Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner

WORLDLY SAINTS

Social Interaction of Dominican Penitent Women in Italy, 1200–1500

B I B L I O T H E C A H I S T O R I C A 3 5

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Social Interaction of Dominican Penitent Women
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Acknowledgements

Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint-
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

T.S. Eliot: *The Dry Salvages*

The saints as an engaging subject of study have brought me many enriching contacts with scholars from near and far. Many of these contacts have lead into friendship, one even to marriage.

I am thankful to my Professors Kalervo Hovi and Reino Kero at the Department of General History (University of Turku) for their broad-minded attitude about the historical study of saints. They have shown a continuous trust and interest in my work, even when my research has taken me to Helsinki and abroad. Doctor Gary Dickson from the University of Edinburgh was the first one to encourage me to study the medieval cult of saints. Even after my year of undergraduate studies in Edinburgh (1990–1991) he has still remained an inspiring teacher and mentor.

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reading of some early versions of this study. I wish also to thank Shirley Gee, who made the visit to Boston practically possible.

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This book has been shaped by discussions with scholars from various other academic institutions and universities as well. I would wish to express my gratitude to Doctor Fernanda Sorelli (University of Padua) who has generously shared her vast knowledge on Thomas of Siena, Maria of Venice, and other medieval Dominicans. In addition, I wish to thank Sofia Boesch Gajano, Willemien Otten, Kate Jansen, Anne Schuchman, Päivi Salmesvuori, Tuomas M.S. Lehtonen, Päivi Mehtonen, Meri Heinonen and Sari Katajala-Peltomaa, whose engaging conversations about various medieval topics I have been able to profit from.

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Finally, I wish to thank my beloved ones. My husband, Christopher, has generously shared his knowledge on medieval topics, solved my computer related problems, and taken care of our daily needs during the final months of writing. His patient reading of my text and countless suggestions for corrections in my written English have not only improved the style of this text, but profited me also more generally. My intellectual debt to him is deep, but even greater is my gratitude for his love. It is his love and that of our precious baby, Oliver, that renders my activities meaningful.

This book is dedicated to my parents, Ulla and Jorma. They taught me the pleasures of the written word. Without their unconditional intellectual, emotional, and practical support this work would never even have begun.

Helsinki, The New Year's Day 1999

Maiju Lehmijoki-Gardner

I Introduction

> Therefore [Maria of Venice] worked with all her might for the well-being of her neighbor by doing corporal and spiritual good deeds [...] She performed all the tasks that she reasonably could: she not only gave alms, but she also personally visited ailing persons and assisted them. She even buried them. She did numerous good deeds, and she would have done even more had I not prohibited her because of her gender, youth, and beauty.
>
> Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria da Venezia*.[1]

Sometimes a few intriguing sentences in a historical source can puzzle a historian so persistently that in order to unwrap fully their implications she is led to conduct many years of research. One source leads to dozens of others, and a historian learns that her puzzle has more pieces than she originally expected (or perhaps hoped) to find. In the course of a number of years she may find answers to her initial question. Yet, she is also likely to realize that her discoveries created new questions, possibly leaving her even more intrigued than before.

The above-cited quotation from the early fifteenth century *vita* of Maria of Venice, a saintly lay Dominican, is the initial reason why this book, *Worldly Saints*, came into being. While I read Thomas of Siena's text I was left wondering about several expressions and distinctions that, I felt, could not have been accidental. It must have been of importance that Thomas explicitly separated corporal and spiritual acts of charity (*opere de la misericordia corporali o spirituali*) and that he perceived alms (*sovençione*) and personal visits to the indigent (*personale visitaçione*) as two separate categories within charity. These distinctions led me to some of those questions that play a prominent role in my study: What *types* of benevolent deeds did medieval women practice? Were Maria's and other penitent women's acts considerably different from those of, say, nuns and hermits? Could it perhaps be that *personal* participation, rather than mere almsgiving, gave these penitents' good will its own particular flavor?

