

**Religious Devotions in the Southern Low Countries as an
Opposition to Catharism 1150-1300**

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Abstract

Through contemplation, and the practice of actions with religious meaning, faith is taught and reinforced. Beliefs that conflict with the established teaching of a religious group are sometimes ruled by it as heretical. Effective in countering heresy are religious practices that would not be performed by those deemed heretical. The practices indicate those who are orthodox and safeguard them from accusations of heresy. Catharism was an expanding heretical sect in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, enticing adherents away from the Roman Catholic Church, rejecting the Catholic sacraments and holding to a dualistic theology. Through the study of eleven hagiographies (idealized biographies of saints) this thesis identifies and examines sixteen attributes of people who lived in the southern Low Countries, corresponding with contemporary Belgium and northeastern France. We show how these attributes aided the Catholic Church's struggle against Catharism through the confirmation, dissemination, and distinction of orthodoxy, while serving to nullify heterodox suspicion of the hagiographical subjects.

A travers l'étude et la pratique des actions de significations religieuses, la foi est cultivée et renforcée. Les croyances en conflit avec les pensées enseignées par un groupe religieux sont parfois jugées hérétiques. Les coutumes religieuses, effectuées par ceux qui ne seraient pas jugés hérétiques, se trouvent efficaces contre ce conflit de l'hérésie. Ces traditions indiquent ceux qui sont orthodoxes et les protègent contre des accusations d'hérésie. Le Catharisme était une secte hérétique en expansion durant les XIIe et XIIIe siècles, incitant les fidèles à s'éloigner de l'Église catholique romaine, rejetant les sacrements catholiques en tenant une théologie dualiste. A travers onze hagiographies (les biographies idéalisées des saints) la thèse identifie et examine seize caractéristiques des personnes qui habitaient les Pays-Bas méridionaux, correspondant à la Belgique et le nord-est de la France de nos jours. Ces attributs ont aidé l'Église catholique contre la lutte du catharisme à travers la confirmation, la dissémination et la distinction de l'orthodoxie, tout en servant d'invalider la suspicion d'hétérodoxie et des sujets des hagiographies.

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1 Introduction

The dark spot marring the beauty of the full moon was there every time Juliana closed her eyes. It could not be ignored, whatever she did. Wherever she went, she saw it, no matter how much effort she put into trying to forget the heavenly vision. Finally, in 1211, three years after the vision first appeared, the meaning came to Juliana. As she was rapt in ecstasy, she heard an angelic voice tell her that:

The moon represented the church, that its lustrous brightness represented the different solemnities celebrated in the Church during the course of the year. The dark spot which obscured a part of the moon, a lustre, signified the want of a certain feast, which was God's will should be instituted; this feast was to honour the most august and most holy sacrament of the Altar" (Beadbuey 39).

Juliana's revelation eventually founded the feast of Corpus Christi, the only feast added to the *temporale*¹ in the thirteenth century (Walters 266), and a solemnity that is still celebrated today².

The prominence of the Eucharist in the interpretation of Juliana's vision was not unique for a pious thirteenth-century Catholic, nor was her desire that others should reverence the Sacrament. Throughout the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Catholic men and women were strongly devoted to the Eucharist, lived holy lives, and held onto the ideals of poverty and chastity, while performing many physical austerities in their quest for spiritual perfection. This thesis will look at the lives of eleven individuals (see Table 2) who, like Juliana, lived in the southern Low Countries³ between 1150 to 1300. Through their hagiographies we will analyze

¹ The "temporale" is a part of the breviary and missal that contains the daily offices, which divide the day into periods of fixed prayer and worship at regular intervals, for the ecclesiastical year (definition from [www. Merriam-Webster.com](http://www.Merriam-Webster.com)).

² The feast day for Corpus Christi in the Roman Catholic Church is on June 19. In most dioceses, the observance of the solemnity is moved to the nearest Sunday.

³ The Low Countries consists of present day Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, parts of Northern Germany and Northern France (Simons 1-3), while the southern Low Counties, the

their ability to shape new religious forms and practices along with plotting the physical expressions of their faith, which impacted their influence upon one another, and the dissemination of their ideas and Church doctrine.

This thesis will discuss the *vita apostolica* and its importance in the southern Low Countries. Following this, the heresy of Catharism is discussed and sixteen different attributes, found in the hagiographies, are surveyed. Each attribute emphasizes a different form of religiosity used by the subjects to keep heterodox suspicions of them at bay, while presenting a distinct way to aid in the fight against Catharism. Of these sixteen attributes, five devotional practices (the practice of physical austerities, devotion to the Trinity, devotion to Saint John the Evangelist, Eucharistic devotion and the development of the feast of Corpus Christi) will be examined in relation to aiding the Roman Catholic Church's fight against the Cathar heresy. This thesis argues that these five practices, along with the additional eleven attributes, prevalent in the southern Low Countries, were used in an effort to directly challenge Catharism while confirming the Church's status as the sole orthodox religion.

1.1 Context

The hagiographies (writings detailing the lives of saints or holy individuals) of eleven individuals form the corpus of primary literature studied for this paper (Table 2). Each individual surveyed lived in the southern Low Countries during the period from 1150-1300. Their *vitae* were well read and circulated throughout the area and even further beyond the borders, impacting the ideals of religious believers who were in contact with them. The hagiographies are used as a primary source in this thesis to determine the religious practices and devotions that are discussed. They are also the central basis for the charts and analysis found within.

main area of study for this thesis is contained in contemporary Belgium and the French departments of Nord and Pas-de-Calais (xiii).

Hagiographies represent a literary genre that present an individual's life in such a way so they are, or will be perceived as a saint. The hagiographical writings are often the only source available to know anything about these historical people and the *vitae* contain and highlight stereotypical depictions of piety, sufferings, religious acts, and miracles, performed during the life or after the death of the individual. The lives of hagiographical subjects are consistently displayed in this way because one main goal of hagiography is to present the subject like other already accepted saints, and highlight aspects of a saintly life that are meant to be emulated by those who read it.

Hagiographies are created for a specific purpose and are written in a particular, exaggerated way to emphasize the facets of society that were valued at the time. The popular cults, history, customs, and traditions of a certain area or religious group are all displayed within their pages. Circumstances of society may change for example, persecution stops and the representation of the ideal martyr in *vitae* is no longer the dominant depiction, or Catharism is no longer a threat and the extreme depictions that distinguished individuals from this heresy are looked at as suspect in fifteenth century hagiographies. However, the ideals such as chastity, charity, fasting and devotions remain as permanent standards for one to follow. The authors of the hagiographies worked within these certain forms and religious ideals to create a model saint, relating the temporal, earthly reality of the individual to their eternal salvation and reward with God (Farrar 84).

It must be understood that the Catholic Church was the all-embracing system of religious and political power in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and it was the central life of existence for most persons (Farrar 84). The hagiographers worked in this system, which influenced how they portrayed their subjects, while the society in which they wrote dictated to a certain extent the concepts and positions that they highlighted. Hagiographic literature evolves (regarding societal issues, not saintly qualities) with the times. In the eleven *vitae*

considered for this thesis, it is evident that apostolic living was an important ideal and that Catharism was a main concern within society (particularly for the Church), and these are both written into the hagiographies within the specified portrayal of the characters religious qualities.

Most hagiographies were written in Latin, the official language of the Church, but some were originally penned in the vernacular. Eve of Saint-Martin wrote *The Life of Juliana of Cornillon*, her close friend, in French, but the vernacular source was lost or discarded once it was translated into Latin (Newman, "Preface" xxxiii). Likewise, with Beatrice of Nazareth, whose *vita* and *treatise* was originally written in the vernacular of Middle Dutch, being translated into Latin by the chaplain who compiled her hagiography (DeGanck xxviii). There are no vernacular copies of her autobiography remaining; perhaps her biographer did not see the need to keep it once it was translated. There are however Flemish versions of her *treatise* still in existence (xxviii).

The *vitae* were frequently later translated from the official Latin into (or back into) the vernacular. Having the hagiographies in the common language of the region made it easier for them to be read and understood. Anneke Mulder-Bakker writes on faith being a communal affair in the Middle Ages where people would meet at the local parish or abbey not only to worship, but also to listen to the lives of the saints (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 39). At the Saint-Truiden Abbey several colloquial copies of hagiographies are recorded as having been in the library, such as the life of Lutgard of Aywières and Christina the Astonishing both in the middle Dutch language of the region (39-40). The retelling of these twelfth and thirteenth century *vitae* inspired the hearers to emulate the examples found within them and provided an ideal of perfection in their spiritual life to strive towards (42).

The authors of the eleven hagiographies studied for this thesis were often well acquainted with the individuals that they were writing about. While another individual communicated

certain *vitae* to the author, such as *The Life of Margaret of Ypres*⁴, others like Lutgard of Aywières and Mary of Oignies were friends with their hagiographers. Both Thomas of Cantimpré who wrote *The Life of Lutgard of Aywières* and James of Vitry who wrote *The Life of Mary of Oignies*, considered the subjects to be their spiritual mothers (Newman, “Introduction” 9). Both of them also revered their respective subjects so highly that they acquired and carried on person a relic of them after their deaths (9). Goswin of Bossut, the biographer of Ida of Nivelles and Arnulf and Abundus of Villers most likely personally knew his subjects as well. In fact, the death of Abundus of Villers is not recorded in his *vita*, highly unusual in the hagiographical genre, suggesting that Goswin died before Abundus and was unable to fully complete the hagiography (Cawley 20).

It is most interesting to note that only two individuals studied for this thesis have been canonized as saints in the Catholic Church. Lutgard of Aywières was elevated to sainthood in 1523 and Juliana of Cornillon was canonized in 1869. Mary of Oignies and Yvette of Huy are considered “blessed,” the first step on the road to sainthood, but there does not seem to be any popular cult towards them that will further advance their cause. This is a contrast to their Italian counterparts, such as Saint Claire of Assisi, who were canonized soon after their deaths. Mulder-Bakker sees the individuals from the southern Low Countries as being regarded as saints during their lifetime (with no significant enduring cult after their death). More importantly, she considers their hagiographies as a new type of genre, used as promotion of a particular lifestyle against the heretical ideas of the Cathars⁵ (Mulder-Bakker, “General Introduction” 23). Barbara Newman also sees the *vitae* in the southern Low Countries, especially the works of James of Vitry and Thomas of Cantimpré, as being overwhelmingly pastoral and instructional in character (Newman, “Introduction” 16-17) in comparison to other

⁴ Friar Zeger, who was Margaret’s confessor and spiritual director, relayed the Life of Margaret of Ypres to the writer of the account, Thomas of Cantimpré.

⁵ Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker relies on the writings of Andre Vauchez for this conclusion.

regions. This thesis takes the position that the hagiographies reviewed were crafted to be instructional. While they certainly have the traditional hagiographical formula, presenting the saintly qualities of the individual, they also have the added layer of intentional instructional text to keep individuals in right orthodoxy and aid in the struggle against heresy.

There are two common academic perceptions in regards to the religious persons (particularly females) found in the hagiographies, that either societal conditions or religious motivations were the main propulsion for newly formed groups like the beguines, or the increase of individuals entering religious orders. Dayton Phillips, Joseph Greven and Karl Bucher are scholars that all support the first perception. They believe that societal conditions were the main impetus for individuals to peruse a religious life. Dayton Phillips studied the Beguines, primarily in medieval Strasburg. He does not see the social unity of the beguines arising from their communal activities or from any religious ideals. In fact, he states that there was “no indication...that an associated religious life had essential significance for beguines. Indeed, if the exact nature of the beguines life had been more accurately interpreted, the beguine house would never have been considered a religious association” (Phillips 152). Phillip’s interpretation of the beguines negates the possibility that any of their activities arose from a common religious fervor amongst them. He sees beguinage developments solely as a social expansion, taking away the religious motivations I believe were fundamental to the formation of religious groups in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Societal conditions were also the research focus of German academic Joseph Greven, who was one of the first scholars to circulate a prevailing theory that assumes the beguines were made up from women who unable to become nuns or find a husband (Simons x). This theory became a common theoretical perception in much work that followed. Karl Bucher also focused his research solely on socio-economic conditions. He came up with the concept of *frauenfrage*. The theory of *frauenfrage* considers why women appeared to outnumber men in

the late Middle Ages, claiming that because there were a greater number of females in medieval cities, beguinages formed as an alternate means of protection for them (Simons x-xi, 149).

Socio-economic situations and *frauenfrage* theory may hold true for a minority of females who entered a beguinage or committed to the religious life, but I think that this explanation underestimates female religious fervor, casting the beguines as a second best organization, which I do not deem to be the case. Basing beguinage development on the social conditions of the day deemphasizes the religious reasons and motivations that I believe motivated the majority of beguines, and the other institutionalized religious surveyed for this thesis. I take the view that many individuals joined these groups by choice, as a way to live out the apostolic ideal.

Herbert Grundmann first postulated a view similar to the one I favour in his book, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*. He argued against Bucher, Greven and Phillips, asserting that the beguines purposefully perused the ideals of apostolic poverty. Grundmann's research points to a middle ground, the *vita apostolica* that inspired religious movements in medieval times. He argues against the idea of *frauenfrage*, effectively presenting how religious motivation played a role in females entering a beguinage or taking up religious orders. Grundmann was the first academic to speak of the beguines as a lay religious movement, by and for women, in the Middle Ages.

Carole Neel similarly argues in her paper "The Origin of the Beguines" that the beguines origins are a result of the increase in lay piety during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. More recently, Walter Simons also considered the beguines as a religious undertaking, looking at their movement through the lens of lay religiosity in the Middle Ages. This thesis aligns with Grundmann, Neel and Simons in considering the religious individuals studied in the hagiographies to be highly motivated and ordered by the *vita apostolica*. The individuals who were surveyed for this thesis are considered to be motivated by religious reasons and looked at

in the light of their own terms, that it was their decision to pursue the religious devotions and practices that they adopted.

People searching for the chance to be lay ministers in the church took up apostolic ideals with vigour and dedication. All sects emerging at this time positioned themselves as a group truly living out apostolic ideals, presenting themselves as true believers by living out the ideals of early Christianity emphasizing their chastity, commitment to poverty, and communal living. While the apostolic life had the ability to lead some towards a greater orthodoxy, it likewise gave the possibility for heresy to expand. The ideals of the *vita apostolica* became the foundation of orthodox religious orders, but also allowed for the establishment of various heretical sects, like the Cathars. The emerging religious sects, both heterodox and orthodox, gained adherents in the new apostolic atmosphere and demanded notice from the church. For the medieval layperson desiring to follow the *vita apostolica* the choice of groups, following the apostolic ideal was vast. This led the general population to grapple with the question, 'which are the true believers?' and resulted in the Church beginning to clearly defining the concepts of orthodoxy.

Ernest McDonnell considers the *vita apostolica* as the common denominator for all religious movements in the Middle Ages. He claims that the "demands of the *vita apostolica* charted the path of both reform and rebellion" (McDonnell, "The Vita Apostolica" 28). McDonnell understands the response to the call of the apostolic life as taking either one of two forms, orthodox or heterodox. The first form, orthodox, saw the individual submitted to the hierarchy of the Church and the sacraments. McDonnell considers the second form, heterodox, grounded in the idea of clerical reformation. He sees lay individuals as wanting more religion, not less, but they wanted it to be the right kind (McDonnell, "The Vita Apostolica" 17), often criticizing the clergy for their lack of adherence to the values of the apostolic life. He claims that even when the clergy did cleanse themselves, living more in line with apostolic ideals, certain

leadership traits were still presenting challenges for the laity, producing dissent (McDonnell, "Beguines and Beghards" 141-142), as individuals living the apostolic life desired their group to exemplify the purest form of lay religiosity and adherence to the *vita apostolica*.

The desire for clerical reformation, which grew out of the Gregorian reform movement of the eleventh century, influenced the longing of individuals to live an apostolic life. Malcolm Lambert discusses the desire for reform in his book *Medieval Heresy*, observing that what started out as orthodox change by the papacy, began to affect the consciousness of the laity, producing the ability for both orthodox and heterodox positions to form. Walter Wakefield also agrees with this hypothesis stating that, "the increased piety and spirit of reform operating entirely within the Church had a great deal in common with the piety and moral fervour which led men out the Church and into heresy"(Wakefield 7).

Wakefield makes a distinction between heresy and popular heresy. Heresy is defined by Wakefield as doctrinal errors. He defines popular heresy as heresies arising from the emotions of individuals who were moved to, "give evidence of their spiritual convictions in their daily lives"(Wakefield 3). Wakefield argues that the motivations of popular heresy were religious, stirred by the desire of lay individuals to express their religious aspirations. Wakefield considers the *vita apostolica* as a key element in the rise of laygroups and the monastic movement. He also contemplates the potential of the apostolic life to lead towards the formation of new heresies (Wakefield 25).

Gordon Leff discusses the possibility that there was not an orthodox outlet available for the laity to express their desire for reform, because the Church stopped the formation of new religious orders in 1215, via the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council. Hence, alienation occurred between the laity and the Church institution. This estrangement changed the context of heresy according to Leff, allowing dissenting groups to easily obtain the label of heretic, at the same time, it allowed for the accepting of unofficial groups such as the beguines, permitting

them to grow in numbers (Leff, "Heresy in the Later Middle Ages" 17). Leff argues from a *Frauenfrage* point of view, an interpretation that I do not fully agree with. However, I feel he correctly identifies the role that the Fourth Lateran Council and the Second General Council of Lyons in 1274, which reaffirmed the ban on new orders, had in the growing negativity towards religious groups and the desire for the religious, to be considered orthodox.

Roger Moore's book, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe*, takes the view that the heresy of Catharism was not a heresy at all. Moore sees the heresy of Catharism created from long-term factors, such as failed attempts at clerical reform. He names lay religiosity as an important factor in its rise. Moore believes that when laymen went too far in the emulation of the *vita apostolica*, rejecting the Church that they saw as sub-standard, and then they were labeled heretical.

This thesis agrees that the *vita apostolica* played a vital role in the forming of all groups, both orthodox and heretical. Adherence to the apostolic life is one similarity the Cathars and Catholics share. However, I do feel in opposition to Moore that the Cathars were justly labeled as heretical. Their rejection of Catholic sacraments such as not believing in transubstantiation, and marriage (Lambert, "Cathars" 24) along with their dualistic beliefs (30; "Medieval Sourcebook: Bernard Gui"; "Medieval Sourcebook Raynaldus"), clearly opposed Church teachings and really left the Church no option except to label them as such.

While there are similarities to be found between the Cathars and the Catholic Church, there are also noticeable differences. It these differences were what the subjects of the hagiographies were presenting, emphasizing their orthodox practices in opposition to the deemed heterodox positions of Catharism. The focus of this thesis is on the hagiographies and their obvious belief that the Cathars were indeed heretical is reflected. This is not to ignore the possibility that there were some sects wrongly accused of heresy, but the Cathar beliefs discussed in this thesis are clearly heretical from the point of view of the Catholic Church. Since

each of the *vitae* surveyed have their roots firmly in the Church, they sincerely believed that the Cathars were heretical and their lives were presented in such a way as to refute this heresy.

Much information on the Cathars is a result of the few remaining historical documents describing their rituals and the notes detailing the inquisition against them. According to Malcolm Lambert in his book *The Cathars*, the doctrines that made up the theology of the Cathar movement were important and distinctive. At first, the Church considered the Cathar doctrine to be simply a branch of Manichaeism or Donatism and was not well equipped to campaign against it in the early years of the crusade. Lambert believes that the slowness of response by the Church contributed to Catharism's growth. He also considers the doctrinal disputes that occurred between the sect and the Church, to consist of new, important theological content, which brought about many needed changes in the Church, including clear doctrinal definitions and an attempt to raise the standard of preaching. This doctrinal clarity served to provide better instruction to the Christian laity.

This thesis is furthermore substantiated by historical Church documents detailing the various councils that occurred between the dates of 1150-1300, to determine which doctrines the Church was defining and the concerns that they held in the twelfth and thirteenth century. Similarly, the writings of individuals such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux are considered, as his works were influential on religious and biblical interpretation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In addition, Carolyn Bynum's research on the female manipulation of food in the Middle Ages is reflected in this thesis, especially in regard to female fasting and Eucharistic devotion. She links to an alternate realm of religious authority for females, looking at the issues of power and control. While some of the specific religious attributes and devotions detailed on the charts in this thesis have been researched extensively in the past, like Bynum's discussion on fasting and Eucharistic devotion, others have not been given as much consideration, nor to my

knowledge have they been compiled in such a way. I hope that the analysis that follows will contribute new ideas and present older ones in a fresh way.

1.2 Importance of the *Vita Apostolica*

One of the paramount influences on religious life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was the concept of lay religiosity, through which non-ordained church adherents sought a way to actively live out their spiritual beliefs. Consequently, the *vita apostolica*, literally meaning “the life of the apostles,” came to be seen as the ultimate religious ideal. According to Ernst McDonnell, the apostolic life was comprised of three basic principles: imitation of Christ and the apostles, a passionate love for souls, and the voluntary embrace of poverty (McDonnell, “The Vita Apostolica” 15). Most religious sects, heretical and orthodox, used the *vita apostolica* to position themselves as true believers, presenting their group as the correct way to live out the ideals of primitive Christianity⁶.

Individuals wanting to live an apostolic life took the words of Jesus to heart and strove to live out his recorded words. Cues for a life of poverty and self denial were taken from scriptures such as Matthew 19:21, “Jesus said to him ‘If you wish to be perfect, go sell your possessions, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me’”, and Luke 9:23, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me”. Based on such verses, the followers of the *vita apostolica* left their homes and families, inspired by the words of Christ: “Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age... and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-30). Adherents of the *vita apostolica* believed that denying

⁶ The term primitive Christianity will be used interchangeably with early Christianity in this thesis. The terms will refer to the form of Christianity instituted by Jesus and his earliest followers as laid out in the Gospels (the first four books of the New Testament containing details on the life of Jesus and his followers) and book of Acts (containing details of the Church in the years after Jesus death), specifically in regard to the concepts of poverty, chastity and self-denial.

themselves familial comforts on earth would earn them “treasures in heaven” (Matthew 19:21, Mark 10:21, Luke 18:22). Many also believed strongly in the concept of chastity, taking to heart scriptures such as Matthew 19:10, which talks of making oneself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

Even though the *vita apostolica* was grounded in scripture, it was not an official doctrine of the Church; rather it was a social ideal that allowed individuals to focus on their inner being in imitation of Christ. The inward absence of desire for material goods was what mattered most to adherents of this lifestyle (Simons 14). Yet the apostolic life did, by definition, demand outward evidence through acts of chastity, charity, and frugal living, which ranged from begging for sustenance to living a simple life of prayer and fasting. Imitating the apostles gave laypersons a way to be more devout and show greater devotion through a form of activism, following Christ’s summons to live out the ideals of poverty and chastity while heeding the command to go into the world and make disciples of others (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15). The voluntary poverty and chastity exhibited by laypeople obliquely questioned the property and values of the Catholic Church. The perceived excesses in clerics’ lifestyles and the non-celibacy of priests often led to popular criticism of the clergy. Pious laypeople wanted to see their religious leadership - like them - following the ideals of the *vita apostolica*, living the same austere way that they were, and leading their congregations according to them.

