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Lived religion and eucharistic piety on the Meuse and the Rhine in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries

1 Introduction

In 1323, when Gertrude Rickeldey of Ortenberg, a lay religious lady in Strasbourg, decided to renounce all property, she met with strong resistance from her confessor, a Friar Minor. Deeply frustrated by his censure, she found comfort in her friend and life companion Heilke of Staufenberg: 'Getruwe im [unserm Herren] wol und nim din selbes war [...] volge dem daz in dir ist' ('Trust Him [the Lord] well and know yourself [...] follow what is inside you').[1] These words spoken by a laywoman in the fourteenth century give food for thought to those searching for religious individualisation in the Middle Ages. They suggest that the individual as a moral category is not simply a discovery of the (Early) Modern world, as is usually held. Regarding earlier scholarship, Cary J. Nederman (2010) has already concluded: 'Renaissance and Reformation constituted a watershed for the appearance of the individual as a moral and political category.' In contrast, Nederman himself, in his own insightful overview of 'Individual Autonomy' in the medieval period, shows that individualisation started long before, from the twelfth century onwards.

Since Colin Morris published his *The Discovery of the Individual (1050–1200)* in 1972, and Caroline Walker Bynum in 1982 recast his researches in terms of '"Discovery of the Individual" or "Discovery of Self"?', an increasing number of researchers have noted a growing role for free choice and individual liberty in private and public affairs in the later Middle Ages. They observe a realm of personal discretion in decision-making with which no one may interfere, and a freedom to speak critically. According to Nederman (2010, 552), 'Know thyself typifies the individualistic outlook present among many medieval thinkers'. Already in the 1120s, Abelard gave his book on ethics the title *Scito Teipsum*

1 *The Saintly Life* 220^{v}. The Middle High German biography, *Von dem heiligen Leben der Seligen Frowen genant die Rückeldegen*, is kept in Brussels, Royal Library of Belgium, MS 8507–09, fol. 133^{r}-239^{v}. Derkits 1990 gives a transcript of this text with an historical introduction. See also Derkits 1991, Hillenbrand 2010, Hillenbrand 2011, and Mulder-Bakker 2014. In collaboration with Freimut Löser and Michael Hopf, I have prepared an edition of this biography in an English translation provided by Gertrud Jaron Lewis and based on the Brussels manuscript: Mulder-Bakker 2017. I quote from this edition under the title *The Saintly Life*. The edition is prefaced by a historical study written by myself.

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("Know thyself" – Clanchy 1997), and in the 1320s William of Ockham developed theories of imprescriptible natural rights and natural liberty conceded by God to mankind: rights that endowed each individual with freedom of judgement as a *ius*. The intellectual historian Larry Siedentop, in his *Inventing the Individual*, speaks of the 'birth pangs of modern liberty' in this context (Siedentop 2014, 281–348). Heilke's advice to Gertrude seems to be in line with Ockham's theory that all individuals have the right to trust their own conscience and follow their interior voice. It is no surprise, therefore, that Ockham committed his ideas to writing in collaboration with a group of spiritual Franciscans, one of whom was Henry of Talheim, a Franciscan *Lesemeister* (learned friar) from Strasbourg, and a longstanding *intimus* of Gertrude.[2] Forms of religious individualisation can thus be surmised for the later Middle Ages; but what of institutionalisation?

Whereas Nederman and most scholars with him limit their studies to philosophers and theologians, it is my purpose to extend my search for processes of religious individualisation to laypeople, and in particular to two pairs of lay religious women. On the first of these, Juliana and Eve, I have already published a comprehensive study in my *Lives of the Anchoresses* (Mulder-Bakker 2005, 78–147, 233–55). The second pair is Gertrude and Heilke. During my stay in Erfurt in 2014/15, as a fellow of the Max Weber College in the context of the project 'Religious Individualisation in a historical Perspective', I was able to complete a study and edition of Gertrude's *Life* (Mulder-Bakker 2017). In the present text I will study these women's claims to individual conscience and choice, and ask whether and how these were addressed by church leaders. I will pose the question whether they may have inspired theologians and prominent churchmen of their time, and 'infiltrated' the institutional Church. It will become clear that, from their anchorhold and their House of Souls, they did in fact inspire laypeople in the area of conventions and traditions. In this way I meant to contribute to reflections on processes of institutionalisation, which hardly existed, and of conventionalisation, which were booming.