Having read the paragraph's opening sentences it seemed to me that Thomas was fully supporting Maria's personal deeds of charity. Nonetheless, the subsequent lines made me wonder whether that was the correct interpretation. What exactly did Thomas mean with the statement that Maria "performed all

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1 "Unde [Maria of Venice] ad ogni fatiga per la salute del prossimo e corporalmente o spiritualmente, col meço dell'opere de la misericordia corporali o spirituali [...] mandando ad essecuçione prontamente tutto quello che buonamente poteva, non solamente per sovençione, ma eçiamdio con personale visitaçione degl'infermi et aministraçione, per fino ala sepoltura, faendo molte cose di pietà: e vie più n'avarebbe facte, se io nolle l'avesse vetate et interdecte, el quale interdire io le faceva avendo rispecto non solamente sesso, ma ancora a la sua giovanile etade e corporale speçiositade." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria 1984, 179.*

the tasks that she reasonably could"? Was he saying that Maria's altruism was conditioned by practical reasoning, that she was perhaps not totally negating herself as one might have expected from a saint? Be that as it may, Thomas himself evidently was not unconditionally delighted about Maria's deeds of service, since he wrote that he had to keep Maria from certain deeds because of her gender, beauty, and youth. Thomas's reservations lead me to phrase further questions: Was the churchmen's approval of women's charity conditional? If so, where were the boundaries of approved action drawn? What kind of criticism could good deeds possibly attract?

I originally intended to limit myself to those lay saints who were venerated by the Dominican hagiographers Raymond of Capua (d. 1399) and Thomas of Siena (d. 1434), namely Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, Catherine of Siena, and Maria of Venice. Yet, I soon realized that this group of saintly women was too limited. Since the medieval Dominican penitents as a collective group had received barely any attention at all, I have found it fruitful, even necessary, to extend my studies to include a list of women who range from Benvenuta Boiani (d. 1292) to Osanna Kosic of Cattaro (d. 1565). This decision to study a wider group of penitent saints has also had its impact on my methodology. My original plan to focus only on a few texts and dissect their narrative strategies with methods borrowed mainly from literary studies was no longer feasible when the number of saints grew from four to more than nineteen, and the *vitae* from the original six to more than thirty. Even my initial research topic – penitent women's charity – expanded to cover women's active life altogether. While charity is an important component in the *vita activa* it was by no means the only one, and thus it has to be studied in the context of other forms of active deeds, such as manual labor and teaching. Finally, this active piety is connected to another fundamental issue, namely to the question of women's presence in the secular world. One cannot possibly discuss the reactions to their active deeds without also studying how their physical presence amidst secular people, men and women alike, was received.

Focal Questions and the State of Research

Worldly Saints focuses on the hagiographic descriptions of the Italian Dominican penitent (lat. *poenitere*, to do penance) women's active lives and their presence in the world.[2]

The first chapter, *"Attending the Celestial Spouse in Poverty and Humility." The Panorama of Lay Piety,* sets the historical background as well as introduces the Dominican penitent saints and primary sources pertaining to them. Though my study focuses on the Dominican laity, it is vital to see how they were connected with other contemporary lay movements. Some lay people participated in regular religious life by working as lay converts (*conversi* / *conversae*) in monasteries

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2 On the various appellations for lay-religious, see p. 34.

and other religious institutions. Nevertheless, since the twelfth century it became increasingly common for lay people to take part in religious life without leaving the secular world. Such movements as the Lombardian *Humiliati* and the transalpine Beguines, which combined working life in the world with rigorous asceticism and evangelical poverty, influenced deeply the mendicant penitents' way of life. The Franciscan and the Dominican penitents alike thus had a common background with earlier lay movements. In short, many of those ideals that we encounter in the Dominican penitent piety were visible not only in the Franciscan penitent organizations but also in other lay movements. Of course, each lay association also produced ideals and strategies that were peculiar to it alone. It is the function of this first chapter to map the Dominican penitents' place amidst many contemporary lay movements, as well as to point out those historical developments that shaped the Dominicans' understanding of women's secular piety in particular.