The ideals of the *vita apostolica* are prevalent in all eleven individuals whose hagiographies form the corpus of primary literature studied for this thesis (Table 2). All of the hagiographies examined emphasize the apostolic ideal of chastity, in the lives of both single and married individuals. During the Middle Ages, a time of chastity for married couples was often given for penance, and the restriction and/or denial of sexual relations at certain times, such as lent, was strongly advocated (Olson 97), reflecting the medieval view that it is valiant and preferable to be chaste. Mary of Oignies’ husband promised to God that he would “live a

celibate [life]" (Vitry 54) during his marriage, and he worked alongside Mary in an ascetic existence, giving up everything for the poor. Yvette of Huy was not only happily widowed (she had often prayed for her husband's death, Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 79), but a young mother of three. Yvette resisted her fathers' insistence she marry again, officially vowing herself to chaste widowhood and devoting her remaining days to Christ (81).

Because sexual purity was such an important ideal, a popular hagiographic motif was the miraculous preservation of religious women's chastity in the face of certain danger. The Virgin Mary herself preserved Yvette of Huy's commitment to chaste widowhood when a youth at the house where she was staying came to her at night with the intention to "try to prevail as a man against a woman" (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 86). Likewise, Lutgard of Aywières was able to escape rape at the hands of a knight she had rejected, though her chastity was brought under suspicion. Lutgard stood up to her doubters by holding her head high as she rode past them on a horse, lifting her veil to expose her face, and giving her modesty, spurned as it was to Christ (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 221). Lutgard believed that Jesus understood the shame of her accusations due to the immodesty he was forced to endure during the events of the Passion. She returned to her monastery quieting her doubters with a greater progress in her Christian life and an increase of spiritual gifts, including apparitions of the Virgin Mary and St. Catherine (222-223).

Commitment to poverty by these individuals was also strong, even in the face of great wealth and opportunity. In the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Low Countries were involved in a period of rapid economic and social development and urbanization, becoming the most highly urbanized region in all of medieval Europe (Simons 4). Many became wealthy through the prosperous cloth industry or via copper and iron production (5). Almost all of the hagiographical characters surveyed were born in these thriving urban settlements. Beatrice of Nazareth was born in the city of Tienen (DeGanck 11), and laywoman Christina the Astonishing

had her home in the thriving town of St. Truiden (Spearing 75). Lutgard of Aywières was a wealthy daughter and later wife in Tongeren (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 215), and Yvette of Huy and Abundus of Villers were both born in the cloth and copper producing city of Huy (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 77; Cawley 210). In addition to being brought up in urban settings, most individuals came from families that had wealth and positions of standing in the community. Mary of Oignies and Ida of Nivelles both had fathers who were members of the commercial elite (Vitry 52; Cawley 31), and Yvette of Huy was born into "the best family in the city" (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 77).

As cities rapidly developed, the social classes became more distinct. Urbanization brought with it a greater divide between the rich and poor, marginalizing the less fortunate and weaker elements of society (Simons 62). In seeking to conform to the ideal of poverty, many followers of the *vita apostolica* renounced their privileged upbringings: detaching themselves from lifelong material comfort by seeking to live like, and with, the outcast poor. Yvette of Huy, for instance, gave away her large inheritance despite considerable objections from her family and friends (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 87) before she went to live and work in poverty at a leprosarium. Likewise, from a young age, Mary of Oignies exhibited solidarity with the poor when she rejected all attempts from her parents to dress her in "delicate and refined clothing", even though her parents mocked her behaviour (Vitry 52-53).

The ideal of poverty brought with it moral concerns about how wealth was generated. Urban expansion introduced the idea of credit into the southern Low Countries, and money lending with interest, or "usury," as it was known, was considered the deadly sin of avarice (Simons 64). Their concern over this sin was the reason many religious like Ida of Nivelles, Mary of Oignies, and Yvette of Huy left the rich lifestyle of their paternal homes to join groups that followed the ideals of apostolic poverty. Suspicion of the corrupting power of wealth and money lending caused individuals like Ida of Nivelles to be conscience stricken over the funds

her father had given for her monastic dowry. She prayed, “Sweet Lord, see how upset I am in my heart over this money” (Cawley 37), and asked God to increase his grace within her so that she would “no longer contend that the money was gained as filthy lucre” (37).

Mary of Oignies was likewise concerned with the sin of avarice, especially because her upbringing had been relatively lavish (Vitry 52). Her privileged childhood caused Mary often to pray for and give alms to the poor in an attempt to lessen her mother’s sojourn in purgatory. Mary harboured grave doubts as to the state of her mother’s soul, asking God to let her know where it was (Cantimpré, “Supplement” 149). One day, an apparition of her deceased mother visited her – evidently from hell. When Mary asked her why she had been condemned there, her mother replied, “I was brought up and I lived on what was acquired by usury and unjust commerce” (149). By not restoring what had been unjustly taken from others, Mary’s mother was damned eternally. Upon hearing this, Mary no longer wept over her mother’s soul, but rationally accepted God’s judgement on her (150). Presumably, Mary of Oignies’ mother had known of her daughter’s concern with riches and avarice while she was alive, as Mary’s relatives often mocked and condemned her and her husband John for their renunciation of worldly goods (Vitry 55). Often, their desire for apostolic poverty set pious followers of the *vita apostolica* in opposition to the newly urban society, and even to their own well-to-do families.

Urbanization likewise changed the social mix. Many moved from rural to urban settings in order to procure employment, leading to a higher population of urban poor, sick and homeless in the cities. Many people desiring to live the life of the apostles responded to this growing social need, inspired by the Gospels, especially passages such as Matthew 25: 34-46, which promises eternal life in heaven to those who cared for the sick, fed the hungry, and visited persons in prison. Jesus states in verse 40 of this passage, “just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me”. Conversely, this passage depicts those who did not help the vulnerable in society as meriting hell. The commands in this

passage were thus strongly motivating, especially for those desiring to live like the apostles of the early church.

In the southern Low Countries numerous hospitals and leper houses were founded to look after the needs of the marginalized within the community. Individuals such as Mary of Oignies (Vitry 55), Yvette of Huy (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 93), and Juliana of Cornillon (176), all ministered at leper houses early on in their religious careers. Helping the poor, sick, and often destitute was an appealing, though somewhat radical, option for lay-women seeking to live out the *vita apostolica*. The *vita* of Yvette of Huy illustrates society's distaste for lepers saying, "few of the inhabitants of the place would communicate with the lepers nor would they deign to serve them" (93). Even the priests would only celebrate Mass with them no more than twice a week (93). However, pious Catholics, in their apostolic fervor, happily served the lepers. Some, like Yvette of Huy, even desiring to become one of them by drinking and eating their food, washing in their used bath water, and mixing her blood with theirs (95) in a bid to experience true poverty and humility. Willingness to help the sick and marginalized, living a life of poverty, and following the model of chastity were ways that laypersons could truly live like the primitive Church. Inspired by the Gospels and the descriptions of the Church in the biblical book of Acts, both men and women undertook actions and devotions that facilitated their desire to live in imitation of Christ and his apostles.

1.3 Beguines and Religious Orders in the Southern Low Countries

Joining the beguines (a group that consisted of clusters of women living together in religious community, but not taking formal vows with the Church) was a popular way for females to live out the *vita apostolica* in the southern Low Countries. The beguinages (dwelling places of the beguines) were primarily urban and often attached to a hospital or leprosarium where the beguines ministered. The women who lived in the beguinages had the freedom to be

involved in society while living in religious community, in contrast to traditional Church convents that were often cloistered.

The early to mid thirteenth century saw a proliferation of beguinages, especially in the southern Low Countries. Two types of beguine communities emerged: convent beguinages and court beguinages (Simons 50-51). Both convent and court beguinages had a superior in charge and certain house rules that they were to follow (50-51). The main difference between the two types of beguinage is their size and location. In the convent model of beguinage, the women lived together in a house or in houses in close proximity to each other, often situated near a parish church where the beguines would attend services (50). The populations of convent beguinages typically were between five to sixteen beguines (51), and they were the most common type of beguinage. Walter Simons estimates that 221 of 298 beguinages were based on the convent model (50).

Court beguinages were less common in Europe overall (72 of 298), but more popular in the southern Low Countries (Simons 51). They tended to be much larger in size, housing anywhere from one hundred to four hundred beguines at a time (55). Some were even bigger, such as the beguine community at St. Christophe in Liège, where a population of around one thousand females was recorded in the mid-thirteenth century (54). Court beguinages were commonly located outside of the city walls and were often like a self-contained town, not only housing the beguines, but also supplying their physical needs with gardens, bakeries, breweries, and other service buildings within their walls (51). As the name implies, “court” beguinages situated their housing around a formal chapel or common yard space (51). Some court beguinages were so large and influential that they did not have to rely on a parish priest to perform their liturgies, having a dedicated priest appointed for services in their chapel (51). Court beguinages were more complex, larger, and more self-sustaining compared to the convent style of beguinage and most nunneries distinctive to the Low Countries (51; 55).

While there is no concrete evidence that any of the females found in the eleven *vitae* were in a beguine community for their entire adulthood, there are plenty of connections and interaction recorded in the hagiographies between the religious females studied for this thesis and beguine communities. Five of the eleven *vitae* (those of Christina the Astonishing, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Mary of Oignies, Margaret of Ypres and Yvette of Huy) do not mention which religious order the woman belonged to, if any. However, there are good reasons for suggesting that these women may have been beguines⁷. Christina the Astonishing moved freely around between female religious groups, spending many years with the beguines and recluses at Looz (Spearing 84). Mary of Oignies is often credited with being the mother of the beguine movement. Like the beguine, she lived her entire life in religious community outside of a monastic setting, but her biographer, James of Vitry, avoided using the word “beguine” to describe her. James instead referred to Mary as a *religiosa*, a term he uses for females who display devotion, piety, and adherence to the *vita apostolica* (Mulder-Bakker, “Introduction” 13). This could be due to fact that beguines were suspect to clerical authorities from the very beginning (Simons 123), because of their non-cloistered, autonomous lifestyle, and Vitry wanted to avoid any negative connotations in his presentation of Mary’s virtues, even though he advocated the beguine lifestyle (Mulder-Bakker, “Introduction” 14). Yvette of Huy, in her work in the Leper hospital, and then retreating to an anchorhold⁸ in her later life, also certainly

⁷ Walter Simons in his book *Cities of Ladies* consider these individuals as beguines. I believe that they were most likely beguines, especially Mary of Oignies, Yvette of Huy, and Christina the Astonishing, but have resisted labeling them definitively as such since the term is not specifically used for them in their hagiographies.

⁸ Anchor-holds were enclosures that were built on to the church or a frequently visited chapel where religious persons could be enclosed (often ceremoniously) for their remaining life. Some choose to live in them semi-permanently, in which case there was not an enclosure ritual performed (Mulder-Bakker, “General Introduction” 21). From their enclosure, anchorites often had a view of the main altar, allowing their participation at Mass and adoration of the Eucharist (Cantimpré, “Living Saints” 61). They additionally counseled and prayed for visitors from the anchor-hold’s windows (60). Like the beguines, recluses living in anchor-holds did not take any vows, remaining laywomen (Mulder-Bakker, “General Introduction” 25). Yvette of Huy and Eve of Saint-Martin (Juliana of Cornillon’s confidant and friend) were both anchoresses.

fits the pattern of a beguine but, like Mary of Oignies, her hagiography does not specifically label her as one.

Several of the women surveyed had relationships with beguine communities and were schooled in them as youngsters. Lutgard of Aywières spent many years in a beguine community before moving to a Cistercian convent (Cantimpré, “Collected Saints” 209). Beatrice of Nazareth was schooled at the age of seven, after her mother died, in a beguine community at Zoutleeuw (DeGanck 25). Juliana of Cornillon befriended the beguine Isabella of Huy. Isabella later joined Juliana’s convent, becoming her lifelong companion and fellow promoter of the feast of Corpus Christi (Beadbuey 89). A beguine community also gave refuge to Juliana and her companions when she was in exile (178) after her enemy, a prior accused of simony, re-asserted magistrates’ rights over the Cornillon abbey (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 154).⁹

While five individuals in the hagiographies may have been connected to the beguines, the remaining six, Abundus of Villers, Arnulf of Villers, Beatrice of Nazareth, Ida of Nivelles, Juliana of Cornillon, and Lutgard of Aywières, were Cistercians. The Cistercians were very prevalent in the southern Low Countries. There were at least forty-nine Cistercian nunneries in the country of Belgium (Simons 110), and the many additional Cistercian monasteries in the area shows the order’s great influence in the country. Even the *vitae*, mentioned above, that do not specify which religious order the individual belonged to, emphasize their closeness to the Cistercians. Religious such as Elizabeth of Spalbeek are mentioned as living close to a Cistercian convent (Spearing 107). Others, such as Christina the Astonishing, had regular contact with

⁹ This prior succeeded in uniting both the bishop and city officials against Juliana, who wanted the abbey to remain as a monastic community, rather than a lay institution. This is reminiscent of an identical action (involving the same prior) that had occurred approximately five years earlier, causing a previous exile for Juliana (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 153-154). With the renewed hostility surrounding Mount Cornillon, Juliana, along with Isabella of Huy, and two additional individuals named Agnes and Ozilia were forced to flee, moving between beguinages and Cistercian convents that would take them in. All of them died exiled from their abbey at Mount Cornillon (153).

Cistercians in St. Truiden (86).

Beguine houses are additionally recorded as having transitioned to become Cistercian convents, due in part to the popularity of the Cistercian movement in the southern Low Countries, and to the similarities in the devotional practice of the two groups. Lutgard's early religious community formally became nuns, adopting the Benedictine rule of the Cistercians (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 209). When Lutgard moved to Aywières, the Beguine community she joined there was likewise officially received into the Cistercian order (209). The spirituality of the Cistercians and the beguines definitely would have influenced each other – most notably in the bodily and devotional actions championed by both groups. Both the Cistercians and the beguines tended to be involved in hospital work, caring for the poor and sick. They also both were inclined towards a more experiential spirituality, based on the writings of individuals such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Saint-Thierry. Examples of this will be discussed later in the thesis (Sections 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4).

1.4 Catharism in the Southern Low Countries

Catharism is believed to have evolved from a sect known as the Bogomils (Lambert, "Cathars" 23). The tenants and rituals of Catharism are homologous with Bogomilism, and are thought to have been transmitted to Western Europe through individuals returning from the crusades (Simons 16). Both the Bogomils and the Cathars held beliefs that stemmed from ancient Gnosticism. They believed in a duality of the universe: that the creation of the world occurred through an evil God, and in order to gain a reunification with the good God, bodily pleasures should be denied and replaced with abstinence (Simons 16; Lambert, "Cathars" 30). Both the Bogomils and the Cathars rejected the priesthood and sacraments of the Catholic Church (Lambert, "Cathars" 24), believing that the "Church of Rome was a den of thieves and ...the harlot of which [is] read in the Apocalypse" (Medieval Sourcebook: Raynaldus). These heterodox ideas spread rapidly throughout Western Europe and were not quashed until the

late thirteenth century, after the Church instituted inquisitions and the Albigensian crusade against the Cathars.

Catharism appeared in the southern Low Countries sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century, but because of the lack of sources the precise date is elusive (Simons 16). However, several sources do mention the Cathars' presence in this region. They are recorded as being in Cologne in 1163, having come from "Flanders"¹⁰ (Moore 1). Eckbert of Schonau mentions them in his book, *Sermons against the Cathars*, as sometimes being referred to as *piphles* in the Low Countries (Simons 17). Finally, a letter written by the clergy of Liège describes the practices of Catharism, labeling them as heretical, but not explicitly naming the group (16-17).

The southern Low Countries, however, were infamous for being a climate in which heresy easily spread and flourished (Simons 18). The propensity toward the spreading of heresy developed in part because of the Gregorian reforms¹¹ that occurred within the eleventh century Church, and the large area that each dioceses covered, which made it difficult to meet the needs of all the parishes (13). The desire for reform within the southern Low Countries, the rise of heretical ideas, and the ideals of the *vita apostolica*, all combined, provoking ecclesiastical concerns with regard to the Church's ability to hold the line between heterodox and orthodox ideals in this region.

While the apostolic life, so diligently followed by the individuals in our eleven hagiographies had the ability to lead many towards a greater orthodoxy; it likewise gave the possibility for heresy to expand. The *vita apostolica* ushered in a period of distinctive, individualized reforms during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, sanctioning the foundation

¹⁰ The text regarding the Cathars arriving in Cologne reads: "In the year 1163 some heretics of the sect of the Cathars came to Cologne from Flanders and stayed secretly in a barn near the city. But when they did not go to church on Sunday they were found out by their neighbors. They were brought before the church court and thoroughly examined about their sect. When they could not be corrected by sound arguments and stubbornly maintained their position, they were summarily expelled from the church and handed over to the lay court. On 5 August four men and a girl were taken outside of the city and burned "(Moore 1).

¹¹ The Gregorian reforms were undertaken by Pope Gregory VII in 1050-1080 in order to address the moral integrity and independence of the clergy.

of orthodox religious orders, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans. However, it also allowed the establishment of numerous heterodox sects such as the Cathars. All these groups matured in the new apostolic atmosphere, demanding notice, both positive and negative, from the Church.

The Cathars can be understood as taking the apostolic life to an extreme. This can be seen in a letter to Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, from Ekbert of Schonou. He writes that the Cathars are unchurching Catholics “on moral grounds, because of their claim to observe the apostolic life in a way which the Catholics did not” (Lambert, “Cathars” 22). Ekbert continues to elaborate on their communal living and dietary restrictions, highlighting the challenge between orthodox Catholic ascetic practices and those of the rival sect that is “claim[ing] many adherents” (22-23). Cathars practiced a very austere lifestyle, abstaining from all animal products and sexual contact in their attempt to live out the apostolic ideal (23). Because this was a difficult undertaking, the majority of Cathars, known as the *Credentes* (Believers) were not strictly required, but only strongly encouraged to follow these austerities. Those initiated as *perfecti* (perfects) were obligated to follow them. Thus, individuals often waited to be initiated into the *perfecti* until right before death to avoid both the strict requirements and obligation that the stringent lifestyle should not be given up¹² (242).

The Cathars’ criticism of the clergy and their desire for greater purity would have been very attractive to would-be reformers of the Catholic Church. The Cathars considered the Church to be so corrupt that it relinquished its line of apostolic succession. Because they believed that sacramental power depended on the purity of the priest, they rejected the

¹² The practice of deathbed commitments was practiced by Catholic laypeople as well. Catholics would commit themselves to a religious house when dying, taking the monastic vows. Often they were then transported to the religious house in order to avail themselves of the care and prayers of the monks and nuns (Lambert, “Cathars” 242).

Catholic clergy as unfit.¹³ The Cathars practiced a rite known as the *consolamentum* (a laying-on-of-hands to receive the spirit of God, a ritual which effectively replaced the Catholic sacraments of baptism, confirmation, ordination, penance and extreme unction, and initiated Cathars into the *perfecti*). According to the Cathars, if the ritual celebrant who celebrated the *consolamentum* fell into sin, then all those whom he had “consoled” were also considered fallen (Lambert, “Cathars” 49).

Female Cathars were able to and did become *Perfecti*, those who held the strictest adherence to Cathar beliefs. Similar to the eleven Catholic practitioners of the *vita apostolica* being examined in this thesis, these women came from all walks of life: widowed, married, and single, and lived together in community. Both groups of women, Cathar *Perfecti* and Catholic beguines, were noted for their piety, chastity, and dedication to the ideals of poverty. Both lived together in all-female homes, studying and discussing the scriptures with one another. Both groups had the ability to move freely in society, freedom of the cloister allowing them to spread their ideas.

But while the lifestyles of the religious and the Cathars were similar in form, they greatly differed in theology. The religious held to the orthodox teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, while the Cathars were radical dualists who separated God completely from the corrupt and fallen material world (Lambert, “Cathars” 31). The Cathars challenged both the concept of the Trinity and the Incarnation (the doctrine that Christ became truly man), claiming that Jesus was not the Son of God, but rather a spiritual emissary, in the form of man, sent by God to earth (25; 31). They also rejected the idea of the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist (transubstantiation), and other sacraments of the Catholic Church: eschewing marriage, by water, confession, and penance (30-31).

¹³ Only those initiated into the Cathar *Perfecti* could perform their rituals, as they were considered to have been purified through their austerities, the continuation of which was promised during the *consolamentum* ceremony.

There had not been such a large, strong heretical movement challenging the Church doctrine for some time, so the surging popularity of the Cathar movement took Catholic authorities in the church unawares.¹⁴ To combat the Cathar menace, the Catholic hierarchy further clarified key church doctrines in order to strengthen their orthodox position at the Fourth Lateran Council, held in 1215. Canon 1 clearly lays out the Church's position in regard to the sacrament of baptism and other doctrines such as the Trinity. The sacrament of the Eucharist and the doctrine of transubstantiation were likewise clearly defined. The very dogmas stressed at the council were the ones rejected by the Cathars. Canon 3 deals with heretics stating, "We excommunicate and anathematize every heresy that raises against the holy, orthodox and Catholic faith which we have above explained; condemning all heretics under whatever names they may be known" ("Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council"). The excommunication of heretics laid out in Canon 3 had begun three years prior when the Albigensian Crusade was instituted in 1209 (Figure 7) to actively fight the heresy of Catharism.

The doctrines the Church was defining, and the justification for the brutal Albigensian Crusade against the Cathars, were disseminated and promoted by special preachers tasked to do so. One such preacher was James of Vitry, who wrote *The Life of Mary of Oignies*. James received a Papal legate¹⁵ to preach against the Cathars in France and Lotharingia¹⁶ (Vitry 36), and there is no doubt that he used his hagiographical writing to help with this task by emphasizing, in the *vitae* he wrote, the many religious devotions that oppose Catharism. In *The*

¹⁴ Lambert discusses the fact that heretical occurrences became more frequent in the 12th century after a large period of heretical silence in both *Medieval Heresy* and *The Cathars*.

¹⁵ A papal legate is a representative of the Pope to either a foreign nation or specific part of the Catholic Church. They are appointed directly by the Pope and are usually sent to take charge of a religious event or defend an effort pertaining to the unity of the faith (Cerretti).

¹⁶ Lotharingia was the name given to the medieval area comprised of the present day Low Countries, the Western Rhineland of Germany, and Lorraine region in France.

Life of Mary of Origins Vitry specifically calls out the Cathars, contrasting them negatively with devout female Catholics. In particular, he contrasted Catholic women's desire for the Eucharist with Cathar heretics' rejection of the sacrament: "Let the heretic infidels be ashamed who receive the delights of food neither in the heart nor with faith" (48). Other devotional practices of Catholic women recorded by Vitry can also be read as a way of combatting Catharism and helping others to do the same¹⁷. The next section will examine the devotional practices highlighted in these hagiographies as important elements of the Church's fight against Catharism.