2 Juliana of Cornillon, theologian and inventor of the Corpus Christi festival, and Eve of Saint-Martin

In 1197, two wealthy girls, Juliana and Agnes, orphaned at a young age, were entrusted to the convent of Cornillon in order to be raised there. The orphans

2 See hereafter.

brought with them a huge dowry, which placed the convent deeply in their debt. Cornillon was a civic institution located just outside the city walls of Liège. It consisted of a leprosarium, rest homes for rich people of leisure, and a place for young children to be educated. It had two departments: a female convent led by a prioress, and a male convent led by a prior who acted as head of the entire institution. Its board of governors consisted of city dignitaries and episcopal representatives. It was not, therefore, an ecclesiastical institution. No vows were taken by the brothers and sisters, and no monastic rule was followed (Spiegeler 1980; 1987).

Juliana, whom we now know as Juliana of Cornillon (1192–1258), proved to be a bookish young woman.[3] She could usually be found in a quiet corner, devoting herself to study and contemplation. 'Semper meditativa erat', her biographer tells us: she was always meditating. She received a solid education, and learned to read the psalter and the main texts of the Bible. Besides vernacular texts, she studied patristic Latin literature and the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux: she knew his sermons on the *Song of Songs* by heart. The prioress, who was responsible for her upbringing, brought the studious girl into contact with the teachers and students of the schools in Liège. Juliana may even, like Beatrice of Nazareth and others, have attended one of the excellent chapter schools. She will also have received some liturgical training (cf. Steenwegen 1983).

As a child, Juliana lived at the *Boverie*, in the meadows outside the convent buildings, and had her own *oratorium* where she could find solitude. As an adult, acting as the prioress of the female convent, she lived in her own house, separate from the other sisters. Having had to flee from Liège in 1247, she became a Beguine at Namur, and spent her last years in a *reclusorium* at Fosses. It should be noted that Juliana was not a nun; she did not follow a monastic rule; and at Fosses she was not formally enclosed as an anchoress. She was an informal recluse. For us studying religious individualisation, it is good to realise that there were many more laypeople in the later Middle Ages who were attracted to a full-time religious life, but also wanted to keep their independence. They lived a lay spiritual life in an urban environment, and are not to be counted as (semi-)monastics.[4]

3 See the *Vita Julianae*, written by a younger scholastic from Liège c. 1260, in the edition by Delville 1999. This edition is based on the 'official' manuscript of Juliana's Vita, written in Cornillon c. 1280 and now kept in Paris, B.N., MS Arsenal 945. It supersedes the edition in the *AASS*, and the English translation by Barbara Newman (1988) based on the *AASS*. Newman wrote an improved translation and a new introduction in 'The Life of Juliana of Cornillon', published in Mulder-Bakker (ed.) 2011, 143–302. For an in-depth study of Juliana's life and thought, see Mulder-Bakker 2005, 78–147, 233–55.

4 I entirely disagree with Elm 1998 on this.

Juliana was often visited by a younger girl, Eve (d. after 1264), probably her cousin. After Eve, in adulthood, had herself formally enclosed as an anchoress at the collegiate church of Saint Martin in Liège, Juliana often visited her and stayed with her in the anchorhold, sometimes for prolonged periods. Eve proved to be a very intelligent and energetic person, who acted as Juliana's sparring partner and helped her set up the Corpus Christi festival. Anchoresses too are laywomen living religious lives on their own. They were usually held in high esteem by the lay faithful and churchmen alike. Because Saint-Martin was a meeting place for reform-minded prelates and scholastics, Eve from her anchorhold could mediate between Juliana and these learned theologians and leading churchmen, among them the Parisian Magister Hugh of St. Cher, provincial of the Dominicans at that time, and his friend Jacques Pantaléon, archdeacon of Liège, who, as Pope Urban IV (1261–1264), would institute the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264.

During the celebration of the Eucharist, at the silent part of the Mass, Juliana as a young adult habitually saw a full moon with a small portion missing. It is easy to imagine that she saw the priest in the choir upholding the incomplete circle formed by the host between his thumb and index finger. For her it symbolised an imperfect church, where the faithful hardly understood what the celebrant was doing as he muttered formulas in mumbo jumbo during the silent canon. She asked Christ what the hidden meaning of her vision was, and received the unsettling answer that a new festival had to be introduced in the Church, the feast of Corpus Christi, and that she had to prepare for it and promote it through the medium of the *humiles*, the lay faithful: 'And you cannot leave this to the *magni clerici*, the leading churchmen.' As later appears from her liturgy, Juliana's overriding concern was the communal experience of the faithful during mass, not just a new ritual performed by the clergy. Small wonder, then, that she could not leave it to the clerics to institute the festival, since they took little interest in the feelings of common believers, and, especially after the Fourth Council of the Lateran in 1215, when the separation between clergy and laity had become a fact, were increasingly preoccupied with their own *sacerdotium*, the priesthood.[5]

5 An illuminating study of the Eucharist and the spirituality it was embedded in is Macy 1974. Angenendt 2013, in his monumental *Offertorium*, 379, gives no attention to the Corpus Christi Office, mentioning only the procession in the streets.

