the purview of this dissertation, but may interest some readers. See *Jesus as Mother*, 122 n34.

¹¹¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 123.

¹¹² Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 123.

¹¹³ *CW*, 176. *IL*, 276. *M*, 102.

¹¹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 162.

Jesus as Mother.¹¹⁵ For example, in *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, Bynum laments the modern focus on poverty and chastity in medieval spirituality (revealing our obsession with sex and money) rather than on the issues that were much more important to medieval people, such as food and fasting.¹¹⁶ In *Fragmentation and Redemption*, she again critiques the modern equation of the body with sexuality, stating that medieval images of the body center more on fertility and decay.¹¹⁷ The positive aspect of such statements is that they encourage scholars to focus on a wider range of topics when studying the body in the Middle Ages. But Hollywood and Lochrie maintain that her view of sexuality remains too restrictive. Bynum implies that issues such as feasting, fasting, fertility, and decay cannot be considered erotic. They suggest a more expansive understanding of sexuality, one that allows for a “complex matrix” or “mesh of possibilities” in which concepts that we might not normally associate with eroticism can interact.¹¹⁸

Hollywood and Lochrie also critique the fact that Bynum exclusively reads Christ’s feminized body as a nonsexual maternal body.¹¹⁹ When Bynum discusses Christ’s side wound in *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, she only mentions the maternal metaphors of the side wound as a nurturing breast or life-giving womb.¹²⁰ Sexuality is omitted altogether. But Hollywood points out that devotional literature written for nuns and the laity instructed readers to “taste, touch, suck, kiss, and enter into Christ’s side wound.”¹²¹ We have evidence that readers followed those instructions because images of the side wound in manuscripts are often fragile and worn from being handled,

¹¹⁵ Amy Hollywood, “That Glorious Slit: Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ’s Side Wound,” *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 184; Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James A. Schultz, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 183.

¹¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 2.

¹¹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 182.

¹¹⁸ Amy Hollywood, “That Glorious Slit,” 184.

¹¹⁹ Amy Hollywood, “That Glorious Slit,” 184; Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” 183.

¹²⁰ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 270-271.

¹²¹ Amy Hollywood, “That Glorious Slit,” 181.

touched, and kissed. Hollywood notes that “those who saw and held these images seem to have made them the object of intense affective response, both imaginatively and physically.”¹²² Since Bynum herself notes that medieval writers do not draw a sharp distinction between affective and sexual responses, it seems strange that she is so reticent to describe the side wound as an erotic image. In *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Bynum goes further and suggests that Christ’s body cannot be both maternal *and* the object of sexual desire. She writes that “some mystics, such as Hadewijch or Angela of Foligno, met Christ erotically as female to his maleness; others, such as Catherine of Siena or Margery Kempe, met him maternally, nursing him in their arms.”¹²³ The options Bynum presents are that mystics either met Christ erotically *or* met maternally. And yet most of the mystics she mentions met Christ both erotically *and* maternally. For example, Angela nurses at Christ’s breast like an infant *and* kisses him in the marriage bed of the sepulcher on Holy Saturday.¹²⁴

Lochrie points out that Bynum may make Christ’s maternal body asexual as an “interventionalist gender correction” to avoid the possibility of homoerotic desire in texts authored by female mystics.¹²⁵ Lochrie points out two instances where Bynum uses gender correction to impose a heterosexual model on Christ’s feminized body. For example, in *Fragmentation and Redemption*, Bynum states that “women could fuse with Christ’s body because they were in some sense body, yet women never forgot the maleness of Christ.”¹²⁶ By emphasizing that women never forgot Christ’s maleness, Bynum renders the sexuality of the female mystic’s sexuality safely heterosexual. In *Jesus as Mother*, Bynum also deploys a heterosexual paradigm for understanding

¹²² Amy Hollywood, “That Glorious Slit,” 181.

¹²³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 222.

¹²⁴ *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 112-114.

¹²⁵ Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” 187.

¹²⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 221-222.

the sexual metaphors used by twelfth-century Cistercian monks: “Religious males had a problem. For if the God with whom they wished to unite was spoken of in male language, it was hard to use the metaphor of sexual union unless they saw themselves as female...Another solution was of course to seek God as female parent, with whom union could be quite physical (in the womb or at the breast).”¹²⁷ Lochrie points out that it is absurd to assume that monks and female mystics were “engaged in a gender-correction process in order to avoid the embarrassment of a homosexual union.”¹²⁸ Indeed, there is no evidence that homosexuality was a particular concern for either male or female mystics. Furthermore, Lochrie argues that there is “no evidence in the mystical writings usually cited of such gender and sexuality policing by female or male mystics; however, there is evidence of scholarly intervention when mystical genders and sexualities stray from heterosexual paradigms.”¹²⁹ Lochrie implores scholars to allow for the complexity of mystical sexualities, such as those seen in Angela’s work. As the two visions of the side wound demonstrate, maternal and erotic imagery coexist side by side in the *Memorial*.¹³⁰ It is important to affirm the erotic complexity of the images Angela uses, but it is also important to not reduce all of Angela’s experiences to issues of gender and sexuality.

¹²⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, 160.

¹²⁸ Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” 188.

¹²⁹ Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” 188.

¹³⁰ In addition to the two visions of the side wound, the *Memorial* contains a lot of erotic or gendered language that describe Angela’s relationship with Christ. These diverse images coexist in Angela’s thought in a way that may seem strange to modern readers. For example, when Angela makes her pilgrimage to Assisi, God speaks to her intimately with language that mirrors the erotic imagery used in the Song of Songs. Yet, amid their intimate exchange, God refers to Angela as “my daughter and my sweet spouse” (CW, 140, 141. *IL*, 182. *M*, 40.). When Angela arrives in Assisi and sees the stained-glass window of St. Francis being held by Christ, God tells her that he will hold her even more closely (CW, 141. *IL*, 184. *M*, 42.). The window clearly depicts Christ holding a child-sized Francis directly next to a parallel image of Mary holding the infant Jesus (see p. 76) for an image of the stained-glass window). The image of Christ holding Francis, which Angela directly refers to in the text, is clearly a maternal image, yet it is used to describe her intensely intimate relationship with God. Angela also refers to Christ as her son when cries out in agony, “my son, my son, do not abandon me, my son” (CW, 198. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142.). Angela relates to Christ as his spouse, his daughter, and even his mother.

Fifth Supplementary Step

This step is different from the others because at least the beginning of it was written by a different scribe. Brother A. was temporarily prohibited by his superiors from meeting with Angela, so he sent a young boy to write down Angela's dictation in the vernacular. Brother A. later translated what the novice had written into Latin. Despite Angela's protests that the account was so badly written that she wanted it destroyed, Brother A. not only kept it but included it in the *Memorial*.¹³¹ It is difficult to tell at what point Brother A. resumed his post as the *frater scriptor*. Although Angela does not say anything clearly heretical, her descriptions of God's poverty and her erotic vision of lying in the sepulcher with Christ on Holy Saturday may have been controversial. Although there is no reason to doubt that Brother A. needed to use another scribe because of difficulties with his superiors, it is interesting that he does not tell the reader when the young boy's writing ends. It is possible that Brother A. wanted to create enough plausible deniability so that any controversial content could be blamed on an inexperienced scribe, especially a *puero parvulo*, most likely a novice.

In this step, Angela received very detailed visions of the passion. The first occurred when she was meditating on the poverty of Christ. Angela states that "God wanted to demonstrate to me even more of his poverty."¹³² The vision she received of God's poverty is astonishing: "I saw him poor of friends and relatives. I even saw him so poor of himself and so poor that he seemed powerless to help himself."¹³³ This vision may have been controversial because Angela was not describing Christ incarnate here, but rather his divinity. She elaborates that "it is sometimes said that divine power was then hidden out of humility. But even if this has been said, I say that God's

¹³¹ *CW*, 179. *IL*, 288. *M*, 108.

¹³² *CW*, 179. *IL*, 290. *M*, 108.

¹³³ *CW*, 179. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110.

power was not hidden then, because he himself has taught me otherwise.”¹³⁴ Invoking God as her authority, Angela says that God did not hide his power. She suggests that God chose to empty himself of divine power out of love for mankind and a desire to be humble and poor.

In the next vision, Angela was allowed to see more of his passion than she had ever seen or heard before.¹³⁵ Interestingly, Angela does not describe the physical injuries of Christ, but rather the “hearts impiously hardened against him...how they constantly kept in mind their purpose to destroy him...the extent of their rage against him...and everything they thought about how they could even more cruelly afflict him.”¹³⁶ In this vision, Christ suffers because of the interior thoughts and motivations of the people who crucified him. Angela clearly has his divinity in mind, since Christ is able to know (through his omniscience) the thoughts, rage, and plans of others. This vision was immediately followed by another occasion in which Angela was “shown the acute pain which was in Christ’s soul.”¹³⁷ In this vision, she saw his “immense love for humanity” and notes that all the “torments and afflictions his body endured...converged in his soul.”¹³⁸ As with Christ’s poverty, Angela maintains that his suffering was so great that it was ineffable. His pain was so intense that “tongue cannot express it nor is the heart great enough to imagine it.”¹³⁹ These visions are extraordinary in their ambivalence about who and what suffers. In the first vision, Christ’s very omnipotence leads to acute suffering. In the vision of the pain in Christ’s soul, Angela seems to

¹³⁴ *CW*, 179. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110.

¹³⁵ *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110.

¹³⁶ *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290-292. *M*, 110. Latin text: “Christus videbat omnia corda impietate obstinata contra se...et quomodo de eo habebant magnam memoriam ad eum destruendum...et iras illas grandissimas eorum...et omnes cogitationes quas faciebant quomodo possent eum magis crudelius affligere.”

¹³⁷ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: “Altera vice fuit mihi demonstratum de illo dolore acuto qui fuit in anima Christi.”

¹³⁸ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: “Sed recipiebat illam quam recipiebat pro grandissimo amore.” “Adhuc recipiebat dolorem ista anima de omnibus doloribus et de omnibus poenalitibus quas receipt illud suum corpus, quae omnia adunabantur in illa anima.”

¹³⁹ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294-296. *M*, 112. Latin text: “Iste dolor acutus, qui est tantum maximus quod lingua non sufficit ad dicendum nec sufficit cor ad cogitandum.”

deify Christ's pain by describing it as ineffable (a term she thus far has used to describe the divinity).

The following vision is no less controversial. Angela entered a state of ecstasy on Holy Saturday¹⁴⁰ and experienced an intensely erotic image in which she found herself in the sepulcher with Christ.¹⁴¹ The sepulcher became a marriage bed in which Angela “kissed Christ's breast—and saw that he lay dead, with his eyes closed—then she kissed his mouth.”¹⁴² Although Christ is dead in the vision, he nevertheless reciprocates Angela's acts of love. When she placed her cheek on Christ's, he “placed his hand on her other cheek, pressing her closely to him” and told her, “before I was laid in the sepulcher, I held you this tightly to me.”¹⁴³

In addition to these lofty visions, the fifth supplementary step also describes a series of seven ways that God enters into the soul. Perhaps after recounting such personal experiences of the passion, Angela realized that she had strayed from the original goal of creating a mystical itinerary. These seven ways are a mystical-itinerary-within-an-itinerary that roughly correspond with the seven supplementary steps. They also help clarify some of Angela's thought on doubt/certitude and ineffability. The more ineffable the experience of the divine, the more the soul is certain that it is God working within it, and the less it doubts. The first way that God enters the soul is when the person feels the sweetness of his love but is not yet aware that God himself dwells within his or her soul.¹⁴⁴ This roughly corresponds to the first nineteen steps in Angela's mystical

¹⁴⁰ *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 112-114. Holy Saturday is traditionally the day that Christ lays in the tomb after his passion on Good Friday. No liturgical celebrations are held during the day in order to remind the faithful that Christ was absent from the world after his death and entombment. In the evening, the Resurrection is celebrated during the Easter vigil.

¹⁴¹ *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 112-114.

¹⁴² *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 114. Latin text: “Et dixit quod osculata fuit primo pectus Christi—et videbat eum iacentem oculis clausis sicut iacuit mortuus—et postea osculata est os eius.”

¹⁴³ *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296. *M*, 114. Latin text: “Et postea posuit maxillam suam super maxillam Christi, et Christus posuit manum suam super aliam maxillam et strinxit eam ad se.”
“Antequam iacerem in sepulcro tenui te ita astrictam.”

¹⁴⁴ *CW*, 187. *IL*, 312. *M*, 124.

itinerary, in which Angela feels the sweetness of God but has not yet had the experience of having the Trinity enter into her soul. In the second way, God speaks sweetly to the soul and the soul feels his presence. However, a doubt remains because “the soul is not really certain that God is in it.”¹⁴⁵ This corresponds to the first supplementary step, in which God speaks sweetly to Angela on her pilgrimage to Assisi and in which the Trinity enters into her soul, making her feel his presence. In the third way, the soul is granted the grace of wanting God perfectly.¹⁴⁶ In the fourth way, the soul is granted the gift of seeing the fullness of God.¹⁴⁷ The vision is spiritual and not material; in other words, it is seen with the eyes of the soul rather than those of the body. This way occurs repeatedly through the *Memorial*, with Angela seeing the All Good, the sublimity of God’s judgments, and God’s power in all of creation.¹⁴⁸

The fifth way is the reception of a divine unction which “revitalizes the soul.” The unction received by the soul is “totally ineffable,” which gives the soul “the utmost certitude and clarity that God is within it.”¹⁴⁹ Angela experiences this unction in the second supplementary step and through it realizes that the way to salvation can only be found through the cross.¹⁵⁰ The sixth way is God’s embrace. Angela writes that “never has a mother embraced a son with such love, nor can anyone else on this earth be imagined who embraces with a love that nears the indescribably love with which God embraces the soul.”¹⁵¹ The embrace kindles a fire in the soul that renders the soul “certain and secure that Christ is within it.”¹⁵² There are multiple points in the *Memorial* when

¹⁴⁵ *CW*, 188. *IL*, 314. *M*, 124. Latin text: “Sed adhuc remanet aliquantulum dubium valde parvum, quo anima non est certa si Deus est in ipsa.”

¹⁴⁶ *CW*, 188. *IL*, 316. *M*, 124.

¹⁴⁷ *CW*, 189. *IL*, 316. *M*, 126.

¹⁴⁸ *CW*, 152, 167, 170. *IL*, 212, 252, 262. *M*, 60, 86, 90.

¹⁴⁹ *CW*, 189. *IL*, 318. *M*, 126. Latin text: “Renovat animam.” “Et in ista tanta et omnino ineffabili unctione intelligit anima certissime et clarissime quod Deus est in se.”

¹⁵⁰ *CW*, 150. *IL*, 206. *M*, 56.

¹⁵¹ *CW*, 190. *IL*, 318. *M*, 126. Latin text: “Quia nunquam nec mater filium nec aliqua persona de mundo potest cogitari quae cum tanto amore amplexetur, quod non indicibiliter cum maiori amore Deus amplexetur animam.”

¹⁵² *CW*, 190. *IL*, 320. *M*, 128. Latin text: “Et tunc securatur et certificatur quod Christus est intus in se.”

God embraces Angela, but perhaps the most poignant examples are when she is embraced by the arm of the Crucified and enters into the wound in Christ's side, and when Christ presses her cheek into his in an intimate embrace in the sepulcher.¹⁵³ In the seventh step, the soul grants hospitality to the Pilgrim and reaches a high understanding of his infinite goodness. It is in this step that Angela states, "I know with the utmost certainty that the more one feels God, the less is one able to say anything about him, for the very fact of feeling something of this infinite and unutterable Good renders one incapable of speaking about it."¹⁵⁴ Brother A. resisted her on this point, perhaps trying to persuade her to say something of what she feels. But Angela was resolute. She told him that if he were to preach after giving hospitality to the Pilgrim, "you would then say to the people with total self-assurance: 'Go with God, because about God I can say nothing.'"¹⁵⁵ While Angela does not explicitly mention the divine darkness, the utter ineffability of the seventh way is reminiscent of the seventh supplementary step.

Sixth Supplementary Step

Throughout the *Memorial*, Angela attempts to recreate the passion and pain of Christ within her soul through compassionate meditation, the process I refer to as radical compassion. But any suffering she was able to achieve, either through meditation or penance or illness, was nothing compared to what she suffered in the sixth supplementary step. In this step, her body and soul endured the most painful moments of passion, especially Christ's sense of abandonment. Brother A. writes that he was not able to write down much of the sixth step because she was very ill, and when she described her experiences of suffering he "could not understand them sufficiently

¹⁵³ *CW*, 175, 182. *IL*, 276, 296. *M*, 100, 112-114.

¹⁵⁴ *CW*, 191. *IL*, 322. *M*, 130. Latin text: "Cognovi certissime quod illi qui magis sentient de Deo, minus possunt loqui de eo; quia eo ipso quod sentiunt de illo infinito et indicibili, de eo minus loqui possunt."

¹⁵⁵ *CW*, 192. *IL*, 324. *M*, 130. Latin text: "Ita quod tu dicere populo securis verbis: Ite cum Deo, quia de Deo nihil vobis possum dicere."

to write a more complete account.”¹⁵⁶ Angela notes that the suffering of her soul far exceeded that of the body and compares her torments to “a man hanged by the neck, who, with hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air.”¹⁵⁷ She was at the point of despair as she watched her virtues “being subverted and departing” while vices that she had conquered or never experienced before were awakened within her.¹⁵⁸ As a result, she was so “overwhelmed with rage that [she] can hardly refrain tearing [herself] apart” and began to horribly beat herself.¹⁵⁹ In her desperation to regain her virtues, she even burned herself in three places (which she calls the “shameful parts”).¹⁶⁰ Overcome with fear and grief, Angela cried out to God unceasingly, “My son, my son, do not abandon me, my son.”¹⁶¹ The suffering eventually faded away, but this step lasted two years and occurred simultaneously with the seventh, according to Brother A.¹⁶²

Seventh Supplementary Step

As the torments faded, Angela found herself immersed in the transcendent darkness of God’s divinity. While the themes of divine ineffability and transcendence can be found throughout the *Memorial*, they are most deeply explored in the seventh supplementary step. Angela saw “the light, the beauty, and the fullness that is God” in a way she had never seen before.¹⁶³ While her previous visions were usually full of the love of God, she states that in the darkness “she did not

¹⁵⁶ *CW*, 196. *IL*, 336. *M*, 140. Latin text: “Non poteram intelligere ad scribendum.”

¹⁵⁷ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 338. *M*, 140. Latin text: “nullam sciebat assignare similitudinem aliam nisi de homine suspenso per gulam, qui, ligatis manibus post tergum et velatis oculis, suspensus per funem remanisset in furcis et viveret, cui nullum auxilium, nullum omnino sustentamentum vel remedium remanisset.”

¹⁵⁸ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: “Anima videt subverti omnes virtutes et discedere.”

¹⁵⁹ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: “Tanta ira postea supervenit quod vix possum tenere me quod non me totam dilanio; aliquando non possum tenere quod non horribiliter percutiam me, et tumefeci mihi aliquando caput et alia membra.”

¹⁶⁰ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 342. *M*, 144. Latin text: “Locis verecundis.”

¹⁶¹ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: “Fili mi, fili mi, non me dimittas, fili mi!”

¹⁶² *CW*, 198. *IL*, 346. *M*, 146.

¹⁶³ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152.

see love there. I then lost the love that was mine and was made nonlove (*non amor*).”¹⁶⁴ Although at first Angela saw God “in darkness” (*in tenebra*),”¹⁶⁵ she came to identify God himself with the transcendent darkness of her visions. She writes that she sees herself “standing or lying in the midst of the Trinity, and that is what I see with such darkness.”¹⁶⁶ In referring to the Trinity as transcendent darkness, Angela may have been influenced by the works of Pseudo-Dionysius, perhaps through her association with Brother A. Although she does not explicitly use Dionysian terminology, Angela largely adopts the emphasis on the superiority of apophatic language, its end in silent communion with the divine, and God’s transcendence and ineffability, although Angela does not associate them with unknowability as much as Dionysius does.

In the opening poem to his *Mystical Theology*, Dionysius describes God as “the darkness so far above light”¹⁶⁷ While he inevitably uses language to describe God, Dionysius argues that God transcends human language and human understanding. In the *Divine Names*, he writes that God is “mind beyond mind, word beyond speech, it is gathered up by no discourse, by no intuition, by no name.”¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, Dionysius recognizes the necessity of language and discusses two ways of speaking about God in his *Mystical Theology*. He makes a distinction between making positive assertions about God or *cataphasis* (e.g., God is good or God is light) and denying those assertions or *apophasis* (e.g., God is not good, God is not light). While both *cataphasis* and *apophasis* are necessary when speaking about God, Dionysius states that *apophasis* is higher and

¹⁶⁴ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152. Latin text: “Et tunc ego perdidit illum amorem quem portabam, et effecta sum non amor.”

¹⁶⁵ *CW*, 202-203. *IL*, 354-358. *M*, 152-154.

¹⁶⁶ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156. Latin text: Et in illa Trinitate quam video cum tanta tenebra videtur mihi stare et iacere in medio.

¹⁶⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans. Paul Rorem (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 138 (*MT* 2 1025A)

¹⁶⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names*, 50 (*DN* 1 588B).

more transcendent than *cataphasis*.¹⁶⁹ He compares apophysis to the process of sculpting. A sculptor has a hidden image in his mind and his job is to cut or “clear aside” the marble to show the hidden beauty within.¹⁷⁰ Similarly, the role of *apophysis* is to clear away the linguistic obstacles to divine transcendence that we create when we make assertions such as “God is goodness” or “God is light.” By denying that God is goodness and God is light, we assert that God transcends what we can conceive of as good or light.

Because of the greater emphasis on *apophysis* in the *Mystical Theology*, *cataphasis* can sometimes be overlooked. But scholars such as Bernard McGinn and Denys Turner have emphasized that *cataphasis* is essential to Dionysius’s theology. After all, nothing can be negated unless it is first affirmed. But even more importantly, the necessity of affirmation and negation is cosmic for Dionysius. Since God is the source of everything that exists, everything in the universe is a manifestation of God, a theophany or revelation of the divine. McGinn notes that “the theological center of Dionysius’s concern is the exploration of how the utterly unknowable God manifests himself in creation in order that all things may attain union with the unmanifest Source. The Dionysian program is a cosmic one in which the divine Eros...refracts itself into the multiple theophanies of the universe, which in turn erotically strive to pass beyond their multiplicity back into simply unity.”¹⁷¹ Since everything in the universe is a created manifestation of God that will eventually return and be united to God, language must first and foremost reflect the infinite diversity of God. As Turner states, “only the sum total of creation adequately reflects the superabundant variety of God.”¹⁷² In order to adequately speak of God, we must both affirm and

¹⁶⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 138 (MT 2 1025B).

¹⁷⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 138 (MT 2 1025B).

¹⁷¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 161.

¹⁷² Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 24.

deny all things of God. Therefore, it is completely fitting for Angela to cry out in ecstasy that the whole world is pregnant with God while later referring to God as darkness. For Dionysius, it is only by immersing oneself in the beauty and diversity of the universe, by affirming every created manifestation of God, that we can “dialectically attain the negation of representations necessary for discovering that God is always more than we can conceive.”¹⁷³

Dionysius expresses the dialectical relationship of *cataphasis* and *apophasis* through his concept of a “dissimilar similarity.”¹⁷⁴ Everything is both similar to God because it is a manifestation of its creator, and dissimilar to God because nothing can reflect his absolute transcendence. Thus, everything is both a similarity to be affirmed through *cataphasis*, and a dissimilarity to be denied through *apophasis*. But we do not stop at mere denial. Central to the idea of the dissimilar similarity is that we deny the contradiction between what is affirmed and what is denied. By denying the contradiction, we come to what Turner calls the self-subverting utterance, in which the contradiction between the affirmed and the denied is expressed linguistically through paradox, or disordered language, as Turner puts it:

We must both affirm and deny all things of God; and then we must negate the contradiction between the affirmed and the denied. That is why we must affirmatively say that God is ‘light,’ and then say, denying this, that God is ‘darkness’; and finally, we must ‘negate the negation’ between darkness and light, which we do by saying: ‘God is a brilliant darkness.’ For the negation of the negation is not a *third* utterance, additional to the affirmative and the negative, in good linguistic order; it is not some intelligible *synthesis* of affirmation and negation; it is rather the collapse of our affirmation and denials into disorder, which we can only express, *a fortiori*, in bits of collapsed, disordered language, like the babble of a Jeremiah. And that is what the ‘self-subverting’ utterance is, a bit of disordered language.¹⁷⁵

However, for Dionysius, the ascent toward God does not end in disordered or chaotic language, since no speech could express the divine reality. The dialectic of *cataphasis* and *apophasis*

¹⁷³ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, 174.

¹⁷⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy*, 148 (CH 2, 137D).

¹⁷⁵ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 22.

ultimately ends in silence. When everything is affirmed and denied, when every distinction between what is affirmed and denied is negated, then speech falters and is silent. Dionysius writes that “My argument now rises from what is below up to the transcendent, and the more it climbs, the more language falters, and when it has passed up and beyond the ascent, it will turn silent completely, since it will finally be at one with him who is indescribable.”¹⁷⁶

Angela’s language displays a similar pattern in the *Memorial* and the *Instructions*. Angela speaks about her experience of God as best as she can in the *Memorial* until she arrives at the seventh supplementary step, where her language begins to break down into contradictions and where categories that were once separate (and even seemingly unbridgeable) are now merged. For example, Angela says God draws her to himself, but he doesn’t draw her with anything she can identify or conceive of.¹⁷⁷ She identifies the Trinity, traditionally associated with light, as the all-encompassing darkness that she nevertheless “sees.”¹⁷⁸ She writes that when she is surrounded by darkness, “I see all and I see nothing.”¹⁷⁹ Even God’s speech is full of the same contradictions when he tells her, “You are I and I am you.”¹⁸⁰ As language breaks down, Angela is drawn into God and totally united to him. She describes herself as standing in the midst of the Trinity¹⁸¹ and even God confirms that they are one.¹⁸² The disordered language of the seventh supplementary step turns into silence after the completion of the *Memorial*, when Angela stops talking about her spiritual experiences. The *Instructions* are full of her spiritual teachings but say little about her

¹⁷⁶ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 139 (MT 3, 1033C).

¹⁷⁷ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156.

¹⁷⁸ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156.

¹⁷⁹ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 156. Latin text: “Et tamen omnia tunc video et nihil video.”

¹⁸⁰ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 158. Latin text: “Tu es ego et ego sum tu.”

¹⁸¹ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156.

¹⁸² *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 158.

experience of God. The scribe who wrote Instruction IV states that she was in the habit of saying “My secret is mine.”¹⁸³

But even when disordered or contradictory, language is powerful for both Angela and Dionysius. Although Dionysius writes that silence is the final stage we arrive at in union with God, he nevertheless has a positive attitude towards language. Language and discursive thought are important and even essential parts of our ascent towards God. In fact, too heavy an emphasis on silence is misleading, since one can only arrive at it by exhausting language. Turner writes that good theology, for Dionysius, “leads to that silence which is found only on the other side of a general linguistic embarrassment. But that embarrassment has to be procured, and to reach that point—this is the essence of the cataphatic—it is necessary for theology to talk too much.”¹⁸⁴ Union with God may be found in silence, but we only arrive there by first talking too much. Although Angela’s attitude towards language is more circumspect if not negative, it is still powerful. In the seventh supplementary step, Angela is worried that her words will blaspheme and even destroy the union she seeks to describe. She states that “even if I say it is the All Good which draws me, I destroy it” and “whatever I say about it is blasphemy.”¹⁸⁵ Whereas for Dionysius language is part of the path to union with God, for Angela, it is potentially destructive of that union.

Angela’s theology may also differ from Dionysius’s in the relationship between unknowability and inexpressibility. McGinn writes that with apophasis, it is possible to “distinguish between unknowability, which relates to the mind, and inexpressibility, which relates

¹⁸³ *CW*, 248. *IL*, 496. Latin text: “Secretum meum mihi.”

¹⁸⁴ Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 23.

¹⁸⁵ *CW*, 204, 205. *IL*, 360, 362. *M*, 156. Latin text: “Et si dico quod est omne bonum, destruo illud. Videtur mihi blasphemare.”

to the mind's ability to communicate what it knows."¹⁸⁶ But Dionysius does not clearly distinguish between unknowability and inexpressibility. In fact, he appears to suggest that they are linked when he writes that "as we plunge into that darkness which is beyond intellect, we shall find ourselves not simply running short of words but actually speechless and unknowing."¹⁸⁷ Running out of words, for Dionysius, is part of the path to becoming speechless and unknowing. But while ineffability is important, *agnōsia*, or unknowing, is the more crucial aspect of Dionysius's thought. He believed that the only true knowledge of God is through unknowing; in other words, Dionysius wished to negate all knowing. McGinn explains that the unknowing Dionysius talks about is "not a 'what' at all, not some concept or content that can be described or defined. It is more like a state of mind...the subjective correlative to the objective unknowability of God. It can only be spoken about through paradoxical assertions of contraries: *agnōsia* is the only true *gnōsis* of God."¹⁸⁸

There is some evidence that Angela believed that God was unknowable. In the first supplementary step, Angela recounts how God withdraws from her after a vision in the Franciscan cathedral of Assisi. In her agony, she cries, "*Amor non cognitus, et quare et quare et quare?*,"¹⁸⁹ that is, "love unknown, why? why? why?" However, Lachance translates this "Love still unknown," as if Angela doesn't know God yet but may know him better in the future. The original text does not have that connotation; God is simply love unknown. This idea is echoed in the seventh supplementary step when Angela says that she lost the love that was hers and was made "nonlove" (*non amor*).¹⁹⁰ As Angela enters deeper into union with God and is deified, she loses the love that is hers and becomes God's love. But his love so transcends any concept that she has of love, that

¹⁸⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 31.

¹⁸⁷ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, 139 (MT 3 1033B).

¹⁸⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 175.

¹⁸⁹ CW, 142. IL, 184. M, 42.

¹⁹⁰ CW, 202. IL, 354. M, 152.

she calls it nonlove. She is transformed into the love unknown, the love that she can't understand or conceive of, that she invoked in the first supplementary step. Although Angela does not explicitly cultivate unknowing as Dionysius does, she frequently refers to God as something that cannot be conceived: God is a darkness "too great to be conceived or understood."¹⁹¹ The darkness that draws her cannot be "named, conceived, or imagined."¹⁹² Angela does not have a concept of *agnōsia* as the true *gnōsis* of God, but she does believe that God is too great to be known or understood.

While Angela only occasionally mentions God's unknowability, she is much more concerned with his inexpressibility. A constant theme of the *Memorial* is Angela's struggle to describe her experiences and Brother A.'s efforts to record her words. It is possible that inexpressibility takes on a larger role in Angela's text because it is dictated. She not only has to overcome the problem of describing the indescribable, but she also has to communicate her experiences in a way that Brother A. can understand, translate, and record. The term "ineffable" (*ineffabilis*) is used at least fifteen times in the *Memorial* to describe Angela's experience of the divine or God himself.¹⁹³ "Ineffable" is repeated eight times just in the last pages of the seventh supplementary step. This is likely because Angela, like Dionysius, believes that human language fails the higher one ascends towards God. Unable to put her experience into words in the highest step, she resorts to terms like "ineffable" to describe what cannot be described.

What is unique to Angela is that she associates the increasing inexpressibility of her experiences with increased certainty of God's action in her soul. I previously discussed Angela's seven ways that God enters the soul, which she enumerates in the fifth supplementary step. As

¹⁹¹ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152. Latin text: "Maius bonum quam possit cogitari nec intelligi."

¹⁹² *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156. Latin text: "Nominari vel cogitari vel imaginari."

¹⁹³ *CW*, 140, 143, 147, 183, 189, 190, 211, 212, 213. *IL*, 180, 186, 196, 298, 318, 378, 380, 382, 384, 386, 382. *M*, 38, 44, 50, 114, 126, 168, 170, 172, 174.

each way leads to more ineffable experiences, the soul becomes more and more certain that God is present within it. This is exactly what happens in the seventh supplementary step. In all the previous steps there were moments when Angela doubted or asked God for signs. But in the seventh step, Angela achieves absolute certitude. She states,

All the signs of friendship, so numerous and indescribably, all the words which God spoke to me, all those which you ever wrote—I now understand that these were so much less than that which I see with such great darkness, that in no way do I place my hope in them, nor is there any of my hope in them. Even if it were possible that all these previous experiences were not true, nonetheless, that could in no way diminish my hope—the hope that is so secure and certain in the All Good which I see with such darkness.¹⁹⁴

It may seem like a paradox that the less Angela was able to say or feel or know about God, the more certain she was that God was within her. But for Angela, God is so transcendent that any experience that can be put into words falls short of his ineffable divinity. Therefore, the surest sign that God was within her occurs in the transcendent darkness of the seventh step.

Yet Angela even transcends the experience of seeing God in darkness. She says that during Lent, she was again in the midst of the Trinity, which she describes as an “extremely deep abyss.”¹⁹⁵ Angela transitions from seeing God as darkness to seeing him as a deep abyss. This is confirmed by the numerous references to the abyss of God in the *Instructions*. In this new state, Angela is drawn out of all her prior experiences, including “the life and humanity of Christ; the consideration of that very deep companionship which the Father from eternity in his love had bestowed on the Son...namely, the contempt, the suffering, and the poverty experienced by the

¹⁹⁴ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 358. *M*, 154. Latin text: “Et omnes amicitias, quas mihi ostendit multas et inenarrabiles, et omnia verba mihi ab eo dicta, et omnia quae scripsisti unquam, intelligo in tantum minus esse illo bono quod video cum tanta tenebra, quod non posso spem mea in illis vel non est spes mea in illis. Immo etsi possibile esset quod essent omnia non vera, nullo tamen modo minuerent spem meam nec minueretur spes mea securissima, quae est certa in illo omnino bono quod video cum tanta tenebra.”

¹⁹⁵ *CW*, 211. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Profundissimum abyssum.

Son of God; and the cross as bed to rest on.”¹⁹⁶ She was even “drawn out of the vision of God in the darkness in which I used to take such delight.”¹⁹⁷ Angela not only states that she no longer has these experiences, but also says that she no longer finds anything in the things that previously gave her delight: “For in the cross of Christ in which I used to take such delight, so as to make it my place of rest and my bed, I find nothing; in the poverty of the Son of God, I find nothing; and in everything that could be named, I find nothing.”¹⁹⁸ It is interesting that Angela describes all of the previous visions and states that she no longer has, but says nothing concrete about this new state. The only thing that characterizes the new state is the absence of anything else she has ever experienced. It seems that Angela, like Dionysius, believed that union with God ends in silence.

¹⁹⁶ *CW*, 211-212. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: De vita et de humanitate Christi et de consideratione illius profundissimae societatis quam Deus Pater tantum dilexit ab aeterno quod dedit eam Filio suo...videlicet in despectu et in dolore et in paupertate Filii Dei, et in cruce quae consuevit esse mea repausatio et meus lectus.

¹⁹⁷ *CW*, 212. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Et sum extracta de illo modo videndi Deum in tenebra illius aquae tantum consuevit me delectare.

¹⁹⁸ *CW*, 212. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Quia in cruce in qua tantum delectabar quod erat mea repausatio et meus lectus nihil invenio, in paupertate Filii Dei nihil invenio, et in omnibus quae nominari possunt nihil invenio.

CHAPTER 4: Fusing Bodies and Souls: An Incarnational Understanding of Divine Union in the *Memorial*

One evening at Vespers, Angela was gazing at the cross when her soul was suddenly set ablaze and she felt that Christ was within her, embracing her soul with the very arm with which he was crucified. The experience inspired so much joy that Angela says she “understood what this man, namely Christ, is like in heaven, that is to say, how we will see that through him our flesh is made one with God.”¹ This vision encapsulates Angela’s understanding of divine union as a participation in the incarnation of Christ. When Christ unites our flesh with his,² the divine becomes incarnate in us. At the heart of the incarnation, seen from a Trinitarian perspective, is the hypostatic union, the joining of the human and divine natures in the divine person of Christ. Angela understands her own union with Christ in a certain sense as hypostatic as well—not just a union

¹ *CW*, 175. *IL*, 276. *M*, 100. Latin text: “Qua comprehendit anima qualiter iste homo, scilicet Christus, stat in caelo, videlicet quomodo istam carnem nostrum videmus unam societatem esse factam cum Deo.”

² As I discuss above, Angela understood the human being as a composite of body and soul, which are united in one person. When Angela talks about her flesh, she is really referring to her humanity, both body and soul. When she emphasizes the suffering of the body or the flesh, it is important to note that it is the soul that allows the human being to sense pain in the body. Any kind of body/soul dualism is foreign to Angela’s work.

of hearts or wills, but a true union or fusion of suffering bodies, in this case of Christ's suffering flesh with hers. After fusing with the suffering body of Christ, Angela/Christ's humanity, which are at this point no longer distinguishable, are united with Christ's divinity in the seventh supplementary step. What is remarkable about Angela's account of this union is the level of mutuality and exchange that occurs between the divine and human persons. Since the Council of Chalcedon established the hypostatic union as orthodox teaching in 451 CE, theologians have struggled to understand how to reconcile the divine and human natures in the person of Christ. The definition of Chalcedon states that Christ is fully human and fully divine and that these natures are not to be confused, transmuted, or contrasted "according to area or function [*achōristōs*]." At the same time, "the distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the "properties" [*idiotētos*] of each nature are conserved and both natures concur [*suntrechousēs*] in one "person" [*prosōpon*] and in one *hypostasis*."³ Because the divine and human natures are united yet distinct, they have *idiomata*, or individuating characteristics, some of which pertain to the humanity and some to the divinity.⁴ Some *idiomata*, such as impassibility, can be attributed to the divine nature, but not to the human nature of Christ, and vice versa. How these individual characteristics come together to form the one person of Christ is traditionally referred to as the *communicatio idiomatum*, or the communication of properties. The *communication idiomatum* traditionally holds that whatever pertains to one nature also pertains to the other.⁵ For example, the title *Theotokos*,

³ "The Definition of Chalcedon," in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 36.

⁴ Highton, Mike, "Hypostatic Union," in *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, ed. Ian A. McFarland, David A. S. Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and et. al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/cupdct/hypostatic_union/0?institutionId=170

⁵ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, J. Levison, and P. Pope-Levison, "Christology," In *Global Dictionary of Theology*, ed. by William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, InterVarsity Press, 2008.
<http://proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/ivpacat/christology/0?institutionId=170>

or God-bearer, was used to describe the Virgin Mary even though she did not literally give birth to the divine essence because the communication of properties allows the virgin birth to pertain to Christ's divinity as well as his humanity. The oneness of the person of Christ means that that the *idiomata* can be attributed to both his human and divine natures without compromising the distinctness of the two natures.⁶

Although Chalcedon established that the humanity and divinity of Christ could not be separated without compromising his personhood, theologians often went to great pains to discern how to attribute individual characteristics to each nature while still maintaining their unity. But Angela describes a fusion of her suffering body with Christ's body so strong that a mutuality is evoked in which the distinctiveness of each nature becomes permeable, and her human person and his divine person share individual characteristics that would not otherwise be attributed to them. The divine person of the Son shares in Angela/Christ's human experiences of poverty, suffering, and contempt, while Angela's humanity shares in the transcendent darkness of the divine, which is the overcoming of suffering through suffering. In the first, it is as if the divine is able to share in human passibility; while in the second, the human being is able to share in God's very self (*theosis*).

⁶ In the Middle Ages, the *communicatio idiomatum* became a subject of debate among theologians. The issue was not so much the ascription of the properties of one nature to the other, but the ascription of divine and human properties to the person of the Word. According to Richard Cross, the issue was with Christological predication, or "the sense in which we can ascribe predicates to the divine person in circumstances when the predicate term picks out a different nature from that implied by the subject term." The example used by theologians such as Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Scotus was the Christological claim "God is man." The issue is more about logic than about theology; theologians struggled to come up with the rational principles that would allow statements such as "God is man" (statements in which the predicate term picks out a different nature from that implied by the subject term) to be true. The incarnation creates a logical conundrum: in Christ, God is a man, but in his divine essence he is not a man. Medieval scholastics attempted to demonstrate how both statements can be logically true and therefore not contradictory. For more information about issues of Christological predication, see Richard Cross, *The Metaphysics of the Incarnation* (New York: University of Oxford Press, 2002), 183–203.

In this chapter, I will first discuss how Angela's understanding of the incarnation and divine union is rooted in Christ's suffering on the cross. In order to fully share in Christ's passion, Angela must overcome the problem of the inexpressibility of pain. At first glance, it does not seem possible to enter into the experience or suffering of another person. But Angela assiduously cultivated her identification with the passion through *imitatio Christi* and meditation. These spiritual practices helped her become open to receiving the gift of radical compassion—the ecstatic experiences that allowed Angela to co-suffer spiritually and physically with Christ. Angela's experiences of Christ's suffering gradually become more intense until her own suffering and his become indistinguishable in the sixth supplementary step. Their bodies and souls are fused to such an extent that Angela is pulled into Christ's hypostatic union and becomes one with the divine in the seventh supplementary step.

Overcoming Inexpressibility of Pain

The thirteenth century was a witness to “one of the greatest revolutions in feeling that Europe has ever witnessed,”⁷ namely, affective devotion to the passion of Christ. Not only was meditation on the suffering of Christ encouraged, especially among pious women, but also penitential practices that included bodily mortification. Angela was a child when Rainieri Fasani first called on the townspeople of Perugia to flagellate themselves publicly to avoid divine condemnation.⁸ As the flagellant movement grew, it would be strange if their intense (and indeed, excessive) piety did not reverberate in her religious imagination. While the modern reader may recoil at such practices, they were part of a spiritual and intellectual movement that began to value pain as a useful tool and sign of holiness. Esther Cohen has used the term “philopassianism” to

⁷ J. A. W. Bennett, *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 32.

⁸ André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, ed. Daniel Ethan Bornstein, trans. Margery J. Schneider (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993), 123.

describe the unique attitude towards pain in the late medieval period.⁹ Cohen writes that “the rise and development of philopassianism in the later Middle Ages and early modern period is therefore an extraordinary phenomenon. It is the complete opposite of the instinctive human reaction to pain: the deliberate, conscious attempt to feel as much physical anguish as possible.”¹⁰

However strange the concept of valuing and cultivating pain may be to modern readers, it is important to distinguish philopassianism from modern masochism. Cohen notes that “one did not seek pain in order to derive sensual pleasure from it. The physical sensation was invoked because it was considered useful, not pleasurable.”¹¹ Although the heights of mystical ecstasy in women’s mystical literature often portray pain and pleasure together—usually in an eroticized manner—Cohen is correct that pain was not sought after explicitly for sexual gratification, but rather as a tool to imitate the suffering of Christ. Cohen also rejects any attempt to explain philopassianism as a result of the famines, wars and plagues of the fourteenth century, observing that “the roots of philopassianism are clearly discernable already in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.”¹² Indeed, physical suffering was not always a requirement of philopassianism. Expert philopassionists like Angela “could duplicate Christ’s agony by means of meditation alone.”¹³

Philopassianism in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is often seen as an attitude of hatred towards the body. But it seems far more likely that the medieval obsession with cultivating experiences of pain was a result of specific attitudes about suffering’s communicability. Cohen approaches her study of pain in the later Middle Ages from the viewpoint that pain “is not only a universal sensation, it is also impossible to convey or share. ‘Man is born unto labor,’ stated Job

⁹ Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” *Science in Context* 8, no. 1 (1995): 51. Please give full citation and then the specific page number.

¹⁰ Cohen, 52.

¹¹ Cohen, 52.

¹² Cohen, 56.

¹³ Cohen, 59.

(Job 5:7), but all scientists dealing with the experience have come up against the barrier of the utter loneliness of pain. It is essentially an individual experience, unsharable and intransmissible.”¹⁴ There is evidence in the medieval period that suggests that thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Christians viewed pain (especially Christ’s pain) as mostly inexpressible.¹⁵ The medieval tendency towards the ensoulment of pain, for example, is powerful evidence that pain was viewed as an internal and highly individual process. Late medieval art, drama, mystical works, and devotional literature also sought to convey the reality of Christ’s physical pain on the cross. But proliferation of artistic expression appears to be asymptotic; while it may convey a partial understanding of Christ’s physical pain on the cross, it is never enough to satisfy a culture driven to fully understand that experience. In the thirteenth century, it is possible to speak of an apophysis of pain—just as the mystic searches in vain for the words to completely express their experience of God, so do all attempts at expression fail to grasp the totality of Christ’s passion. Cohen hints at this when she writes that “the nature of pain might well compare with that of the equally individual and intransmissible mystical experience.”¹⁶ Indeed, if Christ’s pain could be easily and fully grasped by the soul, then intense regimens of meditation on the passion would not have been prescribed to the devout.

It is important to note that this fascination with Christ’s pain was not the result of morbid curiosity or masochism; pain was associated with love, especially in its unitive function. Penitents and mystics sought to unite themselves to God by entering into the pain of Christ, often through reenactment of his passion or intense meditation. Although Angela never directly addresses the

¹⁴ Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” *Science in Context* 8, no. 1 (1995): 48.

¹⁵ Donna Trembinski, “[Pro]Passio Doloris: Early Dominican Conceptions of Christ’s Physical Pain,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, no. 4 (October 2008): 630–56.

¹⁶ Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility,” 49.

inexpressibility of pain, she continually strove to go beyond the limitations of her own experience. In her meditations, visions, and ecstatic experiences, she sought nothing less than to experience Christ's passion with him. If united to Christ in his suffering, she would be united to him in his most powerful act of love. This union with Christ's passion required an act of grace—the efforts of the penitent to imitate and internalize Christ's suffering would not be sufficient on their own. We see this most clearly in Angela, who spent her life cultivating experiences of pain in order to overcome the loneliness of Christ's passion. Angela is acutely aware of the boundary between her experience and Christ's. She is unable to cross that boundary until Christ allows her to through her mystical experiences. Through divine action in her soul, Angela is allowed to share in Christ's suffering as an act of radical compassion (from the Latin *compassio*: *com*/with + *passio*/suffering). For Angela, sharing Christ's suffering is a prerequisite for intimacy with Christ. Only by suffering with him could she understand the extent of his love.

The *Memorial* provides strong evidence that pain and love are deeply connected for Angela. For example, on the road back from Assisi, God says to her, “I am the one who was crucified for you. I have known hunger and thirst for you; and I shed my blood for you, I have loved you so much.” Angela adds, “He then related his entire passion to me.”¹⁷ God proves his love for Angela by shedding his blood and shares that love by intimately relating his suffering to her. But it isn't enough for Christ to tell her about his passion, however detailed the conversation. On the same journey back from Assisi, Christ intensifies the experience and allows her to internalize the cross: “You will experience the cross and the love of God within you. This sign will be with you for eternity.’ And immediately I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and even the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross; and feeling all of this, my soul

¹⁷ *CW*, 140. *IL*, 182. *M*, 40. Latin text: “Ego sum qui fui crucifixus pro te et habui famem et sitim pro te et sparsi sanguinem meum pro te, tantam te dilexi. Et dicebat totam passionem.”

melted into the love of God.”¹⁸ Compassion, love, and pain converge in her soul and allow Angela to become united to Christ. It isn’t enough for Angela to simply suffer in imitation of Christ—she must enter into Christ’s experience. She must drink his blood,¹⁹ lie with him in the sepulcher,²⁰ and feel the internal pain of Christ’s soul.²¹ Experiential knowledge of Christ’s pain is the foundation of Angela’s spirituality.

One of the major themes of the *Memorial* is Angela’s attempts to describe her experiences even, or better precisely in the face of their ineffability. Often, she grows frustrated with her scribe, because the words he records do not convey the sublimity of her experiences.²² Angela is given access, through experiential knowledge, to what would normally be intransmissible—the loving pain experienced by Christ on the cross. Nevertheless, Angela attempts to communicate what she experiences to Brother A., despite the difficulty in expressing what is intransmissible. Christ’s pain and love are at the heart of these ineffable experiences. Scholars such as Bernard McGinn have established the relationship of love and knowledge in mystical union. Because Angela so closely associates Christ’s pain with his love, it is necessary to examine how pain, love, and knowledge co-function in her theology.

According to McGinn, most Christian mystics agreed that love and knowledge were important components of mystical union. However, many mystics differed in their understanding of the “relations between love and knowledge on every stage of the mystical path.”²³ For example,

¹⁸ *CW*, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 42. Latin text: “Do scilicet crucem et amorem Dei intus in te, et hoc signum erit tecum in aeternum. Et ego statim illam crucem et amorem sentiebam intus in anima mea, et resultabat quod sentiebam illam crucem coporaliter, et sentiendo liquefiebat anima mea in amore Dei.”

¹⁹ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142–144. *M*, 12.

²⁰ *CW*, 182. *IL*, 296–298. *M*, 114.

²¹ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112.

²² *CW*, 137–38. *IL*, 172. *M*, 34.

²³ Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition,” in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 67.

love is closely associated with knowledge in the theology of Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry (both often quoted Gregory the Great's statement that *amor ipse notitia est*).²⁴ In contrast, Marguerite Porete understands reason as an impediment to love. Indeed, she kills off reason in her dialogue *The Mirror of Simple Souls*.²⁵ The fact that reason is then resurrected indicates that it is still important (or, at the very least, persistent) on the path to union, but ultimately it must be surrendered if the soul is to become truly annihilated. In order to examine how mystics understand the relationship between love and knowledge in mystical union, McGinn lists four propositions:

1. God is unknowable in the sense that the divine nature cannot be grasped through rational discursive thought.
2. Love has a special access to God because God is love and because he bestows his own form of loving on human persons so that they may love him in return.
3. The love by which we grasp or attain God includes a form of intuitive "knowing" (*intelligentia, intellectus*) superior to reason (*ratio*).
4. This form of knowing subsumes the lower aspects of the reasoning process into the higher, transformed state.²⁶

Angela does not radically depart from these propositions, but rather integrates her understanding of pain into them. She clearly believes in the veracity of the first proposition. In the seventh supplementary step, she worries that she blasphemes by talking about her experience of God, because in these visions the divine cannot be expressed through discursive human language. The second proposition would have to account for her close association of pain with love. To paraphrase Angela's theological conclusion, one might say, "Love and pain have special access to God because God is love and because he showed up the ultimate form of love in the suffering of Christ on the Cross." Christ often communicates his love to Angela by enumerating his wounds

²⁴ Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition," 63.