1.5 Bodily Actions and Devotional Attributes

Several specific anti-Cathar devotions, ritual gestures, and bodily postures are found in each of the eleven *vitae*, and are summarized in the four charts (Table 1, Figure 1, Figure 2 and **Error! Reference source not found.**Figure 13) found at the end of this section and thesis. This section will examine each of the attributes presented in these charts, as I believe that these Catholic devotions and practices were an integral part of the Church's attempt to present a unified, orthodox front in the face of the Cathar menace. The charts were composed solely from information found in these medieval hagiographies. Where a specific action is mentioned in these works, then it appears on the chart. However, one can also *infer* that individuals *did* experience some of the other responses, even though these were not always written down. For example, Elizabeth of Spalbeek is the only individual on my charts who is not specifically mentioned as experiencing religious visions. But since most medieval visions occurred during

¹⁷ Confession was another practice used for keeping individuals in right orthodox practice. It gave priests and spiritual directors an opportunity to educate those confessing on orthodox Church teachings. Thomas of Cantimpré was an appointed confessor at the cathedral in Cambrai, a friend of Lutgard of Aywières, and writer of many hagiographies studied for this thesis (Newman, "Introduction" 1-2). In all likelihood he used his position to combat heterodox beliefs and help lead individuals into correct Catholic teachings.

raptures or ecstasies, which Elizabeth did experience, we can infer that she, like the others, did experience them. However, because it is not explicitly recorded in her hagiography it is not reflected on the chart.

These sixteen attributes have been further divided into four different categories. The first category, signs received, examines “internal characteristics:” ones that occur to the individual but in such a way that they are not evident to others. The second category is labeled “signs exhibited.” These materializations are external attributes that are evident to those in contact with the individual experiencing them. The third grouping looks at self-denying behavior, encompassing the practices of physical austerity and fasting. The final category examines specific Catholic devotions or experiences that are common to all of the hagiographies.

Table 1: List of Attributes by Category

	Signs Received	Signs Exhibited	Self-Denying Behavior	Devotions
Abundant Tears		X		
Austerities			X	
Blinding Light		X		
Dancing		X		
Demons	X			
Dripping Oil		X		
Eucharist				X
Fasting			X	
John the Evangelist				X
Laughter		X		
Prophetic		X		
Purgatory	X			
Raptures/Ecstasies	X			
Tics		X		
Trinity				X
Visions	X			

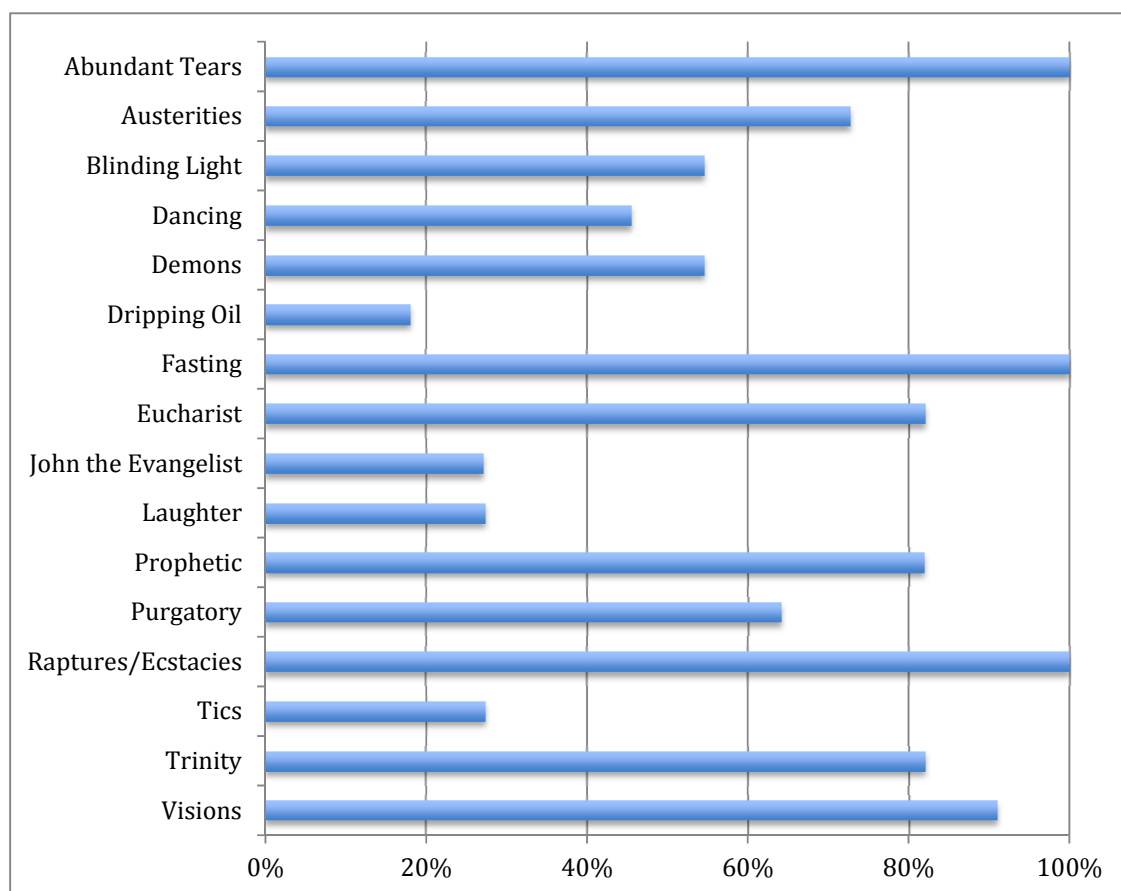


Figure 1: Percentage of studied religious exhibiting the attribute

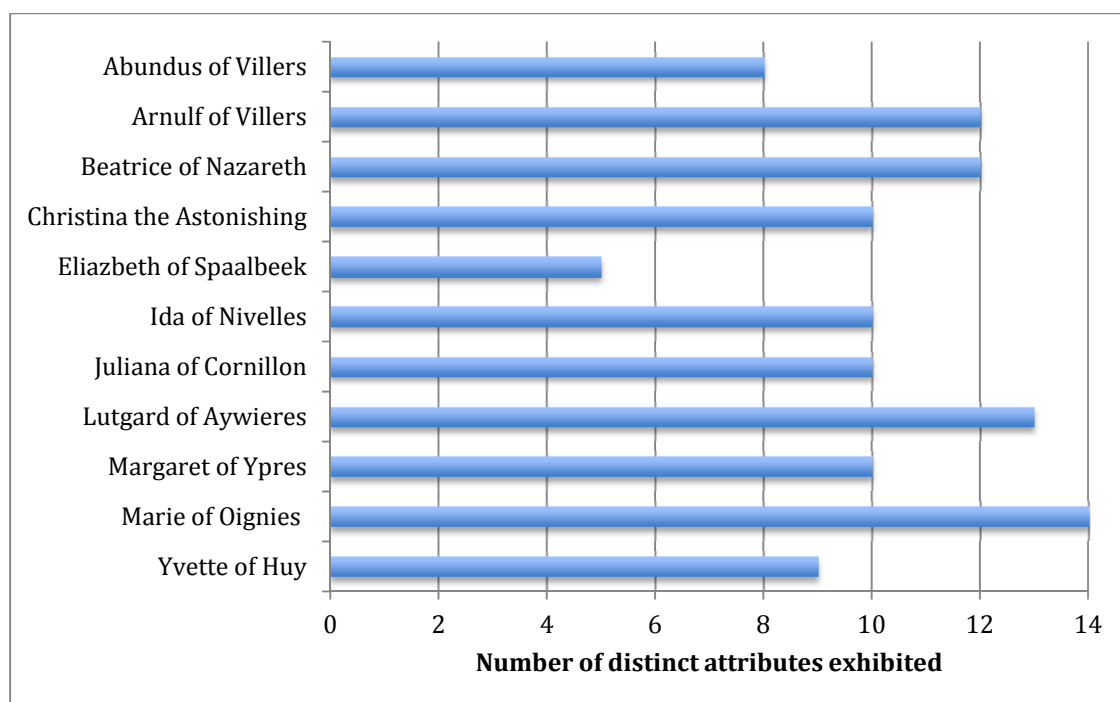


Figure 2: Number of Distinct Attributes Exhibited Per Individual

2 Signs Received

In all eleven of the hagiographies explored for this thesis, the subjects of these writings experienced a “sign received,” by which we mean a personal experience, such as a rapture or ecstasy, which is unknown to the outside observer unless it is divulged to them by the mystic. Signs received make up exactly one quarter of the attributes surveyed (Table 1), and include four different attributes. The first attribute in the category of signs received is the receiving of visions. The second characteristic is the mystical experience of a rapture or an ecstasy. The third trait is the seeing of demons in the same way as ordinary matter, and the final attribute that can be considered as a sign received is the observation of purgatory and seeing and speaking to those in purgatory.

2.1 The Receiving of Visions

Visions supported the mystic by giving a supernatural, orthodox authority to their revelations. Through conversations with canonized Catholic saints and visions that were similar in form to or specifically referenced a biblical one, the orthodoxy of the receiver was established. Religious “visions” can be defined as the seeing or hearing of something not apparent to others present, talking to others not physically in the room, or getting direction in a waking dream or an ecstasy (“OED”). Visions are clearer than a simple dream, and usually involve supernatural entities such as saints and angels.

There is a strong biblical precedent for the occurrence of visions. The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel had visions of God that are described throughout the biblical book of Ezekiel, describing the deity with beautiful and sometimes bizarre imagery. Ezekiel used his visions to address the larger questions of suffering and purpose. The New Testament Saul, later renamed Paul, had a life changing vision in the book of Acts chapter 9 that compelled him to convert to Christianity. The persons written about in the hagiographies, and their biographers, would be familiar with the importance of visions in biblical texts, and with the scriptures extolling the virtues of visions, such as the one found in Acts 2:17. This verse is a reiteration of Joel 2:28 which states, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams”. Verses such as this, were used by the primitive Church as a spiritual marker, an experience that would both be in line with living out the ideals of the apostles and furthermore could increase their personal spirituality (or perception of it to others). Thus, biblical visions assisted in intensifying the desire for individuals living out the *vita apostolica* to experience similar visions for themselves.

Visions were one of the most common mystical experiences mentioned in the eleven *vitae* reviewed, with 91% of the individuals studied experiencing them (Figure 1). As

previously mentioned, only Elizabeth of Spalbeek is recorded as not having visions, but it is very likely that she also experienced them. Visions regarding the Eucharist, especially for women, were particularly popular and will be addressed more specifically later in this paper (in Section 5.4). However, the men studied in this eleven *vitae* pool also experienced strong visionary experiences. Abundus often spoke with the Virgin Mary and Arnulf's *vita* records several visions he had. Interestingly, many of Arnulf's recorded responses to the supernatural figures in his visions are direct quotes from the book of Ezekiel. For example, when Arnulf is asked a question by Christ he responds with, "You, my Lord, you know what" (Cawley 164). This quote is also Ezekiel's response to God in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, found in Ezekiel 37. Again, when Arnulf is shown a vision, he lifted up his eyes and "saw the heavens open wide" (165), a direct reference to Ezekiel 1:1. The visions recorded in the hagiographies, like Arnulf of Villers', are full of scriptural re-quotations and references to biblical visions. The influence that scriptures had on Catholic devout in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries can be seen by their referencing of them during their own visions, along with their emulation of them. Referring to biblical visions in their own visions lent an authority to what medieval Catholic visionaries saw and heard, and the similarities with biblical visions helped to increase the perceived orthodoxy of their own visions.

Similarly, visions that centered on an encounter with a heavenly saint gave a supernatural authority to the visions, especially if a theological message was received during the encounter (McGinn, "The Flowering of Mysticism" 68). Abundus of Villers convinced a novice bent on leaving the monastery to stay when he relayed a specific message for him directly from the Virgin Mary (Cawley 240-241).

Speaking to saints in visions also supported the receiver on a personal level. Saint Catherine appeared to Lutgard of Aywières in a visionary experience telling her that God would "always increase his grace in [her] until, at the summit of [her] life, [she] would acquire the

most powerful merit among virgins" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 224). This vision not only comforted Lutgard when she was scared and uncertain in her position, but gave her the confidence to continue in her devotional practices and austerities for the rest of her life.

Visions of saints also lent credence to personal devotions. In her visions, Margaret of Ypres lays at Christ's feet with Mary Magdalene to demonstrate her devotion to him (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 196), and Ida of Nivelles embraced the Christ child with Mary (Cawley 68). Visions were not just about claiming the veracity of the experience, but also about enjoying union with God and his saints. Thus, in visions the saints confirm the visionary's vocation, participate with them in devotions, and give them direction and guidance

Many of the visions additionally referenced the ongoing fight against heresy. For example, Mary of Oignies is said to have seen crosses descending from heaven, as a sign of God's coming destruction of the Cathars (Vitry 107). She also had a vision of the souls of the righteous, lost in the battle against the Cathars, ascending directly into heaven, bypassing purgatory (107). Likewise, Lutgard of Aywières received a direct request from the Virgin Mary to fast for seven years in reparation for the Cathar heresy (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 240). These visions divinely sanctioned the Albigensian Crusade and encouraged Lutgard's austerities and fasting.

Visions supported the mystics by giving a supernatural authority to their revelations. Lutgard's seven year fast for the Cathar heresy is given greater significance, and an implication that it will be effective, since it was instituted by the Virgin Mary. The approved saints of the church aided in the perception that the hagiographical subjects were orthodox, particularly when visions were received that referenced established biblical ones, or in which the person spoke to approved orthodox saints. This provided for their words to be understood as accepted by the Church, especially if a theological message was received during the encounter with a traditional saint. Visions also supported the receiver on a personal level by lending credence to

their personal devotions, not tolerating their observances to be considered heterodox, as saints participated in them with the visionary. Finally, visions also encouraged the receiver to stay on the orthodox path that they were currently on.

2.2 Raptures, Ecstasies and the Humanity of Christ

The focus on the physicality and humanity of Christ during raptures directly opposed the Cathar belief that Christ did not come in the human form and was one way that the hagiographical individuals opposed the dualism of the Cathars. Raptures and ecstasies refer to an emotional or trancelike state that involves an experience of mystic transcendence (“OED”). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, raptures and ecstasies were essentially about achieving union with God: a union, which also illustrated an individual’s beliefs and practices (McGinn, “Love, Knowledge and Mystical Union” 7). Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, an influential founder of the Cistercian movement, was a proponent of mystical union with God as evidenced in his writings. In Bernard’s sermons on the Song of Songs, he expounds on the fact that God is love, emphasizing that love is the singular way that humans can understand and relate to him (9). Clairvaux draws on imagery from the Song of Songs, believing that marital love is the best image to represent divine union with Christ (9). Bernard’s strong emphasis upon desiring and achieving union with Christ, explains why many of the raptures experienced by the individuals detailed in the eleven hagiographies under consideration here involve themes of love, desire, amorous physical contact with Christ, and mystical marriage to him. In the ecstasy experienced by Beatrice of Nazareth, detailed below, note the pictorial tropes of love and references to the Song of Songs, which are a common feature of all the hagiographies:

“When the Lord’s chosen one had received this privilege of betrothal, she was immediately so filled with sweet joy and exultation that she took no notice of what was going on around her... all the noise of outer things was hushed, and she rested sweetly in the arms of her spouse. Such was the abundance of spiritual sweetness which the Lord’s virgin received from this inner betrothal that, for the entire week following, the abundance remained continuously in her soul as glowing and as new as if she were constantly embraced the

whole time by the heavenly bridegroom resting with her among the flowers and lilies..." (DeGanck 101)

Similar to the attribute of visions, ecstasies and raptures are also interwoven into the majority of the other characteristics that will be discussed. As mentioned previously, visions were most often received during ecstasies. Devotions, such as to the Eucharist, made raptures an essential expression of observance, and prophecies were often given while in an ecstatic state. Thus, raptures and ecstasies were distinguished as an important trait for religious persons in the southern Low Countries to experience. In the hagiographies surveyed for this thesis, 100% of the subjects experienced ecstasies (Figure 1), signifying that they were an important indicator of one's spirituality and holiness.

Ecstasies commonly occurred in times of prayer and intense meditation or during liturgical services and ceremonies. However, some individuals like Margaret of Ypres or Abundus of Villers would experience them at rather convenient times. Margaret of Ypres would go into an ecstasy whenever asked by her mother to help her and her sisters with the housework (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 176). Likewise, Abundus of Villers missed his allotted kitchen duty time, leaving his partner to do the required work while he was in a rapture (Cawley 220).

The distinguishing characteristic of experiencing ecstasies and raptures essentially deals with the humanity of God as revealed in Christ. In the hagiographies, one can particularly notice the description of the human aspects of Jesus when encountered in ecstasy. The focus on intimate interaction with Christ during raptures is also apparent. Ida of Nivelles spoke to Christ with "honeyed whispers" (Cawley 38), and Beatrice of Nazareth embraces him (DeGanck 197) while in the midst of ecstasy. The love for Christ, which was so carnal in the description of him during ecstasies, embodied him, giving him flesh that could be touched, embraced and kissed. These episodes also exhibited that Jesus had accessible, reciprocal, physical emotions for others. The desire to experience God on this level went against the very

essence of Catharism. By experiencing the actual physical body of Christ, ecstatic Catholics were affirming his humanity and indicating God's involvement in the world. The description of ecstasies and raptures in the hagiographies that depict Jesus as a physical being, nullified the Cathars' conception of creation as evil ("Medieval Sourcebook: Cathar Gospel"). Therefore showing human creation to be essentially good, since God has a relationship with them.

The suffering pain of Christ was also experienced in raptures. Bynum believes that the imitation of Christ in his suffering, experienced in and out of ecstasies, came as a result of the *vita apostolica* (Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion" 201). As the quest to live the perfect Christian existence, in imitation of the lives of Christ and the apostles became more literal (201), experiencing his sufferings through ascetic practice and in ecstasies became a route to experiencing the desired union with God. In her daily re-enactment of the Passion of Christ, Elizabeth of Spalbeek would fall into ecstasies immediately before, during, or after, her daily self-beatings and austere actions (Spearing 108-117), incorporating the suffering of Christ together with her love for him in a personal and individual (although rather brutal) way.

The popularity of raptures in all the individuals surveyed communicates the longing of twelfth and thirteenth century individuals to be one with Christ, and illustrates that profound emotional needs were met through the ecstasies. Raptures also affirmed the Catholic position on the full humanity of Christ as mystics interacted with Jesus in a physical manner during their experiences, directly opposing the Cathar belief that Christ did not come in the human form. Through their ecstasies individuals challenged the Cathars and their tenants providing an orthodox way to both confirm and experience Christ's humanity.

2.3 Purgatorial Sufferings and the Sighting of Demons

A devotion to the souls in purgatory and the seeing of demons served as a way to keep Catholics safely within the bounds of orthodoxy, showing the grace and mercy of God in opposition to the malevolent God the Cathars seen as the creator of the world. It also allowed

those who had left to follow the Cathar heresy to think about their eternal resting place and the fate of their soul after death. Medieval Catholics saw purgatory as a transitional place where those who are going to heaven undergo a purification process in order attain the level of holiness needed to enter. It is not a permanent place, but the amount of time spent there does depend on how one lived their earthly life (“Catechism of the Catholic Church” 1030-1032). The doctrine of purgatory was given official status at the Second Council of Lyon in 1274 (Walls 9; “EWTN: Second Council of Lyons”), but by this time the concept had already gained a firm conceptual foothold in Christendom.

The roots for the idea of a purgatorial place can be traced back to the pre-Christian era, with parallels to the idea of purgatory found in Persian, Greek, Roman, Egyptian and Hebrew texts (Walls 10-11), although it is important to recognize that they were not construed as such in their original form. Rather, the Catholic Church later identified these texts and saw them as references of purgatory and drew on them when solidifying the doctrine, using the scriptures and words of theorists to help culturally and scripturally justify its existence (10-11, Skotnicki 10). Plato, for example, spoke of the newly dead in his *Dialogues*. He sees two categories of dead, those who are evil, and those who can be cured of their evil (Walls 11), corresponding the purgatorial concept that some sins can be purified.

The scriptures that the Catholic church pulled out to help substantiate their purgatorial doctrine through scripture included Malachi 3:2-3 which speaks of the Lord coming as a refiner and purifier of gold and silver, purifying the descendants of Levi with fire until they present a righteous offering. Again an episode in the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees is also said by the Church to describe the concept of purgatory. After a number of Jewish soldiers had died, it was revealed that they had hidden tokens of idols in their clothing. Prayer then occurred so that the sin that they had committed would be blotted out, and a sin offering is sent to Jerusalem. These acts were done “taking into account the resurrection,” and “so that they might be delivered

from their sin" (2 Maccabees 12:39-44).

The words of Jesus were also used by the Church to help define purgatorial doctrine. The first passage comes from Matthew 12:31-32, where he says that all sins will be forgiven, except the sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which will not be forgiven in this age or the age to come. This implies that some sins can be forgiven after death, but others, like blasphemy against the spirit, ensure eternal damnation. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus additionally spoke of individuals being thrown in prison until every last penny is paid (Matthew 5:25; Luke 12:58). This idea is often used to represent purgatory where an individual stays, like a prisoner, to atone for each sin before being released. The final scripture used to demarcate the doctrine of purgatory comes from Paul who writes:

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire" (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

The idea that the builder is saved, but only through fire and a burning of the evil works he has done, is one of the preferred scriptures the Catholic Church, used in Medieval times to support purgatory as an actual place.

Origen was one of the first writers of the early church to set out a vision of purgatory. He essentially believed that all souls would eventually be saved, and gave three categories for their purification. Origen believed that there was a place for the righteous, a place for those guilty of lesser sins, where the journey through the fire would be briefer, and a fire for the mortal sinners whose stay there would be more extended, but not permanent (Walls 15). This idea is clearly represented in the later solidification of the doctrine of purgatory by the Church, except the category of eternal, permanent hell fire is included. Augustine also spoke of the purgatorial practice of praying for the dead in his *Confessions*, when he prays for his mother

Monica's departed soul, and again in *The City of God*, where he suggests that prayers for the dead are beneficial for those who exhibited grace in their lives (15).

Augustine also influenced the idea of purgatory in additional ways, other than the ones mentioned above. One position that was especially influential on the subjects of the hagiographies comes from his commentary on Psalm 37. It states, "Although some will be saved by fire, this fire will be more terrible than anything a man can suffer in his life" (Walls 16). The idea here is clear: suffering in this life lessens the suffering after death. Purgatory is an important concept in all of the hagiographies reviewed for this thesis. Devotion to the souls in purgatory or the desire to benefit such souls spiritually is observable in 64% of the hagiographies (Figure 1). In fact, the entire *vita* of Christina the Astonishing can be read as a text to confirm and disseminate the physical place and purpose of purgatory, setting her up as a prime example of suffering in this life to escape punishment in the next.¹⁸

Christina is said to have died and been brought back to life for the explicit purpose of suffering for those in purgatory. While she was dead, Jesus gave her the option of staying in paradise with him, or returning to earth and suffering for the souls of others. Christina chooses the later and Christ tells her that her pains will be to "deliver from purgatory all the souls there for which you felt compassion" (Spearing 76). After Christina's resurrection, she is considered by her friends and family to be possessed, as her ascetic sufferings were so harsh and bizarre. Christina lives in the treetops, or tops of buildings, as she is unable to stand the smell of men (77), or to pray while touching the earth, as it caused her pain and distress (79). Christina tortures herself in burning ovens, stays for extended periods during the winter months (sometimes up to six days) in freezing water, tortures herself on the wheel, hangs herself for a day or two, and incites the neighbourhood dogs to chase her through thorn bushes (78-79).

¹⁸ Christina the Astonishing also accepted purgatorial sufferings for specific people. She asked God to give her half of the purgatorial torments given to Count Louis and to put on her own body. After asking for this, Christina was seen at night tormented by "burning smoke and at other times with freezing cold" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 150).