2.1 Support from prominent theologians and prelates of the church

Juliana then commenced work on a eucharistic theology to provide justification for the feast of Corpus Christi, and devoted some twenty years to thinking through the content and meaning of the Eucharist for the purpose of a liturgical celebration. She read many church authors and theological tracts, especially from the twelfth century, including Alger of Liège and Lotharius of Segni (= Pope Innocent III); quotations from their work are discernible in her liturgy.

In the 1230s (when Juliana was in her forties) she submitted her thoughts to prominent theologians and prelates, notably Jacques Pantaléon, later to be pope, and Hugh of St. Cher, the Dominican scholastic in Paris, as well as to local Dominicans and to the former chancellor of the University of Paris, Guiard of Laon; they are mentioned by name in the *Vita Julianae*. They all approved. With the help of a skilled cleric, a *litteratus* who knew how to write Latin hymns and compose music, she invented a complete liturgy with texts and music, both for the feast day itself and the octave following: the office *Animarum Cibus*.[6] Eve, the anchoress, started to disseminate the festival via her network of female faithful, and collected money for the altar plates. The first Corpus Christi Mass was sung in 1246 at the deathbed of Bishop Robert of Thourotte. The feast seemed on the way to gaining universal acceptance. Unfortunately, the new bishop, Henry of Guelders, was fiercely opposed to Juliana and her feast, so that she had to flee from Liège; she died in exile in 1258.

But her friend Eve did not give up. She had persuaded Hugh of St. Cher, then papal legate, to celebrate the liturgy in person in 1251 in the church of Saint Martin, the church where Eve had her anchorhold. After Juliana's death in 1258, she collected all evidence relating to her and to the origins of the festival and wrote it down in a booklet in French.[7] This anecdotal history was developed into a

6 The office *Animarum Cibus* is not preserved, but was reconstructed by Lambot and Fransen in 1946. It is studied and re-edited in Walters, Corrigan, Ricketts (eds.) 2006. I consider Juliana to be the intellectual author of the office, although her Latin hagiographer writes that the cleric 'started with writing and she with praying'. When he had written a section he presented it to her: 'And what Christ's virgin had approved, he kept; and what the virgin found in need of correction, *she corrected herself* or left it to him to correct' [italics mine]. This is a bold statement about a female for a medieval hagiographer, so bold that the Bollandists omitted these words from their edition in the *AASS*.

7 Eve's narrative in French, qualified as *Fragmenta* by the Latin hagiographer and mostly considered to be some loose notes in modern scholarship, was still kept in Cornillon in the seventeenth century and then qualified as *Vita Gallice scripta* by Barthélemy Fisen in his *Origo prima festi Corporis Christi* (1628), a vernacular vita, therefore. See Mulder-Bakker 2005, 120–1 and

fully-fledged saint's life in Latin by an unknown scholastic: I surmise it may have been Godfrey of Fontaines before he left Liège for Paris.[8] He completed the *Vita* shortly after 1260, just in time for it to be used by Jacques Pantaléon, now Pope Urban IV, to institute the festival in 1264.

The pope wrote a moving bull to Eve, the now elderly anchoress in Liège: 'We know, o daughter, with what intense longing your soul has desired the institution of this solemn festival of the most holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Church [...]. Know then that we have established it as a universal feast and that we have celebrated it with all the prelates here in Orvieto' (Lambot 1969).