²⁵ Marguerite Porete, *Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls*, Trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 163.

²⁶ Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and *Unio Mystica* in the Western Christian Tradition," 68.

and allowing her to share in his passion. Thus, for her, Christ's pain is the most powerful example of his love. For Angela, McGinn's third proposition must also integrate pain. Just as love is a form of knowledge, so is pain a form of experiential knowledge in her thought. Therefore, the third proposition might read: "The love by which we attain God includes a form of intuitive, experiential 'knowing' of Christ's pain on the cross. This knowing is superior to reason, so much so that Angela states, 'nothing of these delights of God is being preached. Preachers cannot preach it; they do not understand what they preach.'"²⁷ For Angela, experiencing Christ's pain on the cross with him in her mystical visions gives her access to a knowledge of God's love and delights that ordinary preachers would not, and in fact could not, have. In McGinn's fourth proposition, a form of intellectualized love subsumes the lower state of reason. But for Angela, everything (love, knowledge, pain) is transcended in the divine darkness of the seventh supplemental step. However, they are not completely transcended—after the vision of the divine darkness, Angela proclaims that she has made the cross her bed. The cross bridges love, knowledge, and pain so that pain is both a form of knowledge and an expression of love. It is a form of experiential knowledge that gives the soul greater understanding of Christ's love. For Angela, pain also takes on love's unitive function, collapsing the boundaries of self and other that make Christ's pain inaccessible. She is able to experience and understand the totality of Christ's passion through her compassionate meditation. In doing so, she also invites the reader to enter into the mystery of the passion by sharing in her meditation. In the next section I will examine how Angela's meditation on the passion wounds her as Christ himself was wounded. The highly emotional language that she uses is intended to also wound the reader, so that the reader can also gain some access—even if only vicarious—to the inexpressible pain of Christ.

²⁷ CW, 131. IL, 150. M, 18. Latin text: "Quod nihil praedicatur de delectatione Dei, et illi qui praedicant non possunt illam praedicare et ea quae praedicant non intelligent."

Beyond *Imitatio* and *Meditatio*: Radical Compassion (*Compassio*) in the *Memorial*

Angela felt intense or radical compassion (*com + passio*) for Christ's passion by being literally allowed to suffer with him. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, late-medieval practices of meditation and *imitatio Christi* encouraged intense identification with the passion of Christ. Angela's own practice of meditation and *imitatio Christi* demonstrates how she deepens her compassion for Christ. Angela's meditative practice in fact becomes a form of *imitatio*; she uses images in meditation like puncture marks that wound her emotionally as Christ was wounded. However, Angela's experience of Christ's agony exceeds what can be achieved through either *imitatio* or *meditatio*: it is instead *compassio*, suffering with/as Christ. Although there is ample textual evidence that Angela engaged in rigorous spiritual practices, it is important to note that the emphasis in the *Memorial* is always on God's action in Angela's soul, not Angela's own actions. This is further confirmed by the use of passive versus active voice when recounting visions of Christ's suffering. Angela's *compassio* or radical compassion is given to her by the divine. Not only does Christ allow her to interiorize his pain, but he also enables her to make his experience her own. Through an infusion of grace, Angela experiences the passion of Christ so completely that she is able to overcome what Esther Cohen calls the "utter loneliness of pain."²⁸ In doing so, Angela transcends the gap between herself and Christ and ultimately herself and God as she is united with Christ's divinity in the seventh supplementary step.

The Imitation of Christ in the Memorial

Giles Constable posits that Christians throughout history have imitated Christ's divinity, humanity, and suffering body.²⁹ Often these different types of *imitatio* are practiced together.

²⁸ Esther Cohen, "Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility," 48.

²⁹ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 151.

Although at some point, Angela practices all three, she mainly focuses on imitating the suffering body of Christ. However, her practice differs from that described by Constable because she is not as interested in salvation or eschatology, the theological underpinning for each form of *imitatio*. Rather than interpret the cross as the means of salvation, Angela primarily sees it as an expression of Christ's love, compassion, and solidarity for humanity. Although her interpretation of the cross has some precedents in devotional literature, Angela's understanding of the cross is a represents a shift from the Anselmian model of atonement widely accepted in her day. It is important to note that Angela ultimately rejects divine impassibility for the same reason that she rejects the Anselmian model of atonement—they both emphasize God's honor and dignity over his love.

Constable argues that the way theologians chose to practice *imitatio Christi* is intimately related to their Christology. For example, in the late antique period and the early Middle Ages, theologians' "primary emphasis seems to have been on [Christ's] divinity and on salvation as a process of deification. God was 'an absence of all human activities and corporeal limitation'... and man became God by shedding human characteristics and taking on divine ones."³⁰ Because theologians emphasized Christ's divinity, *imitatio Christi* in these earlier periods involved shedding what was human and taking on what was divine in order become divine like Christ. In other words, the goal of imitating God's divinity was deification. According to Constable,

The imitation of Christ was linked to the theology of the image of God and divine filiation. 'God was made man in order that man might become God.' Imitating Him was not so much a matter of copying His earthly life and passion as of participating in His resurrection and assimilating to Christ as the image of God.³¹

Constable also asserts that in the early Middle Ages, and especially in the twelfth century, there was more theological emphasis on Christ's humanity and earthly life. Therefore, *imitatio Christi*

³⁰ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*. 151.

³¹ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, 146.

involved imitating Christ's humanity by using his life as a model for one's own.³² In the later Middle Ages, the emphasis on Christ's humanity and his suffering became even more pronounced. *Imitatio Christi* therefore shifted from imitating the humanity of Christ to imitating his body, especially his suffering body.³³ Constable cautions against reading these different forms of imitating Christ as unrelated. Often all three forms of *imitatio* were practiced together. He points out that "the desire to imitate Christ's body, especially His sufferings, was closely related to the imitation both of His humanity and of His divinity, since the passion and the crucifixion were the essential preparations for resurrection and thus set an example for all Christians."³⁴ Therefore, according to Constable, eschatological concern is what links divine, human, and bodily *imitatio*.

However, Angela's concept of *imitatio* varies from Constable's account. At first glance, Angela's account conforms to the ideal of imitating Christ's body, popular in the thirteenth century. For example, as we have seen, she strips naked in front of the cross, mirroring both the nakedness of Christ as well as that of Francis of Assisi.³⁵ When meditating on the passion, Angela fixates on pieces of Christ's flesh and in a moment of ecstasy, lies down with her arms stretched out. She makes her body cruciform,³⁶ imitating Christ recumbent on the cross when the nails are driven through his hands and feet.³⁷ In the beginning of the *Memorial* she states that when she saw images of the passion she would get a fever, or if she heard anyone speak of God, she would scream uncontrollably.³⁸ In addition to imitating Christ's body, Angela also imitated his humanity

³² Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, 181.

³³ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, 194.

³⁴ Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, 194.

³⁵ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 136. *M*, 8.

³⁶ *CW*, 145–146. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48.

³⁷ It should be noted that according to Sarah McNamer, Franciscan images of Christ crucified often do not show him in a recumbent, passive pose. This image of vulnerability was more popular in women's devotional literature. See Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 100.

³⁸ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18.

by selling her possessions and making herself materially poor, as Christ was during his life. It appears almost impossible for Angela to imitate divinity because to her it is completely incomprehensible and inexpressible, but she does imitate qualities that she attributes to God, such as love and later spiritual poverty.³⁹

Angela's *imitatio* also does not conform to Constable's model insofar as she lacks interest in salvation. It is untrue that Angela never mentions salvation, but it is not emphasized in her work. In fact, scholars such as Karma Lochrie note that Angela focuses on "the horror of the Crucifixion, Christ's disfigurement and death, rather than his triumph."⁴⁰ Angela is more concerned with Christ's suffering because it is only by entering into his pain that she can achieve true intimacy with him. Achieving this loving union on earth seems to be the primary focus of the *Memorial*. This is supported by the fact that Angela's mystical itinerary of twenty-six steps ends on earth, not with the beatific vision of heaven. In addition, Angela does not understand Christ's passion primarily in terms of salvific suffering. Although she states the traditional theological belief that Christ died for our sins, Angela mostly understands Christ's suffering in terms of solidarity and compassion, not sacrifice or salvation. For example, in Instruction XXIII, Angela states that Christ "had become human in order to truly feel and carry my sufferings in himself."⁴¹ There is a beautiful mutuality in this statement—as Angela attempts to suffer with Christ in compassionate meditation, Christ assumes a human nature to suffer with her. Christ not only bears his own pain, but hers as well. This mutuality is echoed in another vision in which Angela strips in front of the cross and accuses each of her bodily members of sinning one by one. Afterwards, Christ comes to her in a

³⁹ Angela is given a vision in the fifth supplementary step of God's poverty. See *CW*, 179. *IL*, 288. *M*, 108.

⁴⁰ Karma Lochrie, "The Language of Transgression: Body, Flesh, and Word in Mystical Discourse," in *Speaking Two Languages: Traditional Disciplines and Contemporary Theory in Medieval Studies*, ed. Allen J. Frantzen, *SUNY Series in Medieval Studies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 135.

⁴¹ *CW*, 281. *IL*, 614. Latin text: "Factus fuerat homo ut dolores meos veraciter in portaret et sentiret."

vision and recounts his suffering to her. He enumerates each affliction “from head to toe” as Angela had done in front of the cross.⁴² Angela’s understanding of intimacy with the divine is dependent on the mutual sharing of their bodies, their humanity, and their pain.

Christ must therefore experience the most acute suffering possible, because only then can he express full solidarity with humanity and bear the pain of each human being. That is why it is so important to Angela that “from the instant of its creation until the moment of its separation from the body, the soul of Christ endured, continually and totally, that most acute and unspeakable suffering which he saw he was inevitably destined to sustain according to the divine plan.”⁴³ It isn’t enough for Christ to just suffer when he is crucified. To fully live in solidarity with the suffering of humanity (which is often prolonged), Christ had to suffer acutely in every moment of his earthly life. The radical extent of Christ’s suffering is the result of what Angela calls the “divine plan.”⁴⁴ She states that “Christ saw in the divine light the measure of suffering allotted to him. Because of its very excessiveness and ineffability, this suffering was concealed from all creatures.”⁴⁵ Angela raises Christ’s suffering to divine and almost infinite proportions by calling it ineffable (*qui dolor sua ineffabilitate esset*),⁴⁶ a term also used to describe the divine darkness in the seventh supplementary step (*ineffabili modo videndi Deum*).⁴⁷ Christ is willing to undergo such intense suffering because of his “wonderful compassion toward the human race he loved so much.”⁴⁸ The scribe uses the Latin “*ex compassione*”⁴⁹ here, rather than a term like *miser cordia*,

⁴² CW, 127. IL, 140. M, 10. Latin text: “a pedibus usque ad caput.”

⁴³ CW, 233. IL, 452. Latin text: “Ideo superacutissimum et omnino ineffabilem dolorem quem se videbat infallibiliter sustinere in ipso creationis suae instanti—divina haec sapiential dispensabiliter dispensante—totem et totaliter sustinuit et portavit continue usque ad animae separationem et carnis.”

⁴⁴ CW, 230. IL, 444.

⁴⁵ CW, 230. IL, 444.

⁴⁶ IL, 444.

⁴⁷ IL, 360. M, 156.

⁴⁸ CW, 230. IL, 444.

⁴⁹ IL, 444.

providing further evidence that Angela believed Christ suffered with humanity. Her emphasis on Christ's compassion in Instruction III is important because it demonstrates that Christ's compassion is the model for her own. Therefore, when Angela internalizes the cross and feels pain in Christ's soul as he is crucified, it also follows that Christ mutually experiences the pain of humanity.

Angela's understanding of the role of the cross is radically different than it is in the Anselmian satisfaction model. As I discuss above, Angela is less interested in the salvific effects of the cross; she primarily sees Christ's pain as act of love, compassion, and solidarity that must be returned by the soul. However, Anselmian atonement emphasizes salvation as satisfaction, or the repayment of a debt (i.e., sin). In order for God to be true to his just nature, the debt has to be repaid—it cannot be forgiven without recompense or punishment. Anselm asks:

Does it seem to you that [God] is preserving his honor intact if he allows it to be taken from himself on such terms that, on the one hand, it is not repaid to him, and, on the other, he does not punish the person who takes it?...It is a necessary consequence, therefore, that either the honor which has been taken should be repaid, or punishment should follow. Otherwise, either God will not be just to himself.⁵⁰

Since the debt to God has been incurred by Adam, only one of Adam's descendants can repay the debt. However, its magnitude is so great that no human being could possibly repay it. Anselm states that "this cannot come about unless there should be someone who would make a payment to God greater than everything that exists part from God.... Now, there is nothing superior to all that exists which is not God—except God."⁵¹ However, "the obligation rests with man, and no one

⁵⁰ Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man," *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, trans. Brian Davies and G.R. Evans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 287.

⁵¹ Anselm of Canterbury, "Why God Became Man," 319–20.

else, to make the payment referred to.”⁵² Thus, Anselm concludes that “no one can pay except God, and no one ought to pay except man: it is necessary that a God-Man should pay it.”⁵³

Marilyn Adams writes that the Incarnation was “a drastic step” in Anselm’s thought.⁵⁴ He tries to “minimalize the metaphysical degradation involved, maintaining that the God-man’s human nature has only those limitations that are necessary to accomplish His saving work,”⁵⁵ or the work of satisfaction. Nevertheless, to repay the debt incurred by Adam, Christ had to “render to God something He didn’t already owe (otherwise, there would be no surplus to pay off the family debt).”⁵⁶ For Anselm, the surplus that was required was Christ’s suffering and death. Adams explains that

humans are not by nature mortal—death neither is, nor contributes to that for which God made human beings. Consequently, the obligation to die is not something Adam’s race acquires via its obligation to be and to do that for which human beings were made.... Therefore, Christ’s obedience *unto death* could constitute the ‘surplus’ offering that Christ could make on behalf of Adam’s race.⁵⁷

Christ’s suffering and death produces the surplus satisfaction necessary to repay the debt and reconcile mankind to God.

Unlike Angela, Anselm does not understand Christ’s suffering and death primarily as acts of compassion or solidarity with suffering humanity. Adams writes that for Anselm it is not “part of Christ’s job to *empathize* with us in our sin and suffering. His *identification* with us is *metaphysical* (by taking on a human nature) and *biological* (by becoming a descendent of Adam).

⁵² Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 320.

⁵³ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 320.

⁵⁴ Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?: Medieval Philosophy and the Systematics of Christology* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 11.

Abelard already makes an adjustment and says that Adam’s race shares in his guilt but not in his responsibility. See Peter Abelard, *Peter Abelard: Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Steven R. Cartwright (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2011), 53.

⁵⁵ Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 11.

⁵⁶ Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 12.

⁵⁷ Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 14.

His identification with us is *for legal purposes*—to make satisfaction without being a middleman.”⁵⁸ R.W. Southern, argues that what might interpreted as a glacial legalism is mitigated by Anselm’s intellectual and moral rejection of disobedience.⁵⁹ As a monk, obedience was the most fundamental virtue for Anselm. He wrote, “Were it not better that the whole world, and whatever exists except God, should perish and be reduced to nothingness, than that you should do anything however small against the will of God?”⁶⁰ The slightest sin—even a single glance of the eye against the will of God—was so grave for Anselm that it was greater than the whole value of the universe. Angela also abhors sin, though she is primarily concerned with sin impeding her relationship with God. For example, after the first pilgrimage to Assisi, God gives her the ring of his love and declares, “From now on you are engaged to me and you will never leave me.” When he said this, Angela cried out “Oh, that I may never sin mortally.”⁶¹ For Angela, the consequences of sin are primarily personal, not cosmic.

One of the reasons why Anselm’s account of satisfaction is so legalistic in *Cur Deus Homo* is because he wrote it to refute the arguments of the “infidels.” Adams writes that he probably had Jews and Muslims in mind, because they argued against the incarnation from the metaphysical aloofness, the Justice, and the Wisdom of God.⁶² Anselm attempts to turn these arguments against the incarnation on their heads, which is why he focuses more on metaphysics, justice, and God’s wisdom rather than God’s love for humanity. Sin also figures heavily in Anselm’s model of atonement, because sin is how humanity incurs the debt and dishonors God in the first place. In contrast, Angela does not primarily see the cross as a remedy for sin. Instead, the cross was, for

⁵⁸ Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 16.

⁵⁹ R.W. Southern, *Saint Anselm and His Biographer* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 103–104.

⁶⁰ Anselm of Canterbury, “Why God Became Man,” 305.

⁶¹ *CW*, 143. *IL*, 188. *M*, 44. Latin text: “Es arrata a me et de cetero non discedes a me...Et quando dixit ‘non discedes a me de cetero,’ anima clamavit: O non peccabo moraliter!”

⁶² Marilyn M. Adams, *What Sort of Human Nature?*, 10.

her, the ultimate act of love, compassion, and solidarity. Its purpose was to inspire that same love, compassion, and solidarity in the soul.

The Practice of Meditation in the *Memorial*

Having examined the role of *imitatio Christi* in Angela's thought as well as her understanding of the cross, I will turn to her practice of meditation. Evidence in the *Memorial* suggests that Angela rigorously practiced meditation, especially on Christ's passion. Meditation often precedes the many of the visions and ecstasies of the *Memorial*. However, Angela's intense experiences of Christ's suffering (which I refer to as radical compassion) are not the result of her own efforts but are in fact gifts of divine grace. In fact, Angela's experiences of radical compassion are often involuntary. Each experience punctures and wounds Angela as Christ is wounded. In this section, I will explore the significance of the puncture wounds Angela sustains during meditation and argue that taken as a whole, they not only enable her to experience the ineffability of Christ's passion, but also transform Angela's body and soul as her humanity fuses with Christ in a union of shared suffering.

Often Angela experiences visions and ecstasies while she meditates on the passion. While meditation was no guarantee that someone would be granted divine experiences, Mary Carruthers observes that "like chance, grace also favors a prepared mind."⁶³ For Carruthers, meditation is a "craft of thinking. People use it to make things, such as interpretations and ideas, as well as buildings and prayers."⁶⁴ Medieval meditation is thus a tool that aids in prayer as well as theological interpretation or thinking. Carruthers stresses the agency of the meditating subject when she states that "people do not 'have' ideas, they 'make' them."⁶⁵ Although Angela often

⁶³ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 1.

⁶⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 4.

⁶⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 5.

appears to lose agency when she is swept up into a vision or an experience of ecstasy, there is ample textual evidence to suggest that she assiduously practiced several common types of medieval meditation throughout her life. A few examples include her meditation on the sorrow of the mother of Christ and St. John,⁶⁶ slowly and mindfully reciting the Our Father,⁶⁷ meditating on the bits of flesh that were driven into the wood of the cross,⁶⁸ gazing at the cross during Vespers,⁶⁹ meditating on Christ's poverty,⁷⁰ and meditating on the passion.⁷¹ These examples closely correspond to common kinds of meditative practices. For example, Angela's meditation on the bits of Christ's flesh, on his passion, and on his total poverty may seem morbid to a modern reader. But in the Middle Ages it was common to "make 'excessive images for secure remembering (on the observation that we recall what is unusual more readily and precisely than what is common) includes making very bloody, gory, violent *imagines agentes*.'"⁷² Carruthers uses the image of "puncture wounds" to describe the compunction of the heart that was cultivated in medieval meditation.⁷³

The image of a puncture wound is apt because the practice of meditation or remembering the events of Christ's life evoked images of violence. After all, recording anything in writing was a violent practice. Carruthers advises that "we should keep in mind the vigorous, if not violent, activity involved in making a mark upon such a physical surface as an animal's skin. One must break it, rough it up, 'wound' it in some way with a sharply pointed instrument."⁷⁴ The act of

⁶⁶ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142. *M*, 14.

⁶⁷ *CW*, 129, 148, 163. *IL*, 146, 200, 242. *M*, 14, 52, 80.

⁶⁸ *CW*, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48.

⁶⁹ *CW*, 175. *IL*, 276. *M*, 100.

⁷⁰ *CW*, 179. *IL*, 290. *M*, 108.

⁷¹ *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110.

⁷² Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 101.

⁷³ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 101.

⁷⁴ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 102.

remembering, like that of writing, was designed to evoke strong emotions that, likewise, pierced the soul. Carruthers further observes that “the very word *recordari* is an act of remembering not in Wordsworthian tranquility, but by means of very strong emotions that both punctuated and wounded memory. As the praxis of meditation developed, *compunctio cordis* became elaborated in a variety of ‘ways’ to induce strong emotions of grief and/or fear, including an emotion-filled imagining as one recites or chants the Psalms, the Passion, and other suitable texts.”⁷⁵ By puncturing memory and contributing to *compunctio cordis*, medieval meditation was also a practice of *imitatio Christi* that cultivated suffering in imitation of Christ. Carruthers uses a prayer by Anselm of Bec to demonstrate that “he scares himself, he grieves himself, he shames himself: this is literally *com-punc-tio cordis*, wounding oneself with the *puncti* of text and picture.”⁷⁶ Angela’s highly detailed accounts of her sorrow over Christ’s passion, her focus on the gory details of his suffering, and her fits of screaming when she sees images of the passion⁷⁷ all demonstrate that she practiced the kind of agonizing meditation described by Carruthers.

However, Angela’s own attempts at imitation and meditation can only go so far. Grace may prefer the prepared mind, but no mind, however prepared, can compel grace to act. Angela’s vivid experiences of Christ’s passion cannot be the result of her own efforts but are instead a result of God’s action in her soul. Elena Carrera notes that “Angela presents her meditation on the Passion as a gift from God which made her surrender completely.”⁷⁸ When God grants Angela an experience of the passion, it is usually divided into fragmented and partial experiences. For example, Angela states that during meditation, Christ showed her “his afflictions from head to toe.

⁷⁵ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 103.

⁷⁶ Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 103.

⁷⁷ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 152. *M*, 18.

⁷⁸ Elena Carrera, “The Spiritual Role of the Emotions in Mechthild of Magdeburg, Angela of Foligno, and Teresa of Avila,” in *The Representation of Women’s Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 76.

He even showed me how his beard, eyebrows, and hair had been plucked out and enumerated each and every one of the blows of the whip that he had received.”⁷⁹ Another time Christ invites Angela to place her mouth at the entrance of his side wound and drink his blood.⁸⁰ She “saw and drank the blood, which was freshly flowing from his side.”⁸¹ In yet another example, Angela meditates on the bits of Christ’s flesh that were driven into the wood of the cross.⁸² These meditative experiences puncture the memory as Christ’s hands were punctured by the nails. The image of the puncture wounds in Christ’s hands is a particularly apt description of Angela’s experience with meditation. She focuses on a specific image of the crucifixion that, examined in isolation, only form a very small part of Christ’s passion. But when viewed together, all of Angela’s experiences of the passion become like tiny points of paint made by a brush in in the artistic style called pointillism. In the painting “La Grande Jatte,” the work of the great pointillist painter Georges Seurat, any one point does not make much sense on its own. But viewed together, the points or punctures begin to form an image. Similarly, when Angela’s experiences of Christ’s suffering are examined together, they combine to form not just a vivid but a lived image of the crucified.⁸³ Angela’s body and soul are gradually transformed into the image of Christ as she suffers with him. Although Angela’s pointillism is necessarily textual, and to that extent inevitably has a certain two-dimensional quality to it, there is a sense that the digestion of the consumed Eucharist gave women a similar

⁷⁹ *CW*, 127. *IL*, 140. *M*, 10. Latin text: “Ostendendo a pedibus usque ad caput poenas. Etiam ostendebat pilos barbae et supercilliorum et capitis sibi evulsos et numerabat omnes flagellationes, scilicet assignando singulas flagellationes.”

⁸⁰ Breast milk was considered curdled blood in the Middle Ages and the wound in Christ’s side was often interpreted as a maternal image (he is giving his blood to nourish the infant Church as a mother feeds her child). Medieval readers would have interpreted this experience as intimate and maternal.

⁸¹ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 142–144. *M*, 12. Latin text: “Et videbatur mihi quod ego viderem et biberem sanguinem eius fluente, recenter ex latere suo.”

⁸² *CW*, 145–46. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48.

⁸³ While similar to the impressionist analogy in chapter two, the comparison to pointillism is unique because each point stands on its own, while brush strokes are blended, painted over, etc. Similarly, each moment of Christ’s suffering that Angela experiences both stands on its own and contributes to the larger picture of the totality of Christ’s ineffable suffering.

and even more-dimensional (involving more of their senses) lived sense of Christ's suffering, which is ultimately in equal measure theirs as Christ's. This also brings out the cross-pollination between the lived practice of partaking of the Eucharist and the evocative textual production of spiritual women like Angela.

Hollywood compares Angela's meditative puncture wounds to traumatic memory and experience in her book *Sensible Ecstasy*. For example, both traumatic memory and Angela's puncture wounds are fragmented and "impinge on [consciousness] in uncontrollable and intrusive ways."⁸⁴ It is also notable that both Angela and trauma survivors reject compensatory narratives that might mitigate the horror of the traumatic event. For example, Hollywood notes the "refusal, on the part of many survivors of traumatic or catastrophic events, to accept any palliating or explanatory narrative for their suffering. Victims often express the fear that the imposition of salvific or other explanatory narratives onto their experience undercuts the onlooker's ability to understand and identify with the severity of the victim's suffering."⁸⁵ Angela's experience of the cross is similar because she does not focus on Christ's victory or triumph over sin and death. Hollywood states that "Angela seems less intent on the 'recovery' made possible through narrativization (in this case, the soteriological narrative of Christianity)."⁸⁶ She stays with the horror and brutality of the passion, perhaps with the same concern as the trauma survivor.⁸⁷ It is possible that Angela intuited that if she moved too quickly from Christ's suffering to his glory, she would not fully be able to identify with his passion.

⁸⁴ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 76.

⁸⁵ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 78.

⁸⁶ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 78.

⁸⁷ I do not mean to imply that Angela is somehow traumatized because of her own life experiences. Christ is the one who suffers in an extreme way that might be likened to traumatic suffering. Angela's emphasis is always on Christ's suffering, not her own.

If Christ's extreme suffering on the cross can be considered traumatic, then it is true that Angela attempts to enter into his experience of trauma through compassionate meditation on the passion. However, Angela's spiritual experience of Christ's suffering differs from traumatic experience in the role accorded to narrativization. While narrativization is the normal treatment for traumatic memories, Hollywood notes that medieval meditation practices the reverse.

Medieval meditative practices reverse this pattern, moving through narrative memory in order, through imaginative recreation, to induce sensory and emotive suffering and horror in the face of catastrophic loss—in this case the death of the Godman on the cross. Medieval memory work involves making this historically distant yet cosmologically and soteriologically central event one's own by inducing something like traumatic memories of events that have not occurred to the subject but to Christ. We see this work, for example, in Angela's focus on the gruesome details of Christ's crucifixion, through which she makes present, emotionally and sensorially, the experience of Christ's suffering. Moreover, Angela stresses the extent to which these emotive and visceral responses become involuntary and inescapable.⁸⁸

According to Hollywood, medieval meditation does not utilize narrativization to try to access the experience of Christ's trauma on the cross, but rather uses fragmented images of the passion. While narrativization can be healing for a trauma survivor, Angela does not want to be healed. Quite the opposite, she longs to suffer with Christ because she equates his suffering with his love. It is only through the disjointedness and fragmented nature of her puncture wounds that Angela can experience Christ's pain. She does this, not with a single vision that allows her to experience the totality of the passion, but rather through smaller, repeated experiences that wound her until her body and soul fuse with Christ so that his suffering becomes hers and her suffering becomes his.

Hollywood also suggests that Angela's experience of Christ's passion eventually becomes involuntary and inescapable. The wounds continue to hurt and are constantly re-punctured through her meditative focus on the passion. It is possible that Angela loses agency over the experiences she cultivates through meditation as grace takes over and allows her to suffer more deeply with

⁸⁸ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 77.

Christ. This shift can be seen in the *Memorial* when the use of passive and active voice is examined. For example, in the beginning of the *Memorial*, Angela focuses on her own actions. She speaks in the active voice, telling Brother A. that she “*stripped [herself]* in front of the cross,”⁸⁹ “*fixed [her] attention* on St. John and on the mother of God,”⁹⁰ and says, “*I was meditating* on the great suffering which Christ endured on the cross, *I was considering* the nails, which I had heard it said, had driven a little bit of the flesh of his hands and feet into the wood.”⁹¹ But later in the *Memorial*, Angela focuses less on her actions and uses the passive voice to describe her experiences of the divine. For example, when she sees the passion presented on the Piazza Santa Maria, she states that “the moment when it seemed to me one should weep was transformed for me into a very joyful one, and *I was miraculously drawn* into a state of such delight that when I began to feel the impact of this indescribable experience of God, I lost the power of speech and fell flat on the ground.”⁹² This example is interesting because after using the passive voice her body itself becomes passive, falling to the ground. Angela lies on the ground, imitating Christ’s recumbent posture as he is nailed to the cross, also a passive and vulnerable position. Angela also uses passive voice when she describes particularly intense visions of the passion. She states that “through God’s will, the passion *was shown* to me, that is, he himself granted me to see more of his passion than I have ever heard spoken of.”⁹³ Although Angela mentions that she was meditating on the passion before receiving the vision, her emphasis is on God’s action in her soul. It is God’s will that grants her

⁸⁹ *CW*, 126. *IL*, 136. *M*, 8. Latin text: “*expoliavi me omnia vestimenta mea*”

⁹⁰ *CW*, 128. *IL*, 144. *M*, 14. Latin text: “*figebam me in sancto ioanne et in Matre Dei*”

⁹¹ *CW*, 145. *IL*, 192. *M*, 48. Latin text: “*Cogitabam de magno dolore quem Christus sustinuit in cruce et cogitabam de clavis illis, quos ego audiveram dici quod clavi illi de minibus et pedibus eius carnem portaverunt intus in ligno.*”

⁹² *CW*, 176. *IL*, 278. *M*, 102. Latin text: “*Unde et quando repraesentata fuit Passio Christi in platea Sanctae Mariae et videtur quod tunc fuisset plangendum, et mihi tunc e converso tanta laetitia tunc miraculose tracta fui et delectate, quod perdidit loquelam et iacui postquam incoepi habere illud inenarrabile sentimentum Dei.*”

⁹³ *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110. Latin text: “*Et tunc fuit voluntas Dei, quod fuit mihi demonstratum et quod ipse faciebat me videre plus de passione sua quam sint illa quae adhuc audieram referrari, et quod ipse videbat quomodo ego videbam plus de passione sua quam audiverim dici.*”

the vision, not her own external actions. Angela also states that “on still another occasion, *I was shown* the acute pain which was in Christ’s soul”⁹⁴ The shift from active to passive voice not only emphasizes God’s work in Angela’s soul but also allows her to claim exclusive knowledge of Christ’s pain.

Another shift that occurs along with the increased use of passive voice is that Angela experiences the passion with Christ internally, rather than simply hearing it described. In her early visions, Christ often tells Angela about his suffering or shows her his wounds. For example, Christ shows her all of his wounds in the tenth step.⁹⁵ On the road to Assisi, Angela tells Brother A. that Christ “related his entire passion to me.”⁹⁶ When Christ tells her that he withdrew from the Father in heaven and the dignity that was his in order to become man, he then “recounted the details of his passion and related the sufferings of all his bodily members, his hardships, and the harsh and injurious words he was subjected to.”⁹⁷ In all of these examples, Christ either tells Angela about his passion or shows her the physical wounds inflicted on his body. Angela is merely a spectator or a witness to Christ’s suffering, rather than a co-participant.

But Angela is given the grace of being able to internalize and experience the passion of Christ, overcoming what Esther Cohen calls the “utter loneliness of pain”⁹⁸ as her suffering body and soul become fused with Christ’s. Through Angela’s visions, the personal experiences of Christ have become her own experience. Her internalization of the cross begins in the first supplementary step and gradually becomes more intense. In the first supplementary step, God tells her, “You will

⁹⁴ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: “Altera vice fuit mihi demonstratum de illo dolore acuto qui fuit in anima Christi.”

⁹⁵ *CW*, 127. *IL*, 140. *M*, 10.

⁹⁶ *CW*, 140. *IL*, 182. *M*, 40. Latin text: “Et dicebat totam passionem.”

⁹⁷ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: “Et numerabat singillatim passionem per omnia membra et labores et verba dura et iniuriosa.”

⁹⁸ Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility,” 48.

experience the cross and the love of God within you. This sign will be with you for eternity.’ And immediately I felt that cross and that love in the depths of my soul, and even the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross; and feeling this, my soul melted in the love of God.”⁹⁹ Angela is ambiguous about what it means to feel the bodily repercussions of the presence of the cross. It is unclear if she feels that she is nailed to the cross with Christ or if she is referring to a physical reaction to the ecstasy at feeling the cross within her. Either way, this is a significant experience because it is the first time that Angela feels the cross within her and the first time she equates the cross with Christ’s love, a major theme in Angela’s Christology. Angela also cryptically alludes to the cross producing bodily effects. It is characteristic of Angela not to divulge what exactly she felt (for example, whether she experienced suffering before her soul melted into the love of God). But the internal experience of the cross was at least meant to be felt outwardly. Indeed, God affirms the bodily aspect of Angela’s experience by telling her immediately afterwards, “Your whole life, your eating, drinking, sleeping, and all that you do are pleasing to me.”¹⁰⁰

In another vision, Christ recounts his passion to Angela, but she states, “furthermore, since my soul not only heard, but also felt, all that he had said, merely to repeat it, or hear it, as we do now, is just like nothing at all.”¹⁰¹ Angela did not just hear Christ’s experiences but actually *felt* them. This is a significant shift because it represents a movement from being a spectator/witness of the passion (however intimate) to experiencing the passion with Christ himself. It is also an

⁹⁹ CW, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 42. Latin text: “Do scilicet crucem et amorem Dei intus in te, et hoc signum erit tecum in aeternum. Et ego statim illam crucem et amorem sentiebam intus in anima mea, et resultabat quod sentiebam illam crucem coporaliter, et sentiendo liquefiebat anima mea in amore Dei.”

¹⁰⁰ CW, 142. *IL*, 186. *M*, 42. Latin text: “Tota vita tua et comedere et bibere et dormire et omne tuum vivere mihi placet.”

¹⁰¹ CW, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: “Sed tunc anima audiebat ista et sentiebat ea, quia ita solum referre vel audire quasi nihil est.”

example of Angela's humanity fusing with Christ's in a union of suffering. Christ no longer has to tell her about his passion because she experiences it with him. These two above passages demonstrate Angela's radical compassion because, through divine action in her soul, she feels Christ's suffering inside of her. Her own efforts of *imitatio* or *meditatio*, no matter how imaginative, could not accomplish such complete identification with Christ's pain. Angela also states that she was given an experience of Christ's passion that transcends words. She cannot capture the full experience with human language. Christ's experience of pain takes on an almost divine ineffability.

In the fifth supplementary step, Angela receives two visions that further puncture her soul and allow her to suffer with Christ. In the first vision, Angela is shown previously unknown details of the passion. For example, she states that she was shown "more of [Christ's] passion than I have ever been told, and he saw that I perceived more of his passion than I have ever heard spoken of. For Christ had foreseen all the hearts impiously hardened against him.¹⁰²" It is interesting that she not only gains insight into Christ's ordeal, but also gains insight into the hearts of those who tormented him. Having received this special insight, Angela hungered for more and begged the Virgin Mary and the saints to tell her something of the passion that she did not already know. However, Angela realizes that no matter what is shown to her, she cannot express what she knows of the passion. Brother A. explains:

Her soul had seen so much of the passion that it understood that even though the Blessed Virgin Mary had seen more of it and mentioned more of its details than any other saint, still she herself could not—and neither could any other saint—find words to express it. Christ's faithful one said she understood this so well that if any saint were to try to express it, she would tell them: "Are you the one who sustained it? Christ's faithful one also added:

¹⁰² *CW*, 180. *IL*, 290. *M*, 110. Latin text: "Quod fuit mihi demonstratum et quod ipse faciebat me videre plus de passione sua quam sin tilla adhuc audiveram referri, et quod ipse videbat quomodo ego videbam plus de passione sua quam audiveri dici—quia Christus videbat omnia corda impietate obstinata contra se."

My pain, then, exceeded by far any that I had ever experienced. That my body could not sustain me then should not be cause for wonder, for at that point I could feel no joy.¹⁰³

Not only is Christ's pain inexpressible for Angela, but it is almost as unknowable as the divinity itself. Christ is the only one who can express his own pain, which may account for why he often narrates or shows details of his passion to Angela. However, Angela is not content to merely see or hear about the passion. Her insatiable desire to know and experience it leads to her intense suffering at the end of the passage. It isn't enough to know what Christ suffered; Angela has to feel his pain, which she describes as greater than any she has ever known before. In describing such intense pain, Angela suggests that she is united to "the one who sustained it." Her appeal to the Virgin Mary also demonstrates that she desires heavenly intervention to help her attain this form of radical compassion. In the following vision, the pain is intensified.

Angela's second vision of the passion in the fifth supplementary step allows her to feel the pain in Christ's soul. Since all bodily and spiritual suffering reside in the soul, as I demonstrate in chapter two, Angela is shown the totality of Christ's pain:

I was shown the acute pain which was in Christ's soul. . . . The soul of Christ suffered still other pains from all the torments and afflictions his body endured—all of these converged in his soul. This acute pain, so intense that the tongue cannot express it nor is the heart great enough to imagine it, was all part of the divine plan. I saw such deep pain in the soul of the Son of the Blessed Virgin Mary that my own soul was deeply afflicted and transformed in such pain as I had never known before.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ *CW*, 180—81. *IL*, 292—294. *M*, 110—112. Latin text: "Quod tantam passionem vidit anima sua, quod quantumcumque sancta Maria viderit plus quam aliquis sanctus multis modis sicut assignabat, tamen ipsa intelligebat quod nullo modo ipsa posset illam dicere nec aliquis sanctus. Et ita dicebat quod intelligebat, quod si aliquis illam diceret, ipsa diceret: Tu es ille qui sustinuisti eam. Et dixit ipsa fidelis Christi ita: Tunc fui in tanto dolore maiori quam unquam fuerim experta vel habuerim; quod si corpus meum hic deficit non est admirandum, adhuc enim non possum habere laetitiam."

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: "Fuit mihi demonstratum de illo dolore acuto qui fuit in anima Christi...Adhuc recipiebat dolorem ista anima de omnibus doloribus et de omnibus poenalitatibus quas receipt illud suum corpus, quae omnia adunabantur in illa anima. Iste dolor acutus, qui est tantum maximus quod lingua non sufficit ad dicendum nec sufficit cor ad cogitandum, fuit factus per divinam dispensationem. Quia ego video tantum dolorem in ista anima Filii sanctae Mariae Virginis, quod anima mea effecta est afflictissima et transformata in tanto dolore, quod nunquam fui in tanto."

Angela does not witness Christ's pain like an outsider. His pain causes her own soul to be afflicted. She experiences Christ's suffering so intensely that her soul is fused with Christ's soul. His pain becomes her pain. After this vision, Angela states that "Divine goodness granted me, afterward, the grace that from two there was made one."¹⁰⁵ Compassionate co-suffering with Christ transforms Angela so that her body and soul are fused with his. This fusion becomes even more evident in the sixth supplementary step when Angela suffers Christ's agony on the cross.

Fusing Bodies and Souls: Angela's Union with the Suffering Humanity of Christ

The deepest puncture wound that Angela endures occurs in the sixth supplementary step. In this step, Angela's pain becomes as indescribable as Christ's pain. Brother A. writes that he tried to "write some small part of her testimony of the sufferings she endured, as well as I could grasp them while she was speaking, sketching them rapidly because I could not understand them sufficiently to write a more complete account."¹⁰⁶ He later elaborates that he had trouble because Angela herself had difficulty putting her experience into words: "Christ's faithful one told me, brother scribe, that she thought that the bodily ailments she endured were beyond description, and the ailments and sufferings of her soul were even more beyond any kind of comparison."¹⁰⁷ Even Angela's physical suffering is as ineffable as Christ's pain. The only metaphor she could give Brother A. is that she felt like "a man hanged by the neck, who, with his hands tied behind him and his eyes blindfolded, remains dangling on the gallows and yet lives, with no help, no support, no remedy, swinging in the empty air."¹⁰⁸ It is a visceral image, but also reveals much about

¹⁰⁵ *CW*, 181. *IL*, 294. *M*, 112. Latin text: "Item postea divina bonitas fecit mihi istam gratiam quod de duobus fecit unum."

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, 196. *IL*, 336. *M*, 140.

¹⁰⁷ *CW*, 196—97. *IL*, 336—338. *M*, 140.

¹⁰⁸ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 338. *M*, 142. Latin text: "nullam sciebat assignare similitudinem aliam nisi de homine suspenso per gulam, qui, ligatis manibus post tergum et velates oculis, suspensus per funem remanisset in furcis et viveret, cui nullum auxilium, nullum omnino sustentamentum vel remedium remanisset."

Angela's suffering. It is the image of someone utterly alone, helpless, and in despair. She is suffering like Christ, as a condemned criminal. She endures a pain so intense that she "would prefer to undergo all the afflictions, ailments, and pains which have existed in the bodies of everyone at once."¹⁰⁹ Angela's pain is so unendurable that all of the afflictions of every person in the whole world added together would be preferable to her suffering. It is a suffering is so intense, it can only be compared to the ineffable pain that Christ endured in the passion.

But the hanged man is also a Christological image. As Robert Mills notes in his book *Suspended Animation*, hanging was the most common form of penal punishment in late medieval Europe.¹¹⁰ And like crucifixion, hanging is a mode of punishment that relies on "techniques of suspension," where a body hangs as a spectacle for others to see.¹¹¹ When Angela states that the hanged man dangles from the gallows but still lives, she is evoking the common image not only of bodily suspension, but also of being suspended between life and death, or between heaven and earth.¹¹² Crucifixion is likewise a form of capital punishment that involves the suspension of a person who waits for death (although victims of crucifixion took much longer to die than victims of hanging). Therefore, it is not surprising that the image of hanging is often used to describe Christ's crucifixion. Mills writes that "The imagery of Christ as a hanged man can be related to artworks depicting Calvary as a zone of judicial punishment: medieval Crucifixion scenes sometimes constructed explicit analogies with contemporary judicial practice, for instance by depicting one of the two thieves being dragged backwards up a ladder by a rope, in a scene that

¹⁰⁹ *CW*, 201. *IL*, 352. *M*, 148. Latin text: "Ego libenter eligerem et vellem habere omnia mala et infirmitates et omnes dolores, qui fiunt in omnibus corporibus hominum."

¹¹⁰ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion Books. 2005), 23.

¹¹¹ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 25.

¹¹² Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 25.

clearly echoes medieval hanging techniques."¹¹³ The connection between crucifixion and hanging is also present in medieval texts, such as the *Wohunge of Ure Lauerd (The Wooing of Our Lord)*, a thirteenth century devotional text probably written for anchoresses, which describes Christ's body hanging from the cross.¹¹⁴ Therefore, when Angela compares herself to a man hanged by the neck, she employs an image commonly used to describe Christ's crucifixion. She implies that the suffering she experienced is equivalent to the experience of Christ on the cross.

Angela also describes how she saw her virtues leaving her and in despair she began to tear herself apart. Mirroring the blows and other violence that Christ receives before his crucifixion, Angela states that she could not "refrain from horribly beating myself and [raising] welts on my head and various parts of my body."¹¹⁵ She tells Brother A. that no part of her body was not beaten and afflicted by demons.¹¹⁶ Finally, overcome by grief and fear, Angela cries out "My son, my son, do not abandon me, my son!"¹¹⁷ Her cries echo Christ's words on the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you abandoned me."¹¹⁸ At this point, Christ and Angela indistinguishable, their fused humanity hangs together on the cross as they feel the ultimate agony of feeling abandoned by God. Although Angela's words echo those of Christ's, they are also ambiguous. It is unclear if Angela is thinking of her own sons, who died shortly after her conversion. She may be speaking from the perspective of the Virgin Mary, heartbroken at the impending death of her son. But it is also possible that she is speaking from the perspective of God the Father, who suffers with the Son on the cross. This would be consistent with Angela's other statements about the love of God the

¹¹³ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 186.

¹¹⁴ Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation*, 186.

¹¹⁵ *CW*, 197. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: "Tanta ira postea supervenit quod vix possum tenere me quod non me totam dilanio; aliquando non possum tenere me quod non horribiliter percutiam me, et tume feci mihi aliquando caput et alia membra."

¹¹⁶ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142.

¹¹⁷ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 340. *M*, 142. Latin text: "Fili mi, fili mi, non me dimittas, fili mi!"

¹¹⁸ NRSV, Mt. 27:46.

Father for the cross. For example, in the seventh supplementary step, Angela states that “Even before man sinned, God the Father loved this bed and its company (poverty, suffering, and contempt) so much that he granted it to the Son. And, in concord with the Father, the Son wanted to lie in this bed and continued to love it.”¹¹⁹

The idea of the Father loving the cross and handing it down to the Son is also echoed in a similar passage in Instruction II, “For all of his life the suffering God-man knew only one state: that of the cross. His life began on the cross, continued on the cross, and ended on the cross. He was always on the cross of poverty, continual pain, contempt, true obedience, and other harsh deeds of penance. Since the heritage of the father should be handed down to his sons, God the Father handed the heritage of the cross and penance to his only Son.”¹²⁰ The cross appears to operate in a timeless way in Angela’s thought. Just as Christ suffers on the cross throughout his entire life (as much as he is able to as a human being), God the Father has loved and known the cross eternally, even before man sinned. For Angela, the cross is a treasured inheritance given to the Son by the Father.

Angela’s total fusion with the humanity of Christ is also evident in the sixth supplementary step when she longs for death and even for hell. Angela cannot physically die, or her physical identification with Christ’s suffering would end. But she writes that the pain she experiences is so severe that she longs for death: “I even cry out for death to come in whatever for God would grant

¹¹⁹ *CW*, 206. *IL*, 364. *M*, 158. Latin text: “Et quia Deus Pater istum praedictum lectum amavit antequam homo peccaret—et istum amorem de ista societate, scilicet de paupertate et de dolore et de despectu Deus Pater tantum amavit, et tantum praedictam societatem Deus Pater amavit et dedit eam Filio suo, et Filius in isto lecto continue voluit iacere et continue amavit et concordavit cum Patre.”

¹²⁰ *CW*, 224. *IL*, 420. Latin text: “Sed iste Deus homo passionatus habuit in tota vita sua unum solum statum, scilicet crucem. Nam in cruce incoepit, in cruce mediavit et in cruce finivit. Semper enim fuit in cruce paupertatis, doloris continui et despectus et oboedientiae verae et aliarum arduarum operationum paenitentiae. Et quia haereditas patris debet remanere in filiis et Deus Pater hanc haereditatem crucis et paenitentiae dedit unigenito Filio suo.”

it. I beseech him to send me to hell without delay.”¹²¹ Although Angela does not physically die, her description of being tormented by demons seems to mirror Christ’s descent into hell. She states, “I perceive myself as the house of the devil, a worker for and a dupe of demons, their daughter even. I perceive myself as devoid of rectitude and virtue, indeed, worthy only of the lowest part of hell...It gives me the impression that my soul is surrounded by demons...I am completely closed off from God in such a way that I cannot recall God’s presence...I see myself as damned.”¹²² Fused with Christ, Angela feels as if she is plunged into hell. Although Angela and Brother A. frame this as an experience of deep humility and of purgation of Angela’s soul, it is consistent with her total identification with Christ. Christ’s death and descent into hell were expressions of his deepest humility and love for mankind. Although he is the highest being, God consented to go to the lowest place, one of torment and punishment for the sinful, even though he was without sin. Angela also experiences the humility of being plunged into the lowest spiritual state, where she is tortured by demons and experiences vices that she never felt before. Despite the lofty experiences and spiritual gifts that God has given her, Angela feels damned and loses any sense of the presence of God. Even so, she clings to her love of God and her desire not to do anything that offends him. She describes this suffering as an “extreme purgation and purification” of her soul.¹²³ This experience of profound humility is necessary to prepare Angela for the union with the divinity of Christ that she experiences in the seventh supplementary step.

¹²¹ *CW*, 198. *IL*, 342. *M*, 144. Latin text: “Immo tunc clamo et vociferor mortem per quemcumque modum Deus mihi illam concederet evenire. Et tunc dico Deo quod si debet me mittere in infernum, quod non differat, sed subito faciat.”

¹²² *CW*, 200. *IL*, 348. *M*, 146. Latin text: “Et video me domum diaboli et operatricem et credulam daemoniorum, et video me filiam eorum; et video me extra omnem rectitudinem et extra omnem virtutem, et Dignam ultimo et infimo profundo inferni....unde intus in anima videtur mihi quod sim tota circumdata daemonibus, et video defectus in anima et in corpore; et est mihi clausus Deus et absconditus in omni parte, ita quod nulla modo possum recordari Dei nec eius memoriae nec quod ipse permittat. Et videndo me damnatam.”

¹²³ *CW*, 201. *IL*, 152. *M*, 148. Latin text: “Est maximo purgation et purificatio.”

In this chapter, I have focused on Angela's fusion with the humanity of Christ through compassionate co-suffering. The next chapter will center on Angela's experience of union with the divine in the seventh supplementary step. Having become one with the humanity of Christ, Angela comes to participate in Christ's hypostatic union and is united to his divinity. Fully united with both the humanity and divinity of the Son, Angela is thrust into the very heart of the Trinity. She describes the state as one of total darkness, in which her previous experiences are transcended. There is an astonishing level of mutuality and exchange in Angela's understanding of her union with the person of Christ, both human and divine. Not only are their sufferings exchanged in the experience of compassionate co-suffering, but there is also a mutual interpenetration of human and divine natures that occurs in the seventh supplementary step. The divinity experiences the passibility of Angela/Christ's fused humanity while Angela is divinized and stands in the midst of the Trinity in a stunning expression of theosis. Although divine passibility and theosis were somewhat unusual viewpoints in Angela's time, they are the result of her incarnational understanding of divine union. In chapter six, I will explain in further detail how Angela understands the mutual interpenetration of human and divine in the seventh supplementary step.