Christina's sufferings mirror the sufferings experienced in purgatorial texts. Two such twelfth-century texts were *Sir Owain* and *The Vision of Tundale*. The Vision of Tundale was very popular in the Middle Ages; it originated in Ireland and tells of Tundale's experience in purgatory. While in purgatory, Tundale sees individuals tortured in sulfuric fires and then immediately plunged into freezing snow and ice, shuffled back and forth ceaselessly between the two tortures. Others were forced into an extremely large wild boar where they were swallowed and tortured for their covetous life ("The Vision of Tundale"). Sir Owain saw a wheel in his purgatorial vision during a visit to Saint Patrick's purgatory¹⁹, where souls were being tortured as it turned, while they stood or dangled from it. Both texts also speak of souls being made to cross high bridges while winds swirled around them and to maneuver around the formidable obstacles in their way, increasing the chances that they would plunge into the endless valley below them.

Almost all of the devices used to purify the souls in purgatory can be seen in the sufferings of Christina the Astonishing. She immersed herself into cauldrons full of boiling water up to her breasts or hips while pouring it over the rest of her body. She also froze herself in rivers (Spearing 78), much like the souls in purgatory, who were forced back and forth between the two extreme elements. She tortured herself on the wheel like Saint Catherine, but additionally would walk upright on the wheel of a water mill (78), mirroring the tortures seen in Sir Owain's experience. Even Christina's living and standing on the tops of trees or buildings can be seen to relate to the crossing of the high bridges souls in purgatory were required to perform. The similarities of the sufferings Christina performed for the release of souls in purgatory to the descriptions of purgatorial tortures in these texts, points to the popularity and dissemination of these types of writings, and their important influence on the religious lives of individuals who

¹⁹ According to legends, Saint Patrick's purgatory is a cave or pit that was an entrance to Hell. It was said to be a place for "whoever has gone against His commandments and done sinful things, but has repented and accepted penance and resolved to live a better life in the future, can suffer in this very hole a portion of the penance that he must do for his sins" ("Sir Owain")

heard them²⁰. Furthermore, it shows the influence that popular beliefs, hagiographies, and writings had on the solidification of the doctrine of purgatory by the Church, since all of these episodes, including Christina's, are recorded before the doctrine was formally defined in 1274 at the Second Council of Lyons.

Christina also performed these sufferings because Christ said they would, "move men to repentance and penance and to forsake their sins and turn truly to me" (Spearing 76). One can assume that this statement was interpreted to include those who were involved in the heresy of Catharism. The concept of purgatory would have served as a way to keep Catholics safely within the bounds of orthodoxy and scare those who had left them to return. The vivid descriptions of the torments that awaited those who did not live a righteous life gave individuals cause to think about how they were living. In fact, Tundale's vision causes him to drastically change his ways, giving away all his riches to the poor and to live virtuously the rest of his days. Ida of Nivelles also says, before giving a brief description of hell: "If only it were possible for you to see now what hell is like, you would not allow yourselves to be caught in the net of the devil's snares" (Cawley 58).

Deceased persons returning and asking for prayer confirm the idea that the personal experience of others could aid in the quest to keep souls in orthodoxy. Arnulf of Villers often had deceased individuals come to him and ask for help through his prayers. Lutgard of Aywières even had Pope Innocent III appear to her after his death, while he was in purgatory, asking for her prayers (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 244). The personal recollections of visitations from deceased people from all walks of life, made the concept of purgatory known, and can be seen as a source of comfort for those who had relatives die while in a state of sin.

²⁰ Like Christina the Astonishing, Lutgard of Aywières also takes on sufferings for those who were in purgatory, performing mortifications and fasts for Simon, the Abbot of Foigny. She pleaded with God to release him from purgatory, a request that was granted. Simon appeared to Lutgard to let her know that "he would have spent forty years in purgatory had not her prayer helped him before the merciful Lord" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 242).

Purgatory promised that those they loved were not in hell, but were undergoing purification in order to enter heaven.

Suffering here on earth also led to the bypassing of purgatory for some individuals. Christ told Margaret of Ypres that she had completed purgatory through her earthy afflictions, and would immediately go to heaven when she died (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 201). Lutgard of Aywières also skipped purgatory because of her earthy sufferings, appearing after her death to a nun named Elizabeth de Wans to tell her so. Lutgard made sure that Elizabeth knew that it was her compassion on the souls in purgatory that allowed her to do so, clarifying that her efforts had brought many souls with her into paradise (294). For pious Catholics devoted to the souls in purgatory, compassion and suffering are linked together. Ida of Nivelles is recorded as having such a great empathy for souls that she vomits up blood on many occasions (Cawley 39, 41, 44, 47, 50). The compassion that causes this reaction is seen as a spiritual suffering (11), which is just as effective as the physical sufferings experienced by others such as Christina the Astonishing.

Seeing demons is often associated with concern about purgatory. 55% of the individuals we are considering saw and interacted to some extent with demons (Figure 1), and in four individuals these two things were explicitly linked (Figure 13). For example, Ida of Nivelles often saw both demons and departed souls. In one instance, Ida meets the soul of a woman who had three tormenting demons attached to her as part of her purgatorial punishment (Cawley 51). Ida is able to free the person, rebuking the demons and pleading to God for mercy in her purgatorial sentence. The soul was then freed and ascended into heaven (52). Sir Owain sees demons when he enters purgatory and is immediately surrounded by thousands of devilish fiends who taunt him with grotesque gestures. Christina the Astonishing says that, "demons preside over those in torment, but those who were handed over to demons to be tortured knew that the more cruelly they were afflicted by them the shorter their torments

would be" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 142), making the presence of demons a link to a quicker release from purgatory.

The seeing of demons in visions also is related to these individuals' aid of the dying, and of their helping themselves and others to overcome temptations. Mary of Oignies saw hundreds of demons around the bed of a dying lady. She ran there to pray and swatted the demons away with her mantle in a battle for the soul of the individual (Vitry 86). Ida of Nivelles similarly saw a demon attached to a religious sister and was able to exhort the sister to confession, thus freeing her from the demonic temptations plaguing her (Cawley 89). Arnulf of Villers, however, often had demons appear to tempt him. Sometimes they took the form of a sexually desirable woman. In other visions, a demon in the form of a man would knock the scourge from his hand, tempting Arnulf to not be so austere in his devotions and prayer (169-170). In all instances the demonic presences either alerted the individual to an aspect of purgatory -- Mary of Oignies later saw the person she had battled demons for in purgatory (Vitry 87) -- or caused someone to be aware of temptations and give them an opportunity to overcome them. These examples of battling and being tempted by demons enhance the saintliness of these individuals' by showing them overcoming temptation and helping others to do the same. They also enhance orthodox beliefs, because they demonstrated that the orthodox were able to skip purgatory all together.

The idea of being devoted to the souls in purgatory and the seeing of demons served as a way to keep Catholics safely within the bounds of orthodoxy and to give those who had left a something to think about (their afterlife), and a reason to return to the Catholic Church. Purgatory also shows the compassion and benevolence of God. The Cathars seen the God of creation as evil and went so far as to consider the prophets of the Hebrew Bible as eternally damned "(Medieval Sourcebook: Raynaldus)". The God that is portrayed through the idea of purgatory, does not just damn an individual to hell without cause, rather God allows for the individual to be saved after a time of cleansing and atonement for their wrongs. This also gave

the families and friends, who knew someone who had joined the Cathar sect, hope. Instead of the individual certainly sent to eternal damnation because of their involvement in heresy, there was the hope that they could join them in heavenly paradise after their purgatorial stay.

3 Signs Exhibited (Materializations)

The category of “signs exhibited” encompasses those mystical experiences that are evident to those observing the mystic. These outward materializations encompass seven of the sixteen characteristics (Table 1) comprising 44% of the attributes surveyed. The first materialization considered as a sign exhibited, is that of abundant tears or uncontrollable weeping. The subsequent trait is the receiving of, or seeing of a blinding light on, or emanating through the body of a person. The next sign displayed by some hagiographical subjects was dancing, which involved the movement of the body, often without abandon, in joy or exultation. The dripping of oil from an appendage of a person is also a sign demonstrated by some in the *vitae*. Laughter in most hagiographies was repeatedly an irrepressible attribute, causing an individual to express audible joy. The characteristic of tics similarly involved the uncontrollable jerking movements of one part of the body, or even the entire body. Finally, prophecy as a sign exhibited includes predictions of the future, words of knowledge to others relating to past events and a general discernment of what a person is thinking or feeling in the present.

Such signs presented onlookers or observers of the mystic with physical evidence that they could see or hear, outwardly revealing the piety of the religious. As these attributes became associated with devout individuals, people who desired to be closer to the Divine, or to be considered holy, imitated them. Individuals, in a bid to be devout, paralleled their external attributes with those they had seen in person, heard of, or read about. This can even be seen occurring with centuries separating the writing of the hagiography and its reading. For example, Margery Kempe (1373-1458) read the hagiography of Mary of Oignies (written in

1215), and soon afterwards received an abundance of tears (Kempe 22), and commenced negotiating with her husband to live in a chaste marriage (49, 60), such as Mary and her husband practiced. By modeling their lives after the religious, and drawing on their narratives, laypersons could both transfer the holy characteristics onto their own lives and have a basis to understand their own experiences.

3.1 Three Categories of Abundant Tears

The external attribute of abundant tears refers to uncontrollable weeping that is experienced at the thought, mention, motion, or sight of a religious element. Mary of Oignies cried when she thought about the Passion of Christ and even wept when hearing other discuss it (Vitry 57). Ida of Nivelles wept when she received a visitation from Christ in rapture (Cawley 33), and Beatrice of Nazareth cried in prayer and when receiving the Eucharist (DeGanck 31; 57). Abundant tears materialized in 100% of the individuals surveyed (Figure 1) presenting this characteristic as an important indicator for piety and devotion. These abundant tears were used as a way to pray for those who had left the Church for the Cathar sect, showing love and concern for others.

Tears are often mentioned in a positive light in the Bible. Jesus designated those who mourn as blessed (Matthew 5: 4) in his Sermon on the Mount. Likewise, in the Gospel of Luke a blessing is stipulated for those who weep in this life, because they will later laugh (Luke 6:21). This statement is accentuated by its corresponding woe in Luke 6:25b, “Woe to you who are laughing now, for you will mourn and weep”. These scriptures provided a model for those who followed the *vita apostolica*.

The attribute of abundant tears can be divided into three groupings; tears out of love for others and regret for their sins, tears for one’s own sin, and tears because others are against Christ or the Church. Each of these categories is demonstrated through the tears of the religious in the *vitae* reviewed, backed by the scriptural references that would have inspired them. The

reliance on scriptures for this attribute again, exemplifies the importance for twelfth and thirteenth century individuals to live out the example of the primitive Church found in the Gospels and Book of Acts. The parallels between the Scriptures and the trait of abundant tears additionally points to the independent study and memorization of biblical passages, including the Gospels and Psalms.

Tears out of love for others and regret for their sins is exemplified in the Scriptures throughout the New Testament and Psalms. The Psalms were read and sung almost daily in the Middle Ages from the psalter, a book of Psalms for liturgical or personal devotional use ("OED"). When Ida of Nivelles secretly fled from her home, to escape an upcoming arranged marriage, she took nothing but the clothes on her back, and her psalter that she had "recently begun to memorize" (Cawley 31). It is also said that by the age of five, Beatrice of Nazareth could "recite David's Psalter without flaw and in the right order" (DeGanck 23). Consequently, scriptures such as Psalms 119:136 would be known to her and the other religious in the southern Low Countries. This psalm speaks poetically about crying over the sins of others: "My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept". Additional scriptures such as 2 Corinthians 2:4, would also be familiar: "For I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain, but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you", and John 11:35, where Jesus himself weeps over Lazarus' death. All of these scriptures that discuss tears of love for others present an example and precedent to follow.

These verses clearly impacted Arnulf of Villers who "melted wholly into tears" (Cawley 161) whenever praying for someone who he knew to be "hard-pressed by sins or by weighty temptation, or anyone in sore straits over some tribulation" (161). Lutgard of Aywières was so affected by the sins of others that her "face was daily bathed in water... [and her]... grief and groaning were so unspeakable to those who saw her that scarcely anyone could watch without feeling heavy sorrow at heart" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 268-269). Beatrice is described

as being “often soaked with the flood of tears from her melted heart” (DeGanck 305), the result of her love. A love for others, and desire to see them living a holy life, provoked the tears of the pious. But so did the realization of their own sins, the next category of tears.

Weeping over one’s own failings can be seen in the Bible with the apostle Peter when he wept bitterly after denying Christ at his crucifixion (Luke 22:62). Margaret of Ypres was acutely aware of her own shortcomings and wept and wailed in agony when she missed saying the hours at the proper time, whilst in an ecstasy. Afterwards she confessed her shortcoming with “copious tears” (Cantimpré, “Collected Saints” 183). Similarly, Yvette of Huy was wracked with guilt over her past, affected with tears and penitential rigour (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 99).

Tears over shortcomings were additionally extolled by the priests who provided the sacrament of reconciliation. James of Vitry saw tears as a sign of true faith (Mulder-Bakker, “General Introduction” 13) and speaks of love “drawing forth sweet tears and maintaining her [the female religious] mind in devotion” (Vitry 46), implying that tears will keep someone devoted to proper religious observation.

Vitry furthermore praises the tears of the clergy. Two references are made in the hagiography of Mary, extolling priests in tears. In one example, Mary sees the priest “devoutly and tearfully celebrating Mass” (Vitry 113), and then she saw a dove descend on the priest while a fountain came up from his shoulder (113). In the second example, a priest has been stern with Mary, asking her to restrain her tears. Afterwards, when the priest celebrates Mass he is overcome with so many tears that he feels as if he is suffocating, soaking the book and altar cloth and barely making it through the liturgy (57). Anneke Mulder-Bakker consider this priest to be James himself (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 18), showing that he experienced the gift of tears firsthand, both from those who confessed to him and then personally, lending the weight of experience to his analysis of tears and devotion.

The final category of tears, tears because others are against Christ, comes from scriptures such as Philippians 3:18 “For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears.” Christina the Astonishing was so distraught that the world had forgotten its creator, and that people were living against Christ, that she cried out, twisted her limbs together, and rolled on the ground in lament (Spearing 84). Concerns for the souls of those who are in sin and in outright opposition to the gospel, such as the Cathars, were a common source of abundant tears during prayer. Mary of Oignies prayed and cried for a young novice in the Cistercian order who was unable to say the creed, confess, go to Mass or receive the sacraments (Vitry 67-68), all signs that imply she was in contact with Cathar theology²¹. Mary’s weeks of tears, fasting and prayer eventually freed the young nun from the spirit that was afflicting her (68-69). Thus, the attribute of abundant tears, while not directly having an impact on the fight against heresy, aided in a more personal way, through praying for the souls who had converted to Catharism, and hopefully compelling some back to orthodoxy while showing compassion and concern for them.

3.2 Blinding Light in the Darkness

Blinding light was an attribute that helped the hagiographical subjects to avoid heterodox comparison. The emanation of the pure light of God shining on or through the individual left little room to question their orthodoxy as biblical texts equated light with goodness and darkness with evil (John 3:20-21). Blinding light, as a “sign exhibited,” refers to a light that emanates from a person’s countenance or body, which is visibly seen by others, or a blinding light that was experienced by an individual and clearly seen by others. In the Book of Acts 9: 3-5, a blinding light is mentioned in Saul’s (Paul’s) conversion and Jesus also shines with brightness at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), a typification of Moses

²¹ The Cathars rejected the sacraments of the Eucharist, confession, and would not say the creed since they did not believe in what was being professed.

when he descended from Mount Sinai after seeing God (Exodus 34:29). There are several examples of a shining or blinding light found in the hagiographies. Margaret of Ypres had a brilliant shining star appear on her shoulder. Both her mother and aunt, who were afraid because of it, saw it (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 196). Margaret interpreted this star as confirmation that God was in their midst, quoting Matthew 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them" (197). Likewise, Lutgard of Aywières has a light more "brilliant than the sun" (225) shining on her during the day and into the night, bringing both her and those who saw it a "grace in their spiritual life" (225).

The image of a spiritual light bringing grace to others contrasts, of course, with the assumption that evil resides in the darkness. This contrast brings to mind the Gospel of John where light and darkness are a prevalent metaphor of good and evil. In John 3:20-21 it states, "For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God." The dichotomy between light and darkness, good and evil, is clearly laid out in this passage. Given their desire to live like the apostles, heeding the words of the Gospels, this may have precipitated the descriptions of experiencing heavenly brightness in the hagiographies.

The lightness and darkness imagery usage by pious Catholics may also have been a self-conscious strategy to contrast orthodoxy with the heresy of Catharism, especially when you look at the scripture in John 2:20-21, quoted previously. When exposed in brightness, people cannot easily hide any heterodox ideology they might hold, and therefore their orthodoxy cannot be questioned. Lutgard's illumination experience is mentioned as being given to her by Christ, "lest the slightest suspicion remain in the hearts of her sisters, who seemed to envy her a little" (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 223). There is no evidence that Lutgard had Cathar-like tendencies, or even what the suspicion was; however, she experienced the attribute of blinding

light so that whatever suspicions her sisters had against her would be invalidated. The same reasoning can be applied to the perception of an individual's orthodoxy, if they were radiating a light associated with truth, any heretical suspicions, which implied being in darkness or enslaved to the powers of darkness, would be nullified.

The attribute of a blinding light radiating from or on the body of an individual is mentioned in 55% of the hagiographies (Figure 1). In fact, five of the six individuals who are recorded as having experienced a mysterious, blinding light can be shown to have had contact with Cistercian spirituality, or actually being Cistercian. Ida of Nivelles, who was in a Cistercian convent, was so filled with brightness that she always had adequate lighting to read and do tasks in the pitch darkness of night, without any external sources of illumination (Cawley 66). Mary of Oignies, who as a young child followed the Cistercian monks that would walk through her town (Vitry 52), twice had her face shine with rays of light after receiving the Eucharist (123).

St. Bernard of Clairvaux, founder of the Cistercians, spoke frequently on the theme of light as a metaphor for the soul being freed from self in his book *On Loving God*, and in his sermons on the Song of Songs speaking, for example, in sermon four on of the "brilliant radiance of the truth". The Song of Songs is traditionally thought to be a poem of dialogue between two lovers. However, it came to be known in the early church as an allegory of Christ's love for the church, and then in the Middle Ages as an expression of the soul's union with God (Coogan, 959). People, such as Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, read biblical texts and gave multiple meanings of interpretation in their elucidation of them. This is exemplified through the eighty-six sermons that Clairvaux wrote simply on the Song of Songs (Pangle 2), which do not even comment on the book in its entirety. Clairvaux placed an importance on this particular book regarding connection with the Divine. His ideas were well read and studied in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the concepts he contemplated were imitated and expounded upon by

others long after his death²². Bernard's writings were popular in the southern Low Countries throughout the twelfth and thirteenth century. For example, Juliana of Cornillon is recorded as having memorized twenty of his sermons at a young age (Beadbuey 13). The emphasis on light in the Cistercian movement could additionally account for individuals associated with them being described as luminous²³.

The primary purpose of the attribute of blinding light was to help with the perception that the hagiographical subjects were indeed orthodox. Because of the association of lightness with the good and darkness with evil, its usage by pious Catholics may have been a strategy to contrast their orthodoxy with the heresy of Catharism. If an individual is shining in the light while in prayer or rapture then it is more difficult to associate them with heterodox ideology, which was compared to being in darkness or enslaved to the powers of darkness.

3.3 Dripping Oil and the Song of Songs

The materialization of dripping oil is the least popular attribute found in the hagiographies. It was experienced only by Christina the Astonishing and Lutgard of Aywières (Figure 1, Figure 13). The unique mystical phenomenon of oil dripping from an appendage of the body is rooted in concepts found in Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs, and in the biblical book itself, presenting the orthodoxy of the people who experienced it.

As mentioned, the esteem for Bernard's sermons and writings greatly influenced the model used to connect with the Divine. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux explains that the connection experience should be all encompassing, and a way to become one with Christ.

“As a drop of water poured into wine loses itself, and takes the color and savor of wine; or as a bar of iron, heated red-hot, becomes like fire itself, forgetting its own nature; or as the air, radiant with sun-beams, seems not so much to be illuminated as to

²² Bernard of Clairvaux lived from 1090-1153. His writings however, were still studied and influential in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Many subsequent mystics, such as Meister Eckhart (1260-1328) and John of Ruysbroeck (1293-1381), expound on Clairvaux's ideas.

²³ *Cistercian Architecture and Medieval Society* by Maximilian Sternberg discusses the architecture of light in Cistercian Abbeys and Monasteries.

be light itself; so in the saints all human affections melt away by some unspeakable transmutation into the will of God. For how could God be all in all, if anything merely human remained in man? The substance will endure, but in another beauty, a higher power, a greater glory" (Clairvaux 22).

The mystical element of an all-encompassing encounter with God, where one became like a drop of water in a glass of wine, transformed the consciousness of the mystic, and provided a way for people to convey the knowledge gained from the experience (McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism" 214). Mysticism also involved the receiving of certain signs, such as dripping of oil in this case, to exemplify that a connection with the Divine had indeed been achieved. Saint Bernard stressed the need for personal experience with God, practically seeing it as an equivalent to biblical text (197). In his introduction on the Song of Songs he wrote, "Today we are reading the book of experience" (197), implying that the book should not only be read, but the tenets should be tangibly participated in.

Both Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and the Song of Songs mention dripping oil. Song of Songs 5:5 reads, "I arose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, upon the handles of the bolt." Bernard of Clairvaux speaks of dripping myrrh in sermon ten, likening it to an anointing, a deeply joyful experience:

"Safely may your hands drip with the bitterness of myrrh in the course of this salutary anointing, because God will not scorn this crushed and broken spirit. This kind of anointing, that not only inspires men to amend their lives but even makes the angels dance for joy, must not be easily spurned nor cheaply priced" ("Saint Bernard on the Song of Songs").

In Lutgard of Aywières hagiography she notices her fingers dripping oil after being in contemplative prayer, which left her feeling full of spiritual sweetness (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 231), another wording for the anointing that Clairvaux refers to in his sermon. Lutgard tells the recluse who she is staying with, "I am so filled up inwardly by his superabundant grace that now even my fingers are dripping a kind of oil as a manifestation of grace" (231). She also appears to be in a drunken state after the experience, dancing and gesturing around the room (231) because of the joy she feels, like the angels in Bernard's example.

The hagiographical passage also mentions that Lutgard had been “led into the wine-cellar” by the bridegroom (Cantimpré, “Collected Saint” 231), making mention of three practices she completed “like one beloved” (232), in order to reach this state. The wording of ‘beloved’ is a direct reference to the terminology used in Song of Songs, and the three practices can be seen in both the biblical book and the writings of Saint Bernard. The first practice mentions Lutgard, “eating the bread of penance with toil” (232). This is a reference to the beloved, in Song of Songs 1, who was made to work in the fields, because her brothers were angry with her. The second and third practices mention the one more beloved, who “drunk the abundance of his grace” (232), and thus, “becoming drunk”, like one “most beloved” (232). The image of feeling faint or drunk because of love is woven throughout the Song of Songs²⁴.