He attached to the bull an official copy of the Corpus Christi Office, and charged Eve that 'you respectfully receive this quire and that you freely and liberally provide a copy to all persons who request it'. An exceptional honour for the anchoress: but in fact an honour with a hidden caveat. For the quire contained a revised version of the Corpus Christi liturgy; it was not Juliana's office, but a text adapted by the leading scholastic of the day, Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas apparently convinced the pope that the office as it stood was not acceptable to him or to the Church. This adapted office is known as *Sacerdos in aeternum Christus*.[9]

2.2 Juliana's office *Animarum Cibus* and Aquinas' office *Sacerdos in aeternum*: a comparison

What, then, did Juliana write in her office, and what did Aquinas not approve of? What do we have today in the Roman Catholic Church, where we still celebrate this office as one of the popular spring festivals? Juliana's office opens with the

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Mulder-Bakker 2011, 27–32. I hypothesise that Eve's narrative in French must have been similar to the anecdotal Middle High German biography on Gertrude Rickeldey of Ortenberg, also written by a female biographer; see hereafter.

8 Geoffrey of Fontaines, himself from the Liège area, came to study in Paris around 1270 and became one of the prominent theologians. In circles of religious women's studies nowadays, he is best known as the scholastic who approved of Marguerite Porete's *Miroir des Simples Âmes*. In a miscellany manuscript, Paris, B.N. lat. 16297, partly written in Geoffrey's own hand in c. 1270, he collected, among other things, a tract containing the latest insights into Eucharistic theology and a summary of the reasons why the Feast of Corpus Christi should be introduced. He propagated a form of incarnation theology, with the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and even a rejection of the daily sacrifice by the priest (fols. 237^{a}-237^{b}), a position that Juliana would certainly have affirmed. See Glorieux 1931, and illuminating remarks by Delville in Laffineur-Crépin 1990.

9 Thomas' office is not preserved either. We cannot even be absolutely sure that he is the author of the text *Sacerdos in aeternum* that we know now, but since Zawilla 1985 there is no longer any serious doubt. A new edition is still underway; I use Thomas Aquinas XV, 1864, 233–8.

antiphon *Animarum cibus*: 'Food for souls. The wisdom of God places before us a meal of the flesh that He assumed; we are invited to taste his divinity by eating the food of his humanity.'[10] Juliana envisioned a grand and solemn festival, in which the faithful gathered together in church and proclaimed their communion with God and one another, thus forging and confirming the bond of peace and love. She assigned no place to the priest as a separate actor in the drama. He is the officiant included in 'we, the faithful'. For Juliana, the Eucharist is all about the joy of having Christ present in the community on earth. 'I am with you always, even unto the end of the world' (Mt. 28:20). Christ is right here, she sings, every day anew, *cotidie, cotidie*.

Thomas's message is quite different. In keeping with his view of the *sacerdotium*, he concentrates on the priest.[11] 'Sacerdos in aeternum Christus' ('Christ our high priest in eternity') are his opening words, and the priestly celebrant is Christ's representative. 'God chose to institute this Sacrifice [of the Mass] in such a way that he entrusted the *ministerium* of it only to priests. To them it is permitted to partake [of the bread and wine] and to then distribute it to the others.' The priest comes first, the community of the faithful follow, and individual believers disappear from sight. The messages, and the religious cultures in which they are embedded, could hardly be more different.

It is Aquinas' liturgy that is accepted in the Church and sung today. However, as Miri Rubin has shown, the *Sacramentsfeest* or *Fronleichnamsfest*, as it is called in the Netherlands and in Germany, stole out of the church building and into the streets of the city. As the feast of the urban community, it became the symbol of their communion (= common union with God and one another). It was mainly celebrated in processions and street theatre (Rubin 1991). In short, the festival of Corpus Christi became both an official feast of the Church, with Aquinas' liturgy, and a festival of the urban community organised by the city council or the guilds and celebrated in the streets, with, for instance, Corpus Christi Plays as in York (Beckwith 2001). As one of the Erfurt fellows noticed: 'the resulting ambivalence of the Corpus Christi festival seems still perceptible to me. On the one hand, it is

10 Lambot and Fransen 1946. See Mulder-Bakker 2005, 102–11, also for the following.

11 Thomas in hymn *Ad Matutinas*: 'Sic sacrificium istud instituit,/Cuius officium committi voluit/solis presbyteris, quibus sic congruit,/Ut sumant, et dent ceteris.' In correspondence, Father Jean-Pierre Torrel, the eminent Dominican scholar and Aquinas expert, in answer on my questions to him in 2004, commented: 'vous touchez un point qui m'a toujours un peu intrigué; il y a là une insistance sur le rôle du prêtre qui confine á la polemique; sur ce point, il se pourrait que vous ayez raison et qu'on trouve là un exemple de "dialogue" entre une mystique et un théologien – même si le théologien a cru devoir faire une mise au point et peut-être une rectification des idées de Julienne.'

a very "clerical" feast, the priest with the Eucharist leading the procession, often under a canopy, etc. On the other hand, in a lot of parishes it is a feast of enormous communal importance.'