CHAPTER 5: The Interpenetration of Human and Divine: The (Im)passibility of God in Angela's *Memorial*

In this chapter, I argue that there is an astonishing amount of mutuality and exchange in Angela's understanding of her union with the person of Christ. Not only are their sufferings mutually exchanged, but there is also a profound interpenetration of Angela's human nature (already fused to the human nature of Christ) and the divine nature that occurs in the seventh supplementary step. Angela's union with the divinity of Christ propels her into the very heart of the Trinity. The profound union between Angela and God affects them both: the Godhead shares in the passibility of Angela/Christ's humanity while Angela is divinized and stands in the midst of the Trinity in what can only be described as deification or theosis.

Fusing with the Humanity and Divinity of Christ and Standing in the Midst of the Trinity

If the sixth supplementary step is Angela's ultimate fusion with the suffering humanity of Christ, the seventh supplementary step is her total, transcendent union with the divine in darkness. But in order to understand Angela's theology of divine union properly, it must be acknowledged that the two steps are not separate; they occur simultaneously and are deeply linked. Brother A. writes that "this sixth step, however, lasted but a short while, that is about two years. It concurs with the seventh, the most wonderful step of all, which began shortly before it and which follows in my account. I also observed that what took place in this sixth step faded in a brief moment but not totally or completely, especially in regard to her numerous bodily ailments."¹ Brother A. separates and orders an experience that is integrated and simultaneous for Angela. The pain of the sixth step and the transcendent union of the seventh are experienced together. In the darkness of divinity, Angela appears to have transcended the suffering humanity of Christ. But the fact that the two steps happen simultaneously suggests that Christ's suffering humanity is never completely left behind. For example, one of Angela's most sublime visions of the divine darkness is preceded by illness and suffering. While she is sick, Angela tells Brother A. that "on the one hand, the world with its thorns repels me for when I think of the world I perceive that it is for me only a place of thorns and bitterness. Likewise, devils pursue and harass me in many ways, and almost continually persecute me...But "on the other hand, God draws me to himself...for in this state, it seems to me that I am standing or lying in the midst of the Trinity that I see with such darkness."² Her

¹ *CW*, 199-200. *IL*, 346. *M*, 146. Latin text: Sed duravit praedictus sextus passus parvo tempore, scilicet fere duobus annis, et cucurrit simul cum septimo passu qui incoepit ante sextum passum aliquantulum temporis, et qui sequitur omnibus mirabilior. Et vidi quod praedictus sextus passus deficiendo cessavit in parvo tempore—sed non omnino et totaliter deficit, et maxime quantum ad infirmitates corporis multas de quibus semper plena fuit.

² *CW*, 204. *IL*, 358. *M*, 154. Latin text: Ex una parte mundus cum spinis suis expellit me, quia omne quod in mundo existimo et sunt mihi spinae et amaritudo. Ex alia parte daemones expellunt me cum multa molestia et quasi continua persecutione...Ex alia parte cum se Deus trahit me...Et in illa Trinitate quam video cum tanta tenebra videtur mihi stare et iacere in medio.

experience of unity with the Trinity is experienced in the midst of suffering, illness, and demonic persecution. Therefore, even in the moments of greatest transcendence, we should not forget that suffering is always in the background.

In the seventh supplementary step, Angela's fusion with the divine begins when she sees God "in a darkness, and in a darkness precisely because he is a good greater than can be conceived or understood."³ She calls what she sees in the darkness the "All Good" and says that she sees it accompanied with darkness because "it surpasses every good. All else, in comparison is darkness."⁴ In that darkness, Angela seems to transcend what normally accompanies her spiritual visions. She writes,

When God is seen in darkness it does not bring a smile to the lips, nor devotion, fervor, or ardent love; neither does the body or the soul tremble or move as at other times; the soul sees nothing and everything; the body sleeps and speech is cut off. And all the numerous and indescribable signs of friendship, which he showed me, all the words which God spoke to me, all those which you ever wrote—I understand that these were so much less than that good which I see with such great darkness.⁵

While Angela's exalted description of this experience may lead us to think that she has transcended all her previous experiences, it is important to keep in mind not only that her vision of the darkness was temporary but also had gradations. Brother A. writes that she told him that "on many—indeed, innumerable—occasions, she had seen the All Good, and these visions were always experienced with darkness, but they were not as exalted nor did they include darkness as great as the one we

³ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152. Latin text: Vidi eum in una tenebra, et ideo in tenebra quia est maius bonum quam possit cogitari nec intellegi.

⁴ *CW*, 203. *IL*, 358. *M*, 154. Latin text: Et propterea video cum tenebra, quia superat omne bonum et omnia et omne aliud est tenebra.

⁵ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 358. *M*, 154–156. Latin text: Sed illud, quando videtur Deus illo modo in tenebra, non apportat risum in ore nec devotionem nec fervorem nec ferventem amorem, quia non tremit nec movetur corpus vel anima sicut iam consuevit moveri, sed nihil videt et omnia videt et corpus dormit et truncator lingua. —Et omnes amicitias, quas mihi ostendit multas et inenarrabiles, et omnia verba mihi ab eo dicta, et omnia quae scripsisti unquam, intelligo in tantum minus esse illo bono quod video cum tanta tenebra.

have been speaking of.”⁶ Not only did Angela experience gradations in the intensity of the darkness, she also reported that when her soul was elevated that the elevations blended together.⁷ Therefore, while Angela expresses the superiority of her experience in darkness, it still coexists with her compassionate co-suffering with the humanity of Christ.

In one of Angela’s blended elevations, she describes an extraordinary moment in which she experiences union with both the divine darkness and the humanity of Christ. This vision is particularly significant because it demonstrates Angela’s total fusion with the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in the person of Christ as well as with the Trinity. Angela first tells Brother A. that she feels as if she is standing or lying in the midst of the Trinity when she is in the darkness. She then elaborates on that experience:

And in that Trinity that I see with such darkness, it seems to me that I am standing or lying in the middle... I do not remember when I am in that darkness anything about anything of humanity, or the God-man, or anything which has form, and yet I see all things then and I see nothing. And whether what I have spoken of withdraws from me or stays with me, I see the God-man. He draws my soul with such great gentleness that he tells me sometimes, “You are I and I am you.” I see, then, those eyes and that face so gracious and attractive that he leans to embrace me. What proceeds from those eyes and that face is what I said I see in that darkness which comes from within, and that is what delights me so that I can say nothing about it. When I am in the God-man my soul is alive. And I am in the God-man much more than in the other vision of seeing God with darkness...there has not been a day or night in which I did not continually experience this joy of the humanity of Christ.⁸

⁶ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 154. Latin text: Quamvis multis et etiam innumeris vicibus ipsa vidisset illud omne bonum semper cum tenebra, sed non praedicto et tam altissimo modo et cum tanta tenebra.

⁷ *CW*, 206. *IL*, 366. *M*, 160.

⁸ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 360-362. *M*, 156-158. Latin text: Et in illa Trinitate quam video cum tanta tenebra videtur mihi stare et iacere in medio...Nec recordor quando sum in illa tenebra, de aliqua humanitate vel de Deo homine nec de aliqua re quae formam habeat, et tamen omnia tunc video et nihil video. Et discedendo me vel remanendo me ab isto iam dicto, video Deum hominem; et trahit animam cum tanta mansuetudine, ut dicat aliquando: Tu es ego et ego sum tu. Et video illos oculos et illam faciem tantum placibilem et cum tanta aptitudine, ut amplexetur me. Et illud quod resultat de illis oculis et de illa facie, est illud quod ego dixi quod ego video in illa tenebra, quod venit de intus, et illud est quod me tantum delectat quod narrari non potest. Et in isto Deo homino stando anima est viva; et in isto Deo homine sto multo plus quam in illo cum tenebra...Et ex tunc non fuit modo in isto tempore unus dies nec nox in qua non continue habuerim istam laetitiam de humanitate.

I have quoted the passage at length and it may help to return to it as I refer to it in other sections in this chapter. The passage forms the bedrock of Angela's understanding of both Christ's hypostatic union and her own union with the divine. Although the experiences are blended, it seems that Angela describes three states in this passage. The first and most frequent is the constant presence of the God-man and the experience of joy in the humanity of Christ. This is the state she experiences the most often. Second, there is the darkness in which she does not see anything human, not even the humanity of Christ, because she is completely immersed in the abyss of the Trinity. The third state is when she sees the humanity and the divinity of Christ together. In this state, she sees the God-man and delights in his humanity, but also sees the darkness radiating from his eyes and face, which allow her to experience Christ's divinity. But because she identifies the darkness with the Trinity itself, the darkness that Angela sees in the eyes and face of Christ is nothing less than the naked essence of the Triune God. The entire Trinity participates in the humanity of Christ as he leans to embrace Angela. Her vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes and face suggests that the humanity and the divinity of Christ are not neatly segregated, but rather deeply intertwined.

Even if Angela's spiritual visions vary, the above passage also reveals that for Angela, Christ's suffering humanity is the passageway to his divinity. Lachance eloquently describes this: "But it is through the Son, the lesser darkness, that the mysterious passage takes place. What, as she points out, she sees, with such delight, proceeding from Christ's eyes and face is precisely what issues from the greater darkness in the abyss of the Trinity."⁹ The third stage in which Angela sees the darkness in Christ's eyes and face reflects the way that she understands the hypostatic union: the total interpenetration of humanity and divinity. Her association of the Trinity with the

⁹ Paul Lachance O.F.M., *The Spiritual Journey of the Blessed Angela of Foligno According to the Memorial of Frater A.* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1984), 336.

divine darkness also reveals the Trinitarian implications of her vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes and face. Fused to the incarnate Christ, Angela is fused to the Second Person of the Trinity and pulled into the Trinitarian union. Thus, Angela's fusion with Christ's humanity through compassionate co-suffering leads to her transcendent union with the Trinity in darkness. The agony of Christ on the cross is the gateway or passageway to the abyss of the Trinity.

Divine Passibility in Angela's Memorial

Theologians through the centuries have attempted to explain how the second Person of the Trinity became man, suffered, and died on the cross. At stake were the received assumptions of God—his simplicity, invisibility, incorporeality, remoteness, transcendence, omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, and impassibility, among others.¹⁰ Among the most important attributes is impassibility (the inability to suffer or feel emotions), which is closely related to immutability (the inability to change).¹¹ The divine characteristics could be endangered by the assertion that God became man. The incarnation raised a serious question: How do you reconcile the omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, and impassible nature of God with a human nature that is

¹⁰ Since Adolf von Harnack, the received assumptions have traditionally been attributed to the influence of Hellenistic philosophy. See Adolf von Harnack, *What is Christianity?*, trans. Thomas Bailey Saunders (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 201-209, 211-212. However, the Hellenization thesis has been called into question more recently. According to Paul Gavrilyuk, the Hellenization thesis tends to draw a sharp distinction between the unemotional and uninvolved God of the Greek philosophers and the passionate God of the Bible. It accuses the patristic fathers of uncritically adopting the Hellenistic conception of God and ignoring the emotional God of Scripture. Gavrilyuk argues against this misconception in his book *The Suffering of the Impassible God*. He points out that Hellenistic schools of philosophy had diverse views on divine emotions and involvement in history and that there was an anti-anthropomorphic and anti-anthropopathic impulse in the Hebrew Scriptures that predates Christianity. Many of the received assumptions I mention can therefore be attributed to the Jewish roots of Christianity. Gavrilyuk notes that within patristic thought, there was a concern among theologians that the creator should be separate from the created. The divine attributes were one of the ways that they maintained the distinction between creator and creation. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 21, 41.

¹¹ Scholars have pointed out the definition of impassibility varies widely from one source to another. For a comprehensive account of the many possible definitions, see Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3–9. Gavrilyuk also implies that there may be different levels of passibility/impassibility in his distinction between qualified and unqualified divine (im)passibility (See *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 6–14).

often powerless, ignorant, mutable, and passible? Theologians have tried to resolve this tension in different ways.¹² In the following paragraphs, I will briefly sketch some of the Christological strategies used by Christian thinkers in the late antique period and Middle Ages.

In the first and second centuries, some early Christian groups, including those that formed the large body of thought known collectively as “Gnosis,” adopted Docetism (from the Greek term *dokein*, “to seem, appear”) to avoid the problem by asserting that Christ did not have a real or fully human body.¹³ According to one understanding of Docetism, Christ only appeared to have a body; his human body was often described as a phantom or illusion.¹⁴ However, Allen Brent warns that especially when using the language of “reality” v. “appearance” or “illusion,” we should be wary of our post-Enlightenment assumptions, particularly our tendency to think in terms of Cartesian dualism and the Lockean empiricist tradition in which there are only two levels: physical/real or mental/phantasy.¹⁵ These assumptions were not held by ancient thinkers who, influenced by

¹² It is impossible to discuss each position in detail, but the following is a rough sketch of the major groups and their beliefs.

¹³ The terms “gnosis” and “Docetism” are contested terms. Scholars such as Michael Williams and Karen King have argued against using the term “gnosticism” because the purported definition employs characteristics or identifying traits that are simply not always present in the sources routinely classified as “gnostic.” They argue that the definition has outlived its usefulness and does not do justice to the diversity of sources. See Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism:” An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 28. and Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2003), 218. Christoph Marksches has recently argued for the use of “gnosis,” since this is the term used by late antique Christian theologians, who were the first to bring diverse intellectual and religious movements together using the term. See Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis: An Introduction* (New York: T&T Clark, 2003), 15. Marksches uses “gnosis” typologically and identifies eight ideas or motives that he sees within the relevant texts (see Christoph Marksches, *Gnosis*, 16–17). Docetism, a term first used by Ignatius of Antioch (d. 98-117) to describe people that ignore the reality of the passion or incarnation, is also a difficult term to define because of the diversity of views which I will discuss shortly (see Joseph Verheyden, et al., “Introduction,” *Docetism in the Early Church* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018] 1.) The relationship between “gnosis” and Docetism is also difficult to trace. For example, Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 130–c. 202 CE) did not consider Docetism a separate heresy but a feature of “gnosis,” (see Urban C. Von Wahlde, *Gnosticism, Docetism, and the Judaisms of the First Century: The Search for the Wider Context of Johannean Literature and Why It Matters* [London: Bloomsbury, 2015], 63.) whereas modern scholars have argued that Docetism is a general intellectual current that is present in a variety of Early Christian religious movements. (Allen Brent, “Can There be Degrees of Docetism?” *Docetism in the Early Church*, 22.)

¹⁴ Nicola Denzey Lewis, *Introduction to “Gnosticism:” Ancient Voices, Christian Worlds* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 67.

¹⁵ Allen Brent, “Can There Be Degrees in Docetism?,” *Docetism in the Early Church*, 6.

philosophical traditions such as Platonism, distinguished between different levels or orders of reality. Therefore, for many early Christians, to deny that Christ lived at the level or order of physical reality is not the same thing as to deny that his existence was real.¹⁶ Rather, docetists assigned the body of Christ one level of reality rather than another.¹⁷

Recent scholarship has also complicated our understanding of Docetism by pointing out its diversity and even its different degrees.¹⁸ For example, Jörg Frey identifies six different varieties of Docetism, including Pneuma-Christology, Logos-Christology, Angelic Docetism, the docetic teachings of Saturnilus and Cerdo, Angelomorphic Christology, and Separation Christology. He also notes that various groups held a polymorphic or metamorphic Christ who could change into different shapes (either consecutively or simultaneously), which he views as an offshoot of Docetism. In an effort to create a more expansive definition, Jens Schröter states that Docetism describes forms of Christological thought that foregrounded Jesus' godly existence at the expense of his human existence, although it remains to be seen if this definition gains wider acceptance.¹⁹ However, for the purposes of this brief sketch of Christological strategies used to reconcile the divine and human natures of Christ, Schröter's definition seems sufficient: Emphasizing Christ's divinity at the expense of his humanity was one of the strategies used by early Christian thinkers to avoid the problematic implications of a God who undergoes birth, suffering, and death.

¹⁶ Allen Brent, "Can There Be Degrees in Docetism?," *Docetism in the Early Church*, 6.

¹⁷ Allen Brent, "Can There Be Degrees in Docetism?," *Docetism in the Early Church*, 23.

¹⁸ Allen Brent, "Can There Be Degrees in Docetism?," *Docetism in the Early Church*, 11-12; Jörg Frey, "'Docetic-like' Christologies and the Polymorphy of Christ: A Plea for Further Consideration of Diversity in the Discussion of 'Docetism,'" *Docetism in the Early Church*, 38-42.

¹⁹ "'Doketismus' Formen christologischen Denkens bezeichnet, die die göttliche Existenzweise Jesu auf Kosten seiner menschlichen in den Vordergrund stellten." See Jens Schröter, "Eucharistie, Auferstehung und Vermittlung des ewigen Lebens: Beobachtungen zu Johannes und Ignatius (mit einem Ausblick auf Justin Irenäus und das Philippusevangelium)" *Docetism in the Early Church*, 90.

Arius and his followers, on the other hand, attempted to protect God’s remoteness, uniqueness, and freedom by denying the full divinity of Christ and his consubstantiality with the Father. An examination of the theology of Arius (c. 250–336 CE)²⁰ is complicated by fact that he has been demonized in historical and theological scholarship for centuries and Arianism has often been characterized as the archetypal Christian heresy.²¹ But it is important to note that Pre-Nicene Christianity was theologically diverse but plagued by doctrinal conflicts.²² Arius developed his system of thought before the Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, meaning before the consubstantiality of the Father and Son were declared the orthodox teaching of the Church. Although Arianism was ultimately condemned at Nicaea, scholarly impartiality requires that we should not judge Arius’s teachings according to standards that did not exist at the time that he developed his thought. Furthermore, reconstructing Arius’s theology is difficult because we only have a handful of texts that give us his own thinking in his own words—apart from these, we are wholly dependent on the reports of his enemies.²³ The writings and reports that we do have are often divorced from their original literary context and thus make it difficult to construct the systematic thought of Arius as he himself understood it.²⁴

Nevertheless, scholars such as Rowan Williams have carefully analyzed the extant documents and have been able to trace some of the contours of Arius’s thought. While Arius’s opponents often focus on Christology, particularly the Son’s creation by the Father, Williams notes

²⁰ Rowan Williams notes that widespread consensus puts Arius’s birth in the 250s CE, but this view has no foundation in the primary sources. Since Arius is described as an old man at the time of the Council of Nicaea in 325, Williams argues that it is likely that he was born some time before 280 CE. See Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 30.

²¹ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 1.

²² Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 86.

²³ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 95.

²⁴ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 85.

that Arius himself is more concerned with the nature of God.²⁵ For Arius, God’s total freedom and his unique and immaterial nature are nonnegotiable: God is without any kind of plurality or composition and is not subject to any emanation or diffusion of his substance, meaning that God is completely free of any “inner dynamism” that might compel him to pour himself out into creation.²⁶ Arius describes God as utterly remote from the rest of creation because of his transcendent nature—nothing in the created order can know or understand God as he is.²⁷ Although no creature can comprehend the divine *ousia*, creation is not cut off God because he is an active, loving, and self-revealing God who chooses to manifest his glory through his creation of the Son.²⁸

Everything Arius says about the Son is interpreted in light of his belief in God’s freedom, uniqueness, immateriality, and transcendence.²⁹ God freely chooses to create the Son, who does not share in the Father’s *ousia* or essence.³⁰ For Arius, to assert that the Son is consubstantial with the Father would threaten the uniqueness of God and would subject the transcendent, immaterial deity to the materiality of the incarnation. It would also infringe on God’s freedom, since the Son would not be created as a free act of God’s will. Therefore, the Son cannot be eternal and self-subsistent like the Father. He is part of creation, although God bestows on him all the glory and perfection that a created being can receive. The Son is thus “the knowable likeness of God,” accessible to creation unlike the Father who remains remote, transcendent, and unknowable.³¹ Although Arius was clear that the Son is a creature, he wanted to avoid any suggestion that the

²⁵ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 104.

²⁶ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 98.

²⁷ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 106.

²⁸ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 98.

²⁹ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 111.

³⁰ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 98.

³¹ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 177.

Son is simply “one among others,” or like the rest of creation.³² Arius consistently emphasized the perfection and glory of the Son.³³

Williams describes Arius as both a conservative and innovative thinker. His *Thalia*, a poetic work that exists in fragments quoted by other authors, is “conservative in the sense that there is almost nothing in it that could not be found in earlier writers; it is radical and individual in the way it combines and reorganizes traditional ideas and presses them to their logical conclusions—God is free, the world need not exist, the Word is other than God, the Word is part of the world, so the Word is freely formed *ex nihilo*.”³⁴ Arius’s starting point is the nature of God—his understanding of the Son as a created being who does not share in the *ousia* of the Father was developed in order to preserve the divine attributes that are most important to him, namely God’s uniqueness, immateriality, remoteness from creation, and absolute freedom.

Unlike the docetists and Arians, Nestorius affirmed that the Word became incarnate and had both a divine and human nature. Instead, he sought to protect the divinity from the indignity of a human birth, emotions, suffering, and death by separating the Christ’s divine and human natures. The Council of Nicaea condemned Arianism and declared that the Son was consubstantial to the Father. What was less clear was how the opponents of Arianism could account for the Scriptural texts which ascribe weakness, ignorance, passion, and death to the incarnate Logos. Nestorius was influenced by the Antiochene Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia,³⁵ which, in response to Arianism, asserted that the transcendent Logos could not be the subject of the incarnate

³² Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 98.

³³ Rowan Williams notes that Arius’s supporters were less careful in emphasizing the unique status of the Son in creation, pointing to a difference between Arius’s thought and what later became Arianism. (Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 104.)

³⁴ Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition*, 177.

³⁵ Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society: From Galilee to Gregory the Great* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). 530.

experiences without a blasphemous denigration of his divinity. Therefore, weakness, fallibility, and suffering were attributed to the humanity assumed by the Logos, rather than the divine Logos itself.³⁶ Antiochene Christology wanted to preserve the sharp division between the divine and the human, the Creator and the created. Taken to extremes, this viewpoint could lead to a dualistic Christology or “double Christ” in which the Logos and the human Christ act independently of one another.³⁷ For political and doctrinal reasons,³⁸ Nestorius soon came into conflict with Cyril of Alexandria, who insisted that there was one Christ who was the subject of the incarnate experiences of birth, suffering, and death. To Nestorius, Cyril’s position was blasphemous because it subjected the impassible and immutable divinity to the experiences of suffering and death.

The conflict came to a head with the controversy over use of the term *Theotokos* or “God-bearer.” Nestorius believed that one could speak of God being born, suffering, and dying with carefulness and subtlety. He worried that without the proper safeguards, the term *Theotokos* could lead to heresies, such as making the Virgin a goddess.³⁹ In his “First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*,” Nestorius wrote that “Mary did not give birth to the Godhead (for ‘what is born of the flesh is flesh’ [John 3:6]). A creature did not produce him who is uncreatable.”⁴⁰ Since the Virgin Mary is not a divine person and did not give birth to the uncreated God, Nestorius argued that Mary can only be considered the mother of Christ’s humanity, not his divinity. Therefore, he believed that the title *theotokos*, or God-Bearer, was inappropriate for the Virgin Mary because it incorrectly identified her as the mother of the uncreated God. Although in the above passage

³⁶ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 180.

³⁷ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 237.

³⁸ Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 529–530

³⁹ Henry Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society*, 529.

⁴⁰ Nestorius, “First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*,” *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris Jr., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 96.

Nestorius is objecting to the title of *theotokos*, his central preoccupation was to purify theological discourse of any suggestion of divine suffering.⁴¹ This is evident even in the “First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*” when Nestorius objects to those who claim that God suffers and dies in Christ. Referring to Christ’s words to his executioners, Nestorius writes, “What, in fact, he says is, 'Why do you seek to kill me, a man?' This [man] is he who is crowned with thorns. This is he who says, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me' [Matt. 27:46]. This is he who suffered a death of three days' duration.”⁴² Nestorius is adamant that only the humanity of Christ suffered and died on the cross. To suggest that the divinity, even with the caveat that it was joined to the human nature of Christ, was the subject of birth, suffering, and death was incomprehensible—it compromised and diminished the divinity of God. Nestorius writes, “that which was formed in the womb is not in itself God. That which was buried in the tomb was not in itself God. If that were the case, we should manifestly be worshipers of a human being and worshipers of the dead.”⁴³ For Nestorius, to state that the divinity suffers is to empty God of his divinity altogether. Therefore, an ontological division was needed to preserve the infinite difference between the divine and human natures of Christ. This ontological division meant that there were two subjects of Christ’s actions—the divinity which was the subject of Christ’s divine actions (such as miracles) and the humanity of Christ which was the subject of emotions, suffering, and death (the aspects of human existence that involve mutability, passibility, and other finite attributes).⁴⁴

Nestorius’s position was ultimately condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431 CE, but he not receive an entirely fair hearing. His rival, Cyril of Alexandria, plotted his downfall, chaired the synod in which he was condemned (which meant that Cyril was both the accuser and the arbiter

⁴¹ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 144.

⁴² Nestorius, “First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*,” 99.

⁴³ Nestorius, “First Sermon Against the *Theotokos*,” 100.

⁴⁴ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 142.

of Nestorius's fate), and even persuaded the Pope and the Emperor to denounce Nestorius. Nestorius was condemned and sent into exile. Some scholars, such as Frances M. Young have argued that Nestorius was not as heretical as his enemies made out and that he was a victim of his own lack of definition and insufficient metaphysical tools.⁴⁵ He notes that Nestorius repudiated many of the "Nestorian" views attributed to him by his enemies, such as believing in two Sons (one divine, one human) or dividing Christ.⁴⁶

Although Docetism, Arianism, and Nestorianism had radically different Christologies, the commonality between them is the desire to protect the divine attributes, especially God's impassibility and immutability. All three groups agreed that divine impassibility entailed God's remoteness from the world, a view that Gavrilyuk describes as unqualified divine impassibility.⁴⁷ Since the gap between the Creator and his creation is infinite, God cannot be directly involved in the created world. Although the three groups had different solutions to the problems posed by the incarnation, they agreed that under no circumstances could God be the subject of birth, suffering, or death on the cross. But not all theologians held this view. The writings of Cyril of Alexandria, which were upheld at the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), argue what Gavrilyuk describes as qualified divine impassibility. Cyril still maintained the impassibility of the Godhead, but he was not willing to separate the humanity and divinity of Christ as Nestorius did. He argues for a hypostatic union of Christ's divine and human natures.⁴⁸ Therefore, for Cyril, when we are speaking of Christ's human experiences, there is only one subject of that suffering, not two. Cyril's

⁴⁵ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 239.

⁴⁶ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 230.

Just as Arianism evolved to be different from the original thought of Arius, "Nestorianism" was not necessarily representative of the thought of Nestorius.

⁴⁷ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 19.

⁴⁸ Frances M. Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon*, 261.

view is sometimes referred to as a single-subject Christology.⁴⁹ Christ, in both his humanity and divinity, is the subject of his incarnate experiences; his humanity and divinity do not function as separate subjects. He writes in his “Second Letter to Nestorius:” “while the natures which were brought together into a true unity were different, there is nevertheless, because of the unspeakable and unutterable convergence into unity, one Christ and one Son out of the two.”⁵⁰ For Cyril, Christ is a single subject who undergoes birth, suffering, and death. Therefore, the Son is “said to have undergone a fleshly birth by making his own the birth of the flesh which belonged to him.”⁵¹

Cyril repeats the idea of God making Christ’s human experiences his own in the context of the cross. He writes that “we confess that he who was begotten from God the Father as Son and God only-begotten, though being by his own nature impassible, suffered in the flesh for us, according to the Scriptures, and he was in the crucified flesh impassibly making his own the sufferings of his own flesh.”⁵² When Cyril speaks of God the Son making the birth, suffering, and death of Christ his own, he is describing the intimacy of God’s involvement in the human experience of Christ.⁵³ The uncreated Logos is the subject of the incarnate experience of suffering and death. It is unclear how Logos is able to suffer impassibly; Cyril describes it as a paradox and a mystery. (Young, 261) Although Cyril doesn’t detail exactly how God impassibly makes his own the suffering his own flesh, he is adamant that God is not remote in Christ.⁵⁴ Gavriilyuk describes Cyril’s position as one of qualified divine impassibility because, unlike Docetism, Arianism and

⁴⁹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2004), 197.

⁵⁰ Cyril of Alexandria, “Second Letter to Nestorius,” *The Christological Controversy*, trans. and ed. Richard A. Norris Jr., (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 102.

⁵¹ Cyril of Alexandria, “Second Letter to Nestorius,” 102.

⁵² Cyril of Alexandria, “Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius,” *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1954), 351.

⁵³ Paul L. Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 100.

⁵⁴ Part of the reason why divine impassibility needed to be defended repeatedly in the Christian tradition may be because Chalcedon ultimately failed to mediate between Cyril and Nestorius—it failed to explain how the impassible God could be the subject of the incarnate experiences of suffering and death.

Nestorianism, it allows for God's direct involvement in the created world. Gavriilyuk also suggests that Cyril's understanding of divine impassibility is tied to his ability to redeem mankind. Divine compassion, through which God redeems the world, "far surpasses human compassion precisely because God is not overpowered by our suffering...Far from being a 'fellow-sufferer who understands,' a God who is a mere replica of suffering humanity...is incapable of being a redeemer."⁵⁵ For Cyril, God is impassible because he cannot be overpowered or overcome by his intimate involvement in the suffering of Christ. Cyril's qualified divine impassibility is an important reminder that the definition of divine impassibility is not static. It has been interpreted differently by different thinkers over time.

The Council of Chalcedon (451) generally put to rest the Christological controversies of its time. It reaffirmed the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381), condemned Arianism and Nestorianism, and officially approved certain documents, including Cyril's second letter to Nestorius and his letter to John of Antioch.⁵⁶ Christ was declared to be fully human and fully divine. His two natures were affirmed "without confusing the two natures [*asunkutōs*], without transmuting one nature into the other [*atreptōs*], without dividing them into two separate categories [*adiairetōs*], without contrasting them according to area or function [*achōristōs*]."⁵⁷ Asserting that Christ's human nature and divine nature were united, the definition of Chalcedon states that "the distinctiveness of each nature is not nullified by the union. Instead, the 'properties' [*idiotētos*] of each nature are conserved and both natures concur [*suntrechousēs*] in one person [*prosōpon*] and in one *hypostasis*."⁵⁸ Although the Council of Chalcedon did not address every Christological issue

⁵⁵ Paul L. Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 13.

⁵⁶ Edward R. Hardy, *Christology of the Later Fathers*, 371.

It did not approve all of Cyril's writings, such as his twelve anathemas, which were highly controversial.

⁵⁷ *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 36.

⁵⁸ *Creeds of the Churches*, 35.

of its time, it was successful enough in the west that discussions of the reality and extent of Christ's suffering were not addressed until theologians in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries began trying to reconcile the writings of different patristic authors.

It is important to note that scholastic literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries would single out partial texts rather than undertake a deeper probing and alignment of the authorities that would examine each thinker on his own terms. This tendency often led to a distortion of the authorities they cited. Kevin Madigan argues that Peter Lombard and later scholastic commentators on the *Sentences* are not really trying to reconcile disparate patristic sources as much as trying to correct them and bringing them back into the borders of orthodoxy. He also points out that medieval scholastics used patristic sources innovatively and creatively. He writes that the scholastic commentators "do not really bring their own positions in line with the established *sententiae* of the fathers. They try, instead, to bring the fathers in line with their opinions. To put the matter plainly, they put their opinions on the lips of the patristic authorities and present them as the intended meanings of the fathers."⁵⁹ Thus, medieval theologians were not just interpreting scholastic understandings of Scripture but were promulgating a different understanding of the Scriptures altogether. Madigan writes, "When we examine the actual exegetical practice of high-medieval scholastics, it seems quite clear that they are not just "modernizing" or streamlining in the formal sense but innovating in the material sense."⁶⁰

An example of the tendency described by Madigan is Peter Lombard's treatment of some "rather obscure"⁶¹ chapters written by Hilary of Poitiers, a fourth century patristic theologian from

⁵⁹ Kevin Madigan, *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought: An Essay on Christological Development* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 93.

⁶⁰ Kevin Madigan, *The Passion of Christ in High-Medieval Thought*, 94.

⁶¹ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3: On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 63.

Gaul who was revered as the “Athanasius of the West” for his efforts to combat the Homoion heresy.⁶² The Lombard finds Hilary’s writing on Christ’s human suffering obscure because it seems to suggest that Christ did not really suffer. This would normally be a heretical position by Chalcedonian standards.⁶³ The Lombard is in a difficult situation because Hilary is revered as a Church Father, his words have authority despite that divergence from assumed orthodox doctrine. The Lombard must hence find a way to reconcile Hilary’s pre-Chalcedonian position that Christ was incapable of feeling pain with the orthodox Chalcedonian position that he truly suffered and endured pain during the crucifixion. One of the problematic passages that the Lombard identifies in Hilary is the following:

Although a blow struck Him, or a wound pierced Him, or ropes bound Him, or a suspension raised Him, the things indeed wrought the vehemence of the passion, but did not bring Him the pain of the passion, just as any weapon that passes through water, penetrates fire, or wounds the air...The suffering which rushes upon the body of the Lord was a suffering, but it does not manifest the nature of suffering...the divinity of the body⁶⁴ receives the force of the pain rushing against it, but without feeling pain. That body of the Lord may indeed have had the nature of our pain, if your body were of such a nature that it treads upon the waves, walks upon the waters and does not sink by its movement and if the waters do not give way before the footsteps set upon it, and if it penetrates even solid matters, and if it is not hindered by the barriers of a closed house. But if that is only characteristic of the Lord's body that by His own soul He is borne over the water, stands upon the waves, and passes through walls, why do we, who have been conceived by the nature of a human body, pass judgment upon flesh that has been conceived by the

⁶² The Homoians were a theological group that adopted an intermediate position between the Nicenes and the Arians in the second half of the fourth century. The Homoians supported the formula of faith articulated by the emperor Constantius, who defined the Son as like (*homoios*) to the Father in 359-369 CE. (*Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity*, 2:283)

⁶³ Hilary’s thought was articulated almost a century before the Council of Chalcedon took place in 451 CE.

⁶⁴ Lombard changes “the divinity of the body” to “the power of the body.” See Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3: On the Incarnation of the Word*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2010), 63 (XV.3). It is possible that he does this because the Lombard opposes any Christological ideas that imply any sort of mixture of the human and divine natures of Christ. For example, when he is evaluating the *habitus, assumptus homo*, and subsistence theories of the incarnation, the Lombard opposes all of them because on some level they imply that the divine and human natures of Christ are mixed. For Peter Lombard’s evaluation of the theories, see Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3: On the Incarnation of the Word*, 24-31 (VI.1-6); Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, vol. 1 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1993), 400–402.

Spirit?...He certainly possessed a body to suffer and did suffer, but He does not possess a nature that could feel pain.⁶⁵

Hilary wrote these words in a polemical context in which he was trying to refute Homoian claims that the Son's suffering makes him subordinate or less than the Father.⁶⁶ Hilary agrees with the Homoian assertion that fear and pain prove the Son's inferiority to the Father. Therefore, his strategy is to deny that Christ experienced pain and fear.⁶⁷ He does this by asserting that Christ was like us, but not identical to us. For example, Christ's body seems to possess supernatural powers that allow him to perform miracles such as walking on water and pass through doors. Similarly, Christ's body is different from ours in its ability to experience pain without feeling it, like an arrow passing through air.⁶⁸ For Hilary, Christ's unusual body does not prevent him from sharing a fundamental unity with human nature.⁶⁹ He just believes that Christ assumed flesh that is appropriate for the Word, flesh that seemingly suffers impassibly. Of course, such a view clearly contradicts the orthodox position that Christ truly suffered on the cross. It also contradicts the Chalcedonian doctrine of Christ's human nature, that Christ is "of the same reality as we are ourselves [*homoousion hēmin*] as far as his human-ness is concerned; thus like us in all respects, sin only excepted."⁷⁰ If Christ's humanity could not feel pain, then he would not be like us in all respects except for sin. However, because of the Homoian context in which he was writing, Hilary was more concerned with the Son's homoousion with the Father.

The Lombard reconciles Hilary's words with the orthodox, that is, Chalcedonian position that Christ truly suffered by setting limits to the extent of Christ's suffering. For example, he asserts

⁶⁵ Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity*, Trans. Stephen McKenna, C.S.S.R., The Fathers of the Church, v. 25, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2002), 415—416 (10.22-23).

⁶⁶ Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 158.

⁶⁷ Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 167.

⁶⁸ Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 161.

⁶⁹ Mark Weedman, *The Trinitarian Theology of Hilary of Poitiers*, 160.

⁷⁰ *Creds of the Churches*, Ed. John H. Leith, 36.

that Christ took on the defects of humanity, such as hunger, thirst, sadness, and fear.⁷¹ But Christ did not take on all of our defects; for example, he did not take on our ignorance.⁷² Peter Lombard states that Christ only took on the defects that “were suitable for him as a man to assume and which did not derogate from his dignity.”⁷³ The Lombard ties the dignity of Christ to the preservation of the divine attributes when he states that Christ did not take on the human defect of ignorance. He clearly desires to protect the divine attribute of omniscience and project it on the incarnate Christ. The Lombard’s concern for Christ’s dignity echoes Hilary’s desire for Christ’s flesh to be appropriate for his divine status as the Word. Peter Sympathetic to the desire to preserve Christ’s dignity and impassibility, Peter Lombard reconciles Hilary’s “obscure” theological position by conceding in part that Christ did not suffer to the same extent that we do. He writes:

But lest it be thought that there is any irreconcilable contradiction in the sacred texts [of the Church Fathers], we say that the words of these authorities are to be taken in the following way: they are to be understood to take away from Christ not the truth or ‘propassion’ of fear and sadness, but rather the necessity and passion of his fear and sadness.—For Christ in his human nature had true fear and sadness, but not as we do, who are his members. For by reason of our sin, we are of necessity subject to these defects, and these defects exist in us according to both propassion and passion; but they are in Christ only according to propassion...For one is at times affected by fear or sadness, but not in such a way that the mind’s understanding is as a consequence removed from righteousness or the contemplation of God, and then it is propassion. But at times it is removed or troubled, and then it is a passion.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3*, 57 (XV.1.1).

⁷² Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3*, 58 (XV.1.4).

⁷³ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3*, 57 (XV.1.3). Latin text: Sed eos omnes quos homini eum assumere expediebat et suae dignitati non derogabat. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae* (Grottaferrata [Rome]: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1971), 93.

⁷⁴ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3*, 61-62 (XV.2.1–2). Latin text: Determinatio auctoritatum. Ne autem in sacris Litteris aliqua adversa diversitas esse putetur, harum auctoritatum verba in hunc modum accipienda dicimus, ut non veritatem timoris et tristitiae vel propassionem, sed timoris et tristitiae necessitatem et passionem a Christo removisse intelligatur. Habuit enim Christus verum timorem et tristitiam in natura hominis; sed non sicut nos, qui sumus membra ejus. Nos enim causa peccati nostri his defectibus necessario subjacemus, et in nobis sunt isti defectus secundum propassionem et passionem, sed in Christo nonnisi secundum propassionem. Sicut enim in peccatis gradus quidam notantur propassio et passio, ita et in poenalibus effectibus. Afficitur enim quis interdum timore vel tristitia, ita ut mentis intellectus non inde moveatur a rectitudine vel Dei contemplatione, et tunc propassio est. Aliquando vero movetur et turbatur, et tunc passio est. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV libris distinctae*, 98–99.

The Lombard unequivocally states that Christ does not suffer like us because he is only able to experience propassion, while the rest of humanity experiences both propassions and passions. Unlike us, Christ's understanding is never removed from righteousness or the contemplation of God by an emotion that overpowers him. It is important to note that the medieval meaning of passion (*passio*) is fluid. It could be used to refer to illness, suffering, emotion, or a movement of the soul. However, propassion (*propassio*) had a fairly consistent meaning throughout the Middle Ages. It was used in theological texts as "the kindling that ignites an intense emotion, the flash before the fire."⁷⁵ Therefore, a propassion is the beginning of a passion, before it is fully expressed. Christ only experienced propassions and never passions. Therefore, his propassions could not lead to passions as they do in the rest of humanity. With this position, the Lombard concedes Hilary's point that Christ did not suffer the way we do, but also tries to affirm the reality of Christ's suffering.

To illustrate the distinction between passion and propassion, the Lombard examined one of the most passionate moments in the Gospels: the agony in the garden. In his book *The Passions of Christ in Medieval Thought*, Kevin Madigan writes that the agony in the garden "was a plague and embarrassment to patristic and medieval interpreters. Few narratives in the New Testament were so inimical to received Christological assumptions."⁷⁶ Patristic sources went out of their way to describe the agony in the garden in ways that preserved the divine attributes, but they did not all agree on how best to interpret Christ's fear and anguish. The Lombard notes that some patristic sources maintained that Christ was truly afraid, while others asserted that Christ was not afraid. For example, Ambrose maintains that "neither his power, nor his divinity is troubled, but his soul

⁷⁵ Donna Trembinski, "[Pro]passio Doloris: Early Dominican Conceptions of Christ's Physical Pain," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 59, no. 4 (2008): 650 n 70.

⁷⁶ Kevin Madigan, *The Passions of Christ in High-Medieval Thought*, 63.

is troubled.”⁷⁷ Ambrose thus affirms that Christ was truly afraid, but appears to indicate that Christ only experienced that fear in his humanity in order to protect the divine attributes. In contrast, Augustine argues that when Christ prays “Let this cup pass from me” (Mt. 26:39), he is speaking in the person of his body, the Church: “He speaks for us. Unless perhaps one holds that he feared to die. But the Lord, who was to rise on the third day, did not truly fear to suffer, since Paul burned [with desire] to be dissolved and be with Christ. For the soldier is not stronger than his commander.”⁷⁸ The Lombard argues that both positions are correct because the category of propassion means that Christ was both truly afraid and not afraid. Christ was afraid insofar as he felt the beginnings of fear, but he was not afraid in the sense that he did not fully experience fear the way the rest of humanity experiences fear. Peter Lombard elaborates this point by quoting Jerome’s commentary on the Gospel of Matthew: “He was truly saddened so as to prove how truly he had taken on humanity; but this passion did not dominate his spirit, and in truth, is propassion. Hence it says: He began to be sad. And indeed, it is one thing to be sad, another to begin to be sad.”⁷⁹

Although this position may not seem tenable to a modern reader, it was generally accepted in the Middle Ages, most likely because medieval theologians (like the Lombard) were sympathetic to the idea of preserving Christ’s divine impassibility as much as possible (within the boundaries of orthodoxy). The Lombard’s *Sentences* became the standard textbook and medieval theologians would prove their theological prowess by writing commentaries on it.⁸⁰ While some of the Lombard’s ideas were rejected, his distinction between passion and propassion was generally accepted by scholastic commentators on the *Sentences*. Like Peter Lombard, they only

⁷⁷ Ambrose of Milan, *De Fide*, bk 2 ch 5, quoted in *The Sentences Book 3*, 60 (XV.1.11).

⁷⁸ Augustine of Hippo, “Psalm 21,” *Exposition on the Psalms*, quoted in *The Sentences Book 3*, 61 (XV.1.13).

⁷⁹ Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew*, 26.37, quoted in *The Sentences Book 3*, 62 (XV.2.3).

⁸⁰ Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1993), 1:32.

attributed to Christ the aspects of human existence that did not “derogate from his dignity.”⁸¹ However, in Angela of Foligno’s *Memorial*, there is a completely different set of theological priorities at work. Although Angela was likely aware of the divine attributes,⁸² they are not the starting point of her understanding of God. Barred from formal theological education, Angela encounters Christ through the eucharist and her meditation on the cross. Her understanding of God is hence deeply sacrificial, if not kenotic; God relinquishes his dignity to suffer out of love for humanity. In the *Memorial*, Angela understands Christ’s hypostatic union as a profound interpenetration of humanity and divinity.⁸³ The divine does not remain unaffected by its union with humanity—God is intimately involved in the human experience of Christ and participates in the full physical and emotional horror of the crucifixion. Angela would agree with Cyril of Alexandria that God makes the suffering of Christ’s body his own, though she is far less concerned with whether or not he does this impassibly. For example, Angela argues that the Father is no mere spectator to the suffering of the Son. The Father loves suffering, poverty, and contempt so much that he passes down the heritage of the cross to the Son. Angela suggests that Christ so sanctifies suffering that it becomes part of the divine experience. Although the Father and the Son experience and love the cross, the divine is not overcome or defined by suffering. God always transcends whatever ideas or experiences Angela has of the divine. To use Gavriilyuk’s term, Angela articulates a theology of qualified divine passibility. God participates in the passion and loves the poverty, suffering, and contempt of the cross, but his transcendence is such that the experience of suffering cannot define him.

⁸¹ Peter Lombard, *The Sentences Book 3*, 57 (XV.1.3).

⁸² She mentions divine impassibility specifically in *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74.

⁸³ The natures are not fused or mixed together. In the vision of the darkness in Christ’s eyes and face, Angela also describes seeing the divine darkness apart from the Godman. See *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 156-158.

Angela first raises the question of divine (im)passibility in the third supplementary step. She describes a vision in which God the Father sends his Son out of love to save humanity. Angela's soul is told that Christ "concurred in this love" and "withdrew, so to speak, from his Father from heaven and from the dignity that was his."⁸⁴ For Angela, Christ's love is kenotic—he withdraws from the heights of heaven and relinquishes his divine dignity to take on a lowly human life. She suggests that Christ's love was more important than his dignity. She then tells Brother A. that Christ recounted all the details of his passion. He shows her "the sufferings of all his bodily members, his hardships, and the harsh and injurious words he was subjected to. And in this world, he left his mother which was extremely painful for him; he had left the apostles as well."⁸⁵ Angela tells us that anything she says about this vision "is just like nothing at all" because she did not just hear Christ narrate his passion—she felt all that he said.⁸⁶ No words on her part could fully capture the experience of feeling the passion with Christ. Angela then tells Brother A. that her soul was told something else: "You are amazed that the body of Christ was tormented and suffered in this way; how much more should you be amazed over his divinity that suffered these things in his humanity, which was like a cloak for his divinity."⁸⁷

A cursory reading of this passage may suggest that Angela is describing the *habitus* theory of the incarnation, which asserts that Christ's humanity, once assumed, was accidental and partible from His divinity, like a garment or *habitus* that could be put on and taken off at will.⁸⁸ But I do

⁸⁴ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: Et dicitur tunc animae quomodo Deus Pater misit Filium propter dilectionem et quomodo Filius concordavit in isto amore ut venire...Et, secundum modum loquendi, reliquit Patrem, reliquit caelum et dignitatem.

⁸⁵ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: Et numerabat singillatim passionem per omnia membra et labores et verba dura et iniuriosa. Et in isto mundo reliquit Matrem, quod fuit sibi valde dolendum, et apostolos.

⁸⁶ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: Sed tunc anima audiebat ista et sentiebat ea quia ita solum referre vel audire quasi nihil est.

⁸⁷ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: Miraris de isto corpore Christi sic poenato vel passionato? Quanto magis mirandum de divinitate est quae hoc fieri sustinuit in isto suo mantello, scilicet in humanitate in qua est ipsa divinitas.

⁸⁸ Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 1:400.

not think this is the case. For Angela, Christ's humanity is central to his identity and not something that can be put on or taken off at will. When she states that Christ's humanity functions as a cloak, she could be implying that Christ voluntarily holds back or suppresses his divine attributes underneath the garment of his humanity. Perhaps sensing that she might be on problematic theological ground, Angela explains that the divinity suffered in Christ's humanity. But this statement is equally problematic because the divinity itself is not supposed to suffer at all, according to the orthodox doctrine of divine impassibility. Angela could have easily said "Christ" rather than "his divinity," to indicate that the incarnate Christ suffered according to his humanity but not according to his divinity, but she states "*mirandum de divinitate est quae hoc fieri sustinuit.*"⁸⁹ Angela is clear that the divine suffers with the humanity of Christ. It is also important to note that Angela's understanding of the divine participation in the suffering of the cross emerges from her vision of the passion. She is reflecting theologically on her experience of witnessing and feeling Christ's pain.

Angela then states that God gave her an example that also seems to attribute some suffering to the divine. The example is of a "very noble man whose person cannot be offended, but whose house is damaged and destroyed; that is to say, his house is destroyed in place of his person."⁹⁰ This example demonstrated to me that although God is impassible, out of his great love for us he allowed that great shame to be brought to bear on his divinity in the sight of everyone for all to see."⁹¹ At first glance it appears that this example backs up the habitus theory. Like a cloak, a

⁸⁹ *IL*, 234. *M*, 74.

⁹⁰ The metaphor of the house is fitting because Jesus refers to himself as the Temple which will be destroyed and raised in three days (Jn 2:19).

⁹¹ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: Et, ut ego intellgerem, dabatur unum exemplum de homine nobilissimo qui non potest offendi in persona et offenditur et destruitur in domo sua, videlicet quod destruitur ei domus loco personae suae. Et hic ostendebatur quod, quamvis Deus esset impassibilis, tamen magnam verecundiam illatam esse divinitati permisit coram omnibus propter amorem nostrum.

house covers/gives shelter to a person and can easily be taken off/walked out of. However, in medieval Italy a man's house was often a part of his identity, especially if it was in his family for generations. Anyone would be grieved if his house were damaged or destroyed. Therefore, the image of the destroyed noble man's house does not completely eliminate the possibility of divine suffering. But it may reveal that Angela is at least somewhat concerned with preserving the divine attributes, even if she ultimately concludes that divine participation in the passion is theologically more important than preserving divine impassibility.