What Lutgard and her biographer are trying to convey in regards to the three practices becomes clearer through reading Bernard’s sermon ten on the Song of Songs:

“We have here three stages of the soul’s growth in love, three stages of its advance toward perfection that are sufficiently known and intelligible to those who have experienced them. There is first the forgiveness of sins, then the grace that follows on good deeds, and finally that contemplative gift by which a kind and beneficent Lord shows himself to the soul with as much clarity as bodily frailty can endure” (“Saint Bernard on the Song of Songs”).

Eating the bread of penance for Lutgard is deemed as the forgiveness of sins in Bernard’s writings, alluding to the sacrament of reconciliation. The forgiveness Lutgard finds in reconciliation, provides both grace and spiritual growth, as illustrated in Lutgard’s drinking of grace. Finally, the gift through which the Lord reveals himself to a soul is understood by Lutgard as drunkenness in the Spirit.

Saint Bernard of Clairvaux additionally addressed drunkenness and the image of a wine chamber in sermon ten. He ruminates on the fact that the beloved feels drunk, answering the

²⁴ Song of Songs 5:5 mentions being drunk with love and Song of Songs 1:2 and 7:9 speak of kisses being better than wine or equated to the best wine. Song of Songs, 2:5 and 5:8 mention feeling faint with love.

question whether or not she actually was. “Can she be possibly drunk? Absolutely drunk! And the reason? It seems most probable that when she uttered those passionate words²⁵ she had just come out from the cellar of wine; afterwards she boasts of having been there” (“Saint Bernard on the Song of Songs”). The acknowledgement that the beloved in the Song of Songs was absolutely drunk sets it up as an example for emulation, conveying connection with God. In light of Bernard’s insistence that the Song of Songs should be experienced, not just read, it is easy to see why Lutgard imitated this concept after displaying dripping oil. These practices show that both Lutgard and her hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, had knowledge of, and esteem for, both the Song of Songs and the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux.

Christina the Astonishing’s manifestation of dripping oil was under different circumstances, but it still references Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermon¹⁰ (quoted above). Perhaps also referring to Song of Songs 1:13, “My beloved is to me a bag of myrrh that lies between my breast”. Christina was at this point tied to a post, captured by her family, who were embarrassed by her many public austerities (Spearing 79-80). Christina was in a weak, hungry state, yet unable to eat the bread given to her, when her breasts began to flow with oil (80). This miracle had a three-fold effect: firstly, it filled Christina with joy and secondly, it gave her sustenance. She was able to spread the oil on her bread, drink it as soup, and use it as an ointment for her wounds (80). Finally, the miracle inspired her family to release her from her imprisonment, weep and beg her forgiveness (81).

The sign exhibited as dripping oil for Christina was a manifestation of the grace and mercy from Christ to her, and a sign to those around her that she did indeed have an established connection with the Divine. Lutgard, Christina and their biographers divulged their knowledge of the Song of Songs, and Saint Bernard of Clairvaux’s writings, demonstrating for others that there was an orthodox scriptural base for their mysticism. This both justified their

²⁵ The words Bernard of Clairvaux refers to here are found in Song of Songs 1:2 “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth”.

unique experience of dripping oil, through approved and established literature, and kept any heterodox suspicions of their manifestation at bay with orthodox rationalizations.

3.4 Dancing, Laughter and Uncontrollable Tics

The attributes of dancing, laughter, and uncontrollable tics are three exhibited signs very noticeable to others. These attributes were to show that the hagiographical subjects had an orthodox connection with God, and served as an example that others could repeat. The mystical nature of these manifestations set them visibly apart from the Cathars by showing that all could be filled with the spirit of God, not just the *Perfecti* (Lambert, "Cathars" 30). Dancing involved the movement of the body, often without abandon, in joy or exultation. Laughter in most hagiographies was repeatedly irrepressible, causing an individual to express audible joy at often inopportune times. Tics similarly involved the uncontrollable jerking movements of one part of the body, or even the entire body. These bodily manifestations provided the mystic with a connection to the Divine that was felt physically and emotionally, rather than intellectually. These experiences became a source of the sacred to the individuals whose lives are recounted in these hagiographies, connecting the inner reality of joy and delight that they felt at being in contact with Christ, with their outer reality through the verifiable expression of their feelings.

Biblical sources speak of getting drunk in the spirit, a state that the primitive church experiences in the book of Acts. Christ's disciples were together in a room when they were filled with the Holy Spirit, and accused of being drunk (Acts 2). Peter assured the crowd that they were not drunk, as it was only nine in the morning, but were rather experiencing a fulfillment of a prophecy given in Joel 2:28-32, which sees the spirit of God given to mankind (Acts 2:15-21). The concept of the spirit causing a drunken state is again emphasized in Ephesians 5:18, "Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit". Because the desire to live like the early Christians informed the spirituality of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, many individuals longed to experience a response of

intoxication in their personal connections with God, and the attributes of laughter, tics and dancing were often a measure of being drunk with the spirit.

William of Saint-Thierry (1045-1148), a contemporary of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, wrote expositions on the Song of Songs that expanded Clairvaux's views. Saint-Thierry's writings were also influential reading and devotional material in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Thierry often wrote in support of the wine of God causing drunkenness, describing the notion thus, "The Bride therefore is led into the house of wine, into the joy of the Lord and Bridegroom; but at the first experience of this blessing, impatient of measure and reason, from an abundance of wine she abandons order and yields to the inebriation of exceeding fervor and the languor of human weakness, fainting after God's salvation" (Cantimpré 231-232). Saint-Thierry's words are seen in Lutgard of Aywieres experience of abandonment after dripping oil, when she relinquishes herself to dancing (231). Her hagiographer, Thomas of Cantimpré, even uses the imagery of entering the house of wine set out in Saint-Thierry's writing (and in the Song of Songs) to lend an orthodox explanation for her experience. Likewise, Abundus of Villers also experiences the joy of surrendering to inebriation after being in prayer, and was thought to be in "a totally other frame of mind" (Cawley 217) as a result.

Uncontrollable tics and laughter are found in 27% of the individuals surveyed (Figure 1), while dancing occurs in 45% of the hagiographies (Figure 1). Arnulf of Villers provides a wonderful example of all three of these attributes resulting from being drunk in the spirit. Arnulf was known for his uncontrollable laughter and was frequently compelled to leave sermons at the daily chapter meetings, whose content "acted on his soul" (Cawley 167), because of his irrepressible laughter. He would then escape to the church to "tap out his jubilant, festive dance until the wine of his drunkenness was gradually digested" (168). Even listening to the Psalmody of the other monks caused reactions in Arnulf, as he could not stop "bobbing his head and rhythmically tapping his foot on the ground" (167). His laughter and

bodily tics during these times merged into one movement, affecting his whole body, jolting and fatiguing it (167).

Beatrice of Nazareth's physical displays of joyful inebriation are also often tied to religious events. When she receives her novice habit she cannot contain her body from breaking out in happy gestures, and her body jolted and lurched the whole following night as she lay on her bed (DeGanck 57). Receiving of the Eucharist was additionally an "inebriating nectar" (103) for Beatrice. When she was about to receive the host her body would move "excitedly in a kind of spiritual dance", and she "showed her heart's desire by... the abundance of her tears or her unusual unrestrained laughter" (103).

James of Vitry holds up the attribute of uncontrollable ticking as a way to show the holiness of an individual. He wrote in his introduction to the Life of Mary about a woman who was "driven to show her inner joy by a bodily tic and by jumping up and down" (Vitry 47-48), presenting it to Bishop Fulk as a measure of the "shining sanctity" individuals possessed in the diocese of Liège (39).

But while James of Vitry presented the attributes of laughter, dancing, and tics as spiritual, there were also those who questioned the uncontrollability and orthodoxy of these attributes, or saw them as a source of embarrassment. Arnulf's *vita* makes reference to persons who interpreted his laughter as evil (Cawley 168), and no wonder when he would even experience outbursts of "rollicking laughter" while beating himself with thorny scourges (167). In Beatrice of Nazareth's hagiography, it is recorded that she had to give notice to the sacristan before receiving communion (DeGanck 103) (presumably because of her animated behaviour). Her hagiographer mentions that that her desire for communion was always complied with, but does not say how exactly this was accomplished (103). That such demonstrative actions were controversial is not a surprise. In fact, the uncontrollability of mystics' actions does go against scriptures that declare one of the gifts of the spirit as being self-control (Galatians 5:23).

Moreover, the actions of the demonically possessed were often uncannily similar to those of medieval Catholic mystics. The hagiographers, however, defend these actions as a sign of orthodoxy by suggesting that connection with the Divine brings joy that cannot be repressed.

The mystical connection exhibited through such an outward means also placed the receiver in the role of a teacher. Beatrice of Nazareth, in the absence of personal knowledge regarding mystical practice, often approached her mentor Ida of Nivelles asking her questions, and requesting Ida to pray for her to obtain a mystical experience (DeGanck 63, 65). Beatrice desired to personally experience the signs that Ida modeled when her soul would be “inebriated, and so much so, in fact, that it became a great toil for her even to go to choir and attend the hours” (Cawley 58). The ecstasy that Beatrice eventually experienced, because of Ida’s guidance, left her in “loud laughter” and feeling a “great madness” in her heart (73). The teaching and learning of attributes demonstrates that individuals placed a high importance on experiencing God through yielding to the inebriation they felt during rapture or a vision. Furthermore, emotionally connecting with signs that all could see, was seen as God’s grace for the receiver, which was a greatly desired gift by others.

The attributes of dancing, laughter and uncontrollable tics are set in place to refute the belief that only the *perfecti* could be filled with the Holy Spirit (Lambert, “Cathars” 30). The subjects of the hagiographies experienced a very real and demonstrative infilling of the Holy Spirit. This served to illustrate to others that all could be filled with the spirit, as is indicated in the book of Acts that the adherents to the *vita apostolica* wished to emulate. The experiences are also validated by the writings of Saint Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Saint -Thierry both who see spiritual drunkenness as a way to directly connect with God. Again, establishing the orthodoxy of the subjects through accredited sources and proving that the individuals in the hagiographies had a direct connection with God, one that others could repeat.

3.5 The Gift of Prophecy

If individuals were proven and considered to be true prophets, then their words and actions would be considered orthodox. Prophecy can be seen in the hagiographies as a determiner as to who is orthodox and who is heterodox and used by the subjects to encourage others and keep them from heretical suspicion. The gift of prophecy refers to the ability to predict or foretell an event that will happen in the future (“OED”). Juliana of Cornillon’s hagiographer included a wonderful description of prophecy, worth quoting here at length, as it shows exactly how the concept was theologically interpreted for the thirteenth century individual. The description includes the past and present in the category of prophecy. Hence, it incorporates concepts such as the knowing of hidden sins from the past, and realizing the present thoughts and desires of others as prophetic.

Etymologically, prophecy is so called because it predicts things to come, and accordingly deals with the future alone. But as St. Gregory clearly proves in his exposition of the prophet Ezekiel, in the first homily, prophecy includes past present, and future times. Since the meanings of the word can refer to these three times, then, prophecy is rightly so called not because it tells the future, but rather because it reveals the hidden. So prophecy deals with the future when anything that lies hidden in the future is foretold. It deals with the past when it reveals knowledge of events, which have taken place, but the prophet had not seen or heard about them. And it deals with the present when the secrets of the heart are disclosed, for just as an event may be hidden in the future, so thoughts and feelings are concealed in the heart. On another sense, prophecy deals with the present when a thing is hidden not by the mind but by space, yet it is laid bare by the Spirit, so that the prophet’s mind may be present where the body is absent. All these things can be proven by the testimony of holy Scripture.” (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 208-209)

Prophecy and its fulfillment have been a powerful device since the beginning of human history, as can be evidenced through ancient astrologers and the weight put to the interpretation of dreams. For example, in the Bible, Joseph interpreted the dreams of Pharaoh that saved the land during a famine (Genesis 41:25-57). Pharaoh obviously believed that the dreams were prophetic, or else he would not have followed Joseph’s advice. Biblical use of prophecy is varied in form and reflects the values of society at the time the prophecies are made (Roberts 68). Prophets, such as Samuel, anointed the first rulers of Israel (1 Samuel 9:15-

27; 16:1-13) when the nation wanted a king. And the prophet Elijah defended his God as the true God in a showdown with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18:20-36), leaving no question as to the winner. Later prophets such as Jeremiah, Hosea, and others rallied against corruption and forecast dire consequences should their warnings to follow God were not obeyed. Apocalypses are also prophesied in scriptures, such as the book of Daniel and Revelation.

The language used in biblical prophecies is varied. Prophets can use direct language, such as the prophet Nathan used when he confronted David and Bathsheba's sin (2 Samuel 2:1-12), or figurative as seen in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation (Roberts 68). Direct prophecy can be seen in the career of Lutgard of Aywières, who predicted the death of the Duchess of Brabant (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 264), and at another time was able to accurately tell a young recluse of the sins she had committed in the past, prompting her to confession (265). Ida of Nivelles used more figurative language in her prophecies, saying that newcomers to Maagdendaal who were being blessed by the bishop would experience an unspecified heavenly grace that they would taste inwardly, prophesying that this action would cause them to lose all bodily strength. She even predicted the time and location of each individual's swoon (Cawley 78). Likewise, Christiana the Astonishing used her dancing in a figuratively prophetic way, alerting the town's people of the final destination of a departed soul. When she divinely discerned that an individual who died was going to heaven, she danced and leapt around the town with great abandon. However, if the individual was to be damned to hell she wept and tormented herself (Spearing 83).

The concept of God speaking through an individual in a prophetic way was important in the hagiographies studied for this thesis, with 82% of individuals (Figure 1) exhibiting this trait. Prophets in the Bible were considered the mouthpieces of God. Being seen as prophetic in the *vitae*, thus points to the fact that the actions of hagiographical subjects were written in a way to prove their orthodoxy. If an individual was proven to be speaking for God through the

prediction of, and subsequent fulfillment of their words, then it became more difficult to paint their past words and actions as heterodox.

It is important for prophecies to be fulfilled, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this was used as a way to verify the orthodoxy of the prophet. The main ideas used in judging the completion of the prophecy come from two biblical thoughts on the subject. First, a prophecy must happen as said, or the individual is not a true prophet, and the word given is not from God. Deuteronomy 18: 22 illustrates this fact, "If a prophet speaks in the name of the lord, but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken." Therefore, in order for the person's prophecy to be considered as from God, his or her predictions needed to occur. Interestingly, however, in some of the hagiographies it is admitted that the prophecy was not fulfilled in the way, or on the day, that it was supposed to be. Ida of Nivelles prophesied that Beatrice of Nazareth would receive the grace that she desired on "the day of the Lord's holy birth" (DeGanck 65). However, the predicted day came and went without an ecstasy occurring for Beatrice (65). As seen in the quote below from Ida of Nivelles, the hagiographer does not show this in a negative light for Ida, but rather puts the fault onto Beatrice's sin, justifying the date by saying that the whole of the Christmas season can be considered the day of Jesus birth.

"This did not happen because your sins demanded it, as you suspect; but know for certain that what you hope for will happen before the octave day, counting from the first day of the Lord's birth. Moreover, you should not think that I answered you wrongly even if what I promised for the day of the Lord's birth did not happen, for whoever wished effectually to honour the mystery of the divine operation fulfilled during these days will combine in his mind the holy day of the Circumcision, and they intervening octaves, as one with the day of the divine nativity" (66-67).

The perceived orthodoxy of Ida of Nivelles rested on the fulfillment of her predictions.

Perceptions of Beatrice, her spiritual mentee, were also affected, seemingly tied to Ida as well, since this episode is recorded in Beatrice's hagiography. This incident additionally illustrates the importance of orthodox associations. If Ida of Nivelles had been proven to be a false

prophet, then the spirituality that Beatrice of Nazareth was emulating could be examined as heterodox, simply based on the close spiritual relationship of the two women.

The second biblical thought in regards to prophecy explains that false prophets and false teachers lead others astray. 2 Peter 2:1 states, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions", and Matthew 24:24 reads, "For false messiahs, and false prophets, will appear and produce great signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, even the elect." The importance of the scriptures in the lives of individuals desiring to live out the *vita apostolica* cannot be denied. Therefore, in light of the two scriptural passages mentioned above, the Cathars were interpreted by the Catholic Church to be "false prophets". This interpretation made the words and actions of the hagiographical subjects extra verifiable under scrutiny, so they could not be accused of aligning with the Cathar heresy.

The prophetic also served as a way for individuals in the hagiographies to show their compassion and love for others. Juliana of Cornillon is displayed as using her prophetic tendencies empathetically in her *vita*, often knowing of other's pain before she is told of it, in order to pray for them. Once, when Juliana was away from Mount Cornillon, a fellow sister at the abbey became sick. Juliana heard the bell, which was rung when the Eucharist was being brought to the sick, and immediately knew that one of her sisters was ill, fell on the ground, and prayed for her healing (Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 212). Another time Juliana's gift of prophecy helped a cleric whom she had sent away to do some business for her. While he was gone, she discerned through prophecy that he was in danger because of the weather. She then prayed with her friends, and he remained safe (219). Prophecy in Juliana's case is used to display the qualities of empathy, friendship, and demonstrate that her prayer life was both fervent and effective. These are all qualities that others could emulate, and they served the

purpose of showing that Juliana was both close to God, and a true prophet; thus, aiding in protection against any heretical accusations.

The Cathars were considered to be false prophets and heretical by the Catholic Church. This interpretation made the words and actions of the hagiographical subjects extra verifiable under scrutiny, so they could not be accused of aligning with the Cathar heresy. If individuals were proven to be true prophets, according to the criteria of the Bible, then their words and actions would be considered orthodox. Prophecy can be seen in the hagiographies as a determiner as to who is orthodox and who is heterodox, used by the hagiographers to help show the individual as being established in the Catholic Church.

4 Self-denial

The category of self-denial covers two attributes: physical austerities and fasting (Table 1). The practices of physical austerities are found in 73% of the hagiographical subjects and 100% of them exhibited the behaviour of fasting (Figure 1). Self-denial is a crucial component of the *vita apostolica*. Jesus and his Apostles, as well as the primitive church, lived together in community while practicing and advocating these attributes. Jesus spoke often of denying self to follow him (Matthew 16:34; Mark 8:34 and Luke 9:23), and John the Baptist wore clothing of camel's hair and ate only locust and wild honey (Matthew 3:4, Mark 1:6). Fasting is also mentioned being practiced in the gospels. Jesus fasted for forty days and nights before he started preaching (Matthew 4:2, Luke 4:2), and said the time for his followers to fast was when he was not with them (Matthew 9:15, Mark 2:19, Luke 5:35). The first Christian community is moreover mentioned as fasting and praying when making decisions (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23).

Emulation of the early church and Scriptural texts with regard to fasting and physical austerities was augmented and enhanced by looking at the lives of the early church fathers. A

large number of the leaders and influential men of the early Church lived as hermits and ascetics, often in the desert, where monastic communities developed around them. Those who practiced the ascetic life in this time period sought union with God through his Passion (Chadwick 177). They strove, much like the religious in our hagiographical corpus, to achieve a self-sacrificing detachment from what was considered worldly, and be joined with the Divine through the suppression of physical desires (177). The theme of flesh being sinful or evil is found throughout the New Testament. And the concept was just as influential for the first and second century religious as it was for those in the twelfth and thirteenth century. They were influenced by biblical verses such as 1John 2:16: “For all that is in the world—the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride in riches—comes not from the Father but from the world.” Early ascetics embraced the notion that physical desires were detrimental to the spiritual life. Additional scriptures also confirmed the importance of self-control over desires. Paul states in Galatians 5:24, that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires,” and again commands in Romans 13:14 to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

With the biblical importance placed on the negation of corporeal desires, the practice of physical austerities and mortifications arose. Since desires came from the physical realm, the body, or ‘the flesh’ as the scriptures label it, came to be viewed with disgust, an entity that needed to be governed. Physical appetites are difficult to tame, as can be attested by anyone who has been on a strict dietary regimen or has tried to change a bad habit. Physical austerities involving mortification of the body and fasting became one way to do so. Augustine labeled this type of self-denial as resistance to “nature and nature’s appetites” (Harpham xii).

In Syria, fourth-century monks attempted different ways to deny their flesh. They are recorded as wearing a “heavy iron chain as a belt” (Chadwick 180), as Arnulf of Villers (Cawley 149) and Beatrice of Nazareth (DeGanck 39) would do centuries later. Symeon the Stylite (390-

459) lived an austere life, for years, on top of a column (Chadwick 180), bringing to mind females such as Yvette of Huy who walled herself into an anchorhold at the church. Still other early ascetics severely limited their diet to grass, like the animals (180), paralleling the giving up of particular food groups, or food altogether, by medieval religious.

The elements of physical austerity can be seen in writings as far back as Clement of Alexandria (150-215 CE) and Origen (182-254 CE) (Chadwick 177). Clement of Alexandria wrote a considerable amount on the guidelines for Christians, pedagogically expounding on lifestyle behaviors that he believed Christians should follow. Clement included eating conduct in this, looking at the concepts of regulating food and advocating not eating for pleasure (“The Instructor”; Chadwick 94). Clement’s writings, taken together with the biblical verses advocating abstinence, helped to later justify the greater, more rigorous, denial of food. The third and fourth century also saw the appearance of corporate fasting. Although there are biblical precedents for the practice, during this time it became a permanent practice in monasteries, and during certain periods for the general public (Bynum, “Holy Feast, Holy Fast” 38).

Origen, moreover, expanded on the thought that one should strive for self-sacrificing detachment from the world, pointing out that the martyrs who did so shared in the triumph of the cross (Chadwick 177). The quantity of martyrdoms occurring in the first and second century may have influenced Origen’s writings, but the concept of self-sacrifice helping individuals who are seeking a union with God, was an idea that carried on in later centuries, rationalizing the increasing practices of harsh austerities. Early Church leaders such as Origen, Cyril and Basil all suggested that “one should inflict pain on oneself in order to destroy pleasure and to force the body towards virtue (Bynum, “Holy Feast Holy Fast” 38). Mary of Oignies considered her austerities (a forty day circuit consisting daily of genuflecting eleven hundred times both day and night, reading the psalter in its entirety while standing, praying to the Virgin

Mary on her knees, beating herself with an instrument one hundred times, making sure that blood ran with the last three strokes and then finishing off with fifty more genuflections) as a “sacrifice by a long martyrdom” (Vitry 65), intertwining Origen’s thoughts on self sacrificing martyrs with Mary’s very physical and austere prayers for others.

4.1 The Practice of Physical Austerities and Fasting to Oppose Catharism

The Cathars, of course, were also renowned for their physical controls and austerity. They did not eat meat or any animal products such as eggs, milk, and cheese (“Medieval Sourcebook: Raynaldus”), because they considered them the fruits of coition. Their refusal of animal products was one way that the group could be identified. In 1051, heretics, assumed to be early Cathars, were hanged after they refused to kill a chicken (Lambert, “Cathars” 9). Since Cathars believed that all materiality and procreation was a product (in their dualistic beliefs) of the evil God, they did not have sexual relations (“Medieval Sourcebook: Raynaldus”), and they rejected marriage believing that salvation was possible only when marriage partners rejected each other (Lambert, “Cathars” 30). However, those who had become *perfecti* often were the only ones who practiced total chastity, while the others, especially the married couples, still gave in to the temptation of sexual relations from time to time.

In each of the hagiographies surveyed, we see religious men and women in the southern Low Countries going above and beyond the Cathar austerities for orthodox intentions. They lived their life in a way that reputed heretical beliefs, and reaffirmed orthodox behaviour, opposing Cathar tenants through fasting, chastity and physical acts that were even more stringent than those practiced by the Cathars.