2.3 Tentative conclusions

Two well-educated laywomen, schooled in theology, reflected on religion as lived in the urban community, thinking up new theologies and new forms to express the religious feelings of the common faithful. They focused on the personal and communal piety of believers, sidestepping the mediating role of the clergy. Juliana and Eve appropriated religious agency by inventing a new feast and disseminating it via lay believers, the *humiles*, mainly the network of women and men around Eve and Juliana. In Eve's anchorhold, they met with leading churchmen and scholastics.

These women had no ecclesiastical status. Juliana and Eve were just laywomen living solitary religious lives, the one in an anchorhold, the other in an informal reclusive home. They demonstrated what pursuits well-educated and energetic laywomen were able to encompass, at least when they chose a life style where they could keep their own power of decision, and receive the support of the faithful and of reform-minded clergy. Their manner of religious life was a good model for other ambitious laywomen, at least in Northern Europe.

At the same time, the women maintained intense intellectual contact with leading theologians of the day, for instance the Dominican magister and later papal legate Hugh of St. Cher. It is my impression that Juliana's visions and her activities as a 'prophetic theologian' influenced Hugh in his own work. I cannot go into detail here, but, as I demonstrated in my *Lives of the Anchoresses*, Hugh's support for Juliana is intertwined with his own intellectual development: his new ideas about the Eucharist, and his instigation of the discussion of the nature of prophetic knowledge in *De Prophetia*. Hugh was the scholar who put the question of prophetic knowledge on the scholastic agenda in Paris, and set the entire discussion on a new footing in the years 1235–1236 (Torrel 1997). These are the very years when he was involved in assessing Juliana's visionary and prophetic theology. It cannot be by chance that Juliana's hagiographer in the *Vita Julianae* has a long excursus on prophecy, stressing that Juliana's thought was a product of prophetic knowledge. Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179), the 'Sybil of the Rhine', may be regarded as the first medieval prophetess in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, but it is thanks to Juliana and Hugh that this prophetic 'ministry' was incorporated in medieval theology.

Eve's reputation as a formally enclosed anchoress offered her the freedom to ensure that the new festival was celebrated in Liège and instituted by the pope. In later years, the priests of Liège started the celebration of the Corpus Christi festival by walking in procession to Eve's anchorhold, thus making her part of the ecclesiastical tradition.

Eve certainly made the most of her position as an anchoress. In my *Lives of the Anchoresses* I set out a profile of the ideal anchoress (Mulder-Bakker 2005, 198–9). It indicates the range of activities pursued by historical anchoresses, and what the faithful hoped to receive from them. According to my profile, an anchoress has to be a free and independent spirit; strong-willed, but balanced and even-tempered. She has to love study and meditation, but at the same time possess gifts of communication. An anchoress walks the path of *sapientia*, acquiring *en route* a knowledge of the Bible and theology that equals or surpasses that of professionals. As a prophetess she is charged with proclaiming the word of God to the community. When necessary she criticises the local clergy. In her anchorhold, the anchoress lives the life of angels. Residing on a piece of holy ground, she brings salvation into the here and now, making it visible and tangible – graspable, in the full sense of the word – to the faithful. She imparts the grace of God to those to whom it is due. She is a living saint.

Eve was venerated as the inventor of the Corpus Christi festival in the later Middle Ages, and her relics are still on display in the church of Saint-Martin. She was a model of the anchoritic life style, which was, as I showed in my book, very popular among pious urban women. Juliana, the prophetess, was forgotten until recently.

If we confine our attention to the Church's own institutional documentation of the Corpus Christi liturgy – as most scholars do – we discover only the one-sided clerical perspective. Because Juliana's office is not preserved in full (as, neither, is that of Aquinas), we have to reconstruct the actual history, basing ourselves, on the one hand, on the anecdotes taken from Eve's *Fragmenta* by her Latin hagiographer, and, on the other, on the various parts of the original Corpus Christi Office that lie hidden in one manuscript or another. Most antiphons and hymns, for instance, are preserved in an *Antiphonale* in the Royal Library in The Hague. And many of the prayers are preserved in the personal prayer book of Jacques Pantaléon, Pope Urban IV.