Angela again reveals her concern for preserving the divine attributes when she states that "God is impassible."⁹² However, after making this claim she states quite radically that God allowed "great shame" to be brought to bear on his divinity out of his love. In the traditional interpretation of divine impassibility, the Godhead cannot suffer or feel emotions—the divine can no more be shamed than he can be crucified. But in Angela's theological reflection on God's love during the passion, she ultimately believes that his love for humanity outweighs any concern he might have for his divine dignity, including his impassibility. Therefore, the divine shares in the shame and humiliation of the cross publicly, for all to see. Angela uses the word "shame" (*verecundiam*)⁹³ rather than suffering, perhaps because she did not want to contradict her statement that God is impassible outright. But the shame of the cross is the horrific suffering that was publicly perpetrated on Christ's body. Crucifixion was so humiliating that it was rarely used on Roman citizens. The punishment was generally reserved for slaves, rebels, bandits, and traitors.⁹⁴ It was designed to make its victims as vulnerable as possible: victims were stripped naked and publicly displayed as they died a slow death of asphyxiation and/or hypovolemic shock, a condition that

⁹² *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: *Deus esset impassibilis*.

⁹³ *IL*, 234. *M*, 74.

⁹⁴ David W. Chapman and Eckhard J. Schnabel, *The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus: Texts and Commentary* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2019), 300.

occurs when there is not enough blood for the heart to pump because of dehydration and blood loss.⁹⁵ To say that the divinity took on the shame of the cross out of love is to assert that the divine is possible, that Christ's divinity experienced the suffering of his humanity at some level.

Angela also suggests that the divine participated in the human experience of poverty. Angela is not referring to physical destitution, but rather a kind of spiritual poverty. For Angela, Christ's poverty is a voluntary experience of powerlessness and vulnerability that paradoxically does not hide but perhaps channels and redirects the divine power. She tells Brother A.,

Once I was meditating on the poverty of the Son of God incarnate. I saw his poverty—its greatness was demonstrated to my heart...God wanted to demonstrate even more of his poverty. And I saw him poor of friends and relatives. I even saw him poor of himself and so poor that he seemed powerless to help himself. It is sometimes said that the divine power was then hidden out of humility. But even if this has been said, I say that God's power was not hidden then, because he himself has taught me otherwise.⁹⁶

It is revealing that Angela start with a meditation on Christ's poverty but ends talking about God's poverty (she says *Filii Dei incarnati* and then later uses *Dei*). Angela makes it clear that she is not just talking about the poverty of Christ's humanity—by speaking of God's poverty, Angela subtly gestures that the divinity participates in Christ's human poverty. She also asserts that God's power is not hidden, though she does not elaborate on this point. It is possible that Angela insists that God's power is not hidden because she does not think the poverty of Christ is incompatible with the divine power. For Angela, God's power, like his love, is expressed through the poverty and suffering of Christ. It is through these supposed human defects and weaknesses that God redeems

⁹⁵ David W. Chapman and Eckhard J. Schnabel, *The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus*, 677.

⁹⁶ *CW*, 179. *IL*, 290. *M*, 108-110. Latin text: Quadam vice ego eram in meditando de paupertate Filii Dei incarnati. Et ego videbam paupertatem eius—tam magnum quantum ipse demonstrabat in corde meo et volebat quod ego viderem...Et tunc adhuc fuit voluntas Dei demonstrare mihi plus de illa paupertate. Et tunc videbam eum pauperem de amicis et de parentibus, et videbam eum pauperem de se ipso et tantum pauperem, quod non parebat quod se posset adiuvare. Et sicut dicitur quod tunc divina potentia erat abscondita per humilitatem, quamvis dicatur quod tunc erat abscondita per humilitatem divina potentia, ego dico quod non erat abscondita, et de hoc recepi tunc documentum a Deo quomodo non erat abscondita.

the world. Therefore, poverty and suffering are not inimical to God's nature, because through them he reveals his power, his love, and his very self. And God's embrace of poverty through Christ is not half-hearted, but complete. Angela describes the divine as powerless to help himself: God has ultimate power but chooses not to use his divine power to save himself so that he can share the human experience of total powerlessness and vulnerability. And paradoxically, it is in the voluntary experience of poverty and powerlessness that God's power is fully revealed.

But perhaps the most persuasive argument for a theology of divine passibility in Angela's thought is present in the seventh supplementary step. I want to return to Angela's vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes and face here, for it is in that vision that Angela most powerfully articulates the interpenetration of human and divine natures in the person of Christ. Angela identifies the divine darkness with the essence of the Trinity, it seems to me, so when she sees the darkness in Christ's face and eyes, she is seeing in visible form the mutual penetration of humanity and divinity in the person of Christ. While Angela separates the divinity and humanity of Christ in other contexts—for example, in a later passage she describes a silent transformation in her soul where she passes over from Christ's humanity to his divinity at the elevation of the Eucharist⁹⁷—she does not separate them in this passage. After describing the interpenetration of Christ's human body with the divine darkness of the Trinity, Angela then immediately pivots to the cross, suggesting that the divinity and humanity of Christ participate in the suffering of the passion together. In ecstasy, Angela sings a *lauda*, an Italian sacred song composed in the vernacular and popular from the thirteenth to the sixteenth centuries.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *CW*, 209. *IL*, 374. *M*, 166.

⁹⁸ John Milsom, "Lauda spirituale," *The Oxford Companion to Music*, ed. Alison Latham, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780199579037.001.0001/acref-9780199579037-e-3868>.

I praise you God my beloved; I have made your cross my bed. For a pillow or cushion I have found poverty, and for other parts of the bed, suffering and contempt to rest on... This bed is my bed to rest on because on it Christ was born, lived, and died. Even before man sinned, God the Father loved this bed and its company (poverty, suffering, and contempt) so much that he granted it to the Son. And, in concord with the Father, the Son wanted to lie in this bed and continued to love it.⁹⁹

Angela attributes suffering to the divine when she describes the love of the Father and Son for the cross in this passage. The Father and the Son do not seem to love the cross as a vehicle of salvation, but instead love it explicitly for its poverty, suffering, and contempt. Angela presents a radical reevaluation of suffering. Likely influenced by the philopassianist culture among the laity in the thirteenth century, Angela doesn't see suffering, poverty, and contempt as weaknesses or defects, but as aspects of human life that God sanctifies and chooses for himself.¹⁰⁰ For Angela, suffering, poverty, and contempt become something holy and precious. In the previous chapter, I noted a passage from the *Instructions* in which Angela describes the cross as treasured heritage that the Father hands down to the Son.¹⁰¹ In the above passage, Angela describes the cross in a similar way—it is a cherished possession that the Father loves so much he grants it to the Son. For Angela, suffering need not be perceived as inimical to the divine nature because God chooses it, loves, sanctifies it, and shares it with the Son. It is also noteworthy that the Father appears to have loved the cross even before man sinned, which also implies that he loved it before the incarnation.

It is also worth noting that one of the first *laude* composed in the thirteenth century was Francis of Assisi's Canticle of Brother Sun. See Augustine Thompson, *Francis of Assisi: A New Biography*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012), 122–123.

⁹⁹ *CW*, 205-206; *IL*, 362-364. *M*, 158. Latin text: Laudo te Deum dilectum, in tua cruce habeo factum meum lectum; pro capitali vel pro plumatio inveni paupertatem; aliam partem lecti ad pausandum inveni dolorem cum despectu...In praedicto lecto, quia ipse in praedicto lecto fuit natus, conversatus et mortuus, et quia Deus Pater istum praedictum lectum amavit antequam homo peccaret—et istum amorem de ista societate, scilicet de paupertate et de dolore et de despectu Deus Pater tantum amavit, et tantum praedictam societatem Deus Pater amavit et dedit eam Filio suo, et Filius in isto lecto continue voluit iacere et continue amavit et concordavit cum Patre.

Although *laudae* were typically sung in the vernacular, Angela's *lauda*, like the rest of the *Memorial*, was dictated in her native Umbrian dialect and was direct translated by Brother A. into Latin.

¹⁰⁰ For more on philopassianism, see p. 170–171.

¹⁰¹ *CW*, 224. *IL*, 420.

Most orthodox theologians of the time asserted that Christ became man and suffered the passion as a response to human sin, as it was undertaken to redeem mankind. There are some exceptions to this rule. Theologians such as Hildegard of Bingen, Robert Grosseteste, and John Duns Scotus thought that Christ's incarnation would have occurred independently of human sin. But Angela goes further in suggesting that the passion would have occurred even if man had not sinned. She thinks that the suffering, poverty, and contempt of the cross were such precious possessions that God loved them even before they became necessary to redeem mankind. It is an astonishing statement. If God loved the cross before man sinned, then Angela may be suggesting that the God was capable of suffering independent of a human nature, a highly unusual view for her time.¹⁰²

It is clear from the passage that Angela is less concerned with preserving divine impassibility than she is with demonstrating the Father's love for the Son. Her emphasis on the Father and Son's mutual love for the cross may also be an example of Angela's parental instincts. It makes sense that the Father is able to suffer because his love required that he would not send the Son to experience the cross without understanding it and loving it himself. It is important to Angela that the Father has loved (and perhaps even experienced) suffering, poverty, and contempt before he grants it to the Son. Although it is only conjecture, it is possible that Angela's emphasis on the prior suffering of the Father comes from the guilt of surviving her own children. Angela witnessed the death of her entire family, including all of her sons. Since parents are supposed to die before

¹⁰² It was almost universally agreed that a human nature (body and soul) was required in order to suffer. See Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 19; Donald. Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering in Medieval Theology: Academic Debates at the University of Paris in the Thirteenth Century* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2009), 20. Aquinas also believed that human nature (body-soul composite) is integral to the experience of pain. He writes, "we speak of pain of the body, because the cause of pain is in the body: as when we suffer something hurtful to the body. The movement of pain is always in the soul; since the body cannot feel pain unless the soul feel it." Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1981, 2:740. (ST Ia2ae q.35 a.1) Latin Text: *Ad primum ergo dicendum quod dolor dicitur esse corporis, quia causa doloris est in corpore, puta cum patimur aliquod nocivum corpori. Sed motus doloris semper est in anima, nam corpus non potest dolere nisi dolente anima.* (ST Ia2ae q.35 a.1, responsio ad argumentum 1, lines 1-3 from LLT) In other words, the soul is what enables the person to sense pain, but it will only sense pain insofar as it is connected to a body. Therefore, a full human nature (body and soul conjoined) is necessary to experience suffering.

their children, she may have been especially sensitive to the role of the Father in the Son's suffering and death.

Some might object that the Father can still love the cross (as well as poverty, suffering, and contempt) without necessarily experiencing it. His love for the cross could be abstract, like his knowledge of sin. God cannot experience what it is like to commit sin, but knows sin nonetheless. Indeed, the same person might also object that if suffering is the result of sin, it would logically follow that God could neither experience the act of committing sin nor its result. However, both of these objections do not make sense in the larger theological context of the *Memorial*. Knowledge of the cross was not abstract for Angela; the cross needed to be experienced to be fully known and appreciated. The second objection also assumes that Angela views pain as something negative, i.e. the result of sin that carries the same stigma. However, the *Memorial* directly refutes these assumptions. Christ transforms suffering into an act of love, which the believer can participate in by suffering with Christ.

As I noted in my section "Overcoming the Inexpressibility of Pain" in chapter four,¹⁰³ knowledge and love are intimately linked in the history of Christian mysticism. This also applies to Angela's text. However, Angela adds a third element: suffering. She asserts that love and suffering are intimately bound together by Christ on the cross. When McGinn lists the four propositions that are adopted by the majority of Christian mystics, we must keep in mind that for Angela, whatever is said of love can also be said of suffering. McGinn's third proposition states that "the love by which we grasp or attain God includes a form of intuitive 'knowing' (*intelligentia*, *intellectus*) superior to reason (*ratio*)."¹⁰⁴ Therefore, for Angela, love and pain are both forms of

¹⁰³ See p. 170.

¹⁰⁴ Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition," in *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, ed. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1989), 68.

experiential or intuitive knowledge.¹⁰⁵ This statement is confirmed in many passages of the *Memorial*. For example, when speaking of the delights of God, Angela boldly states “I was filled with such certitude, such light, and such ardent love of God that I went on to affirm, with the utmost certainty, that nothing of these delights of God is being preached. Preachers cannot preach it; they do not understand what they preach.¹⁰⁶” After experiencing the delights of God, Angela concludes that knowledge of God can only be gained through experience. Preachers are not able to preach about the delights of God because they cannot understand what they have not experienced.

Similarly, when Angela experiences a vision of the divine power, God tells her it “cannot be understood in this life. Those who read about it in the Scriptures have some understanding of it, and those who have personal experience of me understand it even more.”¹⁰⁷ In this passage, God himself declares the superiority of experiential knowledge. Therefore, in the *Memorial*, perfect love and knowledge cannot be abstract, that is, pried loose from the experience that undergirds it. If the Father understood suffering abstractly, he would not be able to know or love it perfectly. If those without experience cannot preach what they do not understand, how can the Father lovingly give something to the Son that he also does not understand?¹⁰⁸ For Angela, it is not possible to love suffering abstractly. She must experience it, meditate on it, cultivate it through physical and spiritual poverty, taste it in the bathwater of the lepers, drink the blood from Christ’s side, feel the anguish in his soul, lie with him in the darkness of the sepulcher, and make his cross her bed.

¹⁰⁵ Knowledge in this proposition is both intuitive and experiential because intuition is developed through experience. Intuition is not an innate property; it is honed and cultivated through experience.

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, 131. *IL*, 150. *M*, 18. Latin text: Et ex tunc tanta certitudo remansit mihi et tantum lumen et ardor amoris Dei quod affirmabam certissime, quod nihil praedicatur de delectatione Dei, et illi qui praedicant non possunt illam praedictare et ea quae praedicant non intelligunt.

¹⁰⁷ *CW*, 166. *IL*, 250. *M*, 84. Latin text: Hoc est pro potentia divina; quae potentia non potest comprehendi in hac vita, de qua loquitur Scriptura; et illi qui legunt eam intelligunt parum, et illi qui sentient de me intelligunt plus.

¹⁰⁸ *IL*, 364. *M*, 158.

Furthermore, Angela does not view suffering as negatively as other theologians: as an undesirable consequence of sin or a useful tool on the path to sanctification, but not a part of God's original plan for humanity. Instead, Angela suggests that suffering may not be the result of sin (and perhaps that it pre-dates sin) when she states that the Father loved the bed of the cross even *before* man sinned.¹⁰⁹ In the *Memorial*, suffering is portrayed as something precious and good in itself. Christ *longs* to suffer because it is through the experience of pain that he reveals his limitless love for mankind.¹¹⁰ When Angela sings her *lauda* praising the cross, the site of Christ's suffering becomes her marriage bed. Both Angela and Christ long for the suffering, poverty, and contempt of the cross as newlyweds long for marital intimacy. Thus, poverty, suffering, and contempt are not signs of human weakness and frailty but are experiences lovingly undertaken and cherished, regardless of their salvific value.

Although Angela's vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes and face and the subsequent *lauda* praising the cross as her bed seem to suggest an interpenetration of human and divine that results in God's experience of human passibility, this reading is not the standard interpretation of the passages in question. Scholars such as Bernard McGinn and Paul Lachance read the passage in a more conservative and tradition way. McGinn posits that Angela goes back to the cross out of a desire to show that her spiritual states conform to Christian tradition. He writes, "although this long chapter in Angela's *Book* contains some of the strongest expressions of *unio mystica* in the history of Christian mysticism, Angela and her coauthor are anxious to show the conformity

¹⁰⁹ One could argue that God could love suffering before man sinned because he had foreknowledge of sin and its results. However, because love and knowing are experiential for Angela, her words cannot be explained by foreknowledge alone.

¹¹⁰ At times love and pain are so intertwined in Angela's thought that she seems to deify Christ's pain. She portrays Christ's suffering as ineffable as the divinity itself. If God is love, one begins to wonder whether he could also be pain? However, pain never rises to the same level as love because Christ's suffering is always in the service of love. In the seventh supplementary step, Angela further elaborates that God transcends both love and suffering.

between her states and traditional aspects of Christian life and devotion...while the seventh stage at times involves the experience of being 'extracted' even from Christ's humanity and passion, the more constant form of union has her soul 'transformed into the passion of Christ.'"¹¹¹ McGinn reads Angela's experience of divine darkness as one of transcendence. She passes beyond the humanity of Christ and the passion into the infinite depths of the Trinity. He interprets Angela's more constant experience of Christ's humanity as a way to demonstrate Angela's conformity to a more traditional form of female piety, effectively disconnecting her experience of Christ's humanity from her experience of the divine darkness, even though Angela herself links the two when she speaks about the darkness in Christ's eyes.

Lachance, on the other hand, interprets Angela's *lauda*, in which she returns to the theme of the cross, as a traditional manifestation of Franciscan spirituality. He writes that her *lauda* is "consonant with the Franciscan thesis on the primacy of Christ, before the beginning of time, independently of sin, the crucifixion of the Son had been foreseen by the Father as the ultimate manifestation of his love."¹¹² Lachance reads Angela's assertion that the Father loved the cross before man had sinned not as a statement of divine passibility, but a continuation of the Franciscan thesis of the primacy of Christ. While it is possible that Angela was influenced by the primacy of Christ, the doctrine typically focuses on the incarnation, whereas *lauda* focuses on Father and Son's love for the cross.

The Franciscan thesis of the primacy of Christ is traditionally attributed to John Duns Scotus (1266–1308 CE), a contemporary of Angela (1248-1309 CE).¹¹³ The primacy of Christ

¹¹¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 149.

¹¹² Paul Lachance O.F.M., *The Spiritual Journey of the Blessed Angela of Foligno According to the Memorial of Frater A.*, 340–41.

¹¹³ Although the primacy of Christ is usually associated with Duns Scotus, it was also articulated by theologians such as Robert Grosseteste (1175-1253 CE) and Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179).

essentially decouples Christ's incarnation from God's response to human sin and asserts that Christ would have become incarnate whether or not mankind was in need of salvation. In his *Ordinatio*, Scotus writes that "the incarnation of Christ was not foreseen as occasioned by sin, but was immediately foreseen from all eternity by God."¹¹⁴ In other words, even before man sinned, God had always planned to unite his divine nature with human nature in the person of Christ. God did this "primarily for His own glory, and only secondarily for the redemption of man."¹¹⁵ It was important for Scotus that sin was not the motivating factor for the incarnation; rather, God had always preordained the incarnation of Christ for the sake of his own glory and to make Christ the pinnacle of creation and the center of the universe.¹¹⁶ Scotus writes that if man had not sinned, Christ "would not have been able to suffer, since there would have been no need of a union with a passible body for this soul glorified from its first moment of existence, to which God chose to give not only the highest glory but also willed that it be always present."¹¹⁷ For Scotus, suffering is the result of sin.¹¹⁸ Christ took on a passible body in order to redeem mankind from sin. However, the highest glory would be an impassible body, like the one given to Adam in paradise before the fall. Therefore, if Christ had become incarnate before sin, he would not have been able to suffer. It was on account of Adam's sin that Christ became incarnate with a passible body. Scotus also adds that

¹¹⁴ Damian McElrath, ed., *Franciscan Christology: Selected Texts, Translations and Introductory Essays* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1980), 153. Latin text: *Incarnatio Christi non fuit occasionaliter praevisa, sed sicut bonum fini propinquius immediate praevidebatur a Deo ab aeterno*. Taken from *Ordinatio* III, dist. 7, q. 3 from the text edited by C. Balić, O.F.M. in *Ioannis Duns Scoti: Doctoris Mariani Theologiae Marianae Elementa* (Sibenici, 1933) (hereafter, *DMTME*).

¹¹⁵ Dominic Unger, "Franciscan Christology: Absolute and Universal Primacy of Christ," *Franciscan Studies* 2, no. 4 (1942): 430.

¹¹⁶ Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., "John Duns Scotus on the Primacy and Personality of Christ," in *Franciscan Christology: Selected Texts, Translations and Introductory Essays*, ed. Damian McElrath (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 1980), 140.

¹¹⁷ McElrath, *Franciscan Christology*, 149. Latin text: *forte ut passibilis, quia non fuit aliqua necessitas ut illa anima a principio gloriosa, cui Deus praeoptavit non tantum summam gloriam, sed etiam coevam illi animae, quod unita fuisset corpori passibili*. (*Ordinatio* III, dist. 7, q. 3, *DMTME*.)

¹¹⁸ Unger, "Franciscan Christology," 436.

God became incarnate primarily for his glory and not for redemption because “the redemption or the glory of the soul to be redeemed is not comparable to the glory of the soul of Christ.”¹¹⁹ Therefore, although God decided to redeem mankind from sin in the person of Christ, the incarnation was not primarily motivated out of a desire to save souls. The primary motivating factor was God’s glory.

Lachance most likely interprets Angela’s *lauda* as a continuation of the primacy of Christ because she explicitly states that the Father loved the bed of the cross “before man had sinned.”¹²⁰ Just as God had always planned from eternity to glorify Christ through the incarnation, he also from eternity loved the cross. However, Angela’s *lauda* contains some inconsistencies with the Franciscan thesis of the primacy of Christ. One of the first inconsistencies is that Scotus believed that the primary purpose of the incarnation was God’s glory. But Angela is praising suffering, poverty, and contempt; not glory. The second and perhaps greatest inconsistency is that the primacy of Christ has to do with the incarnation alone, not the cross. In fact, Scotus states that if Adam had not sinned, Christ would have assumed an impassible body. Therefore, Christ would not have been able to suffer on the cross. But Angela asserts that it was God’s intention from eternity for Christ to assume a passible body and to suffer in the passion, since God loved the cross, as well as poverty, suffering, and contempt, *before* man sinned. Christ’s suffering on the cross was therefore not just a redemptive act—it was an affirmation of the inherent goodness of suffering, poverty, and contempt.

Unlike Scotus, Angela does not seem to believe that an impassible body was higher or more glorious than a passible body. In fact, Angela presents Christ as more passible than any other

¹¹⁹ McElrath, *Franciscan Christology*, 149. Latin text: *Cum illa redemptio sive gloria animae redimendae non sit tantum bonum, quantum est illa gloria animae Christi.* (*Ordinatio* III, dist. 7, q. 3, *DMTME.*)

¹²⁰ *CW*, 206. *IL*, 364. *M*, 158.

human being. Possessing divine foreknowledge of his death, Christ continually suffers “from the moment of his conception.”¹²¹ In *Instructio* III she also states that “from the instant of its creation until the moment of its separation from the body, the soul of Christ endured, continually and totally, the most acute and unspeakable suffering.”¹²² And again: “for all of his life the suffering God-man knew only one state: that of the cross. His life began on the cross, continued on the cross, and ended on the cross.”¹²³ For Angela, the inexpressible pain of the cross was something that suffused Christ’s entire existence from the moment he became incarnate to the moment his soul was separated from his body. While Scotus argues for the primacy of the incarnation of Christ, Angela appears to be advocating a primacy of the cross.

One reason why divine passibility in the seventh supplementary step may have been overlooked by scholars such as McGinn and Lachance is because later in the step Angela receives a vision in which everything she has ever known is transcended. Angela states:

It seemed to me that I was in the midst of the Trinity...I was and am now drawn out of everything I had previously experienced and had taken such delight in: the life and humanity of Christ; the consideration of that very deep companionship which the Father from eternity in his love had bestowed on the Son (in which I had taken such deep delight), namely, the contempt, the suffering, and the poverty experienced by the Son of God; and the cross as bed to rest on. I was also drawn out of the vision of God in the darkness in which I used to take such delight. Every previous state was put to sleep so tenderly and sweetly that I could not tell it was happening. I could only recall that now I did not have these experiences.¹²⁴

¹²¹ *CW*, 288. *IL*, 644. Latin text: Fecit enim Deus Pater Fillium doloris, et semper fuit in dolore. Nam ab instanti conceptionis fuit in summa tristitia.

¹²² *CW*, 233. *IL*, 452. Latin text: Ideo superacutissimum et omnino ineffabilem dolorem quem se videbat infallibiliter sustinere in ipso creationis suae instanti.

¹²³ *CW*, 224. *IL*, 420. Latin text: Sed iste Deus homo passionatus habuit in tota vita sua unum solum statum, scilicet crucem. Nam in cruce incoepit, in cruce mediavit et in cruce finivit.

¹²⁴ *CW*, 211–12. *IL*, 378-380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Et videbatur mihi quod eram in medio Trinitatis...Et fui extracta, et sum extracta de omnibus quae prius habueram et in quibus prius consueveram delectari, scilicet de vita et de humanitate Christi et de consideratione illius profundissimae societatis quam Deus Pater tantum dilexit ab aeterno quod dedit eam Filio suo, in quibus ego consueveram profundissime delectari, videlicet in despectu et in dolore et in paupertate Filii Dei, et in cruce quae consuevit esse mea repausatio et meus lectus. Et sum extracta de illo modo videndi Deum in tenebra illa quae tantum consuevit me delectare. Et sum extracta de omni illo statu priori cum tanta unctio et dormitione quod nullo modo percipere potui, nisi quod modo recordor quod non habeo illa.

It would seem from this passage that as Angela draws closer to the Trinity, she is given an experience of the divine transcendence. She is able to surpass every previous step, even the cross and the humanity of Christ. Although Angela does not use the concept of stripping to describe the divine transcendence in the seventh supplementary step, a parallel could be drawn to the eighth step in which Angela removes her garments so that she can go more lightly to the cross.¹²⁵ When Angela describes how all her previous experiences are put to sleep so that she cannot even remember having them, it seems as if her previous experiences are stripped from her like garments, revealing something new that is simultaneously still hidden. Willemien Otten also discusses the concept of spiritual stripping leading to the divine transcendence in her article "In the Shadow of the Divine." She writes that "Central to Dionysius's use of negative theology is...the setting in motion of a kind of reverse divine striptease: an unveiling of the divine which results not in its undressing but in its redressing, as the divine bareness becomes more and more hidden."¹²⁶ Similarly, when Angela's experiences are put to sleep/stripped away, what is left is even more mysterious, hidden, and ineffable: the nothingness and deep abyss of the divine. Perhaps this is why Angela becomes more certain less she understands about God. The hiddenness of God uncovered/recovered through apophatic discourse paradoxically leads us to be able to speak about God more clearly: "The stated inaccessibility of the divine is used methodologically to sharpen the capacity of human language to register things sensitively and to express things effectively."¹²⁷ More attuned- Angela's understanding of God's transcendence is sharpened and she begins to use the language of the deep abyss to describe God.

¹²⁵ *CW*, 127. *IL*, 136. *M*, 10.

¹²⁶ Willemien Otten, "In the Shadow of the Divine: Negative Theology and Negative Anthropology in Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius and Eriugena," *Heythrop Journal* 40, no. 4 (1999): 443.

¹²⁷ Willemien Otten, "In the Shadow of the Divine," 443.

However, I don't think Angela would see God's total transcendence as incompatible with the divine participation in the suffering of the cross. For Angela, God voluntarily consents to participating in the passion, but his suffering does not define him. This view suggests that Angela is articulating a theology of qualified divine passibility, similar to that of Cyril of Alexandria. Like Cyril, Angela adopts a single-subject Christology in which God as Logos (the second person of the Trinity) is the subject of the incarnate experiences of suffering and death. Angela even suggests that the Trinity somehow participates the poverty, suffering, and contempt of the passion when she describes the cross as a precious gift handed down from the Father to the Son. But that suffering cannot define or overwhelm God because he ultimately transcends anything that can be conceived. Angela's understanding of God's participation in human suffering is rooted in her understanding of the hypostatic union. Christ's hypostatic union leads to the total interpenetration of human and divine, thus resulting in the sharing of attributes: the divine participates in the human experience of suffering and the human being participates in the divine life. Although Angela's understanding of the hypostatic union goes beyond what is articulated by Cyril or the Council Chalcedon (especially in the way that she uses the hypostatic union as a model for divine union between the soul and God), she remains Chalcedonian in the sense that neither God and nor the soul are mixed or confused. The sharing of attributes does not overwhelm or overpower either God or the human being. God retains his divine identity as impassible while nevertheless making the suffering of Christ his own.

CHAPTER 6: The Interpenetration of Human and Divine: Deification in Angela's *Memorial*

Deification in the Christian Tradition

Athanasius wrote in his famous exchange formula that “God became man that we might become God.”¹ The idea that human beings can “become God” or become “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4) is known as *theōsis* (also known as deification or divinization; I use all three interchangeably). *Theōsis* can be difficult to define because, although it was almost ubiquitous in the patristic tradition since its first use in the second century by Clement of Alexandria, the first theologian to define it was Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the sixth century.² Deification is

¹ Athanasius, “On the Incarnation of the Word,” in *Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, trans. Robert W. Thomson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 268 (54).

The quote is a restatement of the words of Irenaeus: “He became what we are in order to make us what he is himself.” (AH, 5, Praef.)

² Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

Clement of Alexandria believed that the perfected Christian “becomes a god while still moving about in the flesh.” Quoted in *The Doctrine of Deification*, 121 (*Strom.* 7. 101. 4). For more information on Clement of Alexandria’s

also complex because it is interwoven throughout the larger patristic theological framework and is often related to soteriology, incarnation, liturgy, and asceticism. For example, *theōsis* is often understood as the end goal or *telos* of the divine economy of salvation (summarized through Athanasius's exchange formula), the incorporation of the believer into Christ through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and the ascent of the soul from the image to the likeness of God through the ascetic life.³ Later Greek understandings of *theōsis* included participation in the divine energies (the energies were thought to be distinct from the essence of God, which is unknowable and so radically above the created order that it cannot be participated in), first articulated by Maximus the Confessor (ca. 580–662 CE) and later developed by Gregory Palamas (1296–1359 CE).⁴ Although each theologian treats *theōsis* differently, they all agree that the human being “becomes God” through grace, not through nature: the human being never shares God's essence, thus preserving the absolute incommensurability of the uncreated and the created orders.⁵ The Greek patristic fathers also presuppose a liturgical and ethical background to *theōsis* that emphasizes participation in the sacraments (particularly baptism and the Eucharist), asceticism, and contemplation.⁶

The patristic fathers each had different understandings of *theōsis*, but perhaps some of the most influential views can be found in the Alexandrian tradition, particularly those of Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria. In the exchange formula, Athanasius characterizes deification as a radical

understanding of deification see M. David Litwa, “You Are Gods: Deification in the Naassene Writer and Clement of Alexandria,” *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no 1 (Jan 2017): 125–148; Piotr Ashwin-Siejkowski, *Clement of Alexandria: A Project of Christian Perfection* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008).

Pseudo-Dionysius defines theosis as “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.” Quoted in *The Doctrine of Deification*, 1. Also found in Pseudo-Dionysius, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, ed. Colm Luibheid (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 198 (EH 1.3, 376A).

³ Norman Russell, “Deification,” *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 132-5.

⁴ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 14, 304.

⁵ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 1.

⁶ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 8.

reorientation of humanity towards the divine, brought about by the incarnation. There is a fundamental polarity in Athanasius's thought between God, the source of all being, and non-being. Human beings are oriented towards non-being and corruption because of the pull of our own nature, which was created from nothing.⁷ By uniting human nature to the divine Word, the incarnation reverses the polarity so that human beings are pulled towards the pole of the divine, towards incorruptibility and immortality.⁸ Because the fruits of deification (knowledge of the Father and incorruptibility/immortality)⁹ are mainly associated with eternal life in patristic thought, *theōsis* is often synonymous with salvation.¹⁰ But Athanasius expands the fruits of deification beyond immortality and incorruption by emphasizing the exaltation of human nature through Christ.¹¹ Humanity itself is exalted through Christ's assumption of human flesh in the incarnation because the whole human race exists in solidarity with the human body of the Logos. For Athanasius, "the flesh" is a generic reality shared by all human beings.¹² As a result, "human nature becomes the Word's 'own,' so that we are all, in some sense, incorporated into the incarnate Word and benefit from the 'giving' and 'receiving,' the *communicatio idiomatum*," or exchange of attributions, between God and human nature.¹³ For Athanasius, Christ assumes the human attribute of servitude, while human nature shares in the incorruptibility of Christ's divinity.¹⁴ But deification is not automatic; each human being must appropriate the deification of human nature for themselves through ascetic struggle.

⁷ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 36–37

⁸ Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, 137.

⁹ Athanasius, "On the Incarnation of the Word," 269 (54).

"He revealed himself through a body that we might receive an idea of the invisible Father; and he endured insults from men that we might inherit incorruption."

¹⁰ Divinization of the Christian, 267; Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 8.

¹¹ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 178.

¹² Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 177.

¹³ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 172.

Although never explicitly stated, Angela has a similar understanding of divine union

¹⁴ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 173.

Cyril further expands on the doctrine of *theōsis*, arguing that deification is a process that includes the entire Trinity. Divinization, or participation in the divine life, comes from the Father, through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.¹⁵ For Cyril, we participate in the divine life primarily through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit conferred in baptism and through receiving the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist.¹⁶ *Theōsis* is understood by Cyril primarily as a participating in the life of God. Whereas for Athanasius, *theōsis* was primarily understood as the ultimate expression of our salvation in Christ, it is fair to say that in Cyril, deification is synonymous with participation. In fact, after Cyril, the language of deification fades from the theological vocabulary of the Greek fathers and is replaced with the language of participation.¹⁷

Cyril is one of the last of the patristic fathers to use the term “deification.” After the fifth century, the term was largely abandoned and did not reemerge until the sixth century with the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.¹⁸ Dionysius’s writings led to the rediscovery of *theōsis* in the Christian east, where it remained an important aspect of Orthodox theology. In the west, *theōsis* also declined after the fifth century. Once a prominent feature of the theology of the Latin patristic fathers,¹⁹ deification faded from the theological vocabulary of the west arguably until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (with some notable exceptions, such as John Scotus

¹⁵ Daniel A. Keating, *The Appropriation of the Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 166.

¹⁶ Daniel A. Keating, *The Appropriation of the Divine Life in Cyril of Alexandria*, 89.

¹⁷ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification*, 235.

¹⁸ See p. 158–166 for more information on the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on Angela’s thought.

¹⁹ Jared Ortiz, ed., *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 4.

Eriugena),²⁰ when it was revived by new interest in the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor.²¹

But deification was not universally embraced in the west. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Protestant theologians such as Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth were highly critical of *theōsis*.²² But in recent decades, scholars have attempted to reclaim a tradition of *theōsis* in the Christian west,²³ tracing the theme in the work of theologians such as the Latin patristic fathers,²⁴

²⁰ For more on the influence of Dionysius on Eriugena, see Willemien Otten, "In the Shadow of the Divine;" Paul Rorem, "The Early Latin Dionysius: Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor," *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, eds. Sarah Coakley and Charles M. Stang (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 71–84.

²¹ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 237; Bernard McGinn, *Flowering of Mysticism*, 86; Bernard McGinn, "Love, Knowledge, and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition," *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: An Ecumenical Dialogue*, eds. Moshe Idel and Bernard McGinn (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), 62.

²² Paul L. Gavrilyuk, "The Retrieval of Deification: How a Once-Despised Archaism Became an Ecumenical Desideratum," *Modern Theology* 25, no. 4 (October 2009): 647.

²³ Several edited volumes on theosis have been published that include contributions on theologians in the west as well as in the east. Notable volumes include John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, eds., *Theōsis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization in East and West* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018); John Arblaster and Rob Faese, eds., *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2019); Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, eds., *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, vol. 1 and 2 (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006); Michael J. Christensen and Jeffery A. Wittung, eds., *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007); Franco Arduoso, *Divinizzazione dell'uomo e redenzione dal peccato: Le teologie della salvezza nel cristianesimo di Oriente e di Occidente* (Torino: Fondazione Gionvanni, 2004).

²⁴ Jared Ortiz, ed., *Deification in the Latin Patristic Tradition*.

Augustine,²⁵ Anselm of Canterbury,²⁶ Thomas Aquinas,²⁷ Martin Luther,²⁸ John Calvin,²⁹ Jonathan Edwards,³⁰ John and Charles Wesley,³¹ etc. The project of uncovering *theosis* in the west

²⁵ Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," *Journal of Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (October 1986): 369–387; Robert Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, eds. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2006); P.V. Capánaga, "La Deification en la Soteriologia agustiniana," *Augustinus Magister* 2 (1954): 745–55; Augustine Casiday, "St. Augustine on Deification: His Homily on Psalm 81," *Sobornost* 23 (2001): 23–44; Jose Oroz Reta, "De l'illumination a la deification de l'ame selon saint Augustin," *Studia Patristica* 27 (1993): 364–82; Victor Yudin, "Plato's Contribution to Augustine's Theory of Theosis," *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition*, eds. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (New York: Routledge, 2018).

²⁶ Nathan R. Kerr, "St. Anselm: Theoria and the Doctrinal Logic of Perfection" *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).

²⁷ Daniel Keating, "Justification, Sanctification, and Divinization in Thomas Aquinas," *Aquinas on Doctrine: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Thomas Weinandy et al. (London: T.&T. Clark, 2004); Joost Van Rossum, "Deification in Palamas and Aquinas," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 47 (2003): 365–82; Anne Ngaire Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁸ Knut Alfsvåg, "God's Fellow Workers: The Understanding of the Relationship between the Human and the Divine in Maximus Confessor and Martin Luther," *Studia Theologica* 62 (2008): 175–93; Friedrich Beisser, "Zur Frage der Vergöttlichung des Menschen bei Martin Luther," *Kerygma und Dogma* 39 (1993) 226–81; Dennis Bielfeldt, "Deification as a Motif in Luther's *Dictata super psalterium*," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 401–20; Reinhard Flogaus, *Theosis bei Palamas und Luther. Ein Beitrag zum ökumenischen Gespräch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1997); Lowell Green, "The Question of Theosis in the Perspective of Lutheran Christology," *All Theology is Christology: Essays in Honor of David P. Scaer*, Dean Wenthe and David P. Scaer, eds. (Fort Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminar Press, 2000); Joachim Heubach, ed., *Luther and Theosis* (Erlangen: Martin Luther, 1990); Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Tuomo Mannermaa, *Der im Glauben gegenwärtige Christus: Rechtfertigung und Vergottung zum Ökumenischen Dialog* (Hannover: Lutherisches, 1989); Kurt Marquart, "Luther and Theosis," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 64 (2000): 182–205; Jouko Martikainen, "Man's Salvation: Deification or Justification? Observation of Key-Words in the Orthodox and Lutheran Tradition," *Sobornost* 7 (1976) 180–92; Michael McDaniel, "Salvation as Justification and Theosis," *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, ed. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1992); Simo Peura and Antti Raunio, eds., *Luther und Theosis: Vergöttlichung als Thema der abendländischen Theologie* (Helsinki: Luther Agricola Gesellschaft, 1990); Franz Posset, "Deification in the German Spirituality of the Late Middle Ages and in Luther: An Ecumenical Historical Perspective," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993): 103–26; Jeffrey Silcock, "Luther on Justification and Participation in the Divine Life: New Light on an Old Problem," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 34 (2000): 127–39; Pedro Urbano López de Meneses, "'Christus in fide adest': Cristo presente en el creyente o la teología de la deificación en Lutero," *Scripta Theologica* 32 (2000) 757–99; Jonathan Linman, "'Little Christs for the World': Faith and Sacraments as a Means to Theosis," *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007).

²⁹ Julie Canlis, *Calvin's Ladder: A Spiritual Theology of Ascent and Ascension* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010); John McClean, "Perichoresis, Theosis, and Union with Christ in the Thought of John Calvin," *Reformed Theological Review* 68 (2009): 130–41; Carl Mosser, "The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55 (2002) 36–57; Jonathan Slater, "Salvation as Participation in the Humanity of the Mediator in Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion: A Reply to Carl Mosser," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005) 39–58; J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation and the Gifts: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³⁰ Richard B. Steele, "Transfiguring Light: The Moral Beauty of the Christian Life according to Gregory Palamas and Jonathan Edwards," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008): 403–39; Michael McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism," *Jonathan Edwards:*

has been aided by the fact that it is a fluid concept that often differs from author to author. But as we can see in the sheer volume of published material, scholars of *theosis* in the west generally focus on its soteriological aspects, drawing parallels between the patristic notion of salvation as deification and justification by faith in the writings of the Protestant theologians.³² But I suggest that the most obvious place to search for *theosis* is not in the writings of Luther and Calvin, but rather in the Christian mystical tradition, particularly in the Middle Ages. There has been some scholarship on *theosis* and the Christian mystics, including Eriugena,³³ John Ruusbroec,³⁴ Nicholas of Cusa,³⁵ and John of the Cross,³⁶ but nothing on the scale with which scholars have investigated

Philosophical Theologian, eds. Paul Helm and Oliver Crisp (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press 2003); Michael D. Gibson, "The Beauty of the Redemption of the World: The Theological Aesthetics of Maximus the Confessor and Jonathan Edwards," *Harvard Theological Review* 101 (2008): 45–76.

³¹ Michael J. Christensen, "John Wesley: Christian Perfection as Faith Filled with the Energy of Love," *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007). Michael J. Christensen, "Theosis and Sanctification: John Wesley's Reformulation of a Patristic Doctrine," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 31 (1996): 71–94; David C. Ford, "Saint Makarios of Egypt and John Wesley: Variations on the Theme of Sanctification," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 33 (1988): 285–312; S.T. Kimbrough, "Theosis in the Writings of Charles Wesley," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 52 (2008): 199–212; Steve McCormick, "Theosis in Chrysostom and Wesley: An Eastern Paradigm on Faith and Love," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 38–103.

³² Published writings on *theosis* and justification include: Ross Aden, "Justification and Divinization," *Dialog* 32 (1993): 102–7; Henry Edwards, "Justification, Sanctification and the Eastern Orthodox Concept of *Theosis*," *Consensus* 14 (1988): 65–80; Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009); Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theological Anthropology: Toward Integrating *Theosis* and Justification by Faith," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 34 (1997): 38–73; Veli-Matti, Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Michael McDaniel, "Salvation as Justification and *Theosis*," *Salvation in Christ: A Lutheran-Orthodox Dialogue*, ed. John Meyendorff and Robert Tobias (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1992); William Rusch, "How the Eastern Fathers Understood What the Western Church Meant by Justification," *Justification by Faith*, ed. H. George Anderson et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1985); Justification and Deification in the Dialogue between the Tübingen Theologians and the Patriarch Jeremias II," *Logia* 9 (200): 17–28.

³³ Deirdre Carabine, "Five Wise Virgins: *Theosis* and Return in Periphysion V," *Iohannes Scottus Eriugena*, ed. Gerd van Riel et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1996).

³⁴ Johan Bonny, "John of Ruusbroec: Common Man – Common Love – Common Life," *Theosis/Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2018), 161-170.

³⁵ Pauline Moffitt Watts, *Nicholaus Cusanus: A Fifteenth-Century Vision of Man* (Leiden: Brill, 1982); Nancy J. Hudson, *Becoming God: The Doctrine of Theosis in Nicholas of Cusa* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2007).

³⁶ David Bentley Hart, "The Bright Morning of the Soul: John of the Cross on *Theosis*," *Pro Ecclesia* 12 (2003): 324–44.

theosis in Augustine (even though he only mentions deification eight times in his entire corpus),³⁷ Luther (there is an entire school of thought devoted to studying deification in Luther's writings: the Finnish School),³⁸ and Calvin. John Arblaster and Rob Faesen's recent book *Mystical Doctrines of Deification* attempts to address this omission by focusing on deification in medieval and early modern mystical texts.³⁹ But the volume attempts to address one lacuna while perpetuating another: it contains only one essay on a woman mystic (Teresa of Avila). Paul Collins's *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* includes more women mystics (Marguerite Porete and Julian of Norwich, in addition to Teresa of Avila), but he describes deification in medieval mysticism as a "peripheral" tradition that wasn't fully embraced as orthodox, thus foregrounding the importance of *theosis* inside mysticism on the one hand but further marginalizing it and the role of women writers on the other.⁴⁰ In my research, I found few sources on the women mystics and *theosis*, even though this would seem to be a fruitful area of research. I found two articles on deification in Teresa of Avila and one article on *theosis* in the beguine mystics and Marguerite Porete.⁴¹ What can account for this persistent lack of interest?

³⁷ The words *deificari* and *deificatus* only appear fifteen times in Augustine's entire corpus and seven of those are considered irrelevant to his theology. See Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 369.

³⁸ There is an entire school of thought devoted to studying deification in Luther's writings: the Finnish School. See Tuomo Mannermaa, "Theosis as a Subject of Finnish Luther Research," *Pro Ecclesia* 4 (1995): 37–48; C.E. Braaten and R. W. Jensen, eds., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998); Myk Habets, "Reforming Theōsis," *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 147–8.

³⁹ John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, eds., *Mystical Doctrines of Deification: Case Studies in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

⁴⁰ Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 111.

⁴¹ Peter Tyler, "Psychology, *Theosis*, and the Soul: St. Teresa of Avila, St. Augustine, and Plotinus on the Western picture of *Theosis*," *Mystical Doctrines of Deification*, 152–164; Beverley J. Lanzetta, "Wound of Love: Feminine Theosis and Embodied Mysticism in Teresa of Avila," *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008); Juan Marin, "Annihilation and Deification in Beguine Theology and Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*," *Harvard Theological Review* 103 (2010): 89–109.

I argue that there is an unspoken intellectual hierarchy that privileges doctrinal theology, especially when it defines a confessional tradition in dealing with authoritative matters such as soteriology or the nature of God (this is perhaps why we have so many articles and books on Luther/justification and *theosis*). The texts that are categorized as spirituality are generally seen as less serious and authoritative. Unfortunately, women's mystical texts are often pigeon-holed into the category of spirituality, with the result that their texts are not viewed as intellectually rigorous works of theology. But insofar as these categorizations are ambiguous, they are not helpful. They also lack a sound historical basis. Most pre-modern writers did not make a distinction between theology and spirituality, often viewing the two as integrated.⁴² Even in later texts, it seems absurd to assert that the way Christians think about God (theology) does not affect the way they practice Christianity in their daily lives (spirituality) and vice versa. In fact, the theme of *theosis* would seem to afford scholars a unique opportunity to break down the categories of theology and spirituality and reintegrate them. After all, deification is both a doctrinal issue that touches upon almost every major Christian belief (soteriology, the nature of God, theological anthropology, Christology, etc.) and an important aspect of Christian practice (contemplation, Hesychasm, the Jesus Prayer, union with God, etc.). If scholars of Christianity seek to reclaim or retrieve *theosis* in the west, then they must look at texts that are traditionally categorized as spirituality in addition to texts traditionally categorized as theology. Only then will a fuller and more historically reliable picture emerge.⁴³

⁴² Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Theosis," *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 583.

⁴³ Aristotle Papanikolaou writes "In some forms of Western Christian thought, theology did get separated from the mystical, both in the form of the theologian not being shaped by the experience of prayer—individual and communal—and also in the sense of theology losing sight of what Maximus clearly defines as the goal—knowledge as union with God." See Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Theosis," *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, 583. Scholars of *theosis* in the west may benefit from the more integrated approach taken by scholars in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Fortunately, scholars are already taking steps to remedy the artificial separation between theology and spirituality in the study of *theosis* in the west. One example is seen in Robert Puchniak's response to Gerald Bonner's essay on Augustine's conception of deification. Gerald Bonner argues that Augustine understands deification in terms of participation in God through the humanity of Christ. According to Bonner, deification in Augustine's works never alters the human being's status as a creature and only occurs after death.⁴⁴ From this, Bonner concludes that "the most obvious feature of Augustine's teaching [on deification] is, that so far as he is concerned, deification pertains to the realm of dogmatic rather than contemplative theology; it describes the consequence of the saving work of Christ rather than a mystical state to be enjoyed by a contemplative."⁴⁵ In "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," Robert Puchniak critiques Bonner's artificial distinction between dogmatic and contemplative theology, noting that Augustine would not have considered the two to be separate. He writes that, for Augustine, "all theology ought to be both dogmatic (insofar as it is sound in its articulation) and contemplative (insofar as it coaxes the deepening of faith)."⁴⁶ Bonner's distinction between dogmatic and contemplative theology limits the scope of deification in Augustine by confining it to the realm of theoretical speculation, rather than the end goal of Christian life, belief, and practice.

Another example of scholars of *theosis* challenging the artificial distinction between theology and spirituality, and its accompanying gender divide, can be found in scholarship on the influence of Pseudo-Dionysius on medieval theologians. In his masterful commentary, Paul Rorem traces the influence of each of Dionysius's works in the Middle Ages. He introduces two interpretations of Dionysian union that became popular in the thirteenth century: the intellectual

⁴⁴ Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 381.

⁴⁵ Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Conception of Deification," 382.

⁴⁶ Robert Puchniak, "Augustine's Conception of Deification, Revisited," *Theosis: Deification in Christian Theology*, 1:125.

Dionysian tradition that emerged from Albert the Great and Meister Eckhart and the affective Dionysian tradition which emerged from Thomas Gallus and Bonaventure. The intellectual tradition follows Dionysius's strict emphasis on the mind in the ascent to God, whereas the affective tradition maintained that love went further than the intellect in uniting the soul to God.⁴⁷ Rorem acknowledges that both the intellectual and affective Dionysian traditions exerted a large influence on the medieval mystical tradition.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, Rorem dismisses any Dionysian influence on the medieval women mystics. He writes that "dozens of authors, mostly women associated with the affective tradition of love for Jesus, showed little or no interest at all in the Dionysian corpus and no concern to reconcile *The Mystical Theology* with their experiences or their reflection."⁴⁹ It seems that Rorem dismisses any Dionysian influence on the medieval women mystics because they do not directly quote from the Dionysian corpus or use Dionysian terminology to interpret their religious experiences. For Rorem, the language used by medieval women is not the theological language of Dionysius and his interpreters (Thomas Gallus, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Meister Eckhart, etc.), but rather the vague language of spirituality—women write in the affective tradition of love of Jesus not the theological affective tradition of Dionysius.⁵⁰ But is it really that surprising that women don't use the same theological

⁴⁷ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 216–18.

⁴⁸ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 241.

⁴⁹ Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 225.