The Cathars did not aggressively practice physical, self-induced mortifications, and the religious used this in their desire to be differentiated as orthodox in contrast to them. James of Vitry wrote of the physical deprivations and mortifications his hagiographical subjects performed, in fact he dedicated the book on Mary of Oignies to Fulk, the bishop of Toulouse,

who was exiled from the city by Cathar heretics (Vitry 39, 41). Vitry's introduction goes on to suggest that the examples of the holy women in and around Liège would help the "people who will read it" (49), and shame the heretic (48).

Beatrice of Nazareth performed unforgiving austerities from a young age, sleeping on a bed of thorns (DeGanck 37), and binding her shins and legs with ropes and cords (39) while wearing thorns next to her flesh in the day to experience constant discomfort (37). Arnulf of Villers is also known for his extreme physically punitive actions consisting of daily self-flagellation with a cane enhanced with quills and thorns, after which he would don a coat of hedgehog pelts, quills in, with a coat of chain mail on top. To ensure maximum discomfort, he covered this with a hair shirt and bound himself with iron chains (Cawley 149).

Harsh austerities are additionally often linked to fasting and the desire for food. Mary of Oignies, who constantly fasted, loathed herself when she remembered how she had eaten meat during a serious illness. In compensation for eating something she considered delightful, she cut out a large piece of her flesh and buried it (Vitry 60). Christina the Astonishing would beat herself while eating food, which was given to her as alms, especially when she believed that the food was unjustly obtained (Spearing 82). She would "scream like a woman in labour" while eating saying, "Oh, you wretched soul, what do you want? Why do you long for these foul things? Why are you eating this filth" (82)? Both Mary and Christina obviously felt that eating was connected to the flesh, which they considered evil, and mortified their bodies in an attempt to drive the desire away from them and compensate for the sin they felt they committed in partaking.

For some females the fasting of food led to amenorrhea (the cessation of the menstrual cycle). They interpreted this as a conquering over sin and the flesh (Bynum, "Holy Feast and Holy Fast 202; 274). Thomas of Cantimpré takes the time to mention in the hagiography of Lutgard of Aywières that she was terminated "of the nuisance with which God tamed pride in

the sex of Eve" (Cantimpré 256), referring to her menstrual cycle, presenting the cessation of it as a miracle and blessed event.

Fasting also served a purpose in combating heresy. If the Cathars could abstain from animal products, then these orthodox individuals could abstain from almost everything, often times only receiving nourishment from the ingestion of the host²⁶. By going above and beyond Cathar expectations, the religious showed their devotion to orthodoxy and gave a better example of piety than the Cathars.

Mary and the saints in some cases are seen as instituting specific fasts. Lutgard of Aywières is recorded as performing three separate seven-year fasts. The Virgin Mary commanded the first fast, where she lived on only bread and beer for the entire seven years, because of Cathar cruelty towards Christ (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 240). This particular fast was specifically set as a struggle against heresy, but other religious, such as Mary of Oignies, simply fasted. Mary fasted for three years from the Feast of the Holy Cross (September 14) until Easter. She existed on only a little bread and water at vespers or during the night (Vitry 61). In hagiography after hagiography, we are confronted with similar lengthy and austere fasts displaying an even greater restraint than Cathar abstentions. The intense fasting in the hagiographies provided an orthodox alternative to follow, even harsher in form than the denials found in Catharism.

Likewise, physical austerities, such as self-inflicting wounds and painful acts, also show a resolve that can be interpreted as greater than that of the Cathars. Often the self-induced suffering was directed towards those people who had disassociated themselves from the Church and became Cathars. The sufferings of Christina the Astonishing, as discussed in the

²⁶ The ingestion of nothing but the host, and still living, could be because of the Cathar practice of *endura*. The *endura* refers to the procedure of fasting to death, holding the *consolamentum* before death occurred, thus ensuring that the precepts of the *perfecti* were followed (Lambert, "Cathars" 240). The extreme fasting would be considered an admirable practice; however, in the church, suicide was an act that sent an individual straight to hell, so any merit from fasting would be nullified if it was performed with the express purpose of dying.

section on purgatory (2.3), were dedicated not only to the souls in purgatory, but also for those who had become Cathars. Christina the Astonishing greatly desired that the world would acknowledge its creator (Spearing 84). By saying and believing that God was the one who created the world, a belief that was not held in the dualistic Cathar view where creation was inherently evil and believed to be initiated by Satan (“Medieval Sourcebook: Cathar Gospel”), she was attempting to refute this doctrine. Christina performed very harsh austerities as an example of sharing in Christ’s suffering for humanity, so that people who had united with the Cathars would return to the Church. Juliana of Cornillon also took “upon herself such contrition for the sins of all mankind that she judged all her pain and lamentation for such sins, great as it was, to be little or nothing” (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 191). Juliana was clearly concerned with countering the heresy of Catharism, as evidenced through her institution of the feast of Corpus Christi (discussed in section 5.4.3).

Joining in Christ’s suffering also combated the Cathar belief that Christ did not come in actual human form. The religious, in imitation of the Passion of Christ, often performed physical austerities. This type of austerity focused on Christ’s humanity, which the Cathars denied, and placed the focus on the display of inner virtues that the person, practicing the austerities, exposed (Freiberger 102). By willingly following Christ through his Passion, individuals showed a glimpse of their inner motivation, which was commonly love (104), a love for Christ, and a love for others. Arnulf’s hagiographer says that his frequent beatings were because of a “love fervent to the point of presuming even the likes of this, a love welling up from the depths of [his] heart, a love frothing through the wounds of [his] flesh” (Cawley 136; Freiberger 104). In mortifying his flesh, Arnulf’s inner love was made known to all. His motivation is clearly set out by his biographer as non-heretical, and presumed greater than the Cathars because it is done in imitation of the human Christ.

All of the *vitae* tell of individuals focusing on the sufferings of Christ, but one especially stands out in this regard, Elizabeth of Spalbeek. Elizabeth daily re-enacted the Passion of Christ at the seven canonical hours²⁷ (Spearing 107), brutally twisting her body into postures representing the Passion, which she held for hours, and beating herself, to mimic the torture of Christ several times a day. Furthermore, each Friday she received stigmata of the five wounds of Christ. Her hagiographer writes that men were “beyond excuse if such living arguments and open reproofs do not stir you to strength of faith, desire of love and devotion” (118-119). By displaying her body as Christ’s own crucified self, Elizabeth “affirms the truth of the Passion [in the face of Cathars who deny Christ’s suffering]... and [shows the] desire for the salvation of all men (118). The longing to be joined with Christ in his humanity, concentration, and desire for the human side of Christ set the religious apart not only as having a certain level of spirituality, but it also set them apart from heretical tenants.

In each of the hagiographies surveyed, we see religious men and women in the southern Low Countries going beyond Cathar austerities for orthodox intentions. They lived their life stringently to repudiate heretical beliefs, and reaffirmed orthodox behaviour. Opposing Cathar tenants such as the denial of the humanity of Christ, through fasting, chastity and physical acts that were even more rigorous and severe than those practiced by the Cathars.

5 The Purpose of Devout Devotions

The religious were often enthusiastic in the devotional practices they undertook. Devotions were not necessarily mandated through clerical forms, but were often personal or as we will later discuss, related to a purpose. The next section discusses the attributes found in the

²⁷ The seven canonical hours are often associated with the stages of Christ’s passion: the agony in the garden, and the betrayal with Matins and Lauds, then Christ’s appearance before Pilate, flagellation, carrying the cross, Crucifixion, deposition and entombment with Prime, Sext, None, Vespers and Compline. Elizabeth daily re-enacts the corresponding passion at the time of each office (Spearing 260).

hagiographies that can be considered devotions. There are three specific devotions that will be discussed. A devotion to the Eucharist, a devotion to the Holy Trinity, and a devotion to Saint John the Evangelist (Table 1).

The popularity of the *vita apostolica* and the formation of new orders caused an inward spiritual focus in laypersons (Deane 68), prompting personal devotions to arise. Devotion to the Eucharist, Trinity, Virgin Mary, various saints, and devotedness to the wounds of Christ, or his suffering and humanity, all became common in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Prayer also was an important aspect of devotion at this time. Children would learn prayers such as the Paternoster²⁸ (Our Father), the various creeds, and Psalms, often taught by their mothers, providing an early foundation for devotions that lasted well into their adulthood. Beatrice of Nazareth's mother taught her to pray and memorize the Psalms before she was five (DeGanck 25,), and Lutgard of Aywières mother urged her from a young age to marry Christ (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 216).

Through their devotions, Catholic men and women sought help from various saints, archangels, and martyrs (Deane 68). The hospitals and beguinages of the beguines were named for saints, with the Virgin Mary, Saint Catherine, and Saint Elizabeth being the three most popular (Simons 88). Each of these saints was chosen to portray a facet of the religious life that they wanted to represent.²⁹ Sainly patronage laid out the ideals that the community wanted to follow and helped to distinguish them within orthodox boundaries, the particular saints were

²⁸ The desire for children to know the Orthodox Paternoster may stem from the Cathar rejection of all prayers except this particular one (Lambert, "Cathars" 29), with the Cathar version altered form (75).

²⁹ The Virgin Mary was a very esteemed saint within popular culture and was often chosen as a patron saint in part because of Dominican and Cistercian devotion to her. Mary clearly aligned the beguines with these two sanctioned Church groups who worked with the them providing guidance, confessors, and priests. Saint Catherine was a faithful virgin not only martyred, but also renowned for her intellect and learning, both aspects the beguines esteemed. Saint Elizabeth was a chaste widow who took care of the sick and lepers, much like many beguines did (Simons 87-88).

also promoted by the beguines to the community (87). By exhibiting devotions to particular saints, persons and groups were both aligning themselves with, and seeking intercession from, saints accepted by the Church. The desire for physical connectedness to particular saints was amplified through the increase in the number of relics, which was especially prolific at this time as they were brought back from the crusades, and various individual pilgrimages (Deane 68).

5.1 The Dispersion of Devotions

Devotions spread through contact with other individuals and the reading of hagiographies. The individuals studied rarely travelled outside of the southern Low Countries in their search for a religious life. They did, however, move rather frequently across linguistic borders (the languages of Flemish [Dutch] and French are spoken in this region), diocesan, or political borders. Lutgard of Aywières crossed from Flemish speaking Tongeren, north of Liège, to the French-speaking region of Aywières where she was “miraculously unable to learn French” (Cantimpré, “Collected Saints” 239). Thus, she was protected from becoming elected prioress as she was in Tongeren before she moved³⁰. Beatrice of Nazareth was born in Tienen in the diocese of Liège, moving to the diocese of Cambrai later in her life, and dying in Nazareth. The area in which the religious surveyed for this paper lived their entire lives is rather small. The diocese of Liège was by far the largest, and the majority of the individuals studied were from it. With such a contained area, the possibility they knew and influenced each other is strong, especially given that the religious in the Southern Low Countries stayed mostly contained within its borders.

The timeline (Figure 3 to Figure 12) illustrates when each of the individuals studied in this thesis lived and died. Their major life events and the religious events that occurred between

³⁰ Being elected prioress was not always a welcome honour. The burden of running the abbey, making sure the physical and spiritual needs of the others living there were met, and managing the little disputes that would inevitably arise left little time for one’s own spiritual contemplation and practices.

1150 and 1300 are also recorded. Most of the religious surveyed were active between the years of 1180-1226. Christina the Astonishing is the oldest of the persons reviewed, born in 1150 and dying in 1224 (Figure 4, Figure 8), but was very influential in her younger contemporary Lutgard of Aywières' life, as will be discussed below. Yvette of Huy was the first female to work at a leprosarium in 1181 (Figure 5, Mulder-Bakker, "Living Saints" 93), followed nine years later Mary of Oignies in 1190 (Figure 6). Mary, who is younger than Yvette, is considered the mother of the beguines, who largely ministered in hospitals and leprosariums; however, she lived the same religious lifestyle as her elder, Yvette of Huy. Yvette's hagiography records that her "name and fame circulated, venerable persons of both sexes from the entire region and also religious folk came to see her" (94). This suggests that during this time, Yvette's lifestyle was becoming a popular option, known to others such as Mary, providing an example for them to follow.

The concerns and mandates of the Church are also seen in the timeline. For example, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 prohibited the formation of new religious orders ("Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council"); however, as seen in Figure 7, the Dominican order was nevertheless approved two years later. The Dominicans were influential in preaching and fighting against Catharism (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 240), and since the Albigensian crusade had started in 1209, the prohibition was likely waived to have additional, official help in the Church's fight against the Cathars. The writing Mary of Oignies' hagiography in 1215 (Figure 7) by James of Vitry also was influenced by the Albigensian crusade. James was active in preaching against the Cathars and many of the devotions and traits he emphasizes in Mary's life are purported as an opposition to Cathar practices.

The timelines display each individual's major life events, however, it is their hagiographies that give little clues as to the extent of interaction between them. Unfortunately, however, many times in the hagiographies the names of particular individuals are omitted, as illustrated

in Mary of Oignies' *vita*, which records only that she earnestly prayed for "her friends (that is to say, the religious women who dwelt in the city of Liège ...)" (Vitry 121). It is likely that this included Juliana of Cornillon since, as one can see from Figure 6 and Figure 7, they were contemporaries. Therefore, there is a strong likelihood that Mary knew of Juliana's ideas on the Eucharist, and her intention to institute a feast specifically to reverence it.

There are instances, however, which specifically mention names and expound on spiritual friendships, which developed between these figures. An example of Eucharistic instruction can be seen with Beatrice of Nazareth and Ida of Nivelles, who developed a close relationship when they met at Rameya, where Beatrice was sent to learn the art of writing manuscripts (DeGanck 61). Ida, while only one year older than Beatrice, nevertheless became her spiritual mentor. The mentoring even lasted after Beatrice had returned to her own convent. Ida of Nivelles instructed Beatrice to take communion in order to "amend her former life" (85) through reception of the Eucharist. This advice helped Beatrice so much that she felt, "whether she liked it or not, she would have to follow in the future, wherever it led" (87). Since Eucharistic devotion was so prevalent amongst females in the Southern Low Countries, it is a logical conclusion to assume that fervour came both from physical contact between individuals and from reading hagiographies.

Bodily practices can also be correlated through individual relationships. As seen in Figure 13, the manifestation of dripping oil occurred in two people, Christina the Astonishing and Lutgard of Aywières. These two individuals are both connected to the St. Catherine's religious community at Sint-Truiden. Christina the Astonishing lived on and off at the abbey, and it is recorded in Lutgard's *vita* that Christina counseled her to follow God's lead and move to Aywières even though she did not speak French (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 237). If Christina was able to help Lutgard make such an important decision, it demonstrates that the two not only had contact with each other, but a real relationship. Mutual respect for one

another is shown through the fact that Christina knew of Lutgard's objections and fears about moving, and that Lutgard trusted her advice. Christina was 32 years older than Lutgard and was most likely held in reverence for her extreme austerities and mystical practices.

Furthermore, Lutgard's experience of dripping oil occurred at the town of Loon (Looz) where she was visiting a recluse (231). This is the same place where Christina the Astonishing spent nine years with a recluse named Jutta (Spearing 84). While the recluse is not named in Lutgard's hagiography, it is highly probable that it is Jutta. As Christina and Lutgard are the only two who have a specific mention of dripping oil in their *vitae*, and since they knew each other, we can assume that the occurrences stem from both Lutgard's emulation of Christina's holy practices, which she certainly knew about, from their common connection with Jutta the recluse in Loon, or from the author of their *vitae*, who harmonized them.

The contact between individuals such as Christiana the Astonishing and Lutgard of Aywières, combined with the practice of reading hagiographies of saints, aided in the dispersion of particular devotions in the Southern Low Countries. In the corpus of hagiographies used for this thesis, three main devotions (devotion to the Trinity, to the Eucharist and to Saint John the Evangelist) can be detected. These will be discussed with regards to their use against Catharism. A specific devotion to the Holy Trinity is demonstrated in 82% of the religious (Figure 1). 82% of them were also very devoted to the Eucharist (Figure 1). Interestingly the only two who are not recorded with this devotion are the males Arnulf and Abundus of Villers, the significance of which will be discussed in the section on devotion to the Eucharist. A devotion to Saint John the Evangelist is recorded in only 27% of individuals (Figure 1), but as will be discussed, was an important devotion in regards to Catharism.

5.2 Devotion to the Trinity as Against Catharism

Several of the individuals studied in this survey had a desire to know or see the Trinity, perhaps as a reaffirmation of their own faith, but also conceivably as a tool to be used to combat

Catharism, as the Cathars had rejected this Church doctrine. Beatrice of Nazareth experienced a “great desire to know the Holy and Undivided Trinity” (DeGanck 247). She used books, meditation, and prayer to undertake this task (247), never “stopping her desire to investigate” (248) until she understood the concept. Arnulf of Villers saw the Trinity while in ecstasy. He explained them as “treasures such that to linger among and enjoy them, to be sated with contemplating them and to possess them lastingly is, in itself, life everlasting” (Cawley 165).

Juliana of Cornillon likewise received an ecstatic vision of the Trinity (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 205). Juliana’s ecstasies gave her an “unshakable firmness in the orthodox faith.” Her hagiography states that her visions strengthened her, “whatever might happen (that is, whatever heretical traps were set before her) she could never stray from the correctness of faith” (207). Visions and devotions to orthodox concepts received in ecstasies would not only keep the recipients in the faith, but they could be used as examples to teach others. It is difficult to refute first had knowledge and experience.

Knowledge of the Trinity led people to share it with others as a teaching tool. At the end of Mary of Oignies’ life, she sang a song that lasted for three days, first and foremost praising the virtues of the Holy Trinity and expounding on the supporting biblical scriptures from both the Old and New Testament used to support the concept (Vitry 119-20). When the Trinity was exhausted, she moved on to praise the humanity of Christ, and the blessed angels, saints and apostles who followed the Trinity, before praying for her friends (120). It was not a random act that Mary sang on these themes, specifically winding the Trinity throughout the whole song. All of her themes encompass orthodox beliefs that explicitly refute Cathar doctrine. In her final verses, she proceeded to pray for the Holy Spirit to visit the church, and for more holy labourers to illuminate and save souls.

Mary’s friendship with James of Vitry, who was tasked by the pope to address the crusades against Catharism with sermons given throughout France and Lotharingia (Vitry 36), would

have influenced her. James in turn most likely emphasized her orthodox piety as an example for those who read her hagiography and in his sermons. In note 139 (120) of the book *Mary of Oignies, Mother of Salvation*, Margo King links the three-day antiphon Mary sang at her death to Juliana's composition of *Animarum Cibus*, the liturgical song she composed for the feast of Corpus Christi. Both focused on the Trinity, Incarnation, and humanity of Christ. It is highly probable that Juliana would have known the content of Mary's antiphon when she wrote her liturgy 23 years later,³¹ especially since James of Vitry had completed Mary's hagiography in 1216 (Figure 7), which Juliana most likely read.

Similarly, Lutgard of Aywières, who fell into her final illness on the vigil of the feast of the triune God, sang songs, like Mary, before her death (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 287). The words that she said are not recorded, but Lutgard is recorded as being an "undivided venerator of the Triune God" (287). The possibility is strong that she expounded on the same themes and emulated Mary of Oignies. Lutgard's spiritual director Thomas of Cantimpré wrote the supplement to the life of Marie of Oignies. Hence, he presumably knew of Mary and her devotions.

The Trinity was a concept rejected by the Cathars (Kurtz 193), and by reverencing and promoting the doctrine, it helped to educate others in proper orthodox teachings. Since it was important for the individuals in the hagiographies to be considered orthodox and differentiate themselves as Catholics, as different from the Cathars, the biographers wrote in their specific devotion to the Trinity so they would be considered so. There also was a desire to educate others on important Church doctrines so that they would be aware of and adhere to accepted dogmas. This is seen in Mary of Oignies three-day hymn where she prayerfully sang that God would send workers into the world to illuminate souls (Vitry 120). By devoting themselves to

³¹ Mary of Oignies died in 1213 and Juliana's antiphon was composed with John of Lausanne in 1236.

the Trinity and inspiring others to do so, the hagiographical subjects set themselves apart from the heterodox beliefs of the Cathars.

5.3 A Devotion to Saint John the Evangelist - Confirming His Orthodox Status

John the Evangelist might seem like an odd saint to merit great devotion. Yes, he was the disciple that Jesus loved (John 13:23, 19:26, 21:7), and the biblical book named after him is an esteemed Gospel. However, he was not martyred for his faith as the vast majority of other popular saints were, and little is known about his life outside the little that is recorded in the Gospels that can hold him up as a particular role model. Saint John the Evangelist was nevertheless a particular devotion for 27% of the religious surveyed for this thesis (Figure 1). This has less to do with his saintly qualities and is directly related to the attempt by the Catholic Church to take back the saint from the heresy of Catharism proving him to be an orthodox saint who holds to the doctrines of the Church.

Sadly, most of the writings and books of the Cathar sect were burned during the crusade and inquisitions against them. There are, however, still some writings that remain and it is evident that the Gospel of John was an essential book in Cathar theology and ritual. The book can be seen as a basis for their dualistic beliefs and as an essential part of the *consolamentum* ritual, through which a person joined the ranks of the *perfecti*. During this ceremony, individuals were asked if "Do you give yourself to God and the Gospel?" (meaning the Gospel of John) and if they answered in the affirmative they then vowed:

"Do you promise that henceforth you will eat neither meat nor eggs, nor cheese, nor fat, and that you live only from water and wood (i.e. vegetables and fish), that you will not lie, that you will not swear, that you will not kill, that you will not abandon your body to any form of luxury, that you will never go alone when it is possible to have a companion, that you will never sleep without breeches and shirt and that you will never abandon your faith for fear of water, fire or any other manner of death?" ("Medieval Sourcebook: Cathar Rites").

During the ritual, the Gospel of John was placed on the initiates' head, and the Holy Spirit was invoked.

Various sects and obscure movements have interpreted the Gospel of John in a gnostic way throughout the ages (R. Brown 126), so it is not surprising that both the Bogomils and the Cathars took this structure of interpretation when reading this book. One can detect dualism when reading the Gospel of John, several passages in the gospel lead to interpretation of the theology in a gnostic vein. These include the oppositions of light and darkness found throughout the gospel (John 1:5, 3:19, 8:12, 11:9-10, 12:35, 12:46), the idea that Christ pre-existed (John, 1:1-2) before he became flesh (John, 1:14), and the fact that Jesus said he was not of this world (John 17:16). All these passages combine to question the views that the Johannine community held and lead to varied interpretation of their beliefs (119).

There is a surviving copy of the Cathar Gospel: Book of John the Evangelist, which is written in the style of an apocalypse. It is originally thought to be a sixth-seventh century Bogomil book, with the Latin reproduction dating from approximately the twelfth century ("Medieval Sourcebook: Cathar Gospel"), dating it to the period the Cathars were increasing in numbers throughout the southern Low Countries and France. The Cathar Gospel of John the Evangelist leaves no room for interpretation with regards to dualistic and gnostic beliefs. It starts out by elucidating on the fall of Satan and his active role in the creation of the world. Satan not only fabricates the world, but also makes man in his own likeness, commanding fallen angels into the bodies he had made out of clay and then animating them ("Medieval Sourcebook: Cathar Gospel"). The Cathar belief that God the Father ruled the heavenly realm, while Satan created and ruled the earthly realm can be clearly seen, as can their concern with the rejection of matter (Lambert, "Cathars" 31). The Cathars used the Gospel of John, and their apocalyptic version of it, to support their dualism. Since the individuals in the hagiographies did not believe John was dualistic, nor in favour of the Cathar, they specifically strove to show that he was orthodox in his practices by showing him condoning and participating in Catholic Church rituals and doctrines.