The practice of studying only institutional documentation means that scholars miss all 'lay' material, and helps explain why we still know so little about religious individualisation among non-institutionalised women and the common faithful. What is worse, it helps explain why we still fail to recognise the reciprocal influences of leading churchmen and spiritual women in developing lay devotion and lived spirituality in the later Middle Ages. It also helps us realise that

searching for 'institutionalisation' is only one aspect of our task, which has to be complemented by the search for 'conventionalisation', that is to say the study of constant, formalised, and recognised conventions and practices that regulate and stabilise individual initiatives in societal forms, such as living in an anchorhold, the ministry of a prophetess, or reaching the age of discretion at forty (cf. Mulder-Bakker, Nip 2004).

3 Gertrude Rickeldey of Ortenberg and Heilke of Staufenberg

The noble Lady Gertrude (c. 1275–1335) was raised in the 1280s at Ortenberg castle, not far from Strasbourg. In her biography we read:

> When Gertrude was still a small little daughter, there was a knight's wife in this castle, a good lady, a *guote frowe*, who liked to speak of God and our Lord's suffering [...]. This lady spoke quite plainly and simply of our Lord's suffering, but the child loved to listen to her, and her heart always became inflamed when she heard the lady speak of our Lord's martyrdom [...]. This love consumed her throughout her whole life, in desolate poverty and in the humble model of life that he had shown her out of love.

Thus we read in *The Saintly Life*, a spiritual biography written by a female lay author shortly after Gertrude's death in 1335 (Mulder-Bakker (ed.) 2017). We also read:

> Gertrude was taught the psalter at the age of nine. After she had learned the psalter so that she could pray it well, she daily prayed the seven hours [...]. She prayed so much every day that she completed a psalter every week, and in addition said many other prayers to our Lady and other saints.

As an adult, she used to pray the daily hours, and this she did at home, not in the church. These prayers framed the day, and the other members of the household shared in its sanctification. The house became a hallowed place, and the household a kind of 'holy' family.

The biographer regularly speaks of Gertrude's eucharistic piety. During her marriage with a rich knight, she 'lived in awe and great love of the Lord' and went to the parish church to hear mass. 'She would be very devout [...] especially during the silent canon of the mass where our Lord was elevated. For she was convinced that our dear Lord was present then; this was without a doubt certain in her faith': the biographer takes care to stress this explicitly; apparently it could not be taken for granted; and we are glad to note that Gertrude did not follow

Aquinas.[12] Later, the biographer notes: 'She often stood at mass imagining how, through our Lord's presence, all graces and sweetness overflow her. She was well aware that she was granted this through grace and from God [...]. Moreover, our Lord's suffering was quite present to her.' For Gertrude, the celebration of the Eucharist was all about envisioning Christ's presence, experiencing the overflow of his sweetness at the communion, just as it had been for Juliana. It strengthened her in her personal faith and her self-reliance.

3.1 An ascetic domestic household: a House of Souls

After her husband died, probably in 1301, Gertrude seized the opportunity to take her life into her own hands, and moved to the city of Offenburg where she settled as an independent woman of faith. She devoted herself to an ascetic way of life in her own house. She was soon joined by the young Heilke of Staufenberg, she, too, a noble lady and a relative of hers, who saw the chance to escape from marriage by joining Gertrude.

Heilke must have had a more thorough education. She could read and write; she could check data in her book; which means, I gather, that she had a Latin breviary. Together the women ran an aristocratic household, and Heilke guided Gertrude as Eve had Juliana: helping her to master bewildering mystic experiences, putting them into words and implementing them in action. In Offenburg, 'everyone took her [Gertrude] as a good model, for her whole life was nothing but a perfect imitation of the model and life of our Lord Jesus Christ'. After sixteen years, in about 1317, when Gertrude was about forty years old, she experienced a religious change of life. At this time she rented out her landed estates in Offenburg and moved to Strasbourg. The two women bought a *Hofstatt* together in the patrician environs, ran an urban domestic household, lived as women of faith, and participated fully in the social, religious, and even political life in the city (Mulder-Bakker 2015).

The Franciscans in Offenburg and Strasbourg 'liked Gertrude's way of life so much that many friars came to her, speaking of our Lord. She felt good in their company, for she liked to hear them speak of our Lord'. These visitors included a remarkable number of *Lesemeister*, learned Friars who taught in Strasbourg and elsewhere:

12 Juliana's Corpus Christi Feast was disseminated by Jacques Pantaléon after he too had been urged to leave Liège. He became bishop of Verdun and travelled to the east. The feast was first celebrated in Cologne in 1264. See Martinet 1998.