In a note, Rorem allows that Angela of Foligno and Julian of Norwich may have been influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius, citing the work of Paul Lachance and Andrew Louth, but he seems skeptical of these assertions and interprets these as isolated incidents. See Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 236, n 64. See Paul Lachance O.F.M., *The Spiritual Journey of the Blessed Angela of Foligno According to the Memorial of Frater A.* (Rome: Pontificium Athenaeum Antonianum, 1984), 336. Andrew Louth, "The Influence of Denys the Areopagite on Eastern and Western Spirituality in the Fourteenth Century," *Sobornost* 4 (1982): 190-191.

⁵⁰ It seems strange that Rorem does not see any correlation between the largely female affective tradition of love for Jesus with the Dionysian affective tradition in writers such as Thomas Gallus or Bonaventure, even though there appear to be many similarities. For example, emphasis on love in Gallus and in the women mystics seems, at least in part, to be inspired by the Song of Songs. Scholars have noted that Gallus links the Dionysian mental darkness with the Solomonic lovesick night, a motif also common in women's mystical literature. Paul Rorem,

language as their male counterparts given their exclusion from formal theological education? And knowing how many women mystics worked with male confessors and were indirectly theologically educated, why reduce their contribution to an amorphous love for Jesus?

Furthermore, a lack of direct engagement with the Dionysian corpus does not mean that medieval women did not learn about Dionysius or his ideas elsewhere, such as in sermons or in conversations with priests and spiritual advisors, as referenced above. Indeed, the scholarship of McGinn and Turner suggests that this may have been a possibility. McGinn notes that Thomas Gallus, a proponent of affective Dionysianism, had ties to the early Franciscans, including Anthony of Padua, who Francis had charged with the theological instruction of Franciscan clerics.⁵¹ Although it is admittedly speculative, it is possible that women such as Angela of Foligno could have been exposed to affective Dionysianism through their relationships with Franciscan clerics trained in the thought of Bonaventure and Thomas Gallus. Turner also suggests that indirect Dionysian influence was possible because his thought was pervasive in the theologies of the later Middle Ages. He writes that when the mystics use Dionysian ideas and terminology, they are “drawing from a common resource as we draw breath from the common air; and they no more notice, or feel the need to draw attention to, their theological debts than we do to the presence of oxygen in the atmosphere...[Dionysius] is less what you speak about than he is the air you breathe as you speak.”⁵² In fact, Turner identifies Marguerite Porete specifically as one of the late medieval

Pseudo-Dionysius, 218; Boyd Taylor Coolman, “The Medieval Affective Dionysian Tradition,” *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, 91; Travis Steven Dis, “Violent Lovesickness: Richard of St Victor, Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, and Angela of Foligno,” PhD diss., Harvard University, 2017. Gallus’s emphasis on the exclusion of knowledge at the highest stage of divine union also seems to parallel the death of reason in Marguerite Porete’s *Mirror of Simple Souls*. See Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 82, 249–249; Bernard McGinn, “Thomas Gallus and Dionysian Mysticism,” *Studies in Spirituality* 8 (1998): 81–96; Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 162; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir des simples âmes anéanties*, trans. Claude Louis-Combet, ed. Emilie Zum Brunn (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1991), 178 (LXXXVII).

⁵¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 78.

⁵² Denys Turner, “Dionysius and Some Late Medieval Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe,” *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, 121.

mystical authors who breathes this Dionysian air and incorporates his thought into her mystical theology without acknowledging the source. If Turner is correct that Marguerite was steeped in Dionysian theology, then it is possible that the beguine communities that she interacted with, and indeed other learned women had similar exposure to Dionysian thought. Indeed, McGinn and Turner have directly attributed Dionysian inspiration to multiple medieval women mystics including Angela of Foligno,⁵³ Hadewijch,⁵⁴ Mechthild of Magdeburg,⁵⁵ and Marguerite Porete.⁵⁶ This work is important because recognizing the existence of actual intellectual influences on these women mystics is the first step to taking them seriously as theologians rather than just spiritual authors actualizing their love for Jesus or recording their immediate experiences of the divine.

From *Theōsis* to *Unio Mystica*

The question of *theosis* in the west is also complicated by the fact that western Christian used a wide variety of language to describe their consciousness of the presence of God: contemplation/*theoria*, being one with God, deification,⁵⁷ tasting/touching God, being created in the image/likeness of God, and union with God.⁵⁸ However, if we define *theosis* broadly as deification/“becoming God” or participating/partaking of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4), then the closest corresponding category in the west is *unio mystica*, or mystical union. The language of union did not emerge until the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the writings of Pseudo-

⁵³ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 145.

⁵⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 203, 211.

⁵⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 230.

⁵⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 256–57; Denys Turner, “Dionysius and Some Late Medieval Mystical Theologians of Northern Europe,” *Re-Thinking Dionysius the Areopagite*, 132–34; Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 137–40.

⁵⁷ McGinn defines deification as “fundamentally rooted in the economy of salvation.” See Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, eds. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 405. While this is certainly true of many patristic understandings of deification, this definition seems to be a little too limiting.

⁵⁸ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” 405.

Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor became more popular and accessible in the west.⁵⁹ Pseudo-Dionysius is one of the few patristic authors to use the term mystical union and even defines *theosis* as “the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as is possible.”⁶⁰ Dionysius’s understanding of *theosis* as union with God may have influenced the western mystical understanding of *unio mystica*, but McGinn cautions against reducing the desire for union with God to an issue of reading old texts.⁶¹ The explosion of interest in the mystical life between the years 1200 and 1350 is part of a larger phenomenon that McGinn refers to as the new mysticism in which new forms of religious life abounded (the Cistercians, Victorines, beguines, mendicant orders, etc.) amid increasing urbanization, growing literacy rates, socioeconomic changes, and newfound interest in the *vita apostolica*.⁶²

The theological creativity of the new mysticism produced new ways of understanding union with God. McGinn identifies three models of union: *unitas spiritus*, the Trinitarian model, and the *unitas indistinctionis* or union of indistinction. While these three models are distinct, the models can coexist and overlap in many mystical texts. Angela, for example, uses all three of these models to describe union with God at various points in the *Memorial*, and I will provide further analysis of those models shortly. However, the primary way that most orthodox theologians in the west understood divine union was through the idea of *unitas spiritus*, a loving union of wills that, according to Bernard McGinn, “never involves any form of union of identity or indistinction with God.”⁶³ Theologians who advocated this form of union often used the Scripture passage: “But

⁵⁹ Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge, and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition,” *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 62.

⁶⁰ Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, 198 (EH 1.3, 376A).

⁶¹ Bernard McGinn, “Love, Knowledge, and Unio Mystica in the Western Christian Tradition,” *Mystical Union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 62.

⁶² Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 1–30.

⁶³ Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Gregory the Great through the 12th Century* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994), 213.

anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (1Cor. 6:17, NRSV). One of its most eloquent proponents was the twelfth century theologian Bernard of Clairvaux.⁶⁴ In his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, Bernard characterizes the spiritual marriage between Christ the Bridegroom and the soul as a *unitas spiritus*, writing that “if carnal marriage makes two one flesh (Gn. 2:24), why should not spiritual union make two one spirit (1Cor. 6:17)?”⁶⁵ For Bernard, *unitas spiritus* is achieved when deep mutual love makes God and the soul one spirit: “the human person and God, because they are not of the same substance of nature, cannot be said to be one thing; but by sure and absolute power they are said to be one spirit if they inhere in each other by the bond of love. This union is made not by the coherence of essences, but by the agreement of wills.”⁶⁶ Although the union of spirits allows for a union of wills, it does not allow for the soul and God to be one essence or identity. Bernard is adamant that God, the Creator, “is the cause, not the stuff of their being.”⁶⁷ The created nature of the human being and the uncreated nature of the divine remain distinct in *unitas spiritus*.

In the west, the Trinitarian model was first developed in the twelfth century by William of St. Thierry. William’s understanding of union with God mostly follows the *unitas spiritus* model,

⁶⁴ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” 406.

⁶⁵ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon on the Song of Songs,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987), 241 (Sermon 8.9).

Latin text: Nam si carnale matrimonium constituit duos in carne una, cur non magis spiritualis copula duos coniunget in uno spiritu?

Bernardus Claraeuallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Canicorum* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020)

<http://clt.brepolis.net.proxy.uchicago.edu/cds/pages/FullText.aspx?ctx=GBDFECFI>

⁶⁶ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon 71,” *On the Song of Songs*, Trans. Kilian Walsh (Spencer, MA: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 160. (71.7) Latin text: Quo contra homo et Deus, quia unius non sunt substantiae vel naturae, unum quidem dici non possunt; unus tamen spiritus certa et absoluta veritate dicuntur, si sibi glutino amoris inhaereant. Quam quidem unitatem non tam essentiarum cohaerentia facit, quam conniventia voluntatum.

Bernardus Claraeuallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Canicorum* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020), 40.

<http://clt.brepolis.net.proxy.uchicago.edu/cds/pages/FullText.aspx?ctx=BBDGAACC>

⁶⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, “Sermon on the Song of Songs,” *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, 226 (Sermon 4.4).

Latin text: Esse est ergo omnium quae facta sunt, ipse factor eorum, sed causale, non materiale.

Bernardus Claraeuallensis, *Sermones super Cantica Canicorum* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020)

<http://clt.brepolis.net.proxy.uchicago.edu/cds/pages/FullText.aspx?ctx=GBDFECFI>

in the sense that the soul becomes one spirit with God in a union of wills, but the union includes a sharing in the life of the Trinity through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁶⁸ Other theologians also understood union with God to involve a participation in the inner dynamism or life of the Trinity, including Angela of Foligno, Hadewijch, Meister Eckhart, John Ruusbroec, and Teresa of Avila.⁶⁹

By the thirteenth century, another form of union began to emerge, especially in vernacular literature. Known as the *unitas indistinctionis* (union of indistinction), this form of union asserted that an individual can “reach an interior state in which, at least on some level, there is no distinction, no difference, between God and the self—a union of identity deeper than the mystical uniting in love of two entities that maintain their separate substances.”⁷⁰ This form of union was considered daring and often met with suspicion by the ecclesiastical authorities because of the claim of ontological equality between God and the human soul, which threatened the separation of the created and uncreated orders. But McGinn notes two important caveats, which I believe are essential to bear in mind when reading Angela’s text: 1) Most mystics who spoke of indistinct union allowed that the union was indistinct on one level, but on another level maintained that some form of distinction remained between God and the soul. 2) Mystics often used more than one model to describe union with God, suggesting that “the mystery of the divine-human conjunction was too mysterious to be expressed in only one way.”⁷¹ These caveats are helpful because they remind us that the use of the language of indistinct union may denote the consciousness or experience of the mystic, rather than a theological or doctrinal statement about the equality of God and the soul.

⁶⁸ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” 412.

⁶⁹ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” 413–16.

⁷⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany (1300-1500)* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 56.

⁷¹ Bernard McGinn, “Mystical Union,” 413.

By the end of the thirteenth century, indistinct union began to be associated with the beguines and beghards,⁷² contributing to their condemnation at the Council of Vienne in the papal decrees *Cum de Quibusdam Mulieribus* and *Ad Nostrum*, both issued in 1312.⁷³ *Cum de Quibusdam Mulieribus* is a confusing document that seems to have prohibited the beguine way of life under any form, but also states that “of course, we do not intend in any way to forbid faithful women, whether they promise chastity or not, from living uprightly in their hospices, wishing to lead a life of penance and serving the Lord.”⁷⁴ The confusion led to the uneven implementation of the decree. Many beguine communities were disbanded, although some court beguinages survived into the sixteenth century.⁷⁵ The decree *Ad Nostrum* condemned the beguines and beghards for various autotheist and antinomian errors, including the idea that the soul can become one with God to the point where it shares in the divine prerogatives, including freedom from the moral law.⁷⁶ This was known as the *libertas spiritus* or Free Spirit heresy because, according to *Ad Nostrum*, they taught that “where the spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Cor. 3:17).⁷⁷ Robert Lerner has demonstrated that the heretics of the Free Spirit, although not completely fabricated, were condemned “before very many of them can be proved to have existed.”⁷⁸ He cites a great fear of

⁷² For more information on the beguines, see Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 1995); *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*, Ed. Bernard McGinn, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1994).

⁷³ “The Council of Vienne,” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman P. Tanner, (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 1:383–384 (Decree 28).

⁷⁴ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 133.

⁷⁵ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 136.

⁷⁶ See Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany*, 56; Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 1; “The Council of Vienne,” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 383 (Decree 28).

⁷⁷ “The Council of Vienne,” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 383 (Decree 28). Latin text: *Ubi spiritus Dominis, ibi libertas*.

⁷⁸ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 61.

antinomianism in the later Middle Ages that was “unjustified by actual circumstances.”⁷⁹ There was even less reason to attribute the Free Spirit heresy to the beguines: although *Ad Nostrum* specifically mentions the beguines and beghards in Germany in connection with the Free Spirit heresy,⁸⁰ Lerner argues that it is impossible to name a single Free Spirit heretic in Germany until *after* the Council of Vienne.⁸¹ Furthermore, before *Ad Nostrum* was written in 1312, only two charges of antinomianism were brought against the beguines or beghards and both were inconclusive.⁸²

One of the two charges of antinomianism made against the beguines was brought against Marguerite Porete (c. 1250-1310), a French beguine mystic known for her dialogue *The Mirror of Simple Souls*. Lerner argues that Marguerite’s text was taken out of context because the inquisitors only had access to the excerpts extracted by the inquisitor William of Paris.⁸³ For example, one statement extracted was: “Such a Soul neither desires nor despises poverty nor tribulation, neither mass nor sermon, neither fast nor prayer, and gives to Nature all that is necessary, without remorse of conscience.”⁸⁴ While that may sound like antinomianism, Marguerite provides an important qualification almost immediately afterward, which was not included by the inquisitor: “But such Nature is so well ordered...that Nature demands nothing which is prohibited.”⁸⁵ Therefore, Marguerite does not advocate antinomianism, or the belief that the soul was so perfected and united to God that it is free of the moral law. And yet the only source for the antinomian condemnations made in *Ad Nostrum* that scholars have been able to identify appears to be the list of fifteen tenets

⁷⁹ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 61.

⁸⁰ “The Council of Vienne,” *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, 383 (Decree 28).

⁸¹ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 68.

⁸² Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 78.

⁸³ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 75.

⁸⁴ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky, (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 87.

⁸⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 87.

that were extracted from Marguerite Porete's *The Mirror of Simple Souls* and taken out of context.⁸⁶

As the example of Marguerite Porete illustrates, it is important to keep in mind that concerns over antinomianism were exaggerated and vernacular theologians who describe the *unitas indistinctionis* are not necessarily related to the Free Spirit heresy. For example, Angela describes a form of indistinct union in the seventh supplementary step, but she opposed antinomianism and devoted several passages in her *Instructions* to denouncing the heresy of the Free Spirit.⁸⁷ In fact, many thirteenth century vernacular theologians articulated a notion of indistinct union without advocating antinomianism, including Hadewijch of Brabant, Marguerite Porete (on Lerner's reading), and Jacopone da Todi. For those interested in these vernacular theologians or those who wish to compare thirteenth-century vernacular understandings of indistinct union, I include a detailed discussion of the above theologians in chapter seven.

Angela and Theōsis

Angela's understanding of *theosis* is rooted in her theology of the incarnation and the Trinity. She understands the hypostatic union as the profound interpenetration of the human and divine natures in the person of Christ. The union between the soul and God also functions hypostatically for Angela: in the darkness of the seventh supplementary step, the soul is so closely united to God that their identities interpenetrate. Angela predominantly uses the Trinitarian and *unio indistinctionis* models to describe her union with God. However, despite her daring language, Angela does not see herself as completely indistinct from God. On one level, Angela remains herself—a creature dependent on God—even while on another level she is united hypostatically to Christ and even to the Trinity. Angela always retains her own consciousness and distinctness

⁸⁶ Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages*, 82.

⁸⁷ *CW*, 224, 235, 242. *IL*, 420, 458, 472.

even while describing a union so close that it seems virtually indistinct. Ultimately, I argue that Angela maintains her distinctness precisely because her understanding of divine union is based on the hypostatic union and Trinitarian model. According to the Chalcedonian definition, the human and divine natures of Christ are united but remain distinct, without confusion or mixture.⁸⁸ Similarly, Angela sees herself as united hypostatically to Christ in both his humanity and divinity, but in a way that preserves her distinctness and humanity. This may be why Angela's theology of divine union, unlike that of other mystics of the period such as her contemporary Marguerite Porete, does not contain the concept of annihilation of the self or the soul. If the soul is annihilated or returned to a pre-created state, then the distinction between God and the soul is also destroyed and Angela would have no path to union with the God-man. Angela's understanding of union begins with the humanity of Christ and the fusion of her suffering body with his, as I argue in chapter four. Her humanity is therefore essential to achieving the higher stages of union. Annihilating or divesting herself of createdness would simply not make sense in Angela's understanding of divine union.

In the seventh supplementary step, we see a shift towards a Trinitarian model of divine union. In the previous steps, Angela mainly focuses on describing her union with Christ and his humanity. But in the final step of the *Memorial*, there is a sense that Angela moves from a predominantly Christological union to a Trinitarian union. A parallel movement occurs between the first nineteen stages of the *Memorial* and the first supplementary step: Angela's growing union with Christ's suffering in the first nineteen steps leads her to the Trinitarian indwelling described on the journey to Assisi in the first supplementary step. Diane Tomkinson has argued that these parallel movements indicate that Angela's spiritual experience is less of an ascent or ladder and

⁸⁸ "The Definition of Chalcedon," in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 36.

more of a spiral.⁸⁹ Union with Christ brings her to union with the Trinity in a cyclical or spiral movement that brings her closer and closer to the heart of the divine abyss. Angela's experience of Trinitarian indwelling begins on her pilgrimage to Assisi in the first supplementary step, when she is told that the Trinity will enter into her. Although Angela does not experience the fullness of Trinitarian communion until the seventh supplementary step, her reflection on this early encounter demonstrates her understanding of the Trinity as a communion of persons who exist in a relationship of mutuality and equality. In the seventh supplementary step, it is Angela who enters into the Trinity and becomes part of its inner life and dynamism, thus completing the mutual indwelling that started on the road to Assisi. Her union with the Trinity exemplifies the mutuality and equality of the divine persons, almost to the point where she seems to erase the distinction between human and divine. However, although at times she emphasizes her equality with the divine persons, Angela never loses her identity. Angela's understanding of divine union mirrors her understanding of the Trinitarian union: just as the three persons are both wholly distinct and wholly united, Angela maintains her distinct human identity while remaining profoundly united to the Trinity.

Another feature of Angela's theology of divine union is that she exerts almost no control over her experiences. Unlike other mystical itineraries, such as that written by Beatrice of Nazareth or Marguerite Porete, Angela's *Memorial* is curiously inimitable. Other than meditating on Christ's passion, Angela offers no program of spiritual development. Although Brother A. divides her spiritual journey into steps, Angela's experiences are so unique to her that it reads more like an auto-hagiography than a mystical itinerary. Angela's experiences are not earned or even

⁸⁹ See Diane V. Tomkinson, "'In the midst of the Trinity:' Angela of Foligno's Trinitarian Theology of Communion," PhD diss., Fordham University, 2004, 211; Diane V. Tomkinson, "Angela of Foligno's Spiral Pattern of Prayer," *Franciscans at Prayer* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 193–219.

cultivated, but rather given to her by God through grace. She does not even control the frequency or duration of her experiences. In the seventh supplementary step, Angela writes that “God is the one who leads me and elevates me to that state. I do not go to it on my own, for by myself I would not know how to want, desire, or seek it.”⁹⁰ Despite these idiosyncrasies, Angela believed that the spiritual gifts that God had given her could also be given to others, as I will discuss later when I examine the graces that God gives to Angela’s spiritual sons in a vision from the *Instructions*.

The seventh supplementary step begins with a new kind of encounter with God, one in which Angela sees the light, beauty, and fullness of God in and with darkness.⁹¹ As I explained in chapter three, the language of darkness is reminiscent of Pseudo-Dionysius’s apophatic understanding of the darkness of God.⁹² Like Dionysius, Angela uses the divine darkness to evoke the utter transcendence of God. The first indication that Angela is being drawn into a profound union with God comes when she states, “I did not see love there. I then lost the love which was mine and was made nonlove.”⁹³ Scripture asserts that God is love (1 John 4:8), but God’s transcendence is such that he exceeds any notion that human beings may have of love. By losing her own love and becoming non-love, Angela is drawn beyond herself into God’s love, which becomes non-love because it transcends any understanding she has of love. Angela herself says she did not see love there, indicating that the divine love is so transcendent that it becomes unrecognizable to her. She also describes how the soul begins to see as God sees. She writes that the soul “sees nothing and everything at once,” an assertion she makes at least three times.⁹⁴ The

⁹⁰ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176.

⁹¹ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152.

⁹² See p. 158.

⁹³ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152. Latin text: Et non videbam ibi amorem; et tunc ego perdiidi illum amorem quem portabam, et effecta sum non amor.

⁹⁴ *CW*, 203, 204, 205. *IL*, 356, 358, 362. *M*, 154, 156.

paradox of seeing nothing and everything at the same time suggests that Angela is seeing, not with her own eyes, but with God's eyes.

Angela then describes how God draws her to himself ineffably and she seems to be “standing or lying in the midst of the Trinity, and that is what I see with such darkness.”⁹⁵ Here, Angela uses the Trinitarian model discussed above. She describes being taken up into the heart of the Trinitarian union, where she is unable to remember anything human or anything that has form, suggesting that she is within the formlessness of the divine. She sees all and she sees nothing.⁹⁶ In this deep union with the Trinity, Angela surpasses human sight and begins to take on the divine vision. As the experience withdraws, but simultaneously stays with her, Angela states that she sees the God-man, who tells her “You are I and I am you.”⁹⁷ Angela suggests that she is so deeply united to the Trinity and to Christ that their identities become fused. But Angela also describes “those eyes and that face so gracious and attractive” as Christ leans to embrace her.⁹⁸ The fact that she describes Christ embracing her suggests that, even as their identities are fused at one level, she and the God-man remain distinct.

In this passage, Angela describes the darkness in Christ's eyes and face, which is the same darkness that she sees within the Trinity. I have discussed this vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes in the previous chapter because it illustrates the profound interpenetration of the human and the divine natures in the person of Christ. The image of the embrace suggests that Christ and Angela enjoy the same kind of interpenetrating union. In their mutual embrace, Angela and Christ merge and their identities become interpenetrated. Angela no longer gazes at the darkness in

⁹⁵ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 360. *M*, 156. Latin text: Et in illa Trinitate quam video cum tanta tenebra videtur mihi stare et iacere in medio.

⁹⁶ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 156.

⁹⁷ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 158. Latin text: Tu es ego et ego sum tu.

⁹⁸ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 158. Latin text: Et video illos oculos et illam faciem tantum placibilem et cum tanta aptitudine, ut amplexetur me.

Christ's eyes, but sees the divine darkness *through* Christ's eyes. Angela sees the darkness of the Trinity as Christ does—she witnesses the divine life from within its very center. Hadewijch of Brabant describes a similar form of indistinct union in her seventh vision. During Mass, Christ came to her as a beautiful man with a glorious face. After giving her communion, Christ embraced her and she dissolved into him: “I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to nought and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside me, and I could not longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference.”⁹⁹

One might understandably think now that the vision of the darkness of God and the indistinct union that Angela describes with the Trinity and with Christ are the height of the spiritual life. But astonishingly, Angela reports that she is given the grace of surpassing even the vision of God in darkness. Angela states once again that she is in the midst of the Trinity, but this time she receives even greater gifts. Instead of seeing God in and with darkness, Angela encounters him as an “extremely deep abyss.”¹⁰⁰ From this point on Angela no longer talks about seeing God in and with darkness; “abyss” becomes her preferred metaphor for the absolute transcendence of God in the *Instructions*, where she even uses it as a verb.¹⁰¹ Immersed in the abyss of God, Angela experiences a portion of the divine transcendence. She is drawn out of everything she had previous experienced, including the life and humanity of Christ, his companionship with the Father, the poverty, suffering, and contempt of the passion, the cross as bed to rest on, and the vision of God in darkness. Angela has transcended these previous experiences and states and can no longer find anything in them: “For in the cross of Christ in which I used to take such delight, so as to make it

⁹⁹ Hadewijch, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, trans. Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 281.

¹⁰⁰ *CW*, 211. *IL*, 374. *M*, 166. Latin text: *illud profundissimum abyssum*.

¹⁰¹ *CW*, 249. *IL*, 500. Latin text: *Ita quod istos videtur totaliter in se transsubstantiasse et inabyssasse*.

my place of rest and my bed, I find nothing; in the poverty of the Son of God, I find nothing; and in everything that could be named, I find nothing.”¹⁰²

One with a God who transcends all things, Angela is drawn out of her vision of the divine darkness and is given a greater awareness of the “abysmal profundity” of God.¹⁰³ This state is so transcendent that Angela cannot say anything about it. Although Angela frequently describes her experiences as ineffable and struggles to articulate her visions, her experience of the abyss of God is inexpressible on an even higher level. After repeating several times that no words can be found for her experience, and that no mind can comprehend or even conceive of the divine abyss, Angela states categorically, “for there is nothing which can explain God,” not once but *three times*.¹⁰⁴ Angela’s use of the term abyss is significant because it was an image that was specifically used by thirteenth century women mystics to describe the union of indistinction. Women mystics of the thirteenth century were the first to use the verse “abyss calls out to abyss” or *abyssus abyssum invocat* (Psalm 41:8) to describe the mutual abyss of God and the soul that fuse together in a union without difference.¹⁰⁵ The fact that abyss became Angela’s preferred image of her union with the transcendent God could indicate that she was influenced by this strain of mysticism. But even as she describes the deification of the soul and the taking on of divine qualities and attributes in the highest stages of union, Angela never goes as far as to totally erase all distinction between herself and God.

At one point in the seventh supplementary step, Angela seems to gain access to God’s hidden knowledge. One with the transcendent divine essence, she begins to comprehend divine

¹⁰² *CW*, 212. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Quia in cruce in qua tantum delectabar quod erat mea repausatio et meus lectus nihil invenio, in paupertate Filii Dei nihil invenio, et in omnibus quae nominari possunt nihil invenio.

¹⁰³ *CW*, 213. *IL*, 384. *M*, 172. Latin text: profundissimo abysso

¹⁰⁴ *CW*, 213. *IL*, 386. *M*, 172. Latin text: Deus non potest per aliquid commendari.

¹⁰⁵ Bernard McGinn, “The Abyss of Love: The Language of Mystical Union,” *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God: Studies in Honor of Jean Leclercq* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 101, 103.

mysteries. She writes that “because my soul is often elevated into the secret levels of God and sees the divine secrets, I am able to understand how the Scriptures were written; how they are made easy and difficult; how they seem to say something and contradict it...I see all this from above.”

¹⁰⁶ Angela understands Scripture, not from her vantage point as a human being, but from the vantage point of God, “from above.” But her newfound knowledge is not limited to Scripture. Angela states, “I understand and possess the complete truth that is in heaven and hell, in the entire world, and every place, in all things, in every enjoyment in heaven and in every creature. And I see all this so truly and certainly that no one could convince me otherwise.”¹⁰⁷ Such complete knowledge of all things can only be found in God himself. Such complete knowledge of all things can only be found in God himself. The union Angela describes here seems to go beyond the loving union of wills of the *unitas spiritus*, as she appears to articulate a union without distinction in which she can have access to divine secrets and knowledge. But even here, Angela is still a creature, dependent on God. She states, “I see myself as alone with God, totally cleansed, totally sanctified, totally true, totally upright, totally certain, totally celestial in him.”¹⁰⁸ And again: “My soul is elevated by God and I hold dominion over and comprehend the whole world. It seems, then, as if I am no longer on earth but in heaven, in God.”¹⁰⁹ Angela is no longer her sinful self, but her celestial self,¹¹⁰ purified and holding dominion over the world in and with God. The celestial self

¹⁰⁶ *CW*, 214. *IL*, 386. *M*, 174. Latin text: Et quia anima mea saepe levatur in divina secreta et videt secreta Dei, intelligo illud quo facta est Scriptura divina; illud quo facta est difficilis et facilis; illud quo videtur dicere et contradicere...Et sto desuper.

¹⁰⁷ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176. Latin text: Et in illo manifestare Dei intelligo et habeo totam veritatem quae est in caelo et in inferno et in toto mundo et in omni loco et in omni re, et totum delectamentum quod est in caelo et in omnia creatura, cum tanta veritate et certitudine, quod nullo modo possem credere alii toti mundo.

¹⁰⁸ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 390. *M*, 176. Latin text: Et video me solam cum Deo, totam mundam, totam sanctificatam, totam veram, totam rectam, totam certificatam, et totam caelestem in eo.

¹⁰⁹ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176. Latin text: Subito a Deo levatur anima et dominor et comprehendo totum mundum, et non videtur mihi quod stem in terra, sed stem in caelo in Deo.

¹¹⁰ The idea of a celestial self, or exemplary self is echoed in Hadewijch of Antwerp’s theology. I will explore this further on p. 299.

is possibly the closest Angela comes to describing a pre-created state, but even here she is not describing a union of total indistinction because she still relies on God to cleanse and purify her (indeed, she describes a self that is clearly not God because it must be cleansed and purified).

So far, Angela has mainly spoken about how she was elevated into God or how she saw herself standing in the midst of the Trinity. But increasingly, she emphasizes the mutuality of their interpenetration—just as Angela is taken up into the heart of the Trinitarian union, the divine takes up residence in her soul. For example, Angela writes that “there is in my soul a chamber in which no joy, sadness, or enjoyment of any virtue, or delight over anything that can be named, enters. This is where the All Good...resides.¹¹¹ McGinn notes how similar the “chamber” that Angela describes is to Meister Eckhart’s “little castle” or “little spark,” which characterizes the divine ground of the soul.¹¹² The chamber is a mutual ground of transcendence, a shared abyss. Just as the divine ultimately transcends all emotions,¹¹³ so does Angela retain a chamber in her soul that is not moved by joy or sorrow.

God confirms their mutual indwelling and interpenetration when he says to her: “In you rests the entire Trinity; indeed, the complete truth rests in you, so that you hold me and I hold you.”¹¹⁴ Earlier in the seventh supplementary step, Angela describes herself as lying down or

¹¹¹ *CW*, 214. *IL*, 388. *M*, 174. Latin text: Tamen intus in anima mea est una camera in qua non ingreditur aliqua laetitia nec tristitia nec delectatio alicuius omnino virtutis nec delectatio alicuius rei quae nominari posset, sed est ibi illud omne bonum quod non est aliud bonum, vel illud ita omne bonum quod non est aliud bonum. Et in illo manifestare Dei.

¹¹² Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 149. Angela’s notion of a chamber in the soul where the divine dwells is also reminiscent of Teresa of Avila’s glass castle in *The Interior Castle*. We know that Angela’s *Liber* was widely read in sixteenth century Spain, so it is possible that Teresa may have (in part) been influenced by Angela. See *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 141.

¹¹³ If we recall from the section on divine passibility in chapter five, the traditional understanding of God is that he is impassible and immutable, meaning he cannot change or suffer. Since emotion was considered both a change and a passion, it was generally held that God in his pure essence could not experience emotions. As we have seen in Angela’s work, she allows for the possibility of the divine fully experiencing human emotion through the person of Christ while simultaneously transcending all emotions.

¹¹⁴ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 390. *M*, 176. Latin text: In te pausat tota Trinitas, tota veritas, ita quod tu tenes me et ego teneo te.

resting in the Trinity, but God reminds her that the Trinity also rests in her. Their identities are so merged in the *unitas indistinctionis* that the divinized Angela is able to hold the Trinity as the Trinity holds her. The mutuality and equality she describes between herself and God is reminiscent of the mutuality and equality of the three divine persons of the Trinity. Their mutual penetration is also emphasized as Angela begins to describe her soul in the same terms she uses for God. On the feast of Candlemas, which celebrates the purification of Mary and the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, Angela's soul experiences its own presentation. She writes that her soul "saw itself so noble and elevated that, henceforth, I cannot conceive or even imagine that my soul or even the souls in paradise could be or are endowed with such nobility. My soul then could not comprehend itself."¹¹⁵ As I have discussed previously, Angela frequently asserts that God is ineffable and cannot be conceived by the mind. But in this vision, it is her soul that becomes ineffable and that cannot be comprehended. Her soul takes on a nobility so great that it must be divine, making her soul an incomprehensible abyss like the abyss of God. But even here Angela preserves her own identity—it is her own soul that is presented.

Angela articulates a lofty vision of divine union in the seventh supplementary step. Is the deifying union that she describes meant to be imitated? The text claims to be a mystical itinerary, but quickly turns into an autohagiography, as I demonstrate in chapter three. The steps are so personal and specific that it seems impossible for anyone to replicate her experiences. And images such as Angela holding dominion with God over the whole world seem to inspire awe more than imitation.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Angela firmly believes that the *unitas indistinctionis* is open to other believers. Towards the end of the *Memorial*, Angela asks God where the faithful are. He responds,

¹¹⁵ *CW*, 216. *IL*, 394. *M*, 178. Latin text: Et vidit anima semetipsam tantae nobilitatis et altitudinis, quod nunquam de certero potueram cogitare vel etiam intelligere quod anima mea vel etiam animae quae sunt in paradiso possent esse vel essent tantae nobilitatis. Et anima mea non potuit tunc comprehendere semetipsam.

¹¹⁶ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176.

saying “Wherever I am, the faithful are also with me.” Angela perceives that this is true and says she “discovered that I was everywhere he was.”¹¹⁷ When Angela perceives herself as everywhere that God is, she seems to be sharing in the divine omnipresence. However, she believes that all the faithful are also with God in this way. Brother A. insists that she is talking about the saints,¹¹⁸ but even so, it seems Angela believed the union of indistinction could be achieved by at least some the faithful. This is confirmed in the *Instructions* by a vision in which her spiritual sons gather before Christ crucified. One by one, Christ holds them, embraces them, and presses them into his side.¹¹⁹ She describes three degrees of purification that Christ grants to her spiritual sons: the first is a general purification of every fault. The second is the grace and strength to avoid sin easily, which is only granted to a few. Angela refuses to speak of the third. When the scribe pressed her repeatedly, Angela finally tells him, “What do you want me to say? My sons seem to be so transformed in God that it is as if I see nothing but God in them, in both his glorified and suffering state, as if God had totally transubstantiated and absorbed them into the unfathomable depths of his life.¹²⁰ While the second and third degree of purification are only granted to a few, it is clear that Angela believed that at least some of her spiritual sons would achieve the same indistinct union with God that she enjoyed. In the third purification, Angela only sees God in them because they have become transubstantiated and absorbed (*inabyssasse*) into the abyss of God. The combination of transubstantiation and inabyssation seems almost paradoxical: transubstantiation involves changing into another substance, while inabyssation implies an emptying of all substance

¹¹⁷ *CW*, 217. *IL*, 396. *M*, 180. Latin text: Ubi cumque sum ego sunt fideles mei mecum. Et ego ipsa videbam ita esse, et clarissime inveniebam me ubi cumque ipse erat.

¹¹⁸ *CW*, 217. *IL*, 396. *M*, 180.

¹¹⁹ *CW*, 248-249. *IL*, 498-500.

¹²⁰ *CW*, 249. *IL*, 500. Latin text: Quid vis ut dicam? Ipsi videntur transformati in Deum sic quod quasi nihil in eis aliud video quam Deum, nunc gloriosum nunc passionatum, ita quod istos videtur totaliter in se transsubstantiasse et inabyssasse.

into nothingness. But it seems to follow the basic structure of Angela's mystical journey: her spiritual sons are first transubstantiated into Christ's humanity in its suffering and glorified state. Once fused to the humanity of Christ, her sons are then inabysated and become united to the transcendent nothingness of God.

In the seventh supplementary step, there is a startling mutuality and interpenetration in Angela's experience of divine union. Angela's soul is deified when she is drawn up into the heart of the Trinity and God makes human passibility—the poverty, suffering, and contempt of the cross—his own while nevertheless retaining his impassibility. Because Angela models her concept of divine union on Christ's hypostatic union and Trinitarian union, there is a profound interpenetration of human and divine that nevertheless preserves the distinctness and integrity of both parties but also allows a mutuality and sharing of attributes. In the hypostatic union, the human and divine natures of Christ are united but remain distinct, without confusion or mixture. Similarly, in traditional Trinitarian theology, the three persons of the Trinity are conceived of as wholly united yet wholly distinct. Angela models her own understanding of *theosis* on the Christological and Trinitarian principle of unity in distinction, preserving the radical notion of the *unitas indistinctionis*, while remaining within the boundaries of orthodoxy by stressing the distinct identities of creature and Creator. Similarly, Angela believes that God truly experiences human suffering while retaining his impassibility. Her single-subject Christology and understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* (or sharing of attributes) allows human passibility to apply to the person of the Word (and therefore to all the persons of the Trinity). In this sense, God paradoxically experiences human suffering without altering the fundamental impassibility of his nature. Divine passibility and *theosis* are thus the theological consequences of Angela's deeply Christological and Trinitarian understanding of divine union.

CHAPTER 7: Reading Angela in Context: Vernacular Mystical Theology

As I mentioned previously,¹ political, economic, and educational developments in the thirteenth century contributed to a blossoming of vernacular mystical theology throughout Europe. The growth of the cities created a higher literacy rate among the laity, and the church soon found itself having to meet the needs of a rapidly changing, urbanizing society. As laypeople were drawn towards spirituality, there was an increased emphasis on the *vita apostolica*, or life of the apostles, characterized by an emphasis on penance, poverty, and preaching.² Lay people, especially women, were also increasingly drawn to unregulated forms of religious life, which allowed them to engage in active service while living and praying in community with other women.³ This was in part

¹ See p. 254.

² Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 6.

³ Unregulated forms of religious life had been practiced by women for centuries and was not unique to the thirteenth century. Sarah Foot refers to early medieval women who lived unregulated forms of religious life both communally and individually as “secular vowesses.” See Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate,

because women's monasteries mostly admitted noble and aristocratic women, but also because the changing spiritual emphasis on the *vita apostolica* required more flexible forms of life than the traditional cloister.⁴ Scholars such as Alison More have demonstrated that significant numbers of women participated in forms of unregulated religious life that sought to respond to the social needs of their time, such as working among the poor and lepers.⁵ These women were neither wholly 'lay' nor canonically/legally 'religious,' but occupied an undefined middle ground between the two. In northern Europe, these women began to be referred to as beguines. The term "beguine" was originally a term of derision, likely derived from the old-French *béguer*, to stammer (similar to the term lollard, which was also a term of derision),⁶ but gradually gained respectability. More notes that the beguines and other women who lived unregulated religious lives were known by many names: "in France they were known as '*papelardae*'; in Lombardy, '*humiliatae*;' '*bizoke*' (*bizzoche*) in other parts of Italy; and '*coquennunne*' in the German lands," as well as penitents, anchorites, or recluses, more generally.⁷ They were also referred to by supporters as *mulieres religiosae, religiosae feminae, sanctae virgines, mulieres sanctae, virgines continentes*.⁸

In the thirteenth century, the beguines were perhaps the most successful group of unregulated women religious, especially in the urban centers of northern Europe. What made Beguine life so popular was its flexibility: women did not take formal vows, they could leave at any time, and they were not cloistered, meaning they had the freedom to pursue relationships

2000). However, it is unclear if these secular vowesses are related to the beguines or other late medieval women who chose to live unregulated religious lives.

⁴ Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200-1600* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 2.

⁵ Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 17. See also Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 35.

⁶ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 36.

⁷ Alison More, 5-6.

Romana Guarnieri also posits a connection between the beguines in northern Europe and the *bizzoche* and *pinzochere* in Italy. See Romana Guarnieri, *Donne e chiesa tra mistica e istituzioni* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 47-61.

⁸ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 36.

outside of their communities and to support themselves through work.⁹ Beguines often worked in the textile industry or were employed as teachers and nurses). Miller describes beguine life as remarkably porous—they not only drew royal patrons, bourgeois supporters, and clerical visitors, but also allowed residents to nurture relationships with family, friends, and work associates outside of their community.¹⁰ The ability to maintain ties with the world due and the lack of clausturation made beguine life a popular option for many urban women who were unable or did not wish to join a monastery. Most communities were small and informal, but the larger court *beginages* numbered up to two thousand women at their height.¹¹ Furthermore, scholars have determined that large populations of women in northern Europe became beguines. For example, in some cities in the Low Countries, beguines accounted for up to 7.7% of the population.¹² In other parts of Europe, women also pursued unregulated forms of religious life with equal enthusiasm. For example, while it is harder to deduce the exact number of women associated with unregulated religious life in thirteenth century Italy, Daniel Borstein states that a minimum of 10% of women in Città di Castello pursued some form of religious life, whether institutional (monasteries or religious houses) or unregulated (alone or in groups, as anchoresses or in active service to the world).¹³

How did the beguines fall into disrepute? While there were many reasons for clerical suspicion and eventually the condemnation of the beguines—too many to be surveyed here¹⁴—Barbara Newman suggests an answer to the question that may help explain why Angela escaped

⁹ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 37. Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 9, 76–86.

¹⁰ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 37.

¹¹ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 35, 50.

¹² Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 60.

¹³ Daniel Bornstein, “Women and Religion in Late Medieval Italy: History and Historiography,” *Women and Religion in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. Daniel Borstein and Roberto Rusconi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁴ More comprehensive accounts are provided by Walter Simons (*Cities of Ladies*, 118-137) and Tanya Stabler Miller (*The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 126-144) and Robert Lerner (*Heresy of the Free Spirit*, 78–84.). I also discuss the beguine’s alleged association with antinomianism on p. 254.

some of the criticism leveled at her female contemporaries. Critical of views that interpret the eroticism of the medieval women mystics as “spontaneous manifestation of female desire,” Newman locates their writings in a historical, literary, and theological context. She argues that the beguines of the thirteenth century invented a new kind of literature that she calls *la mystique courtoise*, which she defines as a “hybrid of court and cloister, of bridal mysticism and *fine amour*.”¹⁵ Newman understands *mystique courtoise* as an innovative form of literature that merges monastic discourse on love with the themes and conventions of secular, courtly love. The definition of courtly love is a subject of intense scholarly debate—it is a difficult concept to define because love is depicted in many, often contradictory ways. Joachim Bumke believes that the one common characteristic is the “specifically courtly character of love, the fact that it is set within a framework of the poetic conception of courtly society.”¹⁶ Because the genre itself was flexible and encouraged innovation, it is not surprising that the beguines creatively adapted aspects of courtly love and *fine amour* to express their intense desire for God. However, not all responded to this new form of literature positively. Newman argues that *mystique courtoise* defied the mainstream view that love of God was incompatible with *fine amour*.¹⁷ This could partly explain why Angela’s *Memorial* was not subject to the same level of condemnation as Marguerite Porete’s text—the *Memorial* does not have any discernible influences from courtly love literature and therefore may have been considered less problematic.

When Newman suggests that mixing the secular and religious spheres contributed to clerical suspicion of the beguines, she also complicates her argument. She notes that some

¹⁵ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 138.

¹⁶ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages*, trans. Thomas Dunlap (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 361.

¹⁷ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 140.

thirteenth century authors (theologians and troubadours alike) attempted to bridge secular and religious desire, such as the Dominican friar Gérard of Liège, who interwove biblical and theological sources (Augustine, Bernard, Song of Songs) with vernacular love lyrics.¹⁸ More recent scholarship has also suggested that the boundaries between the secular and religious spheres were likely more porous than previously thought. For example, Brigitte Saouma and Gianluca Valenti have explored the ways in which Latin theology and liturgy influenced the work of the troubadours.¹⁹ However, it is worth noting that these two scholarly works deal with the influence of religious texts on secular literature. Even if mixing of religious and courtly themes was commonplace in the secular literature of the troubadours, that does not mean that it was equally unproblematic in religious literature. Indeed, the ecclesiastical condemnation of Andreas Capellanus's book *The Art of Courtly Love* in 1277 seems to indicate that the church did not approve of the mixture of courtly love and religious discourse, even if the intention was to denounce courtly love.²⁰

There is also a question of the degree to which religious and secular love are merged. While male theologians made some movements towards integrating the two loves (i.e., Richard of St. Victor used “*caritas*” to describe both religious and secular love),²¹ the beguines seem to blur the boundaries more explicitly. The brazenness with which they speak of God as *minne* or *fine amour*, the explicit eroticism of their writings, the courtly elitism of their spirituality—combined with the

¹⁸ Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 140.

¹⁹ Brigitte Saouma, *Amour sacré, fin'amor : Bernard de Clairvaux et les troubadours* (Leuven: Peeters, 2016); Valenti, Gianluca, *La liturgia del “trobar:” Assimilazione e riuso di elementi del rito cristiano nelle canzoni occitane medievali* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014).

²⁰ Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love* (New York: T & T Clark, 2010), 85.

The Art of Courtly Love was written by Andreas Capellanus late in the twelfth century. The book, written in Latin, gives Andreas' lengthy account of the practice of love as well as his rather brief refutation of such practice in the name of a higher and spiritualized form of love.

²¹ Hugh, Feiss et al., *On Love: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St Victor*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 263, Footnote 2.

fact that they were women writing works of theology—were all factors that likely made them vulnerable to their critics.²² However, beyond the realm of the written word, it is important to note that the lifestyle of the beguines also combined the secular and religious spheres in ways that troubled their critics. I already discussed that the beguines lived unregulated religious lives that did not have legal or canonical status. Straddling the line between the secular and the religious, the beguines were neither. They took no formal vows, which meant that their state in life was reversible—they could enter for a time and then go back to their ordinary lives, further blurring religious and secular boundaries. Their lack of claustration led to concerns over chastity.²³ Their desire to mix the active and contemplative lives led them both to desire to withdraw from the world and at the same time to be involved in it.²⁴ The ambivalent nature of beguine life may have heightened anxieties already present among the clergy.

Another question also arises about the relationship between the beguines of northern Europe and other lay women who sought to live unregulated religious lives in other parts of Europe. Bernard McGinn notes that the religious renewal of the thirteenth century saw widespread experimentation with different forms of religious life, rooted in the *vita apostolica*. In particular, he links the early beguine movement in Lotharingia with the nascent Franciscan movement in Umbria.²⁵ McGinn also suggests looking at these early movements from a “synoptic point of view:” when viewed together, they demonstrate a “surprising inner unity...not only in terms of common spiritual values, but also with regard to gender dynamics.²⁶” The early beguine and

²² Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 135, 138, 142.

²³ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 123. We also see a concern about sexual impropriety in Angela’s *Memorial*. The fifth supplementary step had to be recorded by a young boy because the Brother A. was prevented from meeting with Angela due to the concerns of his superiors (*CW*, 179).

²⁴ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 61–62.

²⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 31.

²⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 31.

Franciscan movements both started as lay movements that attracted both men and women, who often worked in collaboration to support each other (e.g., Marie d'Oignies and Jacques de Vitry; Francis and Clare). Both movements also provided the flexibility required to live out the *vita apostolica*. Walter Simons notes that the beguines and Franciscans had similar values, which included the values of poverty, simplicity, and service to those on the margins in society.²⁷ The Franciscan movement itself emerged from a tradition of lay penitent-saints that had existed in Italy since the twelfth century.²⁸ In fact, Mary Harvey Doyno argues that diverse lay groups, such as the beguines, early Franciscans, Humiliati, Flagellants, etc., can all be classified as lay penitent movements. Francis and his early disciples were just lay penitents who happened to get ecclesiastical recognition.²⁹

Like the beguines, lay penitents could be subject to ecclesiastical suspicion as the church sought to exercise more control over lay sanctity. Many of the female lay penitents of the late Middle Ages (Angela of Foligno, Margaret of Cortona, Umiliana de' Cerchi, Clare of Rimini, Catherine of Sienna, and others) have historically been associated with the mendicant orders. But recent scholarship warns that these institutional affiliations are anachronistic and often fictional: some women were described as Franciscan or Dominican tertiaries even though they lived before the third orders were formally established (the Franciscan Third Order in 1298 and Dominican Third Order in the early fourteenth century).³⁰ Associating lay penitent women and beguines with regulated religious orders became a matter of survival after the burning of Marguerite Porete at the

²⁷ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 65-66.

Simons points out that the beguines could not completely embrace the level of poverty that the Franciscans attained because women were almost never given a license to beg and therefore had to earn a living to support themselves (67).

²⁸ Mary Harvey Doyno, *The Lay Saint : Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150–1350* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), 96; André Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, 51.

²⁹ Mary Harvey Doyno, *The Lay Saint*, 5.

³⁰ Mary Harvey Doyno, *The Lay Saint*, 8; Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 5.

stake in 1310 and the condemnation of the beguines at the Council of Vienne in 1312.³¹ Groups of beguines and lay penitents adopted the rule of the Franciscan Third Order (promulgated in the papal bull *Supra montem* in 1298), but did so in order to gain the appearance of orthodoxy, not because they had an authentic relationship with the Franciscan order or affinity with Franciscan spirituality.³² While it is possible that penitents who had a genuine connection with the Franciscan order, like Angela of Foligno, could have sincerely professed the 1298 rule,³³ the use of the rule did not necessarily indicate membership in the Franciscan order. Indeed, with Angela there is no evidence that she formally entered an order.³⁴

We have seen that the thirteenth century beguines and other women who lived as lay penitents had similar lifestyles, religious values, and struggles with ecclesiastical authorities. Each of the four vernacular mystical theologians I examine in this chapter lived, at some point in their lives, as irregular or unregulated secular religious: Angela of Foligno was a lay penitent loosely associated with the Franciscan order, Hadewijch of Brabant and Marguerite Porete have traditionally been associated with the beguines, and Jacopone da Todi lived as a bizzocone, or lay penitent, before he entered the Franciscan order and even then, he identified with the suspect *Fraticelli*, or Spiritual Franciscans. Each had to deal with suspicions of heresy and even outright persecution. Using vernacular languages, which were generally used by the laity outside of the church and academy, each created a “mysticism of the margins,” to borrow a phrase from Maria

³¹The Council of Vienne was summoned from 1311–12 by pope Clement V, mainly to deal with complaints against the Templars. The papal degree *Ad Nostrum* condemned the beguines and beguards, lay groups of men and women who pursued the *vita apostolica* together but did not take vows, with antinomian heresy. See Norman P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1990), 333–34; Robert Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972), 78–84. I discuss the condemnation of the beguines, antinomianism, and Council of Vienne in chapter 6, on p. 256–259.

³² Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 44.

³³ Angela’s conversion occurs in 1285, which makes it possible that she professed the 1298 rule.

³⁴ Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 42.

Lichtmann.³⁵ I have chosen to examine these three vernacular theologians alongside Angela because of the richness of their thought and the important influence their theological texts had on later mystics. In putting these thinkers in conversation, I hope to highlight the richness and diversity of vernacular mystical theology. Aside from their irregular status and its accompanying vulnerability, Angela, Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Jacopone share many commonalities, including use of apophatic language, use of poetic or lyrical language, a focus on mystical union, eroticism, love mysticism, bridal imagery inspired by the Song of Songs, poverty, abjection, and suffering. Throughout they share a desire to establish their authority as authors and theologians.³⁶

However, there are also major differences which set Angela of Foligno apart. Although love is an important aspect of Angela's work, she does not appear to be influenced by courtly romance literature, like Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Jacopone. Angela's understanding of *imitatio Christi* is also slightly different from that of the other vernacular theologians because of her emphasis on suffering with Christ (or as Christ), rather than merely imitating his passion. But perhaps the most important difference is their understanding of divine union. Although Angela at times approaches a kind of indistinct union, she does not go quite as far as the other three mystics in asserting the soul's equality with God. This is because Angela bases her understanding of divine union on Christ's hypostatic union, which allows for union while preserving the distinction between humanity and divinity (Christ's humanity and divinity are united in his person, but not confused or mixed together—they remain distinct). Angela maintains her distinctness by never losing or abandoning herself as Marguerite, Hadewijch, and Jacopone do when they talk about the

³⁵ Maria Lichtmann, "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart: *The Mirror of Simple Souls* Mirrored," in *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 69.

³⁶ McGinn calls Angela of Foligno, Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete, and Mechthild of Magdeburg the four female evangelists because they "had to 'invent' a form of divine authorization of literally evangelical weight, that is, they had to claim that their message came directly from God in a manner analogous to the Bible itself." Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 142.

annihilation of the soul. Angela also does not talk about a pre-created state of the soul in which the soul exists without difference in God. Indeed, as I argue in chapter four, Angela's path to divine union also begins with the fusion of her suffering humanity with that of Christ. If the soul is annihilated or returned to a pre-created state, then Angela would have no path to union with God. Angela's created humanity—both body and soul—are necessary to her fusion with Christ and therefore are essential to achieving the higher stages of union. Angela's thought walks a delicate line, maintaining a profound interpenetration of human and divine while preserving their distinction and difference.

Hadewijch of Brabant

Hadewijch was a thirteenth-century Beguine mystic from the duchy of Brabant in the low countries. Very little is known about her, although some information can be gleaned from her writings. Her knowledge of chivalry and courtly love indicate that she belonged to a higher class.³⁷ She was the head of a group of Beguines, but her leadership was met with opposition and she was evicted from her community.³⁸ In Letter 25, Hadewijch talks about the pain of being separated from Sara, Emma, Margriet, and an unnamed woman.³⁹ Unfortunately, scholars know little about her life in exile or her death.

More is known about Hadewijch's education. It is clear from her writings that she was familiar with Latin, French, the rules of rhetoric, medieval numerology, Ptolemaic astronomy, the theory of music, the rules of letter writing, versification, and the literature of courtly love.⁴⁰ It seems likely that she was educated to some extent in the *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic)

³⁷ Mother Columba Hart, O.S.B., "Introduction," *Hadewijch: The Complete Works* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 3.

³⁸ Mother Columba Hart, "Introduction," 4; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 200.

³⁹ Hadewijch, "Letter 25," *Hadewijch*, 106.

⁴⁰ Mother Columba Hart, "Introduction," 5.

and *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).⁴¹ There is a precedent for this level of education among other female mystics of the period associated with the Beguine movement. Beguines were famous for teaching and religious instruction, especially of young girls.⁴² In some cases, the education they provided was extensive and could include instruction in foreign languages, music, Latin, Bible study, contemporary spirituality, and even theology.⁴³ Some beguines were highly educated and sought to share their knowledge with others in their communities. Beguines employed Bible translations and commentaries in the vernacular, which they used for religious instruction.⁴⁴ There are also documented ties between beguine communities and clerical scholars: In 1245, the beguine court at Champfleury in Douai secured the appointment of a cleric to teach to the women of that community in order to bring beguine instruction up to par with that of schools that trained boys for ecclesiastical careers.⁴⁵

In Paris, the connection between the beguines and the schools was particularly strong. Sermon collections and preaching material reveal that some Sorbonne clerics, starting with the college's founder, Robert of Sorbon, perceived beguines as essential to their pastoral work.⁴⁶ It was not at all unusual for Parisian beguines to have sustained contact with university theologians. Sermons given at the Paris beguinage demonstrates that preachers assumed the beguines were conversant in courtly and theological discourses and inclined to share spiritual teachings with others.⁴⁷ Given the high levels of education documented among the beguines, it is not surprising

⁴¹ Mother Columba Hart, "Introduction," 5.

For more on the trivium and quadrivium, see *A Companion to Twelfth-Century Schools*, ed. Cédric Giraud (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

⁴² Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 81.

⁴³ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 82.

⁴⁴ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 83.

⁴⁵ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 83.

⁴⁶ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 11.

⁴⁷ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 104.

that Hadewijch demonstrated familiarity with several church fathers, including Origen, Hilary of Poitiers, Augustine, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville.⁴⁸ She was also indebted to twelfth-century writers such as the Victorines (Hugh, Adam, and Richard of St. Victor) and Cistercians (Bernard of Clairvaux, William of St. Thierry, and Gueric of Igny).⁴⁹ She was also influenced by poetry of the Church liturgy; she uses at least eleven metrical patterns from the Latin sequences in her “Poems in Stanzas.”⁵⁰

Hadewijch’s writings also demonstrate her high level of vernacular literacy and familiarity with courtly romance literature. Of the mystics surveyed in this chapter, Hadewijch is by far the most influenced by the literature of courtly love. Scholars have noted that among learned groups of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, love seems omnipresent: it is the subject of monastic writings, mystical reflection, academic discourse, and secular literature.⁵¹ In particular, the troubadours (both male and female) praised love in word and song through the vernacular genres of lyric, epic, *Minnesang*, crusading song, pastourelle, courtly romance, *chansions de gest*, and others.⁵² However, scholars are also careful to note that the literature of this period does not present a unified understanding of courtly love. Attempts to create a comprehensive definition have thus far been unsuccessful.⁵³ Nevertheless, there are some themes that appear repeatedly in the literature of the period. Hadewijch borrows many of these themes, including the idea of service, love at a distance, pursuit of amorous fusion through abjection, refinement in love as a badge of class

⁴⁸ Mother Columba Hart, “Introduction,” 6.

⁴⁹ Mother Columba Hart, “Introduction,” 6.

⁵⁰ Mother Columba Hart, “Introduction,” 6.

⁵¹ Werner G. Jeanrond, *A Theology of Love*, 83.

⁵² Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture: Literature and Society in the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 360.

⁵³ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 360.

solidarity, exaltation of Love as a goddess or cosmic principle, representation of the Beloved as a mirror of the self, gender inversion or exchange between lovers as proof of perfect union.⁵⁴

Service is an important hallmark of courtly love, and perhaps the most important to Hadewijch. Many other themes, such as gender inversion, and amorous fusion through abjection, occur through the service that Hadewijch gives to love, or *Minne*.⁵⁵ In the literature of courtly love, a knight accomplishes acts of service (or *minne* service) in order to make himself worthy of the love of his lady.⁵⁶ At times, his service is not sufficient to win her love, and the knight often engages in poetic protest that criticizes service for being one sided and unrewarding.⁵⁷ In a startlingly bold use of gender inversion, Hadewijch casts herself as the knight, performing great service for *Minne* herself, who is gendered feminine.⁵⁸ The male chivalric persona is the model that Hadewijch presents to the beguines in her care: “a love life characterized by struggle, not fulfillment, and poetically gendered male.”⁵⁹ Hadewijch often characterizes love as cruel, violent, and the source of great suffering. Like the knight in courtly love literature, Hadewijch at times complains of her misery, but she is determined to serve Love faithfully no matter the cost.⁶⁰ The service that love requires is great suffering, mostly in the form of a longing for God that can never be appeased. As a result, Hadewijch writes that “I have never experienced Love in any way as

⁵⁴ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 362; Barbara Newman, *Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 164.

⁵⁵ Although Hadewijch seems to borrow the word *minne* from courtly literature, her understanding of *minne* cannot be reduced to courtly love. *Minne* is not only God himself, but also the divine power that pervades the created universe (Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 202).

⁵⁶ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 362.

⁵⁷ Joachim Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 364.

⁵⁸ While there is some gender queering in Angela when she describes drinking from the wound in Christ's side, gender inversion is not as prominent in the *Memorial*. For more on gender inversion in Hadewijch, Marguerite Porete, and other beguine mystics, see Amy Hollywood, “Sexual Desire, Divine Desire; Or, Queering the Beguines,” in *Acute Melancholia and Other Essays: Mysticism, History, and the Study of Religion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 149–162; Karma Lochrie, “Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies,” in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lockrie, et al. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 180–200; Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 180–205.

⁵⁹ Barbara Newman, *Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 147.

⁶⁰ Barbara Newman, *Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 147.

repose; on the contrary, I found Love a heavy burden and disgrace. For I was a human creature, and Love is terrible and implacable, devouring and burning without regard for anything.”⁶¹ By enduring the suffering engendered by love, the soul imitates Christ’s suffering.

While Angela’s emphasis is very much on Christ’s suffering, Hadewijch focuses on her own interior suffering as well as the suffering of the soul in general as it remains faithful to love.⁶² Perhaps Hadewijch’s most powerful treatment of the soul’s suffering is found in number sixteen of her poems in couplets, “Love’s Seven Names.” Love’s first name is “chain” which “binds/ And grasps everything in her power.”⁶³ At first, the chains are “fully welcome,” and soul is glad to be held captive by love.⁶⁴ But as soon as it is bound, the soul becomes subject to the vicissitudes of love: Love “withdraws our consolation/But comforts us again in our worst griefs.”⁶⁵ Although the chain encircles the soul so tightly that it feels as though it will die from the pain, it also “conjoins all things/ In a single fruition and a single delight.”⁶⁶ The chain binds everything into the “anguish or the repose or the madness of Love.”⁶⁷ The “contradictory behavior” of love, the alternation of anguish and repose, is what leads the soul into madness. The soul is inflamed first by the light and

⁶¹ Hadewijch, “Vision 11,” *Hadewijch*, 291.

Unfortunately, I am unable to provide the quotations in the original language because I cannot read Dutch.

⁶² Although Hadewijch devotes the most attention to the soul’s suffering in imitation of Christ, she also asserts that the soul must experience every aspect of Christ’s earthly and heavenly life with him in a passage that is reminiscent of Angela’s fusion with Christ in the experiences of the passion and resurrection in the sixth and seventh supplementary steps: “She had been announced and born with him; and that her body was born from the other; and that she grew up with him and lived together with him as a man in all like pains, in poverty, in ignominy, and in compassion for all those with whom justice was angry; and that her body was nourished interiorly and exteriorly from the other, and never received alien consolation; and that she died with him, and freed all the prisoners with him, and bound what he bound; and rose with him again, and one with him ascended to his Father; and there with him acknowledged his Father as Father, and him as Son with him; and with him she acknowledged the Holy Spirit as Holy Spirit; and with him, like him, she knew all as One, and the Essence in which they are One.” Hadewijch, “Vision 12,” 295.

⁶³ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names (Poem 16 of Poems in Couplets),” 353 lines 17—18.

⁶⁴ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 353 line 19.

⁶⁵ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 353 lines 23—24.

⁶⁶ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 353 lines 25—26.

⁶⁷ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 353 line 29.

the live coal, and then by the fire of love.⁶⁸ In the fire, love “burns to death/Good fortune, success, and adversity” so that “it is all the same to him what it devours...gain or loss, honor or shame/ Consolation at being with God in heaven/ Or in the torture of hell:/ This Fire makes no distinction.”⁶⁹ The fire of love becomes so intense and consumes to the soul to such a degree that the love is the only thing that matters. Positive or negative outcomes are no longer important because the soul has surrendered itself to the all-consuming fire of love.

After this violent love burns the soul and prepares it for union, Love imparts a dew and a living spring that unites the soul to God in an “indivisible kiss—/ That same kiss which fully unites the Three Persons in one sole Being.”⁷⁰ This union “gives them constancy in the midst of changes.”⁷¹ The soul is united to the Trinity in an indivisible way so that there is no difference or distinction between the soul and the divine essence. The dew and the living spring allow the soul to “receive, amid blows, that sweet kiss” of union.⁷² But the consoling union does not last because the highest name of love is hell:

In Love nothing else is acquired
But disquiet and torture without pity;
Forever to be in unrest,
Forever assault and new persecution;
To be wholly devoured and engulfed
In her unfathomable essence,
To founder unceasingly in heat and cold,
In the deep, insurmountable darkness of Love.
This outdoes the torments of hell.⁷³

Once union with God is tasted, the soul burns with the desire to experience it again. The absence of union is experienced as disquiet and torture without pity. The soul founders in insurmountable

⁶⁸ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 354 line 66.

⁶⁹ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 354—355 lines 87—88; 93; 96—99.

⁷⁰ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 355 lines 122—124.

⁷¹ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 355 line 108.

⁷² Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 356 line 136.

⁷³ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 356 lines 156—164.

darkness, striving and longing for a union that does not come. Hadewijch warns the reader that the way of love is not to be undertaken lightly and that the only thing that succeeds with love is the “constant acceptance of caresses and blows.”⁷⁴ The soul must be faithful in the midst of the suffering engendered by love’s presence and absence. She says the heart must possess “fidelity” so that it is able to “conquer” Love.⁷⁵

For Hadewijch, the soul must be willing to suffer a great deal for love. She laments that those who love God are not willing to “carry God’s Son maternally or suckle him with exercises of love. We have too much self-will, and we want too much repose, and we seek too much ease and peace. We are too easily tired, and dejected, and disconsolate. We seek too much consolation from God and men. We will not endure any setback.”⁷⁶ Here, Hadewijch is determined to suffer in the service of love. But in other writings, she seems to echo the knights of courtly literature complaining of the sacrifice they endure for love. In poem ten of the “Poems in Stanzas,” Hadewijch returns to her courtly persona, a knight errant who complains that Love “oppresses us with her noble burden.”⁷⁷ The soul laments that its own baseness prevents Love from admitting it into her good graces.⁷⁸ Then the soul describes the brave knights who “ever serve in the chains of Love,/ And they fear, no pain, grief, or vicissitudes.”⁷⁹ The brave knights serve Love even amidst trials, suffering, and the anguishing dialectic of her presence and absence. The acceptance of suffering and the striving to overcome one’s baseness is what ennoble the soul/knight. The knights give themselves to the service of Love, and as a result “nobility becomes known” to them.⁸⁰ The

⁷⁴ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 358 line 208.

⁷⁵ Hadewijch, “Love’s Seven Names,” 358 lines 210—211.

⁷⁶ Hadewijch, “Letter 30,” 119.

⁷⁷ Hadewijch, “Knight Errant (Poem 10 of Poems in Stanzas),” 152 line 14.

⁷⁸ Hadewijch, “Knight Errant,” 153 lines 16—17.

⁷⁹ Hadewijch, “Knight Errant,” 153 lines 21—22.

⁸⁰ Hadewijch, “Knight Errant,” 153 lines 32—33.

soul encourages its fellow knights to stay true to Love, to “fare through the storms/ In confidence and reliance on Love” because “the day of love is dawning/ When men will never fear pain for Love’s sake,/ And the pain of Love will never be oppressive.”⁸¹ It is interesting that Hadewijch alludes to the future rewards of love, which presumably are not given to the soul in this life but may be possessed in the next. One of the hallmarks of courtly love is that the knight does not insist on any reward—he performs the service for its own sake.⁸² In fact, the spiritual benefits of his love depend on the knight’s willingness to serve without any assurance of reward.⁸³ Surely Hadewijch is aware of the conventions of courtly love, so why does she emphasize the promise of a future without pain?

The answer can be found in the literature of courtly love itself. The problem for writers of courtly love poetry was that of satisfaction or consummation: in lyric poetry, the poet could maintain the tension between spiritual and sexual love without resolving it, but a narrative poet had to bring the story to a conclusion.⁸⁴ If the lovers in the narrative consummate their love, then the ideals of courtly love are destroyed. But if they avoid consummation and stay within the formal conventions of courtly love, then love “appears as no more than abstract theorizing or empty ritual and loses all its beneficial powers.”⁸⁵ Narrative poets resolved this issue in several ways. They could play down the power of love by showing its destructiveness; use satire to ridicule the conventions of courtly love; or have the lovers substitute imperfect courtly love for the perfect love of God.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Hadewijch, “Knight Errant,” 153 lines 30—31; 34—36.

⁸² Joan M. Ferrante, George D. Economou, and Frederick Goldin, et al., *In Pursuit of Perfection: Courtly Love in Medieval Literature* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1975), 5.

⁸³ Joan M. Ferrante, George D. Economou, and Frederick Goldin, et al., *In Pursuit of Perfection*, 5.

⁸⁴ Joan M. Ferrante, George D. Economou, and Frederick Goldin, et al., *In Pursuit of Perfection*, 7.

⁸⁵ Joan M. Ferrante, George D. Economou, and Frederick Goldin, et al., *In Pursuit of Perfection*, 8.

⁸⁶ Joan M. Ferrante, George D. Economou, and Frederick Goldin, et al., *In Pursuit of Perfection*, 8.

The problem in Hadewijch's thought is that love of God does not save the lover from the agonies of love. If anything, the love of God is even more painful than worldly love because it is stronger. Once tasted, it elicits more desire and more suffering when it absents itself again. Therefore, the problems inherent to courtly literature remain: if the soul were to suddenly experience the full, permanent fruition of love (i.e., divine union) here on earth, then the insuperable distance between the soul and God would be overcome and humanity/earthly life would be swallowed up by the divine and cease to exist. On the other hand, if the soul could never experience the fruition of love, no matter how hard it strives to be worthy, then the love of God and all of the soul's virtues and works would be meaningless. Hadewijch resolves the problem posed by permanent fruition by allowing the soul to experience only temporary fruition here on earth. In this taste of divine union, the distance between the soul and God is overcome, but only for a moment. The seeming meaninglessness of the soul's striving is eased by the promise that if the soul suffers for love and remains faithful no matter the pain and setbacks it encounters, then it ennobles itself and can enjoy the permanent fruition of love in heaven. Service to love still ennobles the soul because it is done without any hope of reward in this life.

By asserting that the love of God is even more turbulent, violent, and destructive than worldly love, Hadewijch contradicts the assertion of courtly love poetry that perfect love of God will bring an end to the lover's pain. Her viewpoint also challenges the argument of Richard of St. Victor in his treatise "On the Four Degrees of Violent Love." Richard identifies four degrees of violent (meaning passionate or fervent) love: "love wounds, love binds, love makes one languish, love leads to weakness."⁸⁷ When it comes to the love between human beings, these degrees of violent love harm the body and soul. Richard states that "in the first degree it pierces affection, in

⁸⁷ Richard of St. Victor, "On the Four Degrees of Violent Love," *On Love: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St Victor*, Ed. Feiss et al., (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 275.

the second it binds thought, in the third it dissolves action.”⁸⁸ But the fourth degree is even worse because it “leads to weakness and makes a man despair of a remedy.” Richard observes that among human loves, “this state of love (*amor*) is often turned into something like insanity.... Tempers often flare among lovers...In this state love (*amor*) often turns to hate.”⁸⁹ This last degree is so miserable that Richard cites it as a model of future damnation.⁹⁰

However, when that same violent love is turned toward God, the opposite happens. Instead of increasing misery, the soul grows closer to God. Richard states that “in the first degree God enters into the mind...in the second degree the mind ascends above itself and is lifted up to God. In the third degree the mind lifted up to God passes into him completely. In the fourth degree the mind goes out on account of God and descends beneath itself...[it] goes forth out of compassion.”⁹¹ Because violent love only leads to positive outcomes when directed towards the divine, Richard concludes that the object of violent love should be God alone. M.B. Pranger notes in his article “Monastic Violence” that “violent love should be reserved, then for an object proportionate to it, that is, an object without measure, which is really insatiable: God.”⁹² What is remarkable about Richard’s characterization of love is that he uses the word “*caritas*” to refer to both the erotic love between human beings and the spiritual love between God and human beings.⁹³ The violent loves with which we love each other and God are essentially the same kind of love; but when directed

⁸⁸ Richard of St. Victor, “On the Four Degrees of Violent Love,” 280.

⁸⁹ Richard of St. Victor, “On the Four Degrees of Violent Love,” 281.

⁹⁰ Richard of St. Victor, “On the Four Degrees of Violent Love,” 283.

One is reminded that, for Hadewijch, the highest name for love is hell.

⁹¹ Richard of St. Victor, “On the Four Degrees of Violent Love,” 287.

⁹² M.B. Pranger, “Monastic Violence, *Violence, Identity, and Self-Determination*, Ed. Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 56.

⁹³ Hugh, Feiss et al., *On Love: A Selection of Works of Hugh, Adam, Achard, Richard, and Godfrey of St Victor*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2011), 263, Footnote 2.

towards other human beings, it causes madness and great suffering, and when directed towards God it brings peace and spiritual union.

But for Hadewijch, the turbulence of violent love is even more painful to the human soul when it is directed towards God. The object of love (God) might be proportionate to its violence, but the subject is still a human being. For Hadewijch, love demands that the soul “love [God] with that great love wherewith he loves himself.”⁹⁴ But because we are limited human beings, we cannot do so unless God allows us to through grace. Hadewijch writes that “men on earth must strive for it with humble hearts and realize that, as regards such great love, and such sublime love, and this never-contented Beloved, they are too small to content him with love.”⁹⁵ But even if we cannot accomplish such sublime love on our own Hadewijch writes that, “this never-completed work must stir every noble soul like a storm” so that soul lives in “joyful hope and strong confidence” that God will allow the soul to love as he loves.⁹⁶

However, such striving is not for the faint-hearted. Love is unappeasable and demands nothing less than “that we be wholly destitute of all repose, whether in aliens, or in friends, or even in Love herself. And this is a frightening life Love wants, that we must do without the satisfaction of Love in order to satisfy Love...And that life is miserable beyond all that the human heart can bear.”⁹⁷ And if the soul is granted a taste of God’s sublime love, the soul becomes similarly unappeasable so that “nothing in their life satisfies them—either their gifts, or their service, or consolations, or all they can accomplish. For interiorly Love draws them so strongly to her, and they feel Love so vast and so incomprehensible; and they find themselves too small for this and

⁹⁴ Hadewijch, “Letter 16,” 80.

⁹⁵ Hadewijch, “Letter 16,” 80.

⁹⁶ Hadewijch, “Letter 16,” 80.

⁹⁷ Hadewijch, “Letter 13,” 75.

too inadequate to satisfy that Essence which is Love.”⁹⁸ Drawn into Love and united with her, the soul begins to take on the unappeasable nature of Love, which leaves it with a sense of inadequacy and dissatisfaction with itself and the created world. Therefore, the soul is constantly suffering, either in its striving for Love or in the fruition of Love itself.⁹⁹

For Hadewijch, to withstand such pain is to take up the cross in imitation of Christ and to trust that Love will help the soul endure it. Suffering is as important to Hadewijch as it is to Angela, even though their understanding of how and why the soul suffers is different. For Hadewijch, the soul suffers because it is a limited being seeking to unite itself to limitless Love, while for Angela, the soul is allowed to share in the suffering of Christ on the cross through the grace of radical compassion. Hadewijch emphasizes the soul’s suffering for Love, while Angela primarily emphasizes Christ’s suffering, which the soul seeks to share. Although Hadewijch emphasizes suffering *like* Christ while Angela emphasis suffering *as* Christ, both mystics describe suffering as an essential part of the spiritual life. Similarly, both mystics also describe a state in which the anguish of the soul seems to end. For example, as I mentioned in the previous chapter,¹⁰⁰ Angela begins to take on the transcendence of God in the seventh supplementary step and describes a chamber in her soul that no joy or sorrow can touch.¹⁰¹ While she not completely impervious to suffering, there is part of Angela that transcends the emotions experienced by the soul. Hadewijch calls the soul’s imperviousness to the ups and downs of emotion equanimity,¹⁰² which I would argue is also what Angela is trying to express when she describes the transcendence of joy and

⁹⁸ Hadewijch, “Letter 13,” 75.

⁹⁹ Barbara Newman suggests a comparison between Hadewijch’s passionate love, whose highest name is hell, and the erotic madness of Tristan and Isolt, in which the lovers choose hell over heaven. Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 160–161.

¹⁰⁰ See p. 267.

¹⁰¹ *CW*, 214. *IL*, 388. *M*, 174.

¹⁰² Hadewijch, “Vision 14,” 304.

sorrow.¹⁰³ Angela's chamber in her soul seems to be balanced in a perfect equilibrium; it remains unaffected by the highs and lows of emotion. This emotional equilibrium bears similarities to Hadewijch's concept of equanimity. For example, after receiving the strength of God's own Being in a vision,¹⁰⁴ Hadewijch writes that she "could endure with equanimity everything that came to me before—joy or grief, laughter or weeping, in disgrace and in trouble—in all manners without sorrow."¹⁰⁵ In other words, Hadewijch is given Christ's equanimity to bear suffering and the arrows of love. Like Angela, she experiences emotional equilibrium through her union with the divine.

Angela and Hadewijch also describe union, or fusion, with Christ as a physical embrace. In Vision 7, Hadewijch describes a Eucharistic vision in which she sees Christ "looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful, and beautiful, and with glorious face."¹⁰⁶ Christ gives her communion, and then embraces her in an erotic fusion of their bodies:

He came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported...But soon, after a short time, I lost that manly beauty outwardly in the sight of his form. I saw him completely come to nought and so fade and all at once dissolve that I could no longer recognize or perceive him outside of me, and I could no longer distinguish him within me. Then it was to me as if we were one without difference.¹⁰⁷

Christ embraces Hadewijch and dissolves into her, so that she can no longer distinguish between herself and Christ. As a mention in chapter six,¹⁰⁸ this vision bears striking similarities to

¹⁰³ It is possible to interpret Angela's chamber in the soul as a place that is imbued with divine impassibility and immutability, thus precluding the emotions of joy and sorrow. But Hadewijch's description of equanimity offers a more compelling interpretation: it isn't so much that joy and sorrow do not touch the chamber in Angela's soul, but rather that they do not disturb the equanimity of the chamber.

¹⁰⁴ Hadewijch, "Vision 14," 302.

¹⁰⁵ Hadewijch, "Vision 14," 304.

¹⁰⁶ Hadewijch, "Vision 7," 281.

¹⁰⁷ Hadewijch, "Vision 7," 281.

¹⁰⁸ See p. 264

Angela's vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes. I will requote the relevant passage here for the reader's convenience:

I see the God-man. He draws my soul with great gentleness and sometimes he says to me, "You are I and I am you." I see, then, those eyes and that face so gracious and attractive as he leans to embrace me. In short, what proceeds from those eyes and that face is what I said I saw in the previous darkness which comes from within, and which delights me so that I can say nothing about it. When I am in the God-man my soul is alive.¹⁰⁹

In Angela's vision, she also sees Christ as an attractive man, who embraces her and unites with her in a profound union. Christ even tells her that "you are I and I am you." In their mutual embrace, Angela and Christ merge and their identities become interpenetrated. Angela describes the darkness in his eyes and face and then later describes seeing the Trinity in the same darkness, as if she were looking through Christ's own eyes. Although both Hadewijch and Angela describe fusion with Christ through a physical embrace, Hadewijch goes farther than Angela in asserting an indistinct union with God. When describing her fusion with Christ, Hadewijch states that she "wholly melted away in him and nothing any longer remained to me of myself."¹¹⁰ Hadewijch seems to disappear altogether, leaving only Christ. Indeed, she writes that the greatest satisfaction in the life of a Christian is "to grow up to be God with God."¹¹¹ These quotations are notable because the human being is taken out of the equation: Hadewijch desires to annihilate or negate herself so that only God remains. While Angela describes a profound interpenetration of her humanity with Christ that at times borders on an indistinct union, she never annihilates, negates, or does away with her own subjectivity. When God tells Angela "you are I and I am you," he

¹⁰⁹ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 360-362. *M*, 156-158.

Latin text: Video Deum hominem; et trahit animam cum tanta mansuetudine, ut dicat aliquando: Tu es ego et ego sum tu. Et video illos oculos et illam faciem tantum placibilem et cum tanta aptitudine, ut amplexetur me. Et illud quod resultat de illis oculis et de illa facie, est illud quod ego dixi quod ego video in illa tenebra, quod venit de intus, et illud est quod me tantum delectat quod narrari non potest. Et in isto Deo homino stando anima est viva.

¹¹⁰ Hadewijch, "Vision 7," 282.

¹¹¹ Hadewijch, "Vision 7," 280.

simultaneously proclaims the fusion of their identities while maintaining Angela's distinctness—the "I" needs a "you" and vice versa.

Hadewijch and Angela also share a similar devotion to the Eucharist and a Eucharistic understanding of divine union. I have already discussed Hadewijch's Vision 7 above, in which she receives a vision of Christ giving her communion and then experiences him physically embracing her and dissolving into her. Hadewijch explicitly compares that vision to the reception of the Eucharist: "It was thus: outwardly, to see, taste, and feel, as one can outwardly taste, see, and feel in the reception of the outward Sacrament. So can the Beloved, with the loved one, each wholly receive the other in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of the one in the other."¹¹² In the reception of the Eucharist, the human being and God dissolve into each other as the host is consumed, just as Christ and Hadewijch dissolves into each other and becoming indistinguishable. However, eating is not always a pleasant, peaceful experience. Hadewijch also uses the metaphor of devouring to describe union with God. In "Love's Seven Names," Hadewijch writes that the soul:

Eats his flesh and drinks his blood:
The heart of each devours the other's heart,
One soul assaults the other and invades it completely,
As he who is Love itself showed us
When he gave us himself to eat.¹¹³

Hadewijch explicitly compares the mutual devouring of God and the soul to the Eucharist. The image is more violent than Angela's description of communion, but the idea of the soul and God

¹¹² Hadewijch, "Vision 7," 281—282.

Seeing the host was sometimes just as important as tasting it, especially since people generally did not receive daily communion in the thirteenth century. Seeing the host at the elevation became a "second sacrament," alongside receiving the Eucharist. By the thirteenth century, there are stories of people attending mass just to see the moment of the elevation and people racing from church to church to see as many elevations as possible. See Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 55.

¹¹³ Hadewijch, "Love's Seven Names," 353 lines 30-34.

being mutually united or interpenetrated with each other during the reception of the Eucharist is the same.

As I have explained in chapters five and six, Angela's understanding of divine union is profoundly Christological and based on the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures. But for Angela, Christ is also present in the Eucharist hypostatically—his humanity and divinity are both present on the altar.¹¹⁴ We see this as early as the first supplementary step when Angela compares the beauty of Christ's neck and throat to the beauty that she sees in the host: the human body and divinity of Christ are seen together in her Eucharistic visions.¹¹⁵ Since Angela also understands her union with God as a hypostatic, at least after a fashion, one could say that the Eucharist becomes an expression of her hypostatic union with God as well, to the extent that her humanity (fused now with that of Christ) is joined to the divinity of Christ. For example, in the seventh supplementary step, Angela receives a vision at the elevation of the Eucharist in which she first sees Christ's body on the cross and then immediately feels herself enwrapped in Christ's divinity.¹¹⁶ Angela hears a voice telling her: "Behold, the total joy of angels and saints, and your own total joy."¹¹⁷ The voice is referring to the divinity of Christ, in which Angela's soul is enwrapped. Therefore, Angela, joined with Christ, is both the joy of the angels and saints and her own joy. The Eucharist thus seems to become the outward expression of Angela's interior participation in the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ.

¹¹⁴ Before receiving communion, Angela is told that "the Son of God is on the altar according to his humanity and his divinity." *CW*, 186. *IL*, 308. *M*, 120.

Latin text: "Modo est in altari Filius Dei secundum humanitatem et divinitatem."

¹¹⁵ *CW*, 148. *IL*, 196. *M*, 50.

¹¹⁶ *CW*, 209. *IL*, 374. *M*, 166.

¹¹⁷ *CW*, 209. *IL*, 374. *M*, 166.

Latin text: Hic est tota laetitia angelorum et hic est tota laetitia sanctorum et hic est tota laetitia tua.

As demonstrated above, Angela and Hadewijch also both use the term “abyss” to describe God and the soul.¹¹⁸ Angela only uses the term a handful of times in the *Memorial*, but “abyss” becomes her preferred metaphor for God in the *Instructions*. Although Angela does not specifically refer to the soul as an abyss in the *Memorial*, she implies that the soul becomes so noble and incomprehensible that it shares in the ineffable depths of God.¹¹⁹ Hadewijch also describes both God and the soul as an abyss. For example, in Vision 12, she receives a vision of a bride being conducted to her bridegroom. She was clad in a robe adorned with twelve virtues. Hadewijch writes that the sixth virtue, humility, “bore witness that she was so deep and so unfathomable that she could truly receive greatness to the full in her unfathomableness.”¹²⁰ The humility of the soul leaves it with an emptiness so deep and unfathomable that it can receive the unfathomable God. When the bride reaches the bridegroom, an eagle says to Hadewijch, “Become the veritable bride of the great Bridegroom, and behold yourself in this state!”¹²¹ Hadewijch writes that she was “received in union by the One who sat there in the abyss upon the circling disk, and there I became one with him in the certainty of unity...in that abyss I saw myself swallowed up. Then I received the certainty of being received, in this form, in my Beloved, and my Beloved also in me.”¹²² Not only is the soul an unfathomable abyss that can receive the infinitude of God, but God is also an abyss that swallows up the soul.

There is a deep mutuality and intimacy in Hadewijch’s description of union in Vision 12. She is swallowed up by the abyss of God and God is also swallowed up by the abyss of the soul

¹¹⁸ Indeed, McGinn notes that twelfth century female mystics such as Angela and Hadewijch were among the first to use the language of the abyss to describe both the soul’s relation to God and the violence of love in mystical union. See Bernard McGinn, “The Abyss of Love,” *The Joy of Learning and the Love of God*, 103.

¹¹⁹ *CW*, 216. *IL*, 394. *M*, 178.

¹²⁰ Hadewijch, “Vision 12,” 294.

¹²¹ Hadewijch, “Vision 12,” 296.

¹²² Hadewijch, “Vision 12,” 296.

so both Hadewijch and God are in each other. Angela shares the same sense of mutuality and intimacy in her description of divine union in the seventh supplementary step. For example, after describing how she sees herself standing or lying in the darkness of the Trinity, Angela has a vision in which God tells her: “In you rests the entire Trinity; indeed, the complete truth rests in you, so that you hold me and I hold you.”¹²³ Not only does Angela rest in the Trinity, but the Trinity also rests in her. Angela describes a mutual resting/holding just as Hadewijch describes a mutual indwelling.

Mutuality between God and the soul is so important to Hadewijch that she describes God and the soul as a mutual abyss. In her poem “Daughter of the Father,” Hadewijch writes:

And that beauty will meet with one Beauty,
And they will greet with one single greeting.
And that kiss will be with one single mouth,
And that fathoming will be of one single abyss,
And with a single gaze will be the vision of all
That is, that was, and shall be;
And all are wise with one wisdom,
And with one will of a single thought,
And with one dominion all equally powerful,
In one form, in one likeness,
And in one experience, one power of all.¹²⁴

In this poem, Hadewijch uses many evocative metaphors to express the oneness of God and the soul, some which Angela also uses. For example, Hadewijch mentions the one dominion in which the soul and God are equally powerful. Angela similarly describes holding dominion over all things when united to God in the seventh supplementary step.¹²⁵ But perhaps the most powerful metaphor in the above poem is Hadewijch’s image of the single abyss. The abyss of God meets the abyss of

¹²³ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 390. *M*, 176.

Latin text: In te pausat tota Trinitas, tota veritas, ita quod tu tenes me et ego teneo te.

¹²⁴ Hadewijch, “Daughter of the Father (Poem 12 in Poems in Couplets),” 342 lines 85–95.

¹²⁵ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176.

the soul and the two infinite abysses become one. Hadewijch again describes the merging of abysses in Letter 18:

The soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself; and his own self-sufficiency ever finds fruition to the full in this soul, as the soul, for its part, ever does in him. Soul is a way for the passage of God from his depths into his liberty; and God is a way for the passage of the soul into its liberty, that is, into his inmost depths, which cannot be touched except by the soul's abyss.¹²⁶

God suffices to himself in the abyss of the soul because the soul is so united to God that there is no distinction between the soul and God. Therefore, the abyss of God and the abyss of the soul meet and merge so that each finds fruition in the other and each achieves its liberty in the abyss of the other, which is the same abyss.

However, Hadewijch's understanding of divine union differs from Angela's because of the way that she describes the *unitas indistinctionis* as a return to the exemplary or pre-created self. When Hadewijch talks about the exemplary self, she is referring to the "virtual preexistence of the soul in God."¹²⁷ According to McGinn, Hadewijch's understanding of the exemplary self/the pre-created existence of the soul in God was first articulated by the first century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria.¹²⁸ Philo argues for an "intraideical" interpretation of the Platonic ideas, or forms. In other words, the forms of everything in the world (including human beings) exist in the mind of God.¹²⁹ This idea was taken up by Origen and by Augustine, who argued that the Word of God from all eternity contains the exemplars of all created things. The "eternal, exemplary, and virtual (i.e., in divine power, or *virtus*) preexistence" of the soul was also developed by John Scottus Eriugena and William of St. Thierry.¹³⁰ Hadewijch was highly influenced by Augustine

¹²⁶ Hadewijch, "Letter 18," 86.

¹²⁷ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

¹²⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

¹²⁹ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

¹³⁰ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

and William of St. Thierry, so it is possible that her understanding of a pre-created existence of the soul was influenced by these theologians. However, McGinn points out that Hadewijch takes the idea of the preexistence of the soul in God even further than these theologians because she makes a *direct* appeal to her precreation and eternal self in the Word.¹³¹ For example, in Letter 29, Hadewijch speaks of her eternal being and her own being: “But if I possess [these attributes] in love with my eternal being, I do not possess it yet in fruition of Love in my own being.”¹³² Hadewijch distinguishes between her earthly being and her eternal being, or her pre-created self who is already one with God. While her eternal being already enjoys the full fruition of Love and participates in the divine attributes, Hadewijch’s earthly self has yet to achieve union with God.

Ultimately, Hadewijch wants her earthly self and her exemplary or pre-created self to become one. For example, in Vision 4, Christ appears as a seraph and begins to speak to the exemplary Hadewijch while referring to the earthly Hadewijch in the third person:

Now see me united in unity with your Beloved—and you are my loved one, loved with me. These heavens, which you behold, are wholly hers and mine; and these you saw as two kingdoms that were separated were our two humanities before they attained full growth. I was full-grown before; and nevertheless we remained equal. And I came into my kingdom yesterday, and you became full-grown afterwards; nevertheless we remained equal. And she shall become full-grown today and come tomorrow with you into her kingdom; and nevertheless shall remain equal with me.”¹³³

When the earthly Hadewijch becomes full grown, she will join the exemplary Hadewijch in the kingdom of their humanity, meaning that the earthly Hadewijch will become one with the exemplary Hadewijch. Because the exemplary Hadewijch is united to Christ without distinction and therefore equal to Christ, the earthly Hadewijch will also come to share the same equality with Christ when she is full grown. As McGinn aptly puts it, “Hadewijch’s exemplary self and her

¹³¹ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

¹³² Hadewijch, “Letter 29,” 115.

¹³³ Hadewijch, “Vision 4,” 274.

historical self are growing together in love to attain the fullness of their primordially given equality with the Beloved.”¹³⁴ While Hadewijch’s sense of precreation and eternal status in the Word was central to the claims she made for her writings,¹³⁵ it is a theme that is notably absent in Angela’s text. While Angela posits some equality and mutuality between the soul and God, she does not mention any annihilation of the soul, an exemplary self, or a pre-created state.

Marguerite Porete

As with Hadewijch, little is known about Marguerite’s life outside of what can be gleaned from her writings and trial documents. Sean Field writes that she was probably born around 1260 in the county of Hainaut, most likely in or around the town of Valenciennes, although Bernard McGinn appears to disagree, citing insufficient evidence for us to know where Marguerite was born.¹³⁶ The trial documents refer to her as “Marguerite called Porete;” however this is not a family name.¹³⁷ In Old French, “*poret*” means “leek,” but also refers to an object of little value.¹³⁸ Since Marguerite refers to herself as a “mendicant creature” in the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, the epithet “*poret*” seems consistent with how she saw herself.¹³⁹ Nothing is known about Marguerite’s family, though from her high level of education, scholars have surmised that she was likely from an upper-class origin, possibly part of the urban patriciate (a wealthy, politically active urban class) or the lower aristocracy.¹⁴⁰ Like Hadewijch, Marguerite seems to have developed a *mystique courtoise* that was influenced by vernacular courtly romance literature. The *Mirror* explicitly mentions the *Romance of Alexander* and Marguerite was likely familiar with the *Romance of the*

¹³⁴ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 215.

¹³⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 214.

¹³⁶ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 27; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 244.

¹³⁷ “Document I,” *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 211.

¹³⁸ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 28.

¹³⁹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, trans. Ellen L. Babinsky (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 170.

¹⁴⁰ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 29; Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 244.

Rose.¹⁴¹ Scholars dispute whether Marguerite had any Latin literacy. Some have detected echoes of authors such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Augustine, Richard of St. Victor, William of Saint-Thierry, and pseudo-Dionysius in Marguerite's work.¹⁴² The *Mirror* also contains numerous biblical references. Marguerite may have heard them in the context of the liturgy, in sermons, or in conversations with clergy, but it is also possible she could have been familiar with the Vulgate.¹⁴³ Scholars also debate whether or not she was actually a beguine. Marguerite is referred to as a *beguina* in her trial documents,¹⁴⁴ but it is unclear whether she was part of a formal community such as the beguinage of St. Elizabeth's in Valenciennes. The question is complicated by the fact that the term *beguina* was quite fluid in the thirteenth century and was used to describe any woman who claimed special contact with God and who acted or dressed in ways that set her apart.¹⁴⁵

Sometime between 1297 and 1305 (most likely around 1300), Marguerite ran afoul of Guido of Collemezzo, the bishop of Cambrai. Guido condemned Marguerite's book and ordered it burned, though he seems to have stopped short of declaring Marguerite a heretic.¹⁴⁶ He forbade Marguerite from circulating her book or from writing or speaking about the ideas it contained and threatened to condemn her as a relapsed heretic if she disobeyed.¹⁴⁷ Since Marguerite was released, however, she must have shown some level of cooperation, contrition, and willingness to obey the bishop. There is no mention of any penance, so she was likely able to convince the bishop that she

¹⁴¹ Barbara Newman, "The Mirror and the Rose: Marguerite Porete's Encounter with the *Dieu D'Amours*," in *The Vernacular Spirit: Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, et al. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 105; Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 29.

¹⁴² Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 29.

¹⁴³ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 30.

¹⁴⁴ "Document III," *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 217.

¹⁴⁵ Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris*, 17; Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 32; Alison More, *Fictive Orders*, 18.

¹⁴⁶ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 43.

¹⁴⁷ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 44.

herself was not a heretic.¹⁴⁸ It is possible that Marguerite was genuinely surprised and chastened by Guido's reaction to her book.¹⁴⁹ Afterwards, she edited *The Mirror* and sent it to three churchmen (a Franciscan named John of Quervan, Dom Franc the chanter of the Cistercian abbey of Villers, and Godfrey of Fontaines, a secular Master of Theology and one of the most well-known scholars of his day) and recorded their positive assessments in the epilogue to her book.¹⁵⁰ It is possible that once she received the approval of such well-regarded churchmen, she hoped for a new hearing for her ideas. Her trial documents also state that she sent the book to the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne and to "other simple people—begardis and others."¹⁵¹

Unfortunately, when the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne received it, he contacted the inquisitor of Lorraine, who took Marguerite into custody and brought her to the new bishop of Cambrai, Philip of Marigny.¹⁵² By October of 1308, Philip had Marguerite transferred into the custody of William of Paris.¹⁵³ Philip may have had her transferred to Paris because he felt that Marguerite's case needed a fuller theological hearing, especially if he was aware that theologians such as Godfrey of Fontaines had praised the book. It has been suggested by scholars such as Robert Lerner that Marguerite may have been tried and condemned for political reasons. Her inquisitor, William of Paris, was also confessor to Phillip the Fair. Phillip had pursued a personal vendetta against the Knights Templar and may have used Marguerite's case to reestablish favor with the Pope.¹⁵⁴ McGinn notes that it is possible that Phillip the Fair used Marguerite's trial to

¹⁴⁸ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 45.

¹⁴⁹ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 45.

¹⁵⁰ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 50.

¹⁵¹ "Document VI," *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 225.

¹⁵² Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 56.

¹⁵³ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 60.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Lerner, *Heresy of the Free Spirit*, 68.

demonstrate his defense of orthodoxy, but he mainly attributes her condemnation to the growing fear of heresy, especially mystical heresy.¹⁵⁵

Once in Paris, Marguerite refused to cooperate by taking the judicial oath, which slowed down the proceedings and resulted in her being jailed for over a year.¹⁵⁶ There were two separate matters that William of Paris tried to adjudicate in Marguerite's case. The first was the legal issue of her actions, specifically her disobedience after the condemnation of her book and her admission of her disobedience to the church authorities. The second issue was theological: did her book *The Mirror of Simple Souls* contain heretical statements? William of Paris first attempted to establish Marguerite's heretical actions: he assembled canonists who declared Marguerite a contumacious heretic on the 3rd of April 1310.¹⁵⁷ After that, he gathered twenty-one Masters of Theology on April 11th and presented them with fifteen articles from Marguerite's book, which they also condemned as heretical.¹⁵⁸ The condemnation is noteworthy because the formal consultation of such a large group of theologians in the case of a layperson's writings was unprecedented.¹⁵⁹ Then William recalled the canon lawyers to examine whether Marguerite's actions made her a relapsed heretic. In particular, they examined the fact that she continued to disseminate her book after being forbidden to do so by the Bishop of Cambrai. There may have been some legal difficulty because

¹⁵⁵ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 246.

¹⁵⁶ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 85.

¹⁵⁷ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 96.

¹⁵⁸ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 127.

Although fifteen extracts were condemned, there is only a record of three excerpts.

- 1) That the annihilated soul gives license to the virtues and is no longer in servitude to them. Because it does not have use for them; but rather the virtues obey [its] command.
- 2) That the soul annihilated in love of the Creator, without blame of conscience or remorse, can and ought to concede to nature whatever it seeks and desires.
- 3) That such a soul does not care about the consolations of God or his gifts, and ought not to care and cannot, because [such a soul] has been completely focused on God, and thus its focus on God would then be impeded. Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 128.

¹⁵⁹ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 130.

Bishop Guido had condemned Marguerite's book rather than Marguerite herself.¹⁶⁰ But on the 9th of May, the canonists declared her a relapsed heretic. On the 31st of May, Marguerite was sentenced to death. She was burned at the Place de Grève on the 1st of June 1310. Marguerite Porete's case has attracted historical and scholarly attention because she was the first female Christian mystic burned at the stake after authoring a book.¹⁶¹

Maria Lichtmann characterizes Marguerite's trial as a "head-to-head combat between a non-credentialed, nonacademic mystic and the scholastic theologians at Paris."¹⁶² Marguerite certainly anticipated her inquisitors' lack of comprehension when she wrote:

You who would read this book,
If you indeed wish to grasp it,
Think about what you say,
For it is very difficult to comprehend...
Theologians and other clerks,
You will not have the intellect for it.¹⁶³

For Marguerite, the scholastic, disputational method of the professional theologians who judged her book were at odds with the message of her book, which advocated the annihilation of reason. Despite the attempts of her inquisitors, that Marguerite's text did not die with her—in fact, it was widely disseminated as the work of an anonymous author and translated into Latin, Italian, and Middle English.¹⁶⁴ It wasn't until 1946 that Romana Guarnieri identified a French manuscript as a copy of Marguerite's lost work.¹⁶⁵ Michael Sells notes that her text, attributed to an anonymous author, circulated for centuries without raising doctrinal eyebrows. In fact, it was published in

¹⁶⁰ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 145.

¹⁶¹ Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor*, 3.

¹⁶² Maria Lichtmann, "Marguerite Porete and Meister Eckhart," 66.

¹⁶³ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 59.

¹⁶⁴ Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 117.

¹⁶⁵ Romana Guarnieri, "Il movimento del Libero Spirito, Testi e documenti" in *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 4(1965): 353-708.

1911 by the Downside Benedictines in a modern English translation with the formal Church approvals of *nihil obstat* and *imprimatur*. Theologians continue to debate its orthodoxy.

Although Marguerite Porete and Angela of Foligno were contemporaries who died a year apart, the two mystics are very different. Marguerite, like Hadewijch, is heavily influenced by courtly romance literature, which are both absent from Angela's work. And although Christ is not unimportant to Marguerite, he does not have the central role in her thought that he does in Angela's work. For example, while God occasionally enters the dialogue in Marguerite's text as Trinity, Holy Spirit, and Father, Christ never speaks.¹⁶⁶ Angela's understanding of divine union is also different from Marguerite's because she does not posit any annihilation of the soul or pre-created state. In this section, I will examine three aspects of Marguerite's thought and bring up points of comparison with Angela's *Memorial*. First, I will discuss how both Angela and Marguerite seek to relieve the suffering of the soul in some way. Marguerite seeks to free the soul from the suffering caused by virtues and Angela learns to relinquish the pain of self-doubt as her experience of God become increasingly ineffable. Second, I will describe how Marguerite understands indistinct union with God as an annihilation of the soul and a return to the soul's pre-created state in the mind of God. Where appropriate, I will draw comparisons to Angela's understanding of divine union in the *Memorial*. Finally, I will analyze the importance of transcendence in Angela and Marguerite's thought. Both mystics appear to transcend everything that can be conceived, including the self and all of its experiences.