Through the hagiographies, there is the sense that individuals are devoted to Saint John to aid in the fight against Catharism. Firstly, they demonstrate that he belongs to the Church by illuminating his orthodox qualities. Secondly, the explicit examples of orthodox contact with John the Evangelist are used in a bid for people in the Cathar sect to see that John is clearly in line Catholic Church ideology. This especially occurs when they hear of the saint interacting with the religious in the hagiographies, and performing acts against heretical beliefs. The most vivid example of this is found in the *vita* of Yvette of Huy. Yvette asked the priest if she would be able to take communion, a request that he denied. Heartbroken, she cried herself to sleep, then she received a vision of Saint John the Evangelist. The scene that transpires next is quoted below.

“... she saw blessed John the Evangelist come to her saying: ‘Do you want to communicate?’ when she answered devoutly. ‘I do’, the saint said, ‘Follow Me’. And he went before her into the church, which was only separated from her house by a wall and she saw the Blessed John prepare for the celebration of Mass. And having celebrated the entire Mass in order, thus was it conceded to the woman not only to be present but to take part. Thus she learned the secrets of the Sacrament, which she had not known before. She saw that she had only known a fraction of what was done and saw herself by celebration to be in Communion with each one of the Three. Unrobed after the celebration, St John again spoke to her, ‘Do you want me to tell you why your own priest refused to give you communion when you asked? He did not dare to touch the holy Body of Christ because he recently killed his soul by making his body one with that of a whore’” (Mulder-Bakker, “Collected Saints” 125-126)

Several elements combine in this example to show John is not a saint that belongs to the Cathars. First of all, John the Evangelist performed a Mass, standing in the role of the clergy that the Cathars had rejected. It also makes specific mention that the entire Mass was celebrated, in order, leaving no room to entertain the possibility that this was not a Catholic service, in observance with orthodoxy. Secondly, Saint John grants Yvette’s request to have the sacrament of communion, a sacrament clearly rejected by the Cathars, and one that he would not perform in the Cathar rite. It also makes certain that the reader knows that the priest was not worthy to touch the body of Christ (but John the Evangelist was), both emphasizing the concept of transubstantiation that the Cathars rejected, and the importance of purity in regards

to the handling and ingestion of the host. This thereby infers that the priests who did perform this rite were pure, negating the Cathar belief that they were corrupt.

Thirdly, the passage mentions that Yvette was in communion with each of the three during the Mass in reference to the Holy Trinity, a concept again rejected by the Cathars. Finally, Yvette, as a female, learns the secrets of the Sacrament during Mass. This could be in part to show that Saint John was indeed the same saint that the Cathars had. Female Cathars as mentioned could and did become *perfecti*, being accepted into the elect of the sect. By having Yvette, a female, be privy to the secrets of the Mass, John the Evangelist allows her the same privilege as female Cathar *perfecti*, confirming that he is indeed the same saint they adhere to, but on the side of orthodoxy.

Saint John likewise feeds Lutgard of Aywières. In her vision, he is seen as an Eagle, the traditional symbol for Saint John the Evangelist. The eagle is drinking from the Lord's breast, then comes to Lutgard, places his beak in her mouth, and allows her to drink (Cantimpré, "Collected Saints" 229-230). Mary of Oignies is recorded as having a "great veneration for Saint John the Evangelist" (Vitry 113) and also sees John. He similarly appears to her in the form of an Eagle, but instead of feeding her, plunges his beak into her breast, when she could not stop crying. This gave confirmation to Mary that Saint John brought her tears and groans to the Lord (113). These examples are set in place to refute the belief that Satan was the ruler and creator of the earthly domain (Lambert, "Cathars" 31), and that only the *perfecti* are filled with the Holy Spirit (30). If John the Evangelist is seen both feeding persons, and feeding from them, then how could they be the children of Satan? Saint John also fills Lutgard with the spirit of God through their interaction, refuting the belief that one need be a Cathar elite in order to have this benefit.

By presenting Saint John the Evangelist as performing a mass, giving the transubstantiated host to individuals, believing in the Trinity and showing him feeding and

filling others with the spirit of God the authors of the hagiographies are claiming that John is indeed a saint that belongs in the Catholic Church. They are opposing the use of the Gospel of John in Cathar ceremonies and the dualism that the Cathars read within the pages of the Gospel. By actively displaying the differences between John the Evangelist who was presented in Cathar theology and ritual with their version of the saint, the Catholic Church was in effect taking back their saint.

5.4 The Practice of Eucharistic Devotion to Combat Catharism

The religious in the hagiographies, as shown through Figure 2, Figure 1, and Figure 13, exhibit a strong devotion to the Eucharist. They desired to have frequent reception of the elements in a time when most people took it once a year and others, in religious vocations, partook perhaps up to three times a year (McDonnell, “Beguines and Beghards” 311, 316-318). The sentiment towards the sacrament is eloquently put in Mary of Oignies hagiography, “Life itself for her was the same as receiving Christ’s body, and to be separated from this sacrament for a long time or to abstain from it was like death to her” (Vitry 114). This intense devotion to the Eucharist by Mary is an emotion echoed throughout the hagiographies, and can be seen as a way to distinguish their beliefs from the Cathars who denied the sacrament and doctrine of transubstantiation. It also did not escape notice of their early clerical supporters such as Lambert le Begue who wrote:

“I saw how assiduously and frequently they came to church, how they prayed with greater piety than I did, how honorable and respectfully they conducted themselves, eager to hear the word of God and practice it as well as they could, compassionate when the Lord’s flesh and blood were sacrificed on the altar, as if the universal God again suffered the Passion, with sobs and sighs, so that sometimes, when I stood at the altar with a stony heart, it melted as soon as I felt so much love and devotion. What shall I say about the contrition of heart, the copious tears, the respect and fear with which they so often received the body and blood of Christ, approaching without the clamor and jostling that is so common? There they strode forwards like a well ordered phalanx—a gratifying sight for the righteous, a terrible one for those who are evil.” (Simons 28)

The devotion and reverence noted here would have well distinguished them from the Cathars, possibly those whom le Begue refers to as “those who are evil”. The desire for Eucharistic devotion in the last half of the twelfth century led to many changes in the liturgy, such as the elevation of the host in Mass, a devotion to the sacrament outside of Mass in the form of adoration and prayers, and eventually the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi (McDonnell, “Beguines and Beghards” 311- 312). These changes all served to highlight the humanity of Christ in opposition to the duality of Catharism and the importance of the sacrament in face of the Cathar rejection of it.

Devotion to the Eucharist, ecstasies, and visions, all manifestations in the 81-100% range (Figure 1), can be linked together. The Eucharist was more than a sacrament for most persons, as reception of the host brought them union with God. For many females, this union transported them into mystical ecstasies where they had visions of Jesus, Mary, and the saints, not only seeing them, but also speaking and interacting with them. This union was so desired that for some, if they were not able to communicate, Christ himself gave them the sacrament while they were in rapture. When Margaret of Ypres’ spiritual director was away, she began to weep uncontrollably, falling into an ecstasy by Christ’s statue in the local church, because the local priest would not give her communion. Jesus consoled her in a vision with his body “under the species of bread” (Cantimpré, “Collected Saints” 186), and for fifteen days afterwards she was able to taste and chew this heavenly host. Mystical reception of the host occurred regularly when females had limited access to the sacrament, combining together the practices and devotions of the Eucharist, ecstasies, and visions.

The Eucharist specifically rejected the idea that Christ was not fully human. Because Catholics believed in the doctrine of transubstantiation where the communion host and the wine are believed to become the actual body and blood at mass, it focused their attention on his humanity. This differentiated them from the Cathars who seen the Eucharist simply as a piece

of “common bread” (“Medieval Sourcebook: Raynaldus”). Being devoted to the Eucharist was a way to show that an individual was adhering to proper Church teachings and made sure that they were perceived in an orthodox way. It also provided a devotional example for others copy, keeping their focus on orthodox doctrines.

5.4.1 Devotion to the Eucharist (Female Specific)

In spite of both male and female adherence to the *vita apostolica*, there were aspects of religious life for the twelfth and thirteenth century female unique to them. Bynum writes that the majority of Eucharistic miracles and visions in the thirteenth century came largely from the female populace, and states that it was basically a “female genre” (Bynum, “Woman Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion” 182). This is confirmed through the eleven *vitae* surveyed for this paper with all nine of the females being intensely devoted to the Eucharist, experiencing ecstasies and eight of the nine experiencing visions (Figure 13). Elizabeth of Spalbeek, whose whole body would stretch out in the form of a cross at the moment of consecration, demonstrates the devotion of Eucharistic piety. She would stay rigid with her head, shoulders and neck out of her bed, suspended in the air facing the altar until the Mass was over (Spearing 116). When Elizabeth did receive the host at Mass, she immediately went into an ecstasy, remaining motionless for hours in whatever position she received it in (117). Others, such as Ida of Nivelles, were not beyond trickery to receive the host, visiting a dying woman with the express hope of receiving communion when the priest came to administer last rites (Cawley 61). These women not only longed for the Eucharist, but gained sustenance from its ingestion and observation and would do what they could in order to receive it.

What prompted these nine women to be so devoted to the Eucharist? Carolyn Bynum discusses this question in her book *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, evaluating why this was the case through extensive research and many twelfth and thirteenth century examples. Bynum notes the fact that these women focused their devotion time on the reception of the Eucharist, often

rejecting all other forms of food through rigorous fasts. As a young child, Juliana of Cornillon was often chastised for her excessive fasting, consuming so little that her sisters wondered how she could even live (Beadbuey 22). And when Juliana's sisters tried to pull her away from prayer and meditation before the sacrament, for a meal, she would tell them that she wanted better and more beautiful food, refusing to leave (28).

Females in medieval society developed a strong piety towards the Eucharist, desiring a more frequent reception of the host and used the Eucharist as a way to achieve the desired union with Christ, since the host was transubstantiated into the body of Christ during Mass. At the same time, however, females were dependent on male priests to consecrate the host, hear their confessions, and administer the sacrament. Bynum considers the possibility that the food related focus of medieval woman was a means of controlling themselves and the world that they were in. She speculates that food behavior along with mysticism was a form of power, and a way to especially identify with the suffering of Christ contrary to the way that their male counterparts could or did (Bynum, "Holy Feast, Holy Fast" 237). Imitation of Christ and Eucharistic devotion was thus an expression of the doctrine of incarnation, a concept rejected in Catharism. God became food for them and did so at every Mass, as such, medieval females saw themselves as created in the image of God, and through fasting and devotions to his body they could approach the humanity of God, erasing the dichotomy between God and humanity (296). The lived lives of religious women created a new model of female holiness, which was recorded in the hagiographies for others to look up to and emulate.

Interestingly, the two male hagiographies studied do not mention that they had any specific devotions to the Eucharist, even though both have the recorded behavior of fasting. Arnulf's diet consisted of a biscuit normally eaten by dogs (Cawley 142) and occasionally two or three day old (rotting) leftovers. He also did not drink much, even when thirsty he would only bring the water up to his lips to "tease the gluttonous desire" (143). Likewise Abundus would

find all food “insipid to his bodily palate” (218) after being in ecstasy and felt filled with heavenly refreshment. Arnulf’s fasting is written as being linked to his regimen of austerities, while Abundus’ fasting has the more feminine quality of occurring after being in rapture and experiencing heavenly visions. Neither of their fasting however can be linked to Eucharistic devotion, as is found in the female hagiographies. This confirms Bynum’s hypothesis that devotion to the Eucharist was almost an exclusively female domain.

Rudolph Bell sees gender differences in ascetic practices as “based on their differing perceptions of the locus of sin” (Bell 16). Bell theorizes that for women, evil was seen as internal, and the Devil was a “domestic parasitic force” (16), while for men sin was “an impure response to an external stimulus, one that left the body inviolate” (16). This could be why Arnulf tempted his body with water during extreme thirst, and females linked their fasting to ridding themselves of unworthiness and sin to receive the Eucharist. The internal/external gender differences in ascetic practices may furthermore arise from the twelfth and thirteenth century societal notion that females were inferior to the male (Bynum, “Holy Feast, Holy Fast” 295). Hence, fasting was considered for females as an inner purification in preparation of receiving the divine.

The suppression of physical urges such as hunger and thirst purified and freed the body to receive direct communion with God, while the reception of the body of Christ sustained individuals providing the direct connection for them. The very fact that the Eucharist, rejected by the Cathars, could precipitate a Divine connection, gave credence to the orthodoxy of receiving communion. While being devoted to the sacrament allowed females the protection of not being perceived as heterodox.

5.4.2 Devotion to the Priesthood and Male use of Female Piety

Barbara Newman suggests that the difference between heretical groups such as the Cathars and orthodox Catholics rested in their devotion to the priesthood (Newman 12). As previously

mentioned, females were dependent on the priesthood. Priests heard the frequent and often tearful confessions of our religious and they in turn performed penance, most above and beyond what was asked of them, for absolution of their sins and the sins of others. They hungered for the body of Christ and priests were needed to consecrate the host and offer them the sacrament of communion. The Eucharistic pieties of female religious Catholics tied them to the to priesthood, and their devotion to the priesthood gave them protection from heretical suspicion, making them an example for others to follow.

Rex Barnes' article discusses the idea that the extreme piety of the female subjects was used as a way for the male writer to strengthen their own masculine identity, enabling them to guide other men towards proper church piety (Barnes, "Negotiating Masculinities with the Beguines" 30). According to Barnes the authors accomplished this "specifically by critiquing priests for failing to enact their clerical responsibilities, and labeling alternative religious groups as "heterodox"" (16). The labeling of heretical groups in the *vitae* served as a way to help mitigate the spread of heresies, while calling for male priests to live up to their religious responsibility as the female subjects of the hagiographies were actually doing. Barnes also realizes the male writers "using [the] hagiography as a means to castigate lesser masculine figures in the wake of institutionalized clerical celibacy" (16). If a female could live in a state of such chastity and piety than a male priest should be able to as well.

John Coakley similarly argues that female piety had a considerable impact on male spirituality in the Middle Ages. Coakley considers the writings of Dominicans and Franciscans in the thirteenth century that observed the differences between the women and themselves. He argues that the men used these differences to address their own relationship with the divine. Coakley explores the idea that "gender served as a tool that helped them fashion a medium of encounter with issues at the heart of their calling" (Coakley, "Gender and the Authority of Friars" 445). Coakley understands female mystics as having a privileged contact with the

divine, one that the friars wished to possess (459). However, Coakley considers that there were always set boundaries, as the majority of females submitted to the friar's authority (459) as ecclesiastical leaders, confessors and spiritual directors. Thus females were used as an example to bring the men closer to God, but were still under the direct authority of the male religious that they relied on for communion and confession.

What constituted maleness and femaleness in the Middle Ages was well defined, but there are two hagiographies studied for this thesis that are an exception to this rule. Arnulf and Abundus of Villers are both shown to be extremely pious with heavenly visions, ecstasies and extreme asceticism, including fasting. They both displayed behaviors that are typically linked to females. Figure 2 shows that Arnulf exhibited 12/16 of the bodily behaviors, on par with and higher than many of the females studied, while eight are recognized in Abundus. Arnulf, as mentioned, is known for his extreme bodily penance but he additionally often-experienced ecstasies and visions where he would have heavenly conversations with Jesus, saints and the Virgin Mary (Cawley 163-165). Abundus was also inclined to ecstasies and was particularly close to the Virgin Mary. She often appeared to him in regular situations such as at vespers where she chanted and bowed along with the men (222), and at harvest time where she cooled their faces (234). In ecstasy, Abundus has many conversations with the Virgin Mary and even receives permission to share a kiss on the mouth with her (225). The mystical raptures that are commonplace in female hagiographies are emphasized in both these men, especially in the life of Abundus.

These *vitae*, offsetting the overwhelming number of female ones, must have been written and read amongst the male communities for a reason. Perhaps as specific examples of men encountering the divine, showing others that these postures were not just a female domain, and that they, as males, could also experience divine contact with Christ. Additionally, they could present a model for other men to emulate, helping them to adhere to the practices that would

convey their orthodoxy.

5.4.3 Stopping the Spread of Catharism: Institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi

Devotion to the Eucharist was additionally informed by the doctrines that the Church was actively defining in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. At the Fourth Lateran Council, the doctrine of transubstantiation was clearly defined, and its importance was disseminated to the congregants via sermons and dialogues. The emphasis of the Church on doctrines of the Eucharist (which had been going through a centuries-long process of debates and definitions) (Rubin 14-31) impacted devotion to the sacrament. Comparably the Albigensian Crusade and the Church's active fight against heresy influenced the practices and visions of people. This can be seen in Figure 7. Juliana of Cornillon received her vision in 1209, the same year that the crusade against Catharism started. Was it a coincidence that her vision to institute the feast, which in part was to fight Catharism, occurred the same year that a crusade against the heresy began? Although the interpretation of the vision is recorded as occurring three years later (Beadbuey 29), the concern with heretical uprisings and the atmosphere of intense Eucharistic devotion combined to help construct the vision and its subsequent interpretation.

The development of the feast of Corpus Christi, although spearheaded through Juliana's vision, arose from a common love of the Eucharist, as evidenced in the hagiographies. It is apparent through passages in *The Life of Juliana of Cornillon* that Juliana assumed Eucharistic devotion, through the feast of Corpus Christi, would aid the Church's fight against Catharism. It also is unmistakable in her *vita* that the Cathars were considered an enemy of the Church. In one passage Juliana's friend and supporter, Isabella of Huy, receives a vision while in ecstasy. In it, she saw the celestial court, where different orders of heavenly spirits were gathered around the throne of God in adoration and worship. The spirits were begging God to "protect the world from ruin; to protect the Church Militant, attacked on all sides by heresies; imploring Him to employ the most efficacious means to cause the Faith to triumph" (Beadbuey 91). Her

vision ended with the divine majesty declaring that “their desires should be accomplished, and that the festival of the Most Holy Sacrament, for which they had interceded, should soon be celebrated by the Universal Church” (91).

Isabella’s vision obviously speaks directly to the fact that they thought the feast of Corpus Christi would be a means to help the Church triumph over heresy. More importantly, Isabella’s revelation corroborated Juliana’s original vision and gave her a friend to “talk frequently and intimately, in honeyed speech, about the institution and promotion of this holy festival” (Mulder-Bakker, “Living Saints” 240), giving Juliana the physical and emotional support that she needed to both continue to believe in and promote her cause. Later, another passage in the hagiography confirms the promise that feast would be persuasive in prevailing over heresy:

“it is also necessary that truth should triumph over falsehood and heresy, in order that the enemies of truth, at the sight of so great splendour, in the midst of the immense joy which consoles the universal Church, should be converted” (Beadbuey 106).

With the feast of Corpus Christi the Church is not simply dealing with the dualistic tendencies of Catharism at an intellectual level. This had already been done in the Fourth Lateran Council where the doctrine of transubstantiation was established and the Eucharistic disputes of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were being resolved (“Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council”). The feast, as I see it, concerns itself with the emotional, mystical tenants of transubstantiation hoping to appeal to persons, and confirm orthodoxy through a more emotional route. Seeing the body of Christ processed through the streets, smelling the incense as they kneel in adoration before the host, tasting the body of Christ as they take communion, in all these activities an emotional connection to the sacrament is being promoted. Juliana believed that this emotional connection would both strengthen the resolve of the faithful and possibly convict those practicing Catharism to come back to the Church.

The antiphon (the *Animarium Cibus*) that Juliana, together with John of Lausanne, composed for the feast of Corpus Christi additionally references an emotional connection to the

Eucharist. The song compares the body and blood of Christ to being at a banquet filled with every delicacy, and talks of the spiritual sweetness found through receiving the Eucharist, promoting the solace it can bring (“Animarum Cibus”). The idea of the Eucharist being compared to sweet tasting food is found in the majority of the hagiographies studied. James of Vitry said that the holy women he knew received the sacrament, which was considered as “sweeter than honey and the honeycomb” (Vitry 48). It is difficult to separate a strong emotional bond from pure rational intellect. Connecting emotionally to the Eucharist, through the feast of Corpus Christi, provided an additional attachment to orthodoxy, through a specific devotion and feast that would not be possible in Catharism’s dualistic atmosphere.

6 Conclusion

As evidenced throughout this thesis, the centrality of the Eucharist in Juliana’s vision was not unique to her, nor was her desire that others reverence the sacrament. The religious men and women of the southern Low Countries were connected through their devotions, along with their adherence to the *vita apostolica* and performance of redemptive suffering in their quest for spirituality.

The hagiographical subjects studied were living in a climate of liminality. The uprising of heresies such as Catharism were challenging the Catholic Church as had not been done for centuries. The Church was actively fighting against heresy through inquisitions and crusades, while defining and strengthening their doctrines at the various ecumenical councils held in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Through the hagiographies of the eleven persons surveyed, we see the pivotal role devout actions and practices played in the confirmation of orthodoxy, dissemination of Church doctrines, and in aiding the fight against Catharism.

The authors of the hagiographies used certain tropes and methods to portray the orthodoxy of their subjects. Using the writings both as an example to help others in their

religious practices and devotions, keeping them in orthodoxy, while presenting a way to fight against Catharism through example, prayer and suffering. Sixteen different attributes, found in the hagiographies, were charted for this thesis and each of them emphasized a different form of religiosity used by the subjects to keep heterodox suspicions of them at bay, and to oppose the tenants of Catharism. All sixteen attributes, prevalent in the southern Low Countries, were used in an effort to directly challenge Catharism while confirming the Church's status as the sole orthodox religion.

Further research should be done in light of Robert Ian Moore's recent book, *The War on Heresy: Faith and Power in Medieval Europe* (2012). This book takes a radically different view towards the heresy of Catharism by not considering it a heresy at all. Moore sees the heresy of Catharism created from long-term factors, such as failed attempts at clerical reform and the rapidly changing world, naming lay religiosity as an important factor in its rise. Moore believes that when laymen went too far in the emulation of the *vita apostolica*, rejecting the Church that they saw as sub-standard, it was then that they were labeled heretical. He believes that there was a growing obsession in the Middle Ages that the Church and society were threatened by heresy that affected the decision.

In short, Moore argues that the Cathars were misunderstood in their heretical designations, especially because most of what we know of them comes from ecclesiastical authorities determined to suppress them. He suggests that many of the individuals labeled under the Cathar heresy were actually Premonstatensians and other sincere persons seeking to live out a life of poverty, purity and chastity following the apostolic ideal. Moore probes the idea that the majority of those labeled as Cathars, were not dualists, but radical, orthodox Christians trying to develop reforms.

This new view, that challenges the centuries long belief of Catharism's dualistic tendencies and heretical status, would indeed make the tenants of this thesis null and void.

However, more research must be done into Moore's theory to see if any substantiation can be determined concerning different levels of heterodoxy within the Cathar groups, or the possibility that the Cathars were indeed orthodox. If Moore's theory does become the new norm, what will this mean for the men and women written about in our hagiographies? How will their austerities and devotions be interpreted? Perhaps they will just be seen as a sect within a religious milieu of people, each practicing a particular version of Christian ideals, theirs just simply being more austere.