> She would also ask learned people when our Lord gave her some special understanding that she could not well assess herself. She was not ashamed at what she could not well understand. It seemed to her that if she just let these things remain unexplained, it would have been terrible toward our Lord.

Her own Psalter readings, her conversations with Heilke and the friars, caused Gertrude to have visionary experiences that completely overwhelmed her. She then needed Heilke to understand what overcame her and to capture it in words. Heilke incorporated into her responses the knowledge and insights she had acquired elsewhere. She also regularly 're-preached' at home the sermons they had heard. Evidently, the women held services at home in which Heilke fulfilled the role of c*lerica*.

The Saintly Life creates the impression that there was a lively community of discourse in and around the house, one in which occupants, visitors, and learned Franciscans met informally to discuss their faith. Referring to such group-building phenomena, Robert I. Moore speaks of 'communities' in which participants develop 'a sense of belonging together' and a 'group identity' by means of shared learning and discussion (Moore 1996, 37). This holds as true for the household of Gertrude and Heilke as it did for Eve's anchorhold. Unlike Eve, however, the two ladies in Strasbourg did not choose full-time religious life in a *reclusorium*, but stayed in their home. They had the means to set up an ascetic domestic household, in what I have termed a *House of Souls*.

3.2 Striving for Christian perfection

Over the years, Gertrude became more diligent in her struggle for complete detachment, and *wore Armut*, espoused personal poverty. According to the biographer, twelve years prior to her death, hence in 1323, she was commanded by God not only to live a poor and ascetic existence but completely to renounce all possessions. She had to give away her money, her house, and the clothes that she wore. She was instructed to give up her status and noble identity. The final transition to complete detachment was to surrender her family property. Here she encountered principled objections from her confessor, but was supported by her friend Heilke. How is this to be understood?

It was during this very period 1322/23 that the controversy about the Franciscan ideal of poverty between Pope John XXII and the Spiritual Franciscans, including William of Ockham and Magister Henry of Talheim, reached its peak. A war of pamphlets was waged, one to which Henry of Talheim contributed, and papal bulls were issued (Gál (ed.) 1996, 67–82; Gonzales 2006). Magister Henry,

who had studied in Paris, was Provincial of the Franciscans for upper Alemannia, and set up the General Chapter of his order in Strasbourg in 1325. As we read in *The Saintly Life*, he was intimate friends with Gertrude, *der ir denn heimlich war*. Inspired by the spiritual Franciscans, Gertrude took completely to heart what was at issue in the fundamental debate on poverty during these years. Just as the Franciscans had to exist without property or security, Gertrude would similarly live in *woren Armut*. By breaking all connections with family, church, and city, she was thrown upon her own conscience, trusting her own will and her own wisdom. In consequence – and this is vital for her significance –, she was no longer an interested party to the many conflicts in the city. She stood above the warring factions, and could take action against *unglimph*, outrage and injustice.

> When Gertrude heard talk about the great lords who treated the poor with such great violence and haughtiness or about others who undertook and accomplished such terrible things and thus were greatly despised by the people and were lamentably judged for it, she was seized with great compassion.

Clearly here was one of the common faithful, in this case a woman, standing up for her personal autonomy and the right to make her own moral decisions, such as to be a pauper, and to venture to enter the realm of public morality.

3.3 Further contacts with learned mendicants

In the last ten to fifteen years of their lives, Gertrude and Heilke exhibited spiritual insights that they shared with Magister Eckhart. In describing Gertrude's spirituality in *The Saintly Life*, the lay author uses words and anecdotes of her own, but we recognise commonality with Eckhart's thinking. When Magister Eckhart, the Dominican who had also studied and taught in Paris and served as provincial of his order in Germany, returned from Paris to South Germany in 1313, and worked in such places as Strasbourg, he found himself surrounded by dozens of *virtuosae* (women and men), striving for Christian perfection in the midst of their fellow citizens (Mulder-Bakker 2014). His writings and vernacular sermons suggest that he then saw that his primary task was to keep these women within the bounds of orthodox Christianity. He felt sympathy with their ideals but saw the dangers as well; he perceived their intellectual power but also noted their lack of both scholastic training and sense of moderation. He certainly felt inspired by their innerworldly perfection. He understood that he should offer them inspiring secular models of Christian perfection, and create a path for women's spiritual and moral solidarity within a domestic setting.