Relieving Suffering and Relinquishing Self-Doubt

As Amy Hollywood has pointed out, "if medieval people's great love of the body and understanding of embodiment as constitutive of human personhood lie behind their ascetic

¹⁶⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 249.

practices, clearly the burden of such ascetic sanctification did not fall equally upon all. Rather, hagiographical traditions portray women as disproportionately responsible for such suffering, the bodily sanctification it enabled being shared by the men around them.¹⁶⁷ Perhaps influenced by other beguines who stressed suffering such as Hadewijch and Beatrice of Nazareth, Marguerite sought to detach female holiness from suffering and wanted to allay the pain of women undergoing harsh ascetic practices for the sake of sanctity. This is most evident in her treatment of the virtues. While it is necessary for the soul to follow the virtues at first, Marguerite describes them as harsh taskmasters that cause the soul “the greatest torment a creature could suffer.”¹⁶⁸ The soul gives everything it has to the virtues, but with few rewards. Marguerite writes that “such Souls leave all things, and still the Virtues say to this Soul, who gave all this to them retaining nothing to comfort nature, they say to her that the just are saved at great pain. And so this exhausted Soul who still serves the Virtues says that she would be assaulted by Fear and tormented in hell until Judgement Day if afterward she would be saved for sure.”¹⁶⁹ Unlike the annihilated soul, who gives up everything to become everything in God, the soul that gives all to the virtues is not even certain of her own salvation. She is plagued with worry and doubt that her service is not good enough to merit eternal life. This is perhaps because the soul at this stage depends on her own actions to attain salvation, rather than passively allowing God to act in her. The pain caused by the virtues eventually causes the soul to leave them altogether. The soul sings to Lady Love:

Virtues, I take my leave of you forever...

¹⁶⁷ Amy Hollywood, “Suffering Transformed,” *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics*, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 110.

¹⁶⁸ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 86; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir des simples âmes anéanties*, trans. Claude Louis-Combet, ed. Emilie Zum Brunn (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1991), 50 (VIII). French text: “Le plus grand tourment que créature puisse souffrir.”

¹⁶⁹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 86; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 50 (VIII). French text: “ces Ames laissent toutes choses, encore que les Vertus disent à cette Ame qui leur a tout donné et n’a rien retenu pour conforter Nature, qu’à grand peine le juste est sauvé. Voilà pourquoi cette Ame lasse, encore soumise aux vertus, peut dire qu’elle voudrait être en proie à la Crainte et tourmentée en enfer jusqu’au jugement pourvu qu’après cela elle soit sauvée.”

Your service is too constant, you know well...
I was once a slave to you, but now I am delivered from it.
I had placed my heart completely in you, you know well.
Thus I lived a while in great distress,
I suffered in many grave torments, many pains endured.
Miracle it is that I have somehow escaped alive.¹⁷⁰

According to Marguerite, the virtues cause suffering because they require constant striving to meet their harsh demands. They demand an impossible perfection that can destroy the soul altogether. The soul inevitably fails to meet the virtues' demands. Marguerite writes that, "the soul is completely submerged and tormented by these horrible faults of hers."¹⁷¹ Rather than trying to achieve perfection, Marguerite argues that the soul should focus on annihilating its will so that God can act through it. The problem with striving to meet the demands of the virtues is that the emphasis is put on the soul's actions rather than God's actions within the soul. Marguerite is not concerned with what the soul does—the soul must relinquish its own action so that God can act directly through the soul.

According to Marguerite, the soul must transcend the virtues and become nothing. When the soul has annihilated itself, it is no longer in service to the virtues. The virtues instead serve the soul, thus avoiding two things: 1) the pain of failing to meet the demands of the virtues and 2) a situation where the soul can act however immorally it wants to because it is "free" of the virtues (i.e. antinomianism). Love explains that:

This Soul takes leave of the virtues, insofar as the practicing of them is concerned, and insofar as the desire for what they demand is concerned. But the Virtues have not taken

¹⁷⁰ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 84; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 46 (VI).

French text: "Vertus, je prends congé de vous à jamais...

Votre service est trop coûteux, je le sais bien...

J'étais donc votre serve; à présent je suis délivrée.

En vois j'avais mis tout mon coeur, je le sais bien,

De quoi je vécus en attendant, à juste titre.

J'en ai souffert plus d'un rude tourment, j'ai endure mainte peines;

C'est merveille que j'aie pu m'échapper vive."

¹⁷¹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 89; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 54 (XI). French text: "Cette Ame est toute accablée et épouvantée de ses horribles fautes."

leave of her, for they are always with her...So this Soul has gained and learned so much with the Virtues that she is now superior to the Virtues, for she has within her all that the Virtues know how to teach and more, without comparison.¹⁷²

The soul eventually surpasses the virtues by first obeying them and learning from them. Once it is mistress of the virtues, the virtues serve and are always with it. The soul becomes virtuous not because of its own striving towards perfection, but because it has emptied itself so completely that God gives to it his own righteousness. As Amy Hollywood explains, “the detachment of such souls is so great that they have no ‘place’ within which God works, but rather the divine works in himself.”¹⁷³ Therefore, the soul does not need to practice the virtues because God, who works through it, already contains the fullness of the virtues. For Marguerite, the abandonment of the virtues also requires the soul to give up independent action. The only action completed by the soul is the action that God performs through it.

Marguerite’s passage on the virtues has a distinctly pastoral aim. She is aware that the soul can be tormented by its faults in a way that is unproductive and self-defeating (such as scrupulosity).¹⁷⁴ In order to free oneself from this spiritual suffering, the soul must relinquish its will, so that God wills and acts through the soul directly. The soul that has transcended the virtues lives “without reproach of conscience because she does nothing from within herself.¹⁷⁵” After surrendering its will and independent action, the soul has no ability to sin since God alone wills and acts through the soul. Therefore, penance for sin is not needed. In the annihilated soul there is

¹⁷² Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 103—104; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 78—79 (XXI). French text: “Cette Ame a pris congé des Vertus, pour ce qui est de leur usage et du désir de ce qu’elles demandent, mais les Vertus n’ont pas pris congé d’elles, car elles sont toujours avec elles...Or il s’est produit que cette Ame a tant gagné et appris auprès des Vertus qu’elle se trouve au-dessus des Vertus, car elle possède en elle tout ce que les Vertus savent apprendre, et encore plus, sans comparaison.”

¹⁷³ Hollywood, Amy, “Suffering Transformed,” 108.

¹⁷⁴ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 89.

¹⁷⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 121; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 107 (XLI). French text: “Cette Ame vit sans reproche de sa conscience, car elle ne fait rien à partir de soi.”

no suffering associated with guilt or shame and there is no need for penitential practices meant to inflict physical and/or spiritual pain.

In fact, Marguerite repudiates many of the harmful practices associated with “feminine” spirituality. Food asceticism was one of the primary markers of female sanctity in the late Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶ Women such as Catherine of Siena and Margaret of Cortona fasted until they were no longer able to eat and eventually died of starvation. In her text, Marguerite distances herself from these kind of practices. In fact, she defends eating explicitly:

This Soul gives to Nature whatever she asks...Why would such souls feel guilty about taking what is necessary if necessity asks it? For these Souls this would be to fault the innocence and to encumber the peace in which such a Soul rests from all such things. Who would make his conscience guilty about taking the necessities from the four elements, as light from heaven, warmth from fire, dew from the water, and from the earth what sustains us?¹⁷⁷

Food asceticism is not necessary in Marguerite’s spirituality because her emphasis is on total detachment. Spiritual practices, such as fasting, are completely superfluous to Marguerite because they emphasize the soul’s actions, rather than God’s actions. In fact, the above passage suggests that fasting may even be a hindrance to the soul’s progress because the damage done to the body disturbs the peace of the annihilated soul. Marguerite again displays pastoral concern by trying to steer her readers away from extreme bodily penances and food asceticism. She is also concerned about the spiritual suffering that such practices cause, such as feeling guilt for eating or drinking. Perhaps Marguerite was aware of the incidents like that in the *Life of Marie d’Oignies* by Jacques

¹⁷⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 99—100; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 73—74 (XVII). French text: “Cette Ame donne à Nature autant qu’elle lui demande...Et aussi pourquoi ces Ames auraient-elles scrupule de prendre ce qu’il leur faut, quand nécessité leur demande? Ce serait, pour ces Ames, faute contre l’innocence et obstacle à la pai xen laquelle l’âme se repose de toutes choses. Qui est celui qui doit avoir scrupule de satisfaire son besoin de quatre éléments, comme de la claret du ciel, de la chaleur du feu, de la rosée de l’eau et de la terre qui nous soutient?”

de Vitry, where Marie cuts off a piece of her flesh as penance for eating a bit of meat.¹⁷⁸ While it is unclear whether Marguerite would have known this account, she is clearly aware of prevalence of food asceticism,¹⁷⁹ especially among women, and the harm that guilt over-eating and drinking could cause—so much so that she tries to relieve this guilt in her readers.

Marguerite is not only concerned with relieving the necessity for physical pain but also spiritual or interior pain as well. It is significant that Marguerite wants the soul to annihilate the will as the locus of desire. Many mystics who suffer from the dialectic of God's presence and absence (such as Hadewijch) suffer precisely because of their desire for God's presence. Hollywood observes that "the suffering engendered by God's apparent absence to the soul can be overcome through the annihilation of the soul through which his abiding presence is made apparent. By recognizing that in which all things are equal, their uncreated ground in the divine, suffering, estrangement, and alienation are superseded, and the soul is transfigured into love. Without such a move, the body would continue to suffer, for it is the most obvious and visible site of difference from and absence from the divine."¹⁸⁰ God's abiding presence is made apparent in the annihilated soul because God alone dwells in it—there is no individuated soul to speak of. The soul reverts to its pre-created state where it was perfectly with God without a will of its own. The body does not need to suffer because it does not need to be purified. God himself is purity in the annihilated soul.

Angela's *Memorial* is also concerned with relieving the pain that the soul feels as it struggles with the virtues and confronts feelings of unworthiness. In the *Memorial*, much of Angela's suffering is caused by self-doubt and the fear of deception. She doubts her worthiness to

¹⁷⁸ Jacques de Vitry, "Life of Marie d'Oignies," *Two Lives of Marie D'Oignies*, trans. Margot H. King, (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1998) 63.

¹⁷⁹ See Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, 150-186.

¹⁸⁰ Amy Hollywood, "Suffering Transformed," 109.

receive the incredible graces and visions that God gives her, which makes her question the legitimacy of her experiences. Since she is not worthy to receive such favors from God, she worries that she is being deceived and that these experiences may come from the devil. For instance, after receiving a revelation from God, Angela begins to doubt whether the experience was of divine origin. She cries out to God, “Since all that you have said is true, and as extraordinary as you say it is, and since you are God almighty, give me a sign that I may really be sure that it is you. Take away my doubt about it.”¹⁸¹ God grants her request and tells her that it “will be continuously in the depths of your soul and from it you will always feel something of God’s presence and be burning with love for him. And you will recognize in your heart that no one but I can do such a thing.”¹⁸² God gives her a sign of his continual presence in her soul, which should take away all her self-doubt. But it seems that no matter how many signs and reassurances God gives her, Angela continues to doubt herself and her experiences.

It isn’t until the seventh supplementary step, when she struggles to describe what she witnesses in her visions, that Angela becomes certain that she is not being deceived. When she has the vision of the darkness of God, she writes: “My soul was then granted a most certain faith, a secure and most firm hope, a continual security about God which took away all my fear...I was made so sure of God that in no way can I ever entertain any doubts about him or of my possession of him. Of this I have the utmost certitude.”¹⁸³ Angela’s previous experiences constituted love exchanges between her and God. But when she sees God in darkness, she goes beyond love and

¹⁸¹ *CW*, 149. *IL*, 204. *M*, 54. Latin text: “Postquam ita est quod tu es Deus omnipotens et sunt vera ista et sunt ita magna sicut tu dicis, da mihi signum quod sim segura quod tu sis. Trahe me extra dubium.”

¹⁸² *CW*, 150. *IL*, 206. *M*, 56. Latin text: “Quod signum erit continue tecum intus in anima tua, et quo semper senties de Deo et eris calida de amore Dei. Et cognosces intus in te quod hoc non potest facere alius nisi ego.”

¹⁸³ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354—356. *M*, 152. Latin text: “Et tunc data fuit animae una fides certissima, una spes segura et firmissima, una securitas de Deo continua quae abstulit a me omnem timorem...Et effecta sum ita segura de Deo, quod nunquam possum dubitare de eo et quod non habeam Deum certissime.”

becomes nonlove.¹⁸⁴ It is in this darkness that Angela finds the most certainty about God and the divine nature of her experiences. One might think that the more mysterious and elusive God becomes, the less security one would have about the divine. But for Angela, this experience gives her absolute certainty. In fact, the less she can say about her experience of God, the more she trusts the divine origin of her experience. Angela becomes unable to doubt that God is the source of the darkness and cannot imagine being separated from him. The dialectic of God's presence and absence also ceases in this place of darkness. She writes that, "In this state the soul can never even think of the withdrawal of this good, or about withdrawing from this good, or that it might ever be separated from it from then on."¹⁸⁵ Once at this stage, the fear and anxiety about being separated from God is gone. This is not a state of suffering but rather of freedom from suffering, fear, and doubt.

Indistinct Union: Annihilation of the Soul and the Pre-created State

Marguerite understands the *unitas indistinctionis* as a process of self-annihilation that results in the soul's return to a pre-created state in the mind of God. Just as the soul must give up the virtues, she also must completely relinquish her will. Love explains that "such a Soul neither desires nor despises poverty nor tribulation, neither mass nor sermon, neither fast nor prayer, and gives to Nature all that is necessary."¹⁸⁶ The annihilated soul does not will or desire anything—good or bad—because it no longer has a will. Instead, the soul's will is replaced with God's will so that it can only will only what God wills. In this pre-created state, the soul experiences peace and repose, free from all anxiety about her sinfulness. Love explains that "this Soul does not belong

¹⁸⁴ *CW*, 202. *IL*, 354. *M*, 152.

¹⁸⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 203.

¹⁸⁶ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 87; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 51 (IX). French text: "Cette Ame ne désire ni ne méprise pauvreté ni tribulation, ni messe ni sermon, ni jeûne ni oraison, et donne à Nature tout ce qu'il faut, sans remords de conscience."

to herself, which is why she cannot have anxiety. For her thought is at rest in a peaceful place, that is, in the Trinity, and thus she cannot move herself from it, nor have anxiety, as long as her Lover is content. From this place no one falls into sin, and any sin which was ever done, responds Love to Reason, is as displeasing to her will as it is to God's."¹⁸⁷

When the soul has returned to its pre-created state in the mind of the Trinity, it cannot sin, agonize over its past wrongs, or attempt to hide them. The soul is a perfect mirror that reflects only God's will, God's judgments, and God's actions. The soul cannot sin because it has no will to choose anything contrary to God's will. God alone wills and acts through the soul and God cannot sin. Although Angela doesn't understand indistinct union as a return to a pre-created state, she also asserts that there is a chamber in the soul that does not experience anxiety, sadness, or even joy. For Angela, union with God transforms the soul so that it begins to take on the divine attributes, including God's equanimity and transcendence of emotion. However, Angela does not mention sinlessness or the annihilation of the will, possibly because she wants to avoid any accusation of antinomianism.¹⁸⁸

The annihilated soul must also give up reason in order to become divine because God (who alone exists in the annihilated soul) cannot be comprehended through human reason. Marguerite distinguishes between two Holy Churches: 1) Holy Church the Little, which is governed by reason and 2) Holy Church the Great, which is made up of annihilated souls and is governed by Love. Love states that "Holy Church could understand them perfectly if Holy Church were within their souls. But no created thing enters within their souls except God alone who created the Souls, so

¹⁸⁷ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 99; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 71 (XVI). French text: "Cela veut dire que cette Ame n'est pas à elle et c'est pourquoi elle ne peut avoir mésaise; car sa pensée est assise en lieu paisible, en la Trinité, aussi ne peut-elle s'en éloigner ni avoir mésaise, du moment que son ami est bien aise. Mais de ce que d'aucuns tombent dans le péché et que péché fut oncques commis, sa volonté a déplaisir et il en va de même pour Dieu."

¹⁸⁸ For a more detailed discussion of Angela, Marguerite, and antinomianism, see p. 258–259.

that none would understand such Souls except God who is within them.”¹⁸⁹ Holy Church the Little cannot understand these souls because they are transparent mirrors of the divine, and reason cannot comprehend the divine in its totality. But Marguerite also implies that the annihilated souls—Holy Church the Great—cannot fully understand themselves because they have become God. Angela states something similar when her soul experiences its own presentation before God. Her soul becomes so noble and elevated that it can no longer comprehend itself.¹⁹⁰ For Angela, the soul becomes incomprehensible because it takes on God’s incomprehensibility in union with him. But for Marguerite, the soul cannot understand itself because there is no longer any intellect left to understand, as the soul’s understanding is annihilated and replaced with God’s understanding. Angela’s understanding of divine union has no corresponding annihilation of the intellect. The Soul also implies this in the dialogue when speaking to Reason: “Thus I love better what is in Him beyond my intellect that I do what is in Him and in my intellect. For this reason what He understands and what I do not understand is more mine than what I understand about Him and which is mine.”¹⁹¹ Because the annihilated soul has given up reason, God knows within it what it is unable to know. And for the soul, this is more important, more transcendent, and more its own than anything a person could grasp with her own human intellect.

Throughout the *Mirror of Simple Souls*, Reason has tried to understand the transformation occurring in the annihilated soul and even at one point expresses a desire to serve these souls.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 102; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 76 (XIX). French text: “Sainte Eglise ne pourrait les connaître parfaitement si elle n’était dedans leurs âmes. Et nulle chose créée n’entre dans leur âmes. Seul y entre Dieu qui créa les Ames. C’est pourquoi nul ne connaît ces Ames sinon Dieu qui est en elles.”

¹⁹⁰ *CW*, 216. *IL*, 394. *M*, 178.

¹⁹¹ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 113; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 94 (XXXII). French text: “C’est pourquoi j’aime mieux ce qui est en lui et qui est hors de mon entendement que ce qui est en lui et en mon entendement, pour cette raison qu’est mieux à moi ce qu’il connaît et que je ne connais pas, que ce que j’en connais et qui m’appartient.”

¹⁹² Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 119.

But towards the end of the book, Reason dies within the dialogue (but comes back) not only because it cannot understand the annihilated soul, but because it cannot bear the language that the Soul uses to describe itself. The Soul tells Reason, “I was...and I am, and I will be always without lack, for Love has no beginning, no end, and no limit, and I am nothing except Love. How would I have anything else? This cannot be.”¹⁹³ The Soul equates herself with God because she has become so annihilated that she no longer exists but only God is within her. Reason finds this language blasphemous and cries out, “How dare one say this? I dare not listen to it. I am fainting truly, Lady Soul, in hearing you; my heart is failing. I have no more life.”¹⁹⁴ Reason dies because it cannot understand the soul’s transformation into Love and it cannot bear the soul’s language of equality with the divine. Reason ultimately cannot understand that “between a lover and a beloved there is no lordship,”¹⁹⁵ but rather total equality and mutual self-giving. Although Angela does not use the language of lordship, she describes her own relationship with God in similar terms of mutuality. The Trinity and the soul dwell in each other and hold each other in a mutual embrace.¹⁹⁶

For Marguerite, the soul also gives up its own independent action when it gives up the virtues, the will, and reason. Love states, “This soul...does not do any work for God’s sake, nor for her own, nor for her neighbors’ either, as was said above. But God does it, if He wills, [He] who is able to do it.”¹⁹⁷ The soul has ceased to be an independent actor because she has become

¹⁹³ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 162; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 178 (LXXXVII). French text: “Mais pour ce qui est de moi, je suis et serai toujours sans faillir, car Amour n’a ni commencement ni fin ni mesure, et je ne suis qu’Amour. Comment donc serait-elle ma possession? Cela ne saurait être.”

¹⁹⁴ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 163; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 178 (LXXXVII). French text: “Comment ose-t-on dire chose pareille? Je n’ose l’écouter, en verité, je défaille à vous ouïr, madame l’Ame. Le cœur me manque. Je suis san vie.”

¹⁹⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 112; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 92 (XXXI). French text: “Entre ami et amie, il n’était point de seigneurie.”

¹⁹⁶ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 390. *M*, 176.

¹⁹⁷ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 145; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 150 (LXXI). French text: “Cette Ame ne fait plus œuvre pour Dieu, ni pour elle-même, ni non plus pour son prochain, ainsi qu’il l’a été dit. Mais Dieu le fasse, s’il le veut, qui le peut faire.”

nothing. Only God works within her. And because she has lost her will, she cannot will or desire to do anything. Love emphasizes the nothingness of the annihilated soul:

If you understand perfectly your nothingness you will do nothing, and this nothingness will give you everything. If you cannot come perfectly to understand your nothingness which is of the truth as much as you, it is necessary for you to do something...As God has transformed you into Himself, so also you must not forget your nothingness. That is, you must not forget who you were when He first created you, and what you might become if He keeps your works, and who you are and will be, if not by the One within you.¹⁹⁸

The nothingness that Love advocates is not just a renunciation of everything that makes the soul an individual, but also a pre-created nothingness. For the soul to be completely annihilated and free, it must go back to the state where it was not, before it received its individualized existence. This nothingness is everything because the soul becomes God, who is everything. The soul who acts independently is not annihilated and does not understand its nothingness. The nothingness of the soul is twofold: 1) It is nothing in reality—meaning that the soul is nothing in comparison to God, who alone *is*. 2) It is nothing in itself—meaning that the soul has made itself nothing by annihilating the features within itself that make it an individual so it can be united by God. United with God in its pre-created state, the soul cannot suffer because it no longer is. The soul becomes impassible because it is united to God who is impassible. It acts because God acts. It is because God is.

Angela also emphasizes the soul's nothingness, but in the Memorial, nothingness is used to describe humility before God. For example, God showed her that "she herself was nothing and was created from vile substance; how he found nothing good in her, and yet he loved her and she

¹⁹⁸ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 115; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 96—97 (XXXIV). French text: "Si vous connaissez parfaitement votre néant, vous ne ferez rien et ce rien vous donnera tout. Et si vous ne pouvez parfaitement venir à connaître votre néant qui est, à la vérité, tout ce qui est de vous, il vous convient faire autre chose...Si Dieu vous a muée en lui, vous ne devez cependant pas oublier votre néant, quand il vous créa d'abord, et ce que vous auriez été s'il avait pris garde à vos œuvres, et ce que vous êtes et que vous seriez s'il n'y avait en vous ce qui est de lui."

herself could love him; and his love is so great and perfect that when it is recalled, there is no place left for pride."¹⁹⁹ As a sinful human being, Angela understands her lowliness and realizes that she is nothing in comparison with God's greatness. But God also exemplifies perfect humility. In the fourth supplementary step, Angela receives a vision in which God shows her his power and then his humility: "Because I had understood the power of God and perceived now his deep humility, my soul was filled with wonder and esteemed itself to be nothing at all—indeed, saw in itself nothing except pride."²⁰⁰ (170) Recalling God's love, his awesome power, and his perfect humility help Angela to realize that she is insignificant and full of pride. In other words, the love of God helps her to become humbler. However, in the *Instructions*, the roles of love and humility reverse: humility becomes the source of love and begins to play a pivotal role in the soul's divinization. In Instruction V, Angela states that "the primary virtue of all, which is the love of God and neighbor, originates in the light of humility. For the soul, perceiving its own nothingness, and perceiving God lowering himself for such vile nothingness and even united to this nothingness is set ablaze with love for God, and in this burning love is transformed into God."²⁰¹ Before the soul can properly love God, it must understand its lowliness and vileness. Only then can the soul realize the depths of God's love, because the soul realizes how far God must lower himself to unite with the soul's nothingness. When confronted with the greatness of God's love, the soul is similarly set ablaze with love and becomes one with God. But here, it is God who takes on the soul's nothingness, rather than the soul taking on God's nothingness. This is perhaps the closest Angela

¹⁹⁹ *CW*, 165. *IL*, 246. *M*, 82. Latin text: "Quomodo in ipsa nullam bonitatem invenit, et quomodo Deus, qui diligit eam et quem ipsa potest diligere, est ita res maxima et perfect quod, quando recordatur, nulla superbia habet ibi locum."

²⁰⁰ *CW*, 170. *IL*, 262. *M*, 92. Latin text: "Quod comprehendens anima potentiam inenarrabilem et videns tantam profundam humilitatem, mirabatur et reputabat se nihil omnino, et quasi nihil in se videbat nisi superbiam."

²⁰¹ *CW*, 253. *IL*, 512. Latin text: "Nam prima virtutem omnium quae est dilectio Dei et proximi, ab hoc lumine trahit originem. Quia anima, videndo se nihil et Deum pro tam vili nihili inclinatum et vilificatum et etiam suae nihilitati unitum, accenditur in amore et accensa ipso amore transformatur in Deum."

comes to Marguerite's notion of nothingness. However, she does not understand the soul's nothingness as an annihilation of the soul, but rather relates nothingness with humility (and ultimately the divine humility).

Transcendence

Marguerite and Angela's mystical programs both require unrelenting transcendence, especially transcendence of the self, the soul's most pernicious attachment. Marguerite's mystical itinerary is composed of seven stages; each stage must be transcended for the soul to progress to its annihilated, pre-created state. In each stage, there is a moment when the soul seems complacent. If the soul chooses to stay there, it cannot ascend to the next stage or achieve the peace of annihilation. For example, in the first stage the soul is "stripped of her power to sin" and follows God's commandments.²⁰² However, the soul is tempted to be complacent with this stage: "so it seems to this Soul to be labor enough for her to do all that she knows how to do. And it seems to her that, even if she lived a thousand years, her power would be fully occupied with maintaining and keeping the commandments."²⁰³ The soul cannot imagine a higher stage because it is so busy obeying the virtues and following the commandments. Perhaps the most difficult stage for Marguerite is the fourth stage where many souls become stuck. She writes that in this state the soul is drawn by love into the height of contemplation. This soul is "marvelously filled with love by great faith through the concord of union which places her in possession of its delights." Because the soul delights so much in this love, it mistakenly believes that this is the highest stage:

So the Soul believes that there is no higher life than to have this over which she has lordship. For love has so grandly satisfied her with delights that she does not believe that God has a greater gift to give to the Soul here below...It is not strange if such a Soul is

²⁰² Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 189; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 220 (CXVIII). French text: "dépouillée de son pouvoir de péché."

²⁰³ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 189; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 220 (CXVIII). French text: "Et ce semble à cette Ame épreuve suffisante pour elle et pour ce qu'elle sait faire. Et il lui semble que, si elle devait vivre mille ans, son pouvoir aurait assez à faire de tenir en garder les commandements."

overtaken, for gracious love makes her completely inebriated, and so inebriated that it allows no perception except what she has through the power by which love delights her. And thus the Soul cannot value another state, for the great brightness of love has so dazzled her sight that she sees nothing beyond her love. And there she is deceived, for there are two other stages.²⁰⁴

Although she readily admits that it is difficult, Marguerite states that the soul must transcend its delight in love in order to move to the highest stages. The problem for Marguerite is complacency—she pushes the soul to always seek that which is beyond. It is important to overcome the fourth stage because this is the stage where the soul can suffer greatly from God’s presence and absence. To become free of suffering and to achieve the peace of the annihilated soul, one must transcend to the fifth stage where the soul must give up not only its attachment to the delights of love but also its attachment to itself. The sixth stage, the highest the soul is able to achieve on earth, occurs when the soul “sees neither God nor herself, but God sees Himself of Himself in her, for her, without her. God shows to her that there is nothing except Him.”²⁰⁵ In the sixth stage, the soul completely embraces its nothingness and enters into its pre-created state where God alone exists. In this stage, the body may suffer and be persecuted (as Marguerite was at the end of her life), but suffering is no longer theologically necessary—there is no soul to be purified by suffering, no self that can identify with the suffering Christ, no independent will that can imitate Christ. The ascent stops at the sixth stage because the soul has been annihilated. There is nothing more to transcend, and the seventh stage is reserved for those in heaven.

²⁰⁴ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 190–191; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 222–223 (CXVIII). French text: “Et l’Ame tient donc qu’il n’est pas de vie plus haute que de posséder ce don’t elle a seigneurie. Car Amour l’a, de ses délices, si grandement rassasiée qu’elle ne croit pas que Dieu puisse accorder à une âme ici-bas...Il n’est pas étonnant que cette Ame soit ravie, car Gracieuse Amour la rend tout ivre et tellement qu’elle ne lui laisse rien entendre si ce n’est elle, en raison de la force avec laquelle Amour la fait jouir. Aussi l’Ame ne peut-elle apprécier un autre état que le sien. Car la grande clarté d’Amour a tellement ébloui sa vue qu’elle ne lui laisse pas la possibilité de voir au-delà de son amour. Mais là elle se trompe. Car il est deux autres états.”

²⁰⁵ Marguerite Porete, *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, 193; Marguerite Porete, *Le Miroir*, 227 (CXVIII). French text: “Mais cette Ame, ainsi pure et illuminée, ne voit ni Dieu ni elle-même, mais Dieu se voit par lui-même en elle, pour elle, sans elle. Et Dieu le lui montre: rien n’est si ce n’est lui.”

-Marguerite's apophatic language strives not to create systems or express ontologize but rather to break down systems and to subvert ontologies that threaten to make God another "reality." (257)
-Marguerite insists that there is no coming to terms with God, but only the constant effort, the performance, or the process of negating the works of the intellect and will in order to attain the annihilation in which God and the Soul become absolutely one once more. (257)
-Two apophatic pillars: 1) God is totally incomprehensible and therefore "nothing" from the perspective of human categories, 2) the Soul must become nothing by willing nothing in order to attain the God who is nothing and therefore all. (257)

Transcendence is also important in Angela's thought, particularly in the seventh supplementary step. When Angela experiences the vision of God in darkness, it is hard to imagine a higher state. After all, what is beyond the darkness, in which Angela stands within the Trinity and sees everything and nothing?²⁰⁶ Nevertheless, Angela transcends her vision of God in darkness and begins to describe God as an extremely deep abyss.²⁰⁷ In the abyss of God, Angela appears to transcend experience itself. She is drawn out of everything she has ever known of God and finds nothing:

I was and am now drawn out of everything I had previously experienced and had taken such delight in: the life and humanity of Christ; the consideration of that very deep companionship which the Father from eternity has bestowed on his Son (in which I had taken such deep delight), namely, the contempt, the suffering, and the poverty experienced by the Son of God; and the cross as bed to rest on, I was also drawn out of the vision of God in the darkness in which I used to take such delight. Every previous state was put to sleep so tenderly and sweetly that I could not tell it was happening. I could only recall that now I did not have these experiences. For in the cross of Christ in which I used to take such delight, so as to make it my place of rest and my bed, I find nothing; in the poverty of the Son of God, I find nothing; and in everything that could be named, I find nothing.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ *CW*, 204. *IL*, 358. *M*, 156.

²⁰⁷ *CW*, 211. *IL*, 374. *M*, 166.

²⁰⁸ *CW*, 212. *IL*, 380. *M*, 170. Latin text: Et fui extracta, et sum extracta de omnibus quae prius habueram et in quibus prius consueveram delectari, scilicet de vita et de humanitate Christi et de consideratione illius profundissimae societatis quam Deus Pater tantum dilexit ab aeterno quod dedit eam Filio suo, in quibus ego consueveram profundissime delectari, videlicet in despectu et in dolore et in paupertate Filii Dei, et in cruce quae consuevit esse mea repausatio et meus lectus. Et sum extracta de illo modo videndi Deum in tenebra ill aquae tantum consuevit me delectare. Et sum extracta de omni illo statu priori, nisi quod modo recordor quod non habeo illa, quia in cruce in qua tantum delectabar quod erat mea repausatio et meus lectus nihil invenio, in paupertate Filii Dei nihil invenio, et in omnibus quae nominari possunt nihil invenio.

In this new state, Angela seems to transcend not only her past experiences, but experience itself. She can find nothing because there is no-thing to find. She is immersed in the nothingness of God, the extremely deep abyss, in which the soul no longer experiences suffering, delight, or anything that can be named or conceived. Yet Angela's understanding of transcendence differs from Marguerite's because she has no concept of the annihilation of the soul.

Jacopone da Todi

Jacopone, a Spiritual Franciscan poet, mystic, and author of the *Lauds*, was born between 1230-1236 in Todi, a city in the Umbrian valley of central Italy.²⁰⁹ He came from an aristocratic family and his father's name was Iacobello Benedetti.²¹⁰ Jacopone studied at the University of Bologna and married Vanna di Bernardino di Guidone between 1265 and 1276.²¹¹ He settled down as a *notaio*, a profession that combined elements of law and accounting.²¹² After the death of his wife, Jacopone turned his back on his old life and became a *bizzocone*, or public penitent, for ten years.²¹³ During this time, he gained a reputation for holiness and befriended the Franciscan Spirituals. A good number of the lauds can be dated to this period.²¹⁴ In 1278, Jacopone became a Franciscan friar and began to study the life of Francis and the works of Bonaventure.²¹⁵ In 1294, he wrote a poem to Pier da Morrone, the newly elected Celestine V, exhorting him to stay true to his ascetic ideals and warning him of the possibility of corruption by the papal court.²¹⁶ Jacopone

²⁰⁹ "Foreword," *Jacopone da Todi: The Lauds*, trans. Serge and Elizabeth Hughes, (New York: Paulist Press, 1982), xix.

²¹⁰ "Introduction," *The Lauds*, 24.

²¹¹ "Introduction," *The Lauds*, 24.

²¹² "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xix.

²¹³ "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xix.

²¹⁴ "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xix.

²¹⁵ "Introduction," *The Lauds*, 33.

²¹⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 173 (L 54).

was part of the delegation of Spirituals who successfully appealed to Celestine V in 1294 for more autonomy and protection from the Conventuals.²¹⁷

Unfortunately for Jacopone and the Spirituals, Celestine abdicated soon afterward after only five months in office. His successor, Boniface VIII had little sympathy for the Spirituals. Jacopone signed his name to the Lunghezza Manifesto of 1297, which declared that Boniface VIII was no longer pope and condemned the church's decadence.²¹⁸ Joining the Cardinals Colonna in rebellion against Boniface, Jacopone severed his Franciscan ties of obedience in open defiance of the papacy.²¹⁹ But in less than two years, the Colonnas were defeated and Jacopone was captured, tried, and condemned to life imprisonment in an underground cell in a monastery in Todi.²²⁰ The poem he wrote shortly after he was imprisoned reveals that he was kept underground near a latrine, he was chained, and no one was allowed to speak to him.²²¹ In Lauds 56 and 57, Jacopone pleads in vain for Boniface VIII to lift his excommunication, but it wasn't until 1303 that Boniface's successor Benedict XI had him released.²²² He spent his last years at the Franciscan convent of San Lorenzo in Collazzone and died in 1306. Jacopone's mystical lauds were most likely composed in the last ten years of his life, during the papacies of Celestine V and Boniface VIII.²²³

Neither a beguine, nor a woman, Jacopone da Todi stands out among the three women mystics discussed in this chapter. As a man, he was not subject to the same limitations and inherent suspicion that the women mystics faced. In fact, Jacopone's work at times is unapologetically

²¹⁷ For more information about the conflict between the Spiritual and Conventual Franciscans, see p. 32, 41–55.

²¹⁸ John Took, "Iacopone da Todi," *The Oxford Companion to Italian Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). <https://www-oxfordreference-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780198183327.001.0001/acref-9780198183327-e-1663>.

²¹⁹ "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xx.

²²⁰ "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xx.

²²¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 174 (L 55).

²²² "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xx.

²²³ "Foreword," *The Lauds*, xx.

misogynistic, such as Laud 8 in which he seems to justify a husband beating and ultimately killing his wife out of jealousy because she is vain.²²⁴ Despite the occasional misogyny and woman-baiting, Jacopone's *Lauds* bear striking similarities to the writings of Angela, Hadewijch, and Marguerite, as I will explore below. His use of the vernacular, his experience as a *bizzocone* or lay penitent, and his association with the Spiritual Franciscans place him with Angela and the beguine mystics at the margins of the religious and ecclesiastical landscape of the thirteenth century. Jacopone was educated as a young man and likely knew Latin, though he shared the skepticism of his fellow Spiritual Franciscans towards learning and may have chosen to compose his lauds in the vernacular because it is considered a more humble, less prestigious genre.²²⁵ This explanation is consistent with his refusal to be ordained: Jacopone rejected the additional education and higher status afforded by clerical orders and decided to remain a lay brother. McGinn points out that male mystics who did not qualify as teachers through the normal ecclesiastical or academic channels often had to create new models of authority like the women mystics.²²⁶ Jacopone's status first as *bizzocone* and then as a lay brother as well as his association with the Spiritual Franciscans would have made his authority vulnerable and tenuous. Once excommunicated and imprisoned, he would have lost any authority he once possessed. As a result, like Angela and the beguine mystics discussed in this chapter, Jacopone claimed authority directly from his relationship with the divine. For example, in Laud 92 he claims to share in God's sovereignty, giving him "authority over Rome and its Curia,"²²⁷ the very entities that excommunicated and imprisoned him.

Jacopone's poems reveal his passionate, uncompromising character. Elémire Zolla writes that the "cumulative effect of Jacopone's lauds is that of Giotto's frescos, which departed from the

²²⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 82-83 (L 8:16-81).

²²⁵ Jacopone criticizes the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake in several Lauds. I discuss this further on p. 329.

²²⁶ Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 22.

²²⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:90). Also see p. 329.

holy composure and fine shadings of the icon, turning painting into a matter of stark, huge bulks dented by downright shadows, of human features either solemn or laughing or turned awry with pain—a universe where nothing is graded, developed into nuance.”²²⁸ Jacopone rails against the evil of halfway measures and half-hearted devotion.²²⁹ He was a fierce supporter of the Spiritual Franciscan cause and wanted a literal practice of poverty—poverty was not a metaphor to Jacopone. He had a deep mistrust of compromise and a tendency towards extremes.²³⁰ His emotions were intense and often vacillated from one extreme to the other: In one poem he can rail with hatred against the corruption of Boniface VIII, while in another he describes the peace and quietude that fill the soul in union with God. His mystical lauds (Lauds 90-92) incorporate many of the themes present in the works of Angela, Hadewijch, and Marguerite, especially the theme of the *unitas indistinctionis*. Like Hadewijch, Jacopone emphasizes God as Love and writes of the soul’s suffering due to the agonizing dialectic of presence and absence of God. Like Marguerite, he emphasizes the annihilation of the soul and relinquishing the will. Like Angela, he is profoundly influenced by Francis, speaks of God as deep abyss, and has a similar understanding of the *unitas indistinctionis*.

Jacopone’s mystical lauds begin with a reference to “cruel charity” which wounds him.²³¹ Before he knew the love of Christ, Jacopone thought that love would be a “gentle peace,”²³² but instead it causes him “torment I could never have imagined.”²³³ Like Hadewijch, Jacopone

²²⁸ Elémire Zolla, “Preface,” *The Lauds*, xiii.

²²⁹ “Introduction,” *The Lauds*, 28.

²³⁰ “Introduction,” *The Lauds*, 29.

²³¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 257 (L 90:1); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, ed. Franco Mancini (Roma-Bari: G. Laterza, 1974), 280 (L 89:1). Italian text: “Amor de caritate/perché m’ài ssi feruto.”

²³² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 257 (L 90:11); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 280 (L 89:12). Italian text: “credendo dulzura.”

²³³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 257 (L 90:13); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 280 (L 89:15). Italian text: “Provo tormento, qual non me cuitava.”

describes love in terms of violence and suffering. Nevertheless, love continues to draw him with an intensity that induces madness.²³⁴ The last forty-seven lines of Laud 90 are a hymn to Love in which Jacopone repeatedly chants “Love, Love” (*Amor, Amore*) and “Love, Love-Jesus” (*Amor, Amor-Iesù*), begging the Love that has wounded and captured him to let him drown in Love.²³⁵ This section of the laud begins with Love and ends with Love, with the word “love” appearing in each line. The similarity to Hadewijch’s poem “Were I but Love” is striking. Hadewijch also suffers from the “madness of Love” and is tormented by the intensity of her desire.²³⁶ The poem’s final stanza is mostly a repetition of the word Love (*minne*). Hadewijch writes “O Love, were I but love,/ And could I but love you, Love, with love!/ O Love, for love’s sake, grant that I,/Having become love, may know Love wholly as Love!”²³⁷ Like Hadewijch, Jacopone also longs to become love. He begs Love to make him one with Christ: “Love, love, may my soul be one with You.../Jesus, my hope, drown me in Love.”²³⁸ Jacopone longs to die or drown in love so that he is annihilated, and Love is all that exists.

In addition to his emphasis on love, Jacopone’s poetry also mirrors the thought of beguine mystics, such as Hadewijch and Mechthild of Magdeburg, in its evocation of the soul’s suffering due to the presence and absence of God. While Jacopone experiences great joy in the presence of God, he writes that he suffers immensely when Love is absent:

For You, Love, I weaken and die;
I cry out to embrace You.
When You are gone, mine is a living death,
And I sigh and weep for Your return;

²³⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 258 (L 90:58).

²³⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 264 (L 90:240—287); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 288 (L 89: 251—290).

²³⁶ Hadewijch, “Were I but Love (Poem 15 in Poems in Couplets),” 350 line 4.

²³⁷ Hadewijch, “Were I but Love,” 352 lines 49—52.

²³⁸ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 265 (L 90:277, 287). Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 288—289 (L 89: 280, 290). Italian text: “Amore, Amor, l'anema teco unita.../ Iesù, speranza mia, abissame enn amore!”

The English is translated as “drown,” but Jacopone uses *abyss* as a verb, as Angela does in the *Instructions*. See *CW*, 249. *IL*, 500. I discuss Angela’s use of “abyss” as a verb on p. 269.

Once You are back my heart blossoms.
Come back, my Love, come back
And hasten to my aid! Come back,
Love that consumes and binds me tight.²³⁹

Jacopone longs for the return of Love as the bride in the *Song of Songs* longs for the return of her bridegroom. In *Song of Songs* 5:6-8, the bride is woken by her bridegroom knocking at the door. But when she opens it, she finds that he has gone: “I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone...I sought him, but did not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer. Making their rounds in the city the sentinels found me; they beat me, they wounded me, they took away my mantle, those sentinels of the walls. I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, tell him this: I am faint with love” (NRSV). Jacopone describes himself as similarly wounded and often describes himself as “faint with love.”²⁴⁰ Captured by love, Jacopone wanders as if dazed and doesn’t know where he is.²⁴¹ He longs to be reunited with his absent lover, begging God to take pity on his suffering, comfort him, and consider his needs.²⁴² Although Laud 90 ends with Jacopone longing for death, suffering does not have the last word. In Laud 91, Jacopone reveals that when the soul has annihilated itself, it will reach a point of quietude in which there is

²³⁹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 260 (L 90:112—119); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 282 (L 89: 115—122).

Italian text: “Per te, Amor, consumome languendo
e vo stridenno per te abbracciare;
quando te parti, sì mogo viviendo,
sospiro e plango per te ritrovare;
te retornando, 'l cor se va stendendo,
ch'en te se pòzza tutto trasformare;
donqua plu non tardare, Amor or me sovene,
legato sì mme tene, consumese lo core!”

²⁴⁰ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 264—265 (L 90:246, 279, 285).

Jacopone uses the Italian “pasmare” for “to faint.” See Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 288—289 (L 89: 249,288).

²⁴¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 260, 265 (L 90:122, 125, 286).

²⁴² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 260, 264 (L 90:120, 250, 252).

no suffering or striving.²⁴³ Thus, for both Jacopone and Marguerite, annihilation of the soul or self is what ultimately ends the suffering of the soul and the striving for the virtues.

In Laud 92, Jacopone describes three stages of self-annihilation, which he likens to three heavens. The stages are a little difficult to identify and Jacopone does not present them in a systematic way. Nevertheless, it appears that he believes that annihilation of the will is the first step, or first heaven. Jacopone's notion of the annihilation of the will is far from the orthodox understanding of divine union as a *unitas spiritus*, or union of wills. For Jacopone, it is not enough for one's will to be in concord with God's will; in the first step of self-annihilation, "the will of man drowns completely."²⁴⁴ The result is the beginning of the soul's fusion with God: "being and nonbeing I have fused together,/ And out of love banished my will with its 'yes' and 'no.'"²⁴⁵ The soul in this state disowns all things and "no longer cares to possess" anything. Without a will, the soul does not desire anything: "Once cut off from all things,/ Nothing is lost and nothing is sought;/ Without appetite, being, or desire to possess,/ The soul possesses all and is beyond corruption."²⁴⁶ Jacopone notes the paradox that in giving up all possessions, the soul possesses everything because it possesses and is possessed by the Possessor of All Things.²⁴⁷

In the other mystical lauds, Jacopone describes the annihilation of the will in similar terms. In Laud 91 he writes that when the soul is united to Truth, "Its old nature fades away,/ It is no longer master of itself./ The soul wills and yet does not will:/ Its will belongs to Another.../It no

²⁴³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 267 (L 91:70).

²⁴⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:26); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 290 (L 90: 31—32). Italian text: "de l'omo anichillato,/ che à anegato tutto so volere."

²⁴⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:13—14); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 289 (L 90: 16—18). Italian text: "Da l'essere a lo none/ ho fatta l'unione/ e, per affetto, lo 'sì' e 'l 'no' mozzare."

²⁴⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:15—18); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 290 (L 90: 19—23). Italian text: "Mozzato da lui tutto,/ e nulla perde e nulla pò volere;/ omnia possede e de nulla è corrotto,/ però che llo n'è mozzo onne appetere,/ l'essere e 'l possedere."

²⁴⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:23).

longer seeks to possess, as was its wont.”²⁴⁸ When the soul annihilates its will, it not only ceases to possess or desire anything, but also is no longer capable of independent action. Since the will has been annihilated and replaced with God’s will, only God acts through the soul. This is perhaps most profoundly demonstrated in Jacopone’s dialogue with Christ in *Laud* 90. Christ rebukes him for the intensity of his ardor and commands him to “put order into you love.”²⁴⁹ But Jacopone responds that he is unable to do so because he has annihilated his will. He states that “this new creation has no strength to act on its own... You, not I, are responsible for what I do./ If I displease You, then,/ You are displeasing Yourself, Love.”²⁵⁰ He goes even farther in blaming Christ, saying:

If it was temperance You wanted,
 Why did you lead me to this fiery furnace?
 In giving Yourself, the Infinite,
 You canceled all measure in me...
 If there is fault in my immoderate love it is Yours,
 Not mine: it was You who led the way, Love.²⁵¹

Since Jacopone has no will other than God’s will and is no longer capable of independent action, Christ himself is responsible for the intensity of his love. Jacopone has no choice but to love with the intensity of Christ’s love, which is infinite, immoderate, and without measure.

²⁴⁸ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 271 (L 91:219—222, 224); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 304 (L 92: 327—331, 334). Italian text: “lo suo è sbarattato/ de sé non n’ à vigore./ Volendo ià non vòle,/ ché non n’ à so volere/e ià non pò vedere.../né 'n sé vòl possedere.”

²⁴⁹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 261 (L 90:144); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 284 (L 89:147). Italian text: “Ordene questo amore.”

²⁵⁰ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 262 (L 90:168, 173—175); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 285 (L 89: 171, 177—178). Italian text: “Ma dasché 'n perde la sua qualitate.../a tte se pò imputare, non a mme, quel ch'eo faccio;/ però s'eo non te placcio, tu te non placi, Amore.”

²⁵¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 262 (L 90:184—187, 190—191); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 286 (L 89: 187—190, 193—194).

Italian text: “A tal fornace perché me menavi,
 se volivi ch'eo fuss'en temperanza?
 Quando si esmesurato me tte davi,
 tollivin' da me tutta mesuranza...
 unde, se cci à fallanza, Amore, tua è, non mia,
 però che questa via tu lla facisti, Amore.”

The second stage of self-annihilation is the annihilation of the intellect. Jacopone writes that one must “strip his soul of all thought” and “hold onto nothing.”²⁵² As a Franciscan Spiritual, Jacopone believed that the call to poverty meant abjuring the pursuit of knowledge. In other lauds, he remarks that knowledge leads to vainglory.²⁵³ But the annihilation of the intellect is more than turning away from the pursuit of knowledge. Jacopone writes that “Intellect drowns/ In this silence of frozen waters/ Far beyond exultation and suffering./ Nothing grieves me.” Not only does the intellect drown, but the soul is silenced in a frozen peace.²⁵⁴ It is no longer subject to exultation, suffering, or grief—a state similar to the emotional equanimity described by Angela and Hadewijch, discussed above. The soul also begins to take on the ruling power of God, as Angela describes in the seventh supplementary step.²⁵⁵ The soul finds itself in the Kingdom of God, in “the heart of the sovereignty of God!” The soul begins to take on the sovereignty of God and now has “authority over Rome and its Curia.”²⁵⁶ Having abandoned the intellect, the soul is now above the canon lawyers and other educated clerics in the Curia, not because of its own intellectual merits but because it has taken on God’s own intellect and ruling sovereignty.

The final stage is the third heaven, where the soul is completely annihilated. The annihilation of the soul is a constant theme in all of the mystical lauds. In Laud 90, Jacopone writes that the soul is “no longer mistress of herself, even the memory/ of herself and her needs and desires is gone./ United with Christ she is almost Christ;/ Fused with God she becomes divine.”²⁵⁷

²⁵² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:63–64); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 291 (L 90:75, 77). Italian text: “Spogliare se vòl l'om d'onnevovelle.../e ne la mente no posseder covelle.”