I, however, consider the suffering of the hagiographical subjects to have had a distinctive purpose, that of aiding in the fight against Catharism through the devotions and attributes they intentionally displayed. They truly believed that the Cathars were heretical, as the Church they followed and loved had labeled them thus, and they were sincere in their portrayals of orthodoxy. Through their actions, faith was taught and reinforced. The religious attributes shown in their hagiographies aided the Catholic Church's struggle against Catharism through the confirmation, dissemination, and distinction of orthodoxy, while serving to nullify heterodox suspicion of the hagiographical subjects. The strength and endurance they portrayed, whether or not embellished by their hagiographers, still stands as a testament of their devotion to Christ, and their desire to live according to the *vita apostolica*.

Table 2: Corpus of Hagiographies in This Thesis

Name	Date of Death	Affiliation	Writer and date of Hagiography
Mary of Oignies	1213	Hospital sister at leper house in Willambroux, then laysister at Oignies	James of Vitry, 1215 Supplement written by Thomas of Cantimpré, 1231
Arnulf of Villers	1228	Cistercian lay brother at Villers	Goswin of Bossut
Yvette of Huy	1228	Hospital sister at leper house in Huy then anchoress in Huy	Hugh of Florefe
Ida of Nivelles	1231	Beguine in Nivelles, then Cistercian nun at Rameya	Goswin of Bossut
Christina the Astonishing	1232	Laywoman at St Truiden	Thomas of Cantimpré, 1232
Margaret of Ypres	1237	Laywoman at Ypres	Thomas of Cantimpré, 1240
Abundus of Villers	1239	Cistercian Monk at Villers	Goswin of Bossut
Lutgard of Aywières	1246	Beguine, then Cistercian nun at Aywières	Thomas of Cantimpré between 1246-1248
Elizabeth of Spalbeek	1266 (approximate)	Laywoman	Philip of Clairvaux during her lifetime
Beatrice of Nazareth	1268	Cistercian	A priest connected to the community at Nazareth
Juliana of Cornillon	1269	Prioress of Abbey at Mount Cornillon, Liège	Most likely written by Eve of St. Martin in Liège

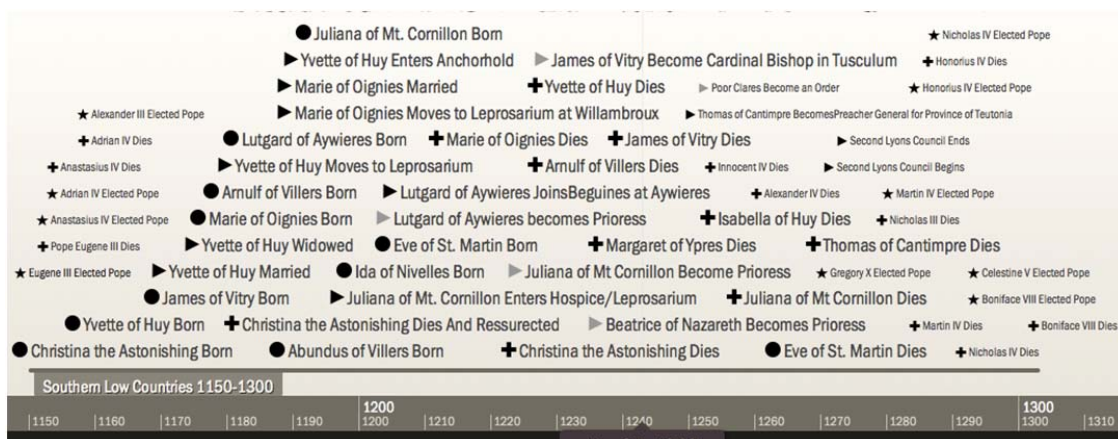


Figure 3: Timeline 1150-1300 (less detailed)

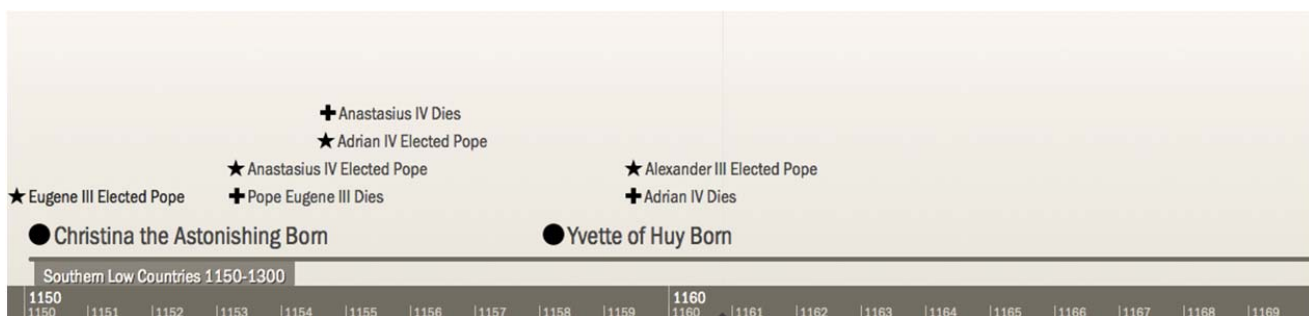


Figure 4: Timeline 1150-1169

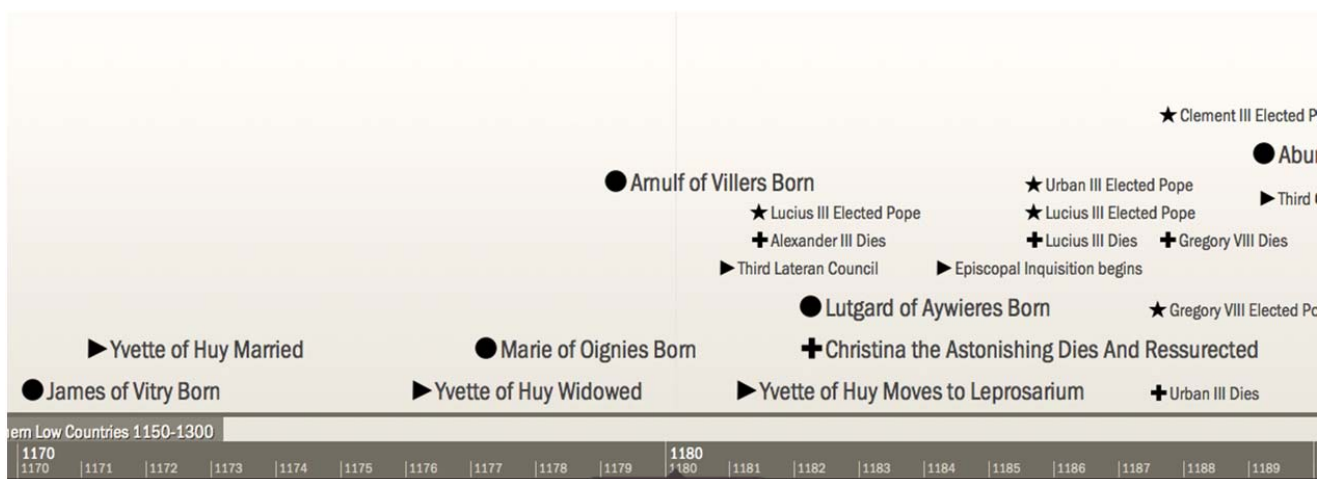


Figure 5: Timeline 1170-1189

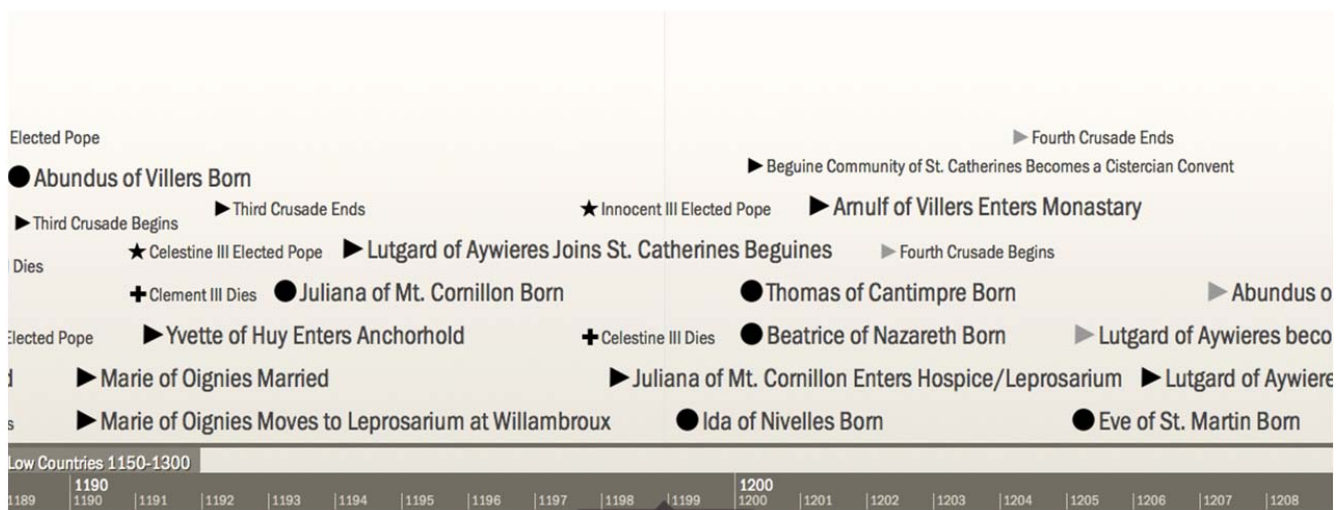


Figure 6: Timeline 1189-1207

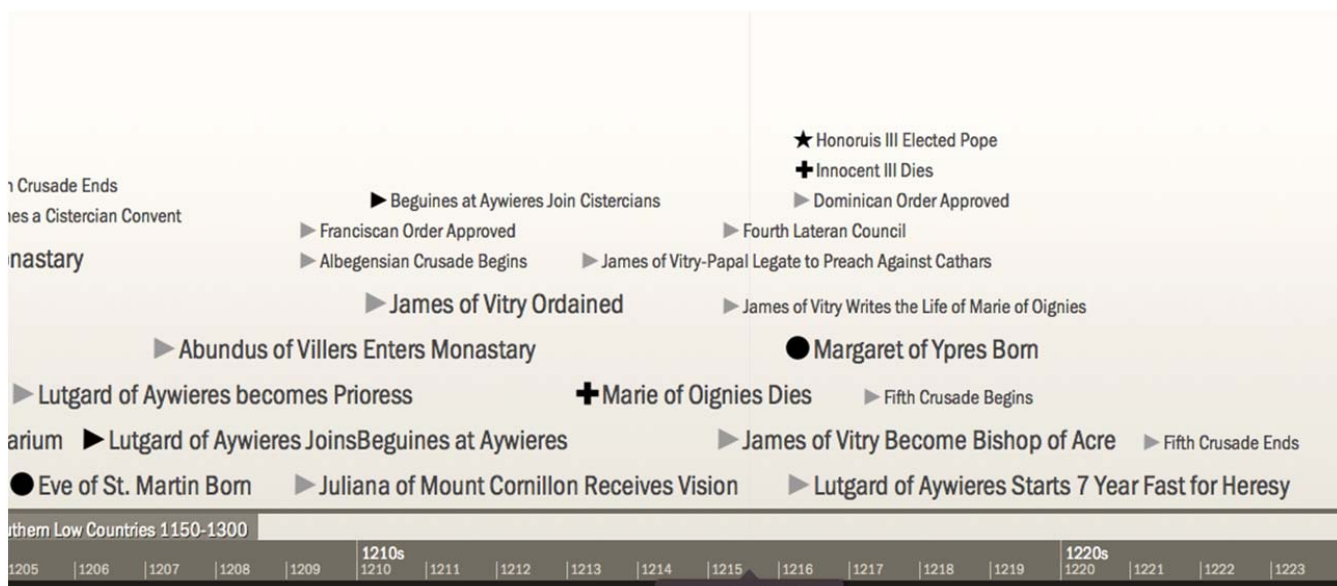


Figure 7: Timeline 1205-1223

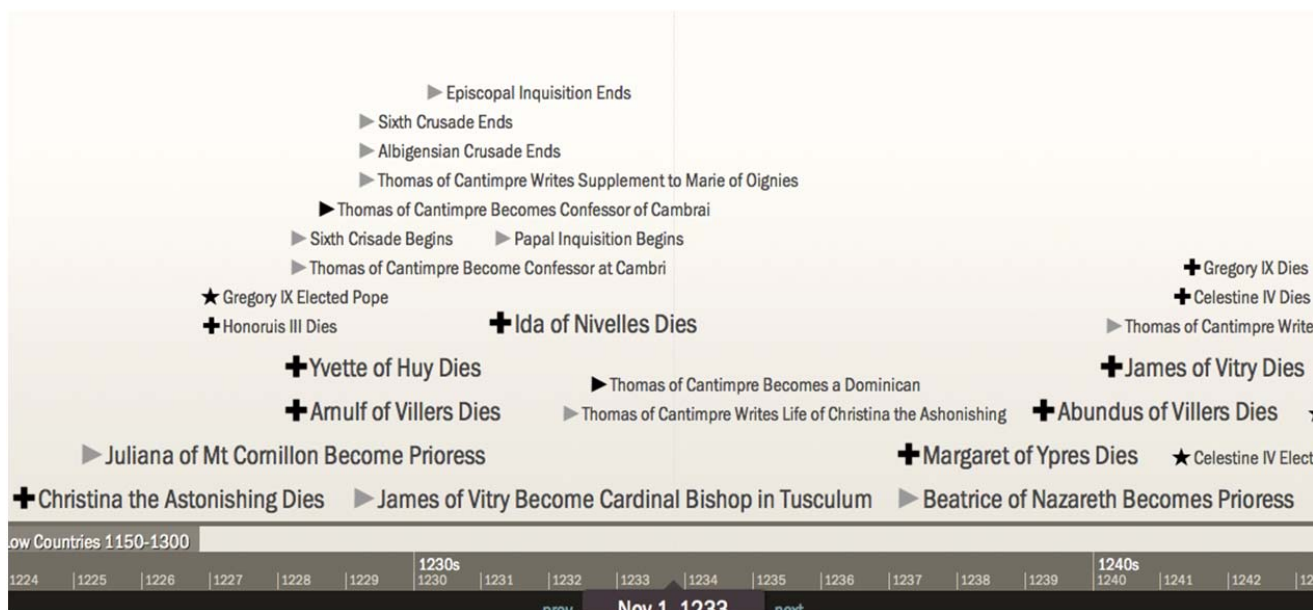


Figure 8: Timeline 1224-1242

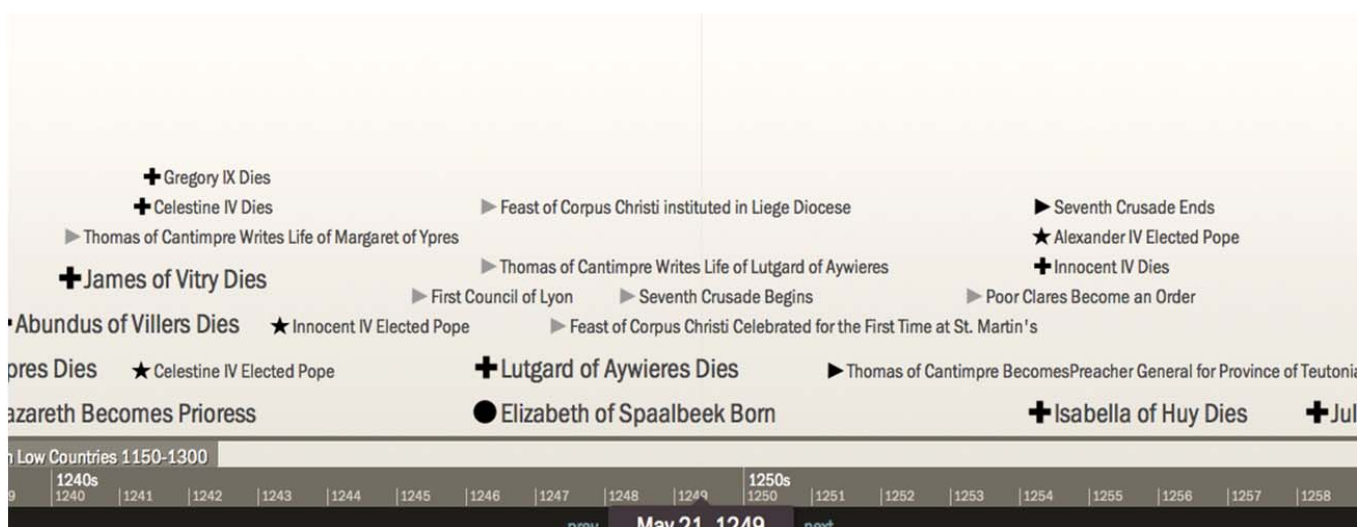


Figure 9: Timeline 1240-1257

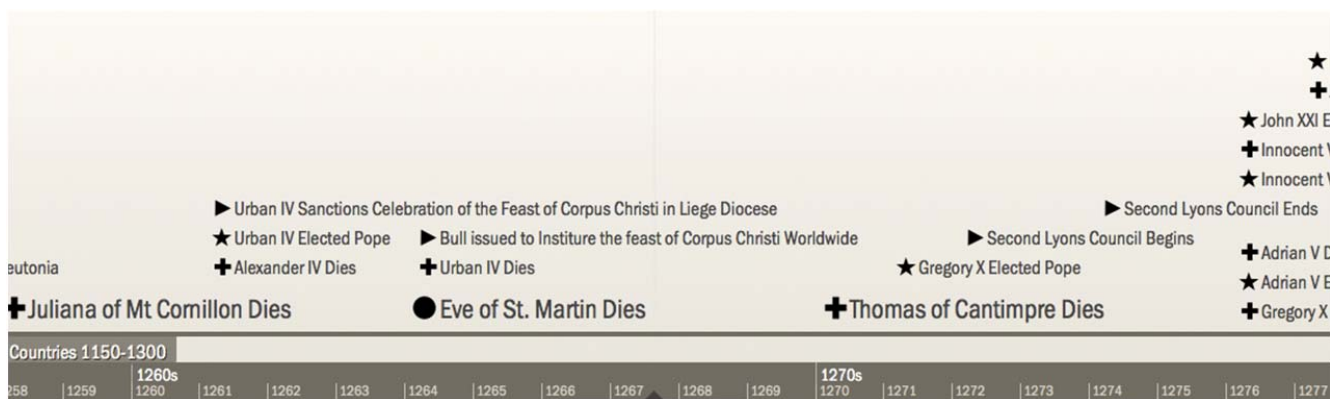


Figure 10: Timeline 1258-1276

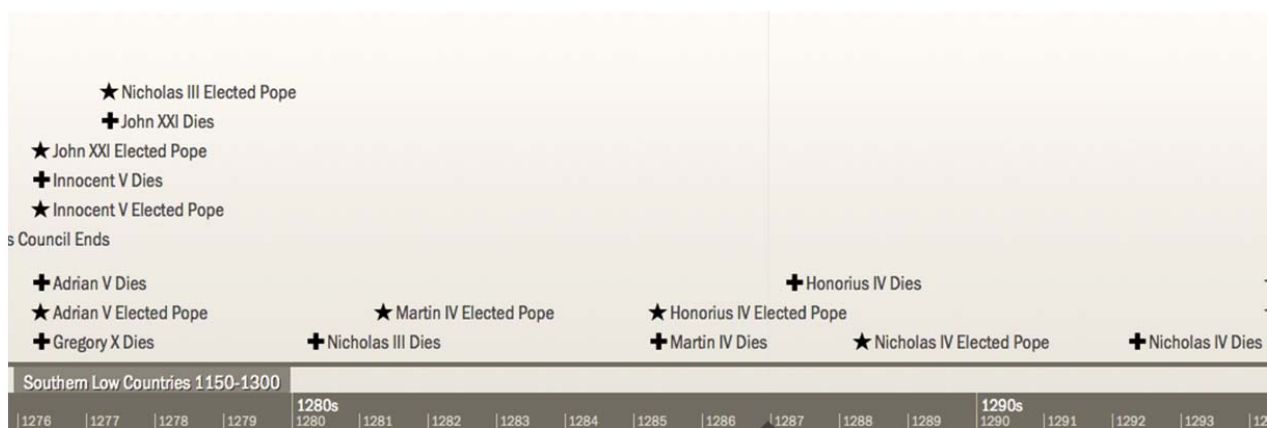


Figure 11: Timeline 1276-1293

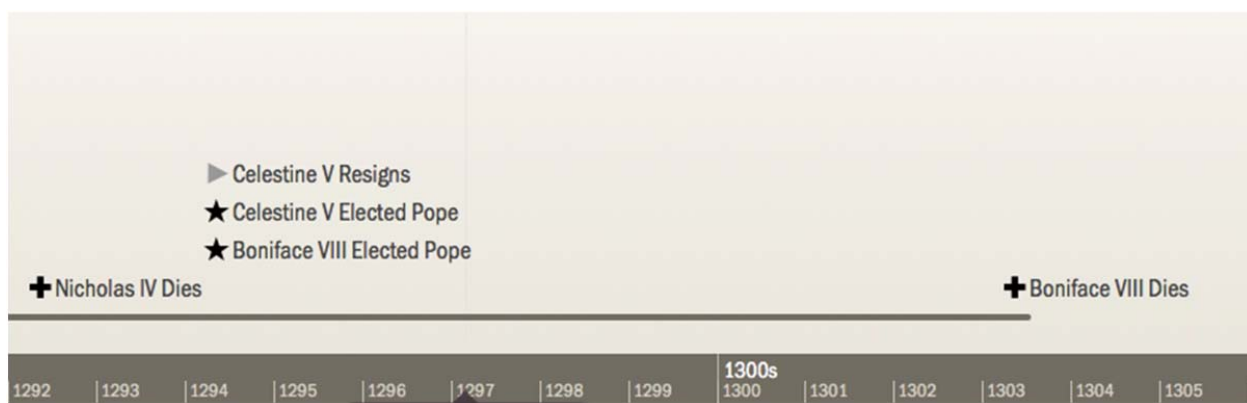


Figure 12: Timeline 1292-1305

	Abundus of Villers	Arnulf of Villers	Beatrice of Nazareth	Christina the Astonishing	Elizabeth of Spalbeek	Ida of Nivelles	Juliana of Cornillon	Lutgard of Aywières	Margaret of Ypres	Mary of Oignies	Yvette of Huy
Abundant Tears	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	x	x	x
Austerities		X	X	X	X		x		x	x	x
Blinding Light			X			X	x	X	x	x	
Dancing		X	X	X				X		x	
Demons		X	X			X	x	X		x	
Dripping Oil				X				X			
Eucharist			X	X	X	X	x	X	x	x	x
Fasting	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	x	x	x
John the Evangelist								X		x	x
Laughter	X	X	X								
Prophetic	X	X		X		X	x	X	x	x	x
Purgatory	X	X		X		X		X	x	x	
Raptures/Ecstasies	X	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	x	x	x
Tics		X	X							x	
Trinity	X	X	X			X	x	X	x	x	x
Visions	X	X	X	X		X	x	X	x	x	x

Figure 13: Specific instances by each individual

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