Eckhart summarised his new philosophical and theological thinking in a number of vernacular works, most notably in his *Buch der göttlichen Tröstung*. His work is well-known in modern scholarship, and much studied. But women too started to record their insights. Their work is hardly studied at all; it has often not as yet surfaced, and so is not investigated. But here now is *The Saintly Life*. I show in my book that the laywoman from Strasbourg, in writing this spiritual biography in her native tongue, tried, in an innovative way, in graphic exempla and brief narratives, to catch the spiritual ideas underlying the lives of Gertrude and Heilke. In her proven ability to capture in images the ideal of inner-worldly perfection, she also reveals that those ideas frequently coincide with the thinking of Magister Eckhart.

4 Conclusions

Gertrude received a basic education at home. As a noble young lady, she was taught mainly the Psalter by a *guote frowe*. Other girls were taught by their mother or grandmother. Heilke must have received further schooling in a similar way to Juliana and Eve a century earlier. Because women, both laywomen and *moniales*, were barred from schools and academic training, they depended on private education. As a consequence, they never penetrated the academic world of learning or entered (male) institutions.

Together, Gertrude and Heilke set up an ascetic domestic household, in and around which a lively community of discourse arose, and within which the two women and their visitors, including learned Franciscans, discussed their faith. Heilke regularly 're-preached' sermons she had heard. The women built a religious culture in which learned *Lesemeister* and lay religious women inspired each other and developed a shared inner-worldly spirituality. As we saw above, Eve the anchoress at Saint-Martin and Juliana had also gathered a network of women and men around them. At Eve's anchorhold they met with leading churchmen and scholastics.

Gertrude and Heilke's home was a House of Souls. In the fifteenth century, reformist Dominican Johannes Nider gave a description of the model of lay religious life in a domestic setting, applying to it the term *domus animarum* (House of Souls; see Van Engen 1999). We learn from this that the owners of such a House of Souls and their company could lead a religious life without requiring any special religious status. Due to their ownership of property, they were citizens within the community of citizens. It is significant that Nider locates their houses in the proximity of the centres of learning of the mendicants. The women evidently

had studious dispositions, and valued their contact with learned brothers. Nider defines the women as lay religious. He does not label them semi-religious and place them halfway between the laity and the monastic state, as modern scholarship often does.

From her House of Souls, Gertrude ventured to enter the public ethical discourse in Strasbourg. Inspired by the Franciscans, Gertrude and Heilke stimulated new systems of ethics and morality that benefited the entire community. Moreover, *The Saintly Life* is an ideal embodiment of a religious culture in which learned *Lesemeister* and lay religious women inspired each other and developed a shared inner-worldly spirituality.

In sum, two types of autonomous religious life are presented in this chapter, types that were to gain more widespread recognition in the later Middle Ages. The first is that of the anchorhold, and the second that of the House of Souls; in both of these, self-confident and ambitious women could strive for religious perfection in secular forms, and in an urban environment. Moreover, in *reclusoria* as well as in Houses of Souls women could give effect to the human right to make their own decisions, pursue their own personal aspirations, and – to a certain degree – appropriate religious agency in the urban community.

Their communities of discourse yielded a lived faith that was founded on incarnation theology, a eucharistic piety that had its source in a direct relationship between the believer and God, and a shared endeavour by learned mendicants and lay religious women to provide guidance to the common faithful.

The two types were never institutionalised in the Church, and gave rise to no official, institutional locations where women could give expression to their personal aspirations.[13] The women grew into exemplary models in the field of conventions and traditions, there to inspire women and men over the generations. The evidence given here testifies to women's religious individuality, their independent intellectual culture, and their collaboration with learned mendicants to develop new communal festivals and a new, inner-worldly spirituality. In cases where women wished to penetrate the institutional world of the Church, they needed short-cuts, and depended on their personal contacts with leading churchmen, for instance to give effect to their insights, as in the celebration of the Corpus Christi festival.

As I argued above, the practice of studying only institutional documentation means that scholars miss all this 'lay' material. The quest for religious individu-

13 Canon Law knows of hermits and recluses only within a monastic (Benedictine) setting, where monastics could aspire to leave the community and fight the devil on their own as a kind of super-monk or super-nun in a hermitage or anchorhold. The Church also recognised male eremitical orders such as the Carthusians and the Hermits of Saint Augustine.

alisation in the context of 'institutionalisation' yields only failed institutionalisations; the approach has to be complemented by a search for 'conventionalisation', that is to say constant formalised and recognised conventions, which also regulate and stabilise individual initiatives in societal forms.

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