²⁵³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 185 (L 61:42).

²⁵⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 277 (L 92:81–85); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 292 (L 90:96–100). Italian text: Anegat'hone Entelletto enn un quieto/ (per ciò che so' <e>sbannito,/ vergogna né onor mai non me placque,/ né nulla me desplace.

²⁵⁵ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176.

²⁵⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 275 (L 92:90); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 292 (L 90:106). Italian text: “possede Roma e tutto lo sanato.”

²⁵⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 259 (L 90:94–97). Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 283 (L 89: 95–100).

The soul is no longer mistress of herself and has no desires because she no longer possesses a will. She has no memory of herself because she has annihilated the intellect. She has no needs because there is no longer a self that could need anything. The soul is fused to God through Christ and becomes divine. In Laud 91, Jacopone insists that the soul is so annihilated that it is as if the soul had never existed:

And as wax melts from the heat of fire,
So the soul drawn to that light is resplendent,
Feels self melt away,
Its will and actions no longer its own.
So clear in the imprint of God
That the soul, conquered, is conqueror;
Annihilated, it lives in triumph.

What happens to the drop of wine
That you pour into the sea?
Does it remain itself, unchanged?
It is as if it never existed.
So it is with the soul: Love drinks it in,
It is united with Truth.²⁵⁸

Italian text: "de sé memoria nulla pò servare,/ ormai a sé plu dare voglia nulla né cura,/ de po' perde valura, de sé onne sentore./ En Cristo transformata, è quasi Cristo,/ cun Deo conionta tutta sta devina."

²⁵⁸ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 271 (L 91:204—218); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 304 (L 92: 307—326).

Italian text: "como cera, desfatto,
a gran foco mustrata,
en tanto si reluce
a quello lume tratto,
perde tutto so atto,
voluntat'è passata;
la forma che lli è data
tanto si ll'à absorto
che viv' estanno morto
et è vvénto e vittore.

Non gir chidendo en mare
vino, se 'l ce mittissi,
che trovar lo potissi,
ch'el mar l'à receputo.
E chi 'l pò sì provare,
non pensar che restesse
et en sé remanesse
(par che non fuss'essuto);
l'Amor sì l'à bevuto,
la Veretà mutato."

Jacopone uses a variety of metaphors: some, like the wax melting from the heat of the fire or the drop of wine poured into the sea, are traditional but interpreted in a radical way as a *unitas indistinctionis*. For example, the soul/wax is not just melted by God/the flame but becomes resplendent and takes on the characteristics of the flame. Others, like the image of God drinking in the soul, have echoes in the Eucharistic images of Hadewijch and Angela. God and the soul become indistinguishable; conquered by Love, the soul becomes the conqueror and lives in triumph with God.

Jacopone also implies that in the third heaven, the soul may attain a pre-created state. Speaking of the soul's indistinct union with God, in which all semblance of the self has been annihilated, he writes:

Formed without form, the features of all faces
Blurred out of love, acquire once more
The traits of an original innocence;
And this is so because in the third Heaven,
The soul, reborn in the new Adam,
No longer sins in thought or deed.²⁵⁹

The pre-created soul is formed as a thought in the mind of God, but it does not yet have form because it has not yet been joined with a body. The fact that Jacopone says the “features of all faces” are “blurred out with love” implies that in the pre-created state, the soul does not have any individual identity or existence. Annihilation of the soul and the self, for Jacopone, requires the

²⁵⁹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 278 (L 92:111—116); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 293 (L 90: 131—137).

Italian text: “Formati senza forma,
mozze tutte le faccie per amore,
però che so' tornati en prima norma;
e questa è la casone:
chi sta èllo terzo stato
'ndel novo Adam plasmato,
non vòl pensar peccato né operare.”

annihilation of any sense of individual identity. Jacopone says that the soul regains its original innocence because it no longer sins in thought or deed. But the soul is no longer capable of sinning because it no longer has any independent thought, will, action or identity.

In Laud 60, Jacopone ties the vernacular mystical tradition of the annihilation of the soul to the Franciscan ideal of poverty. Lamenting the conflict between the Spiritual and Conventual Franciscans, Jacopone writes that poverty “knows not strife or hatred!”²⁶⁰ Unlike Francis of Assisi, poverty dies “having made no testament,”²⁶¹ referring to the infighting that occurred over how to interpret the *Testament* and *Rule* after Francis’s death. Rather, poverty dies in peace and “leave[s] the world as it lies.”²⁶² Poverty has left nothing behind but its “deepest wisdom.”²⁶³ Those who follow poverty are “slave to nothing” and “possess all things.”²⁶⁴ Jacopone again uses the image of the three heavens to describe how we must dispossess ourselves to live in true poverty. First, the soul sheds the love of honor/reputation, the accumulation of riches, and the pursuit of knowledge.²⁶⁵ The second heaven is harder, because the soul must cast aside fear, hope, pain and joy.²⁶⁶ Jacopone is not calling for the soul to strip itself of all emotion, but rather says that the soul “must cast aside the fear of Hell, the hope of Heaven,/ Joy in the good and sorrow in adversity.”²⁶⁷ Like Hadewijch and Angela, Jacopone means that the soul must live with equanimity and must follow Christ for pure reasons, not out of fear or because it wants to be rewarded with eternal life.

²⁶⁰ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 184 (L 60:2); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 97 (L 36: 3—4). Italian text: “Povertat’è via sicura,/ non n’à lite né rancura.”

²⁶¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 184 (L 60:5); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 97 (L 36: 7—8). Italian text: “Povertat’è more en pace,/ nullo testamento face.”

²⁶² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 184 (L 60:7); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 98 (L 36: 9). Italian text: “larga el monno como iace.”

²⁶³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 184 (L 60:13); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 98 (L 36: 15). Italian text: “alto sapere.”

²⁶⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 184 (L 60:13—14); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 98 (L 36: 16—18). Italian text: “a nnulla cosa suiacere/ e ’ndesprezzo possedere/ tutte le cose create.”

²⁶⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 185 (L 60:37-39).

²⁶⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 185 (L 60:47).

²⁶⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 185 (L 60:51—52); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 100 (L 36: 63—66). Italian text: “De l’onferno non temere/ néd en cel spen non n’avere/ e de nullo ben gaudire/ e non doler d’aversitate.”

The third heaven is very similar to Marguerite's abandoning of the virtues. Jacopone writes that "virtue and vice fall to earth" and die.²⁶⁸ The soul is stripped of "every good and every virtue."²⁶⁹ Although Jacopone does not mention the will here, it is possible that the soul is stripped of good and the virtues because it has no will to choose goodness or virtue. Jacopone seems to confirm this when he says that the third heaven is founded on "*nichil*" or nothing. *Nichil* describes the transcendent nothingness of the divine. However, in Laud 91, Jacopone identifies *nichil* with the annihilated soul who has become nothing: "The base of this highest of peaks/ Is founded on *nichil*, Shaped nothingness, made one with the Lord."²⁷⁰ By describing the divine and the annihilated soul as *nichil*, Jacopone mirrors the language of Angela, Hadewijch, and Marguerite in describing the union of the soul and God as a mutual abyss. For Jacopone, the soul and God are united in a mutual nothingness. Jacopone, like the women mystics, also uses the language of the abyss to describe the infinite depths of God, but when it comes to divine union, he emphasizes the mutual poverty of God and the annihilated soul.

In addition to the Franciscan emphasis on poverty, the stigmata of Francis of Assisi were also a major influence on Jacopone's poetry. As I explain in the Introduction, the early Franciscans interpreted the stigmata as a sign that Francis was an *alter Christus*. Thomas of Celano wrote, "I consider blessed Francis the holiest mirror of the holiness of the Lord, the image of his perfection."²⁷¹ Jacopone understands Francis in a similar way when he remarks on the tears that

²⁶⁸ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 185 (L 60:57); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 100 (L 36: 71—74). Italian text: "Se so' nude le vertute/ e lle vizia non vestute,/ mortale sento ferute,/ caio en terra vulnerate."

²⁶⁹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 186 (L 60:63); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 100 (L 36: 83—84). Italian text: "Da onne ben si tt'à spogliato/ et de vertut'espropriato."

²⁷⁰ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 271 (L 91:226—228); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 304 (L 92: 337—340). Italian text: "Questa si summa altezza/ en nichil è fundata,/ nichilità enformata,/ messa en lo suo Signore."

²⁷¹ Thomas of Celano, "Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul," in *Francis of Assisi- Founder*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, O.F.M. Cap., et al (New York: New City Press, 1999), 2: 263.

onlookers shed when seeing “the new Christ’s wounds.”²⁷² Jacopone can call Francis the new Christ because, like Christ, Francis climbed “the towering palm tree” of the cross.²⁷³ Jacopone writes to Francis: “You were so closely bound to Him in love you never faltered,/ And the marks on your body attest to that union.”²⁷⁴ The union that Jacopone is referring to is nothing less than Francis’s indistinct union with the divine. Since the cross is the ultimate sign of Christ’s infinite love, the marks of the stigmata are a sign of the infinitude of God. Simply meditating on the stigmata and its “likeness to Christ” can make “the heart sink into an abyss of love.”²⁷⁵ Jacopone links the stigmata to indistinct union when he writes: “This is the mission of love, to make two one,/ It united Francis, softened his heart like wax,/ And there pressed its seal, leaving the marks/ Of the One to whom he was united.”²⁷⁶ Although the image of God pressing his seal into the wax of the soul is traditional, Jacopone understands divine union as literally making two into one. He takes the image of the seal and wax one step further in Laud 90 when he writes that “Christ put His mark on me. And stripped of myself/ (O wondrous exchange!) I put on Christ.”²⁷⁷ God’s mark is the *nichil* or nothingness of annihilation. Jacopone surrenders his self—will, intellect, soul—and becomes nothing in order to receive Christ, who is everything. For Jacopone, this is the true

²⁷² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 188 (L 61:56); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 116 (L 40: 116). Italian text: “Cristo novo plagato.”

²⁷³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 188 (L 61:61); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 117 (L 40: 125—126). Italian text: “Quella altissima palma,/ o’ salisti, Francesco.”

²⁷⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 188—189 (L 61:63—64); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 117 (L 40: 129—132). Italian text: “fusti en Lui sì afisso,/ mai non te nne amutasti;/ con’ te ce trasformasti/ nel corpo n’è miniato.”

²⁷⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 188 (L 61:52); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 116 (L 40: 105—108). Italian text: vederlo en la simiglia/ de Cristo crucifisso;/ lo cor n’era enn abisso/ veder tale specchiato!”

²⁷⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 189 (L 61:69—72); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 117 (L 40: 133—136, 141—148). Italian text: “l’Amor è ‘n quest’offizio,/ unir dui ‘nn una forma:/ Francesco nel sopplizio/ de Cristo lo trasforma.../L’Amor devino altissimo/ con Cristo l’abbraccio,/ l’affetto suo ardentissimo/ sì llo c’encorporao,/ lo cor li stemperao/ como cera ad segello;/ εμπρεμέτετε Quello/ ov’era trasformato.”

²⁷⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 259 (L 90:84—85); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 282 (L 89: 86—88). Italian text: “de Cristo se ritrova figurato;/ ià non se trovò mai sì gran baratto,/ vestirse Cristo, tutto sé spogliato.”

meaning of the stigmata: the marks of Francis's hands, feet, and sides point to the radical nature of Francis's indistinct union with Christ.

Although Christ is essential to the thought of Jacopone, he does not understand suffering with Christ in the same way that Angela does. For Angela, suffering with Christ means literally feeling his pain by meditating on the passion, thereby opening herself to share in the experience of the cross. Angela does not shy away from graphic descriptions of Christ's suffering body, such as when she meditates on the bits of flesh that are driven into the wood of the cross by the nails in Christ's hands and feet.²⁷⁸ Although Angela herself also suffers, the emphasis is usually on Christ's pain, not her own. Brother A. interrupts the fourth step to mention that Angela performed extraordinary penances, because she does not bring them up herself.²⁷⁹ The one time in the *Memorial* where Angela focuses on her own physical and emotional suffering is in the sixth supplementary step, but even there she uses images of hanging or suspension and repeats the words of Christ on the cross to demonstrate that she is experiencing the anguish of the passion.²⁸⁰

Jacopone, on the other hand, emphasizes the suffering engendered by love, as Hadewijch does. Although the suffering is undertaken in imitation of Christ, the cross is not the main emphasis of the Lauds. Rather, the cross is valued because it reveals the infinite love of Christ. Love is ultimately what causes both the soul and Christ to suffer. For example, in Laud 75, Jacopone presents a dialogue between two friars (they address each other as "Brother") who are at different stages in the spiritual life. The first friar flees from the "consuming cross and its fires;/ Their heat drives me back and I flee from Love."²⁸¹ But the second friar rebukes the first speaker, calling him

²⁷⁸ CW, 145. IL, 192. M, 48.

²⁷⁹ CW, 125. IL, 134. M, 6.

²⁸⁰ As I demonstrate on p. 197, Angela's image of hanging on the gallows is an explicit reference to the crucifixion.

²⁸¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 225 (L 75:1–2); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 7 (L 2:1–2).

Italian text: Fugio la croce, cà mme devora;/ la sua calura non pòzzo portare!

“unworthy” because he flees the cross.²⁸² The second friar does not understand why the first runs away from “that joy which I insistently seek.”²⁸³ The first friar is more experienced in the spiritual life because he has suffered from the intensity of Love. The second friar rebukes the first for calling the cross a torment, but the first friar says that those who have not experienced the fires of love do not “know the heat of the flame.”²⁸⁴ The first friar has suffered from the heat of Love and is tormented by its intensity. While the laud begins with two friars sharing their experience of the cross, it ends with the friars discussing the nature of Love. Jacopone completely identifies the cross with Love so that they are interchangeable. The message of the cross is the burning intensity of Christ’s infinite love.

Laud 75 is also notable because it demonstrates Jacopone’s emphasis on the suffering soul. Jacopone describes the suffering of the first friar’s soul in graphic terms. The first friar states that “no iron bands could contain this pressure,/ Which threatens to split me from stave to stave.”²⁸⁵ Jacopone evokes an image of torture on the rack, which echoes Angela’s image of the man hanging from the gallows in the sixth supplementary step. However, unlike Angela, Jacopone does not generally use graphic language to describe Christ’s passion in his mystical lauds.²⁸⁶ In Laud 90,

²⁸² Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 226 (L 75:7); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 8 (L 2:9—10).

Italian text: “Parme che facci gran villananza/ de gur fugenno lo so delettare.”

²⁸³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 225 (L 75:6); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 8 (L 2:7—8).

Italian text: “Frate, co’ fugi la sua delettanza,/ ch’eo vo chedenno d’aver sua amistanza?”

²⁸⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 227 (L 75:52); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 9 (L 2:53—54).

Italian text: “co’ ’n la fornace, trovare pò’ loco?/ Se non c’è entrato, non sai quign’è stare.”

²⁸⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 227 (L 75:59—60); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 9 (L 2:60—62).

Italian text: “portar non p’o’ el mosto;/ no n’aio cerchio che sia tanto tosto/ che la fortuna no ’l faccia alentare.”

²⁸⁶ He does portray Christ’s suffering in more graphic terms in Laud 93, which is one of his Marian lauds. For example, he writes:

Lady, they’ve taken one of His hands,
 Pressed it against the cross,
 And the nail has ripped through the flesh...
 Lady, they’ve taken His feet
 And nailed them to the tree;
 They have broken all His bones and joints.
 Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 279 (93:38—40; 44—46).

Jacopone describes Christ's sacrifice on the cross primarily as an act of love. When Christ rebukes him for his inordinate love, Jacopone responds by saying that he is simply imitating Christ's measureless love on the cross. He describes Christ's love in the following way:

You did not defend Yourself against that Love
That made You come down from heaven to earth;
Love, in trodding this earth
You humbled and humiliated Yourself...
In Your life and in Your death You revealed
The infinite love that burned in Your heart.
You went about the world as if You were drunk,
Led by love as if You were a slave...
You, Wisdom, did not hold Yourself back;
But poured out your Love in abundance...
You rushed to the cross to embrace us.²⁸⁷

Like Angela, Jacopone believes that the cross is a sign of Christ's infinite love and that Christ allowed himself to be humbled and humiliated by the incarnation and the passion because of his love for mankind. But for Jacopone, Christ doesn't just ascend the cross willingly; he rushes to embrace us on the cross. This image of the crucifixion is active and stresses the heroic and voluntary nature of Christ's suffering. Scholars such as Sarah McNamer and Anne Derbes have argued that the image of Christ willingly ascending the cross on a ladder was adopted by thirteenth

The only time Christ's passion is described in such terms is in the Marian lauds. Mary is the "ideal figure of Compassion, both *the* compassionate and *the* compassion-deserving." (See Elémire Zolla, "Preface," *The Lauds*, xvi.) Jacopone does not seem to incorporate the Marian ideal of compassion as much into his mystical lauds.
²⁸⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 263 (90:192–195; 198–201; 208–209; 211); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 286 (L 89: 195–198, 201–204, 211, 215).

Italian text: "Tu da l'amore non te deffendisti,
de celo en terra féce te vinire;
Amore, a ttal bascezza descendisti,
com' om despetto per lo mondo gire...
En vita e 'ndel morire mustrasti per certanza
Amor d'esmesuranza, che ardia ne lo tuo core.
Como ebrio per lo mondo spesso andavi,
menàvate l'Amor com' om venduto...
Tu, Sapienzia, non te continisti...
Per abbracciarne, en croce sì curristi."

century Franciscans in both art and literature.²⁸⁸ The image was likely meant to promote the ideal of voluntary sacrifice or the voluntary rejection of the world to follow Francis and Christ.²⁸⁹

Jacopone adopts this image of the crucifixion because it demonstrates that Christ was drunk on love—his love was so intense that it moved him to act recklessly without regard for his own life. Christ rebukes Jacopone for his reckless and unrestrained love in Laud 90, but Jacopone reminds him that it was Christ who modeled this love on the cross—Jaopone is merely following his example. Therefore, Jacopone emphasizes imitating Christ’s love rather than his suffering, although love accomplishes both because the intensity of his desire causes great pain. Both Angela and Jacopone seem to modify the idea of *imitatio Christi*. For Angela, Christ’s suffering isn’t meant to be imitated so much as it is meant to be lived and experienced with him. Instead of *imitatio*, she proposes *compassio*, or suffering with. Jacopone, on the other hand, takes *imitatio Christi* and transforms it into *imitatio amoris*. Since the cross reveals the infinite love of Christ, the soul is called to model that self-annihilating love that gives up everything for the beloved.

In the passage above, Jacopone describes the passion in terms of humiliation, echoing a similar passage in the Memorial where Angela writes that Christ “allowed that great shame to be brought to bear on his divinity in the sight of everyone for all to see.”²⁹⁰ Jacopone also presents God as willingly powerless and vulnerable during the passion because of his great love:

I see that Love has so bound You
As to almost strip You of Your greatness;
How, then, could I find the strength to resist,

²⁸⁸ Anne Debes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 147; Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 100.

²⁸⁹ Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation*, 101.

²⁹⁰ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: “Et, ut ego intellgerem, dabatur unum exemplum de homine nobilissimo qui non potest offendi in persona et offenditur et destruitur in domo sua, videlicet quod destruitur ei domus loco personae suae. Et hic ostendebatur quod, quamvis Deus esset impassibilis, tamen magnam verecundiam illatam esse divinitati permisit coram omnibus propter amorem nostrum.”

To refuse to share in its madness?
For the same Love that makes me lose my senses
Seems to have stripped You of wisdom;
The love that makes me weak
Is the love that made You renounce all power.”²⁹¹

In this passage, Jacopone stresses God’s kenotic love over his greatness and power, like Angela does in the *Memorial*.²⁹² God allows his greatness to be almost stripped away when he becomes man in the incarnation and suffers the indignity and humiliation of crucifixion. God seems to be stripped of wisdom because love makes him act drunk, recklessly giving up his life for humanity. And finally, love makes God renounce his power because Christ chooses not to defend himself from the pain, vulnerability, and humiliation of the cross. Jacopone stresses that if Love affects the almighty God to such an extent, then he has no hope of resisting the intoxicating influence and madness of love and can’t be blamed for the intensity of his desire.

Finally, like Hadewijch and Marguerite, Jacopone describes the pinnacle of the relationship between God and the human being as the *unitas indistinctionis*, or union without distinction. Once annihilated, the soul becomes fused with God. In Laud 90, Jacopone writes of the soul: “United with Christ she is almost Christ;/ Fused with God she becomes divine.”²⁹³ For Jacopone, the soul enters a state of quietude in which it no longer suffers from the intensity of love and the soul is no longer capable of sinning or being separated from God. He writes that “Neither iron nor fire can

²⁹¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 263 (90:228—235); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 287 (L 89: 231—238).

Italian text: “Che l’Amor veio te sì à legato,
quasi privato d’onne to grandezza,
co’ sirìa mai fortezza en me de contradire,
ch’eo non voglia empascire per abbracciarte, Amor?
Ché quell’Amore che me fa empascire
a tte par che tollesse sapienza
e quell’amor che sì me fa languire,
a te per me sì tolse la potenza.”

²⁹² For a full account of Angela’s position, see p. 225–229

²⁹³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 259 (90:96—97); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 283 (L 89: 99—100). Italian text: “En Cristo transformata, è quasi Cristo,/ cun Deo conionta tutta sta devina.”

pry us apart;/ The soul now dwells in a sphere beyond the reach of death and suffering,/ It looks down on all creation/ And basks in its peace.”²⁹⁴ In this state, the soul looks down on creation from the perspective of God because the soul is no longer distinguishable from God. The union that Jacopone describes, like that of Marguerite, is not a temporary state but a permanent one. The soul can do nothing to lose it. Now that the soul is annihilated and has no will, it no longer has to strive for anything. Jacopone writes that “there is no other action at those heights;/ What the questing soul once was it has ceased to be./ Neither heat nor fiery love/ Nor suffering has place here”²⁹⁵ There is no desire, no violence, no death in this union: “You have drowned both wanting and not wanting/ And extinguished desire; yours is peace unending...You have passed through death to true life,/ Safe forever from attacks or violence;/ Leaving yourself behind, you live in God.”²⁹⁶

Because Jacopone believes that the indistinct union between God and the annihilated soul is permanent and precludes sin, his mystical lauds at times seem tinged with antinomianism. For example, he writes “The soul that possesses You/ Remains forever pure,/ Does not wound or sully itself with sin.”²⁹⁷ However, Jacopone is not implying that the soul is free from the moral law. Like Marguerite, Jacopone believes the soul remains without sin because it is fused with God and wills only what God wills. Furthermore, God will not abandon the soul, leaving it to its own will and sinful actions. Jacopone writes:

²⁹⁴ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 258 (90:41—45); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 281 (L 89: 43—48). Italian text: “Foco né ferro non la pò partire/ (non se devide osa tanto unita),/ pena né morte ce non pò salire/ a quella altezza dove sta rapita;/ sotto sé vede tutte cose gire/ et essa sopra tutte sta gradita!”

²⁹⁵ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 267 (91:69—72); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 297 (L 92:101—106). Italian text: “Altr'atto non ci à loco,/ lassù ià non s'apressa;/ quel ch'era s'è cessa/ en mente che cercava;/ calore, amor de foco,/ né pena non chi è amnessa.”

²⁹⁶ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 272—273 (91:248-249; 269-271); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 305—307, (L 92: 369—372, 403—407). Italian text: “volere e non volere/ en te si è anegato,/ desiderio armortato,/ per ciò c'ài sempre pace.../né non timi firita/ né cosa che tte ofenda;/ nulla cosa t'è forte,/ date po' t'èi partita; en Deo fatta en finita.”

²⁹⁷ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 270 (91: 165—168). Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 302 (L 92: 245—252). Italian text: “Monda sempre permene/ mente che Te possede;/ per colpa non se lede,/ cà non ce pò salire;/ en tanta altezza stane/ et en pace resede,/ mondo cun vicio vede/ sotto sé tutto gire.”

If you have given to Him
 All of yourself without reservation,
 Loving Him and not yourself, He cannot leave you.
 That Good you were given when He fused you with Himself,
 Would it not be lost as well
 Were He to allow you to fall into sin?
 Therefore, as that Light cannot abandon itself,
 Neither can it abandon you: Love has made you one.²⁹⁸

Once the soul is annihilated and fused with God, the soul takes on God's goodness. That goodness can only be removed if God were to leave the soul, which he will never do because of his great love. Similarly, the soul is a captive to love in this union and is therefore unable to leave God. The mutual love that the soul and God feel for each other is similar to that described by Angela, Hadewijch, and Marguerite: "In being possessed you possess,/In seamless union; As you drink you are being drunk—nothing can separate you."²⁹⁹ Jacopone also believes that the annihilated soul cannot sin because the state of quietude means there is no action or striving. In *Laud 92*, Jacopone says that in the union of indistinction, "the cycle of seasons is no longer,/ The heavens are immobile, they spin no more."³⁰⁰ At one point he describes the union as the "silence of frozen waters."³⁰¹ For Jacopone, the state of quietude not only means that the soul does not suffer, but

²⁹⁸ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 269 (91:149—156); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 301 (L 92: 221—232).

Italian text: "Se ttutto Li tt'èi dato,
 de te non reservando,
 non te, ma Lui amando,
 ià non te pò lassare.
 Quel Ben che t'è donato,
 en Sé te commutando,
 lassàra sSé, lassando
 en culpa t'e<n>cascare?
 Donqua, co' Sé lassare
 ià non pò quella Luce
 sì te, lo qual conduce
 per sì onito amore."

²⁹⁹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 272 (91: 261—264); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 306 (L 92: 389—394). Italian text: "Possedi posseduta/ en tanta unione,/ non c'è devisiōne,/ che te da Lui retraga;/ tu bivi et èi bevuta/ en transformaziōne."

³⁰⁰ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 276 (92: 75—76); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 292 (L 90: 89—91). Italian text: "L'autonni so' quadrati,/ so' stabelliti, non pòzzo voltare;/ li celi so' stanati."

³⁰¹ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 277 (92: 82); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 292 (L 90: 97).

also that it does not act. It is frozen and immobile, like God who cannot change or be moved by any external force. The soul takes on God's immutability.

The soul also rules over all of creation with God and has taken on his sovereignty. Like Angela, who states that in God she has dominion over the whole world,³⁰² Jacopone states that:

Participating in the essence of all creatures
It can now say, "All things are mine."
The doors open wide, and entering within
The soul becomes one with God,
Possesses what He possesses.³⁰³

Fused with God, the soul is part of the essence of all creatures and possesses all things. Jacopone is keenly aware of irony: the Franciscan is called to renounce all possessions, even his attachment to his will and individual self, but then possesses everything with God. In becoming *nichil*, the soul paradoxically becomes everything and participates in the existence of all things.

Conclusion

The writings of Angela, Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Jacopone demonstrate that vernacular mystical theology in the thirteenth century is rich, complex, and deserving of serious theological inquiry. Women writers such as Angela, Hadewijch, and Marguerite Porete are often studied because they are among the first female vernacular writers in western Europe. While they do make important contributions to vernacular literature, it is also essential to note their contributions to

Italian text: "per ci'ò che so' iacciate tutte l'acque."

³⁰² *CW*, 215. *IL*, 388. *M*, 176.

³⁰³ Jacopone da Todi, *The Lauds*, 266 (91: 45—49); Jacopone da Todi, *Laude*, 296 (L 90: 65—72).

Italian text: "De tutto prende sorte,
tanto à per unione
de transformazione,
che dice: « Tutto è meo ».
Operte so' le porte,
fatta à comunione
et è en possessione
De tutto quel che Deo."

theology. Angela, Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Jacopone are among the first theologians to articulate an understanding of divine union that goes beyond the *unitas spiritus* model.³⁰⁴ They pioneer the notion of indistinct union with God as well as the notion of entering into the Trinitarian union/participating in the intra-Trinitarian life. Hadewijch, Marguerite, and Jacopone are among the first theologians to describe the violence of love in terms of annihilation of the soul. Their understanding of a pre-created state in which the soul is one with God, influenced thinkers such as Meister Eckhart and John Ruysbroeck. Although Angela's thought does not include the annihilation of the soul or a pre-created state, she creatively uses the hypostatic union of Christ's humanity and divinity to understand the union of the soul and God, expressing their mutual interpenetration while maintaining the distinctness of each. The complexity and creativity of their thought demonstrates that vernacular mystical theology, although it existed outside of formal theological schools, was valuable and an integral part of medieval theology.

³⁰⁴ See p. 254–255.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have argued that Angela of Foligno's thought contains a robust Christological and Trinitarian theology which informs her understanding of divine union. For Angela, union with God is a participation in the incarnation of Christ and ultimately in the Trinity itself. Her Christology is fundamentally Chalcedonian and rooted in the hypostatic union, or the joining of the human and divine natures in the divine person of Christ. Angela understands her own union with Christ in a certain sense as hypostatic as well—not just a union of hearts or wills, but a true union or fusion of suffering bodies: Christ's suffering flesh with hers. Angela engaged in the traditional spiritual practices of her time, especially *imitatio Christi* and meditating on Christ's passion. However, her experience of Christ's agony exceeds what can be achieved through either *imitatio* or *meditatio*: it is instead *compassio*, suffering with and as Christ. Christ reveals the

experience of his passion to Angela so that she is able to truly suffer with him. The culmination of Angela's experience of the passion occurs in the sixth supplementary step in which Angela and Christ's suffering bodies become indistinguishable. Angela's fusion with Christ's humanity through compassionate co-suffering leads to her transcendent union with the Trinity in darkness. The agony of Christ on the cross is the gateway or passageway to the abyss of the Trinity.

In the sixth and seventh supplementary steps, Angela describes a fusion of her suffering body with Christ's body so strong that a mutuality is evoked in which the distinctiveness of each nature becomes permeable, and her human person and his divine person share individual characteristics that would not otherwise be attributed to them. The divine person of the Son shares in Angela/Christ's human experiences of poverty, suffering, and contempt, while Angela's humanity shares in the transcendent darkness of the divine. In the first, it is as if the divine is able to share in human passibility; while in the second, the human being is able to share in God's very self (*theōsis*), who she paradoxically describes as impassible. The astounding mutuality between the soul and God in Angela's theology sometimes seems to stretch the boundaries of orthodoxy, but Angela's understanding of divine union nevertheless maintains the distinctness of human and divine. Rooted in Chalcedonian Christology, Angela preserves God's impassibility while allowing him to share in the suffering, poverty, and contempt of Cross. Similarly, Angela's understanding of *theōsis* upholds her human distinctness even when she is immersed in the divine darkness and standing in the midst of the Trinity.

Angela's Chalcedonian Christology is perhaps most profoundly demonstrated in her vision of the darkness in Christ's eyes and face, which functions in this dissertation as the central metaphor through which Angela describes the hypostatic union and her own union with Christ. Earlier in the seventh supplementary step, Angela identifies the divine darkness with a deeper,

Trinitarian union. But in the vision of the darkness of Christ's eyes, the divine darkness that she experiences in union with the Trinity comes together in the person of Christ and profoundly expresses how she understands hypostatic union: as the total interpenetration of humanity and divinity. This interpenetration is at the heart of her own understanding of divine union. It accounts for her belief that the divine shares in the human experience of poverty, suffering, and contempt (even if God ultimately remains impassible, or (im)passible) as well as her belief in the capacity of the human soul to be deified, to become one with the transcendent darkness of God.

Divine (Im)passibility

Angela only uses the word "impassibility" only once in the Memorial, where she asserts her belief that God is impassible while simultaneously arguing that God experienced the suffering of Christ's passion. She reports that God himself tells her "You are amazed that the body of Christ was tormented and suffered in this way; how much more should you be amazed over his divinity that suffered these things in his humanity...although God is impassible, out of his great love for us he allowed that great shame be brought to bear upon his divinity."¹ This statement appears contradictory: How can God both be impassible and suffer the shame of the passion at the same time? The answer lies in Angela's Chalcedonian understanding of Christ, which mirrors Cyril of Alexandria's single-subject Christology. Cyril himself uses a similar paradox when he states that "we confess that he who was begotten from God the Father as Son and God only-begotten, though being by his own nature impassible, suffered in the flesh for us, according to the Scriptures, and

¹ *CW*, 160. *IL*, 234. *M*, 74. Latin text: *Miraris de isto corpore Christi sic poenato vel passionato? Quanto magis mirandum de divinitate est quae hoc fieri sustinuit in isto suo mantello, scilicet in humanitate in qua est ipsa divinitas. Et, ut ego intellgerem, dabatur unum exemplum de homine nobilissimo qui non potest offendi in persona et offenditur et destruitur in domo sua, videlicet quod destruitur ei domus loco personae suae. Et hic ostendebatur quod, quamvis Deus esset impassibilis, tamen magnam verecundiam illatam esse divinitati permisit coram omnibus propter amorem nostrum.*

he was in the crucified flesh impassibly making his own the sufferings of his own flesh.”² Both Angela and Cyril understand Christ as one person, or subject, with two natures that are profoundly united yet distinct. The distinction between the natures allows the divine to remain impassible, even while Christ as a person experiences horrific suffering. Nevertheless, for both Angela and Cyril, God is not content to keep the suffering of Christ’s humanity at arm’s length: God mysteriously and paradoxically makes the suffering of Christ’s body his own, consenting to bear the shame of the cross with the humanity of Christ. Cyril and Angela thus seem to argue for a qualified divine passibility: they argue that God consents to share in the experience of human passibility without allowing that suffering to overcome his divinity or altering God’s fundamentally impassible nature.

Theosis

The seventh supplementary step contains some of Angela’s most daring descriptions of divine union. It is in this step that Christ tells her “You are I and I am you,”³ and God says “In you rests the entire Trinity; indeed, the complete truth rests in you, so that you hold me and I hold you.”⁴ Despite this daring language that seems to blur distinctions between the soul and God, Angela’s understanding of divine union must also be understood in a Christological context. Traditional Chalcedonian Christology asserts that Christ’s human and divine natures are united hypostatically, or in his person, without confusion or intermixture. Although Angela never mentions Chalcedon in her writings, she takes the Chalcedonian and Trinitarian understanding of unity-in-distinction and applies it to her own union with the divine. The union she describes with

² Cyril of Alexandria, “Third Letter of Cyril to Nestorius,” *Christology of the Later Fathers*, ed. Edward Rochie Hardy, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press. 1954), 351.

³ *CW*, 205. *IL*, 362. *M*, 158.

Latin text: Tu es ego et ego sum tu.

⁴ *CW*, 215. *IL*, 390. *M*, 176. Latin text: In te pausat tota Trinitas, tota veritas, ita quod tu tenes me et ego teneo te.

God in the seventh supplementary step is profoundly Christological. Just as Christ's human and divine natures are united hypostatically (in his person) without confusion or intermixture, so does Angela maintain her individual identity, even when seemingly fused with the suffering human and divinity of Christ. Unlike other thirteenth century mystics, such as Hadewijch and Marguerite Porete, Angela does not discuss the annihilation of the soul or return to a pre-existent state. She also seems to resist the notion of a totally indistinct union with God, despite her daring language. On one level, Angela remains her human self—a creature dependent on God—even while on another level she is united hypostatically to Christ and even to the Trinity. Angela always retains her own consciousness and distinctness even while describing a union so close that it seems virtually indistinct. Ultimately, I argue that Angela maintains her distinctness precisely because her understanding of divine union is based on the hypostatic union and Trinitarian model. According to the Chalcedonian definition, the human and divine natures of Christ are united but remain distinct, without confusion or mixture.⁵ Similarly, Angela sees herself as united hypostatically to Christ in both his humanity and divinity, but in a way that preserves her distinctness and humanity. This may be why Angela's theology of divine union, unlike that of other mystics of the period such as her contemporary Marguerite Porete, does not contain the concept of annihilation of the self or the soul. If the soul is annihilated or returned to a pre-created state, then the distinction between God and the soul is also destroyed and Angela would have no path to union with the God-man. Angela's understanding of union begins with the humanity of Christ and the fusion of her suffering body with his, as I argue in chapter four. Her humanity is

⁵ "The Definition of Chalcedon," in *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, ed. John H. Leith (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1982), 36.

therefore essential to achieving the higher stages of union. Annihilating or divesting herself of createdness would simply not make sense in Angela's understanding of divine union.

In the seventh supplementary step, we also see a shift towards a Trinitarian model of divine union. In the previous steps, Angela mainly focuses on describing her union with Christ and his humanity. But in the final step of the *Memorial*, there is a sense that Angela moves from a predominantly Christological union to a Trinitarian union. A parallel movement occurs between the first nineteen stages of the *Memorial* and the first supplementary step: Angela's growing union with Christ's suffering in the first nineteen steps leads her to the Trinitarian indwelling described on the journey to Assisi in the first supplementary step. Diane Tomkinson has argued that these parallel movements indicate that Angela's spiritual experience is less of an ascent or ladder and more of a spiral.⁶ Union with Christ brings her to union with the Trinity in a cyclical or spiral movement that brings her closer and closer to the heart of the divine abyss. Angela's experience of Trinitarian indwelling begins on her pilgrimage to Assisi in the first supplementary step, when she is told that the Trinity will enter into her. Although Angela does not experience the fullness of Trinitarian communion until the seventh supplementary step, her reflection on this early encounter demonstrates her understanding of the Trinity as a communion of persons who exist in a relationship of mutuality and equality. In the seventh supplementary step, it is Angela who enters into the Trinity and becomes part of its inner life and dynamism, thus completing the mutual indwelling that started on the road to Assisi. Her union with the Trinity exemplifies the mutuality and equality of the divine persons, almost to the point where she seems to erase the distinction between human and divine. However, although at times she emphasizes her equality with the

⁶ See Diane V. Tomkinson, "'In the midst of the Trinity:' Angela of Foligno's Trinitarian Theology of Communion," PhD diss., Fordham University, 2004, 211; Diane V. Tomkinson, "Angela of Foligno's Spiral Pattern of Prayer," *Franciscans at Prayer* (Boston: Brill, 2007), 193–219.

divine persons, Angela never loses her identity. Angela's understanding of divine union mirrors her understanding of the Trinitarian union: just as the three persons are both wholly distinct and wholly united, Angela maintains her distinct human identity while remaining profoundly united to the Trinity.

The Case for Reading Angela as a Theologian

Despite Angela of Foligno's importance in the history of Christian mysticism, she has never quite received the scholarly recognition she deserves in theological studies. Amy Hollywood posits that this may be due in part to a contemporary distaste for and "widespread denigration of affective and bodily forms of mysticism."⁷ The *Memorial*, even more than the works of other vernacular theologians such as Marguerite Porete, Hadewijch of Brabant, and Mechthild of Magdeburg, is full of graphic descriptions of Christ's suffering body that have been considered excessive and even hysterical in scholarly circles.⁸ These voices are often ignored by theologians because "scholars uncomfortable with such imagery cordon it off into the domain of spirituality or devotion, places in which purportedly theologically imprecise language can work to comfort and persuade without being taken as 'true.' Spirituality and devotion are places of fuzzy, if well-intentioned, thinking about God, as opposed to the rigorous spaces of theology."⁹ But by sidelining these voices, we impoverish our understanding of medieval theology. Hollywood argues that a complete understanding of the history of Christian theology only emerges when scholars pay

⁷ Amy M. Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 6.

⁸ Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 331–32; Amy Hollywood, *Sensible Ecstasy*, 1–21.

⁹ Amy Hollywood and Rachel Smith, 'Christology', in Edward Howells, and Mark A. McIntosh (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, Oxford Handbooks (2020; online edn, Oxford Academic, 2 Apr. 2020), <https://doi-org.proxy.uchicago.edu/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198722380.013.25>, accessed 04 Apr. 2023.

attention not only to scholastic theology, but also to hagiography, vision books, didactic letters, poems, and spiritual guidebooks.

Some contemporary scholars (such as Amy Hollywood, Bernard McGinn, Barbara Newman, Michael Sells, Willemien Otten, Patricia Dailey, and others) have taken writings of medieval women mystics seriously as works of vernacular theology, but more scholarship is needed. There remains a dearth of scholarship that seriously engages vernacular mystical texts as works of theology, analyzing them by the same rigorous theological criteria that scholars already apply to scholastic and monastic theology. Angela is barely known by scholars of theological studies, except perhaps in the niche field of Franciscan studies.¹⁰ I agree with Emily Holmes's observation that the traditional reaction to women's mysticism has been to "exclude these bodies and voices from the theological canon as heretical, or to subordinate them as 'spirituality' rather than the more serious and authoritative 'theology.'"¹¹ What Holmes is describing is the separation of mysticism from mystical theology. Spirituality, like mysticism, is often relegated to the realm of experience, which is falsely considered separate from theology. Holmes criticizes the dismissal of these vernacular works as examples of inscrutable "mystical experience," rather than engaging them as works of theology. Medieval women's writings are not treated like theological texts, cited as theological authorities, or even compared to (much less placed on the same level as) the vast body of theological material produced by men in the Middle Ages. Part of the problem with contemporary scholarship is that forms of knowledge that existed outside of the universities are

¹⁰Arcangeli hints at this when she notes that in Italian scholarship, "Angela's neglect by literary critics may also reside in the fact that most editions of her work are issued by publishing houses affiliated with religious orders, whose primary concern is spiritual edification," Arcangeli, 44. Although she is referring to literary critics, the same could be said of theological scholarship.

¹¹ Emily A. Holmes, "'My God Became Flesh' Angela of Foligno Writing the Incarnation," in *Women, Writing, Theology: Transforming a Tradition of Exclusion*, ed. Emily A. Holmes and Wendy Farley (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2011), 69.

undervalued. As much as medieval theologians quoted the old adage *amor ipse notitia est*,¹² extolled women's visionary experience as a higher form of learning than the scholastic models of the time, or sought out visionary women who had access to a form of knowledge that they lacked,¹³ modern scholars still privilege university education and book learning in their medieval subjects.

Indeed, medieval women's contributions to theological learning have been ignored, even when there is evidence that these women were educated or that their contemporaries valued and sought after their knowledge. For example, Angela of Foligno attracted a theological reputation strong enough to be referred to as a "teacher in the discipline of God"¹⁴ in the epilogue to the *Instructions*. Darleen Pryds notes that Angela has traditionally been called *magistra theologorum*—implying that her theological knowledge rivaled that of the theological masters at the universities.¹⁵ According to Pryds, Angela did not engage in the formal scholastic theology of the universities, but rather "cultivated her own understanding of theology through personal experience and then taught her theological insights to others through personal interactions that were subsequently recorded in dictated letters and autobiographical writings."¹⁶ Pryds calls this "somatic theology."¹⁷ This form of theology should not be seen as inferior, according to Pryds, because it represents an alternative intellectual tradition that was open to women, who had no access to traditional avenues of learning. She writes that "while Franciscan men studied at universities and *studia* of the order, women learned their advanced theology through listening to sermons, through having conversations with spiritual directors or confessors, and through

¹² Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in euangelia*, (Turnhout, Belgium: Typographi Brepols editores pontificii, 1953), 232.

¹³ Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 3.

¹⁴ *CW*, 318. *IL*, 742.

¹⁵ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities: An Example of Medieval Somatic Theology," in *Her Bright Merits: Essays Honoring Ingrid J. Peterson, OSF*, (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012), 145.

¹⁶ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities, 145.

¹⁷ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities, 145–46.

engaging in public debate and interaction”—as well as through reading works available in the vernacular.¹⁸ Lay women also developed small groups that “emerged around singular learned women, such as Angela, and could be likened to the original forms of men’s education found in the twelfth century, but they are presently overlooked as being so rare as to be insignificant.”¹⁹ It is clear that additional study should be done of the circles that learned women attracted in Italy and in other parts of Europe. But Pryds’s critique goes further. She points out that no woman appears in any reference volume on medieval philosophy or theology, such as the Blackwell *Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages* or *A Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*.²⁰ Female contributions to the Franciscan movement are also noticeably missing even in somewhat recent studies, such as Michael Robson’s *Franciscans in the Middle Ages*.

Although there remains a lot of work to do, some recent scholarship has valued the contribution of women mystics and sought to rectify the lack of scholarly interest in their theology. There have been some recent theological studies of the beguine mystics,²¹ but theological, literary, and historical material on Angela of Foligno remains scarce.²² Sometimes, when Angela’s text is

¹⁸ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities, 146.

¹⁹ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities, 150.

²⁰ Darleen Pryds, "Angela of Foligno, Magistra Theologorum Outside the Universities, 151, note 15.

²¹ While I cannot give an exhaustive bibliography here, these are a few recent studies that theologically engage the beguine mystics: Amy M. Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1995); Bernard McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad Pub., 1991); Bernard McGinn, *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete* (New York: Continuum, 1994); Patricia Dailey, *Promised Bodies: Time, Language, & Corporeality in Medieval Women’s Mystical Texts*, Gender, Theory, & Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013); Ellen L Babinsky, “Christological Transformation in The Mirror of Souls, by Marguerite Porete,” *Theology Today* 60, no. 1 (April 2003): 34–48; Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (203) to Marguerite Porete (1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

²² Bernard McGinn takes Angela seriously as a mystical theologian in McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*; Darleen Pryds refers to Angela as a somatic theologian and Dianne Tomkinson refers to Angela’s theology of poverty, suffering, and contempt in *Her Bright Merits: Essays Honoring Ingrid Peterson, O.S.F.*, ed. Ingrid J. Peterson, Mary Meany, and Felicity Dorsett, (Saint Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012); John Coakley argues that Angela’s reflection on her mystical experience is a distinctly theological reflection in Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*; and Emily Holmes takes seriously Angela’s Incarnational theology in Emily A. Holmes, *Flesh Made Word: Medieval Women Mystics, Writing, and the Incarnation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013). The two

analyzed by scholars, it is robbed of its complexity and innovation. For example, Peter Dronke's historical study *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* acknowledges that while there has been a lot of progress in studying the many medieval texts written by women, "most of their intellectual and imaginative achievements are still neglected."²³ Yet when he discusses Angela, he only grants her rhetorical, not theological innovation: "however extravagant her emotional utterances, Angela did not lay claim to any new belief, any idea that challenged the prevailing world-picture of theologians in her time. Her innovations were startling; yet they were confined, we might say, to the form in which she experienced and retold accepted spiritual realities; she did not impinge on their content."²⁴ Hopefully, in the pages of this dissertation, I have demonstrated that this statement is incorrect—Angela's *Memorial* is a work of original, innovative theology. But if this is the case, why have these innovations been so easy to ignore?

I wish to return to the issue of theology's relationship with spirituality and briefly conclude with some thoughts on how women mystics such as Angela can help us navigate the dense fog that seems separate these disciplines. I have argued that there is an unspoken intellectual hierarchy that privileges doctrinal theology. The texts that are categorized as "spirituality" are generally seen as less serious and authoritative. Despite attempts to define spirituality as an academic discipline in its own right, spirituality still seems to remain theology's lesser cousin, existing on the margins of what scholars would consider rigorous academic study. This dissertation is not the place to hammer out the intricate distinctions between theology and spirituality or whether spirituality should be accorded more respect in the academy at large. These issues are complex and have been discussed

following dissertations treat Angela's Christology and Trinitarian theology: Micaela L. Eschbacher, "The Christology of Angela of Foligno: Christ the Penitent and the Experience of Poverty, Suffering and Contempt" (Ph.D., Saint Louis University, 1997); Diane V. Tomkinson, "In the Midst of the Trinity: Angela of Foligno's Trinitarian Theology of Communion" (Ph.D., Fordham University, 2004).

²³ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, vii.

²⁴ Dronke, 217.

extensively by some of the most erudite senior scholars of the day.²⁵ However, I can note that most pre-modern writers (including Angela and her contemporaries) did not make a distinction between theology and spirituality, often viewing the two as integrated.²⁶ Evagrius Ponticus articulated the insight that religious experience and theological understanding are deeply intertwined in his famous saying: “if you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.”²⁷ Barred by their gender from participating in formal education and prohibited from interpreting scripture, women such as Angela creatively turned to their prayer lives as sources of theological content and reflection. Thus, the women mystics may be uniquely qualified to help scholars integrate the way Christians think about God (theology) with the way Christians practice their faith in their daily lives (spirituality). Angela of Foligno and the women surveyed in chapter seven seemed to challenge nearly every social, ecclesiastical, and theological boundary that their society tried to impose on them. Neither wholly ‘lay’ nor canonically/legally ‘religious,’ they occupied an undefined middle ground between the two. As celibate women, they wrote with erotic passion about union with Christ, mixing secular and religious notions of love. Confronted with the seemingly insurmountable transcendence of God and the infinite difference between the created and the uncreated, these women courageously leapt across the gorge and discovered that they had

²⁵ See the many insightful essays in Elizabeth A. Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows, eds., *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Theosis,” *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology*, ed. Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 583. There has also been a lot of recent scholarship on contemplation and spiritual practice among scholastic theologians. See Rik Van Nieuwenhove, *Thomas Aquinas and Contemplation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021); Robert Glenn Davis, *The Weight of Love: Affect, Ecstasy, and Union in the Theology of Bonaventure* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Roberto Hofmeister Pich and Andreas Speer, eds., *Contemplation and Philosophy: Scholastic and Mystical Modes of Medieval Philosophical Thought: A Tribute to Kent Emery, Jr.*, (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Alessandro Beghini, *Contemplazione e conoscenza mistica: la dottrina di Tommaso d'Aquino nella Summa contra Gentiles* (Rome: Casa editrice Leonardo da Vinci, 2015); Ayelet Even-Ezra, *Ecstasy in the Classroom: Trance, Self, and the Academic Profession in Medieval Paris* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017).

²⁷ Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger, OCSO (Trappist, KY: Cistercian Publications, 1972), 65.

fallen into the infinite abyss of God. Their lives and writings give witness to the creative possibilities that can emerge when we open ourselves to different—and marginal—methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches. While they may not solve the tensions and ambiguities of the relationship between theology and spirituality, hopefully the women mystics can teach us to be more attentive to the voices on the margins and the in-between spaces.

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