In the chapter's second part I focus on the actual protagonists of my study: the Italian Dominican penitent saints of the Middle Ages. Many of those women who were considered as saintly by their contemporaries must have vanished from the written record or, alternatively, we know them only by names. Thus, I have focused on those nineteen women about whom we have some closer narrative evidence, mainly hagiographies. In chronological order they are Benvenuta Boiani (1255–1292), Giovanna of Orvieto (1264–1306), Jacopina of Pisa (c.1279–c. 1370), Margherita of Città di Castello (1287–1320), Sybillina Biscossi (1287–1367), Villana Botti (1332–1360), Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), Maria Mancini (1350–c.1431),[3] Maria of Venice (c.1379–1399), Margherita of Savoy (1380/1390–1464),[4] Margherita Fontana (1440–1513), Magdalena Panatieri (1443/1453–1503), Osanna of Mantua (1449–1505), Stefana Quinzani (1457–1530), Lucia Bartolini Rucellai (1465–1520), Colomba of Rieti (1467–1501), Lucia Brocadelli (1476–1544), Catherine of Racconigi (1486–1547), and Osanna of Cattaro (1493–1565). I present a brief biography of each of these saints as well as provide a bibliography of primary and secondary sources regarding them. A good number of Dominican penitent saints were unmarried women who came from well-to-do social classes. Nonetheless, the group of saintly penitents comprised also married women and widows, and several offspring of poor families. Therefore, the *vitae* of Dominican penitents testify to the piety of women from all walks of life. I am calling all these nineteen women as saints even if actually only one of them, namely Catherine of Siena, was officially canonized. Thus, the appellation 'saint' is in this study used as an expression that testifies about the existence of a cult among the Dominicans and local people rather than about actual papal canonization. In the Middle Ages many local cults remained without final papal sanction, but it did not hinder people from venerating their local *beati* and *beatae* as if these would have actually been declared saints.[5]

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3 Although Maria Mancini died as a nun, she lived for some years as a penitent, see p. 47.
4 Margherita of Savoy died as a nun, but for almost twenty years she lived as a penitent, see p. 47.
5 On the relation between local and papally sanctioned cults, see VAUCHEZ 1981.

In the next chapter entitled *"In Church, at Home, or Wherever She Went." The Secular World as a Forum for Religious Life* , I examine the penitent women's presence in the secular world by asking how these women were situated in this world and how their secular existence was presented as a religiously satisfying way of life. The lay women did not withdraw from the world to a specifically religious space, namely a monastery. Instead they created spiritual fulfillment within their ordinary lives by following religious practices and pious customs. This religious life that was not spatially defined was in fact at the heart of lay piety. I start off by studying the Dominican penitent women's actual housing arrangements in order to understand better their lives' concrete *realities,* which in no small part shaped the *ideals* concerning their daily religious life. The medieval penitent saints lived mainly in private homes. Within this category I have found principally four alternatives: the parental home, a benefactor's house, a marital home, and a widow's own dwelling place. In the late fifteenth century these private housing arrangements were increasingly complemented by another alternative, communal housing with other penitents. To communal housing and these four types of private accomodation can be added a sixth option, which was, however, rarely used by the Dominican penitents: solitary living in an anchorage. Each housing arrangement had its own rewards and challenges, but the basic question in each of them was how penitents were able to remain in the secular world and still achieve religious perfection.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the techniques of saintly living in the world. What were the strategies that the penitents' employed in order to transform their secular existence into a religiously satisfying way of life? Did sanctity in the world mean denial of one's secular status or could the world be seen as a particularly rewarding field of activity for a saintly woman? This study shows that penitents employed a myriad of strategies for saintly living in the world: in their external engagements they created a pious state of mind by wearing their religious costume as well as by following devotional practices and secular customs that were adapted to suit their varying daily needs.

The following chapter *"One Should not Abandon Other People." The Virtues of the Active Life* addresses the hagiographic portrayals of penitent women's social deeds. Women's active religious life (*vita activa*) was not a monolithic concept, but instead it was constituted of various actions that were also evaluated differently by the hagiographers. Accordingly, I have analyzed each component of women's active life separately, but I have also tied them together by studying the internal value hierarchy that separated these actions. The Dominican penitent women performed mainly three types of active deeds: manual labor (mainly house chores), charity, and teaching. All of these were seen as spiritually rewarding and socially beneficial, but each of them was evaluated differently by the hagiographers. In the course of this chapter, I shall analyze which deeds constituted manual labor, which charity, and which teaching, and how their respective values were evaluated. To understand the ways in which the hagiographers judged their protagonists' various social deeds I shall also examine penitent piety's relation to earlier religious traditions. How did the lay-religious

borrow from pre-existing tradition, and in which respect did they transform the old teachings? I am also interested in the function of the active life in the hagiographies. Therefore, I ask whether saintly women's active life was regarded as a way to change the world or as means for these women's penitential self-improvement.

Social deeds played an integral part in penitent sanctity. In fact, the Dominican hagiographers underscored, as was seen in Maria of Venice's *vita* that opened the preface, the actual, physical deeds of service, which essentially complemented those forms of neighborly love that did not request personal participation, such as almsgiving and prayer. Nonetheless, the hagiographers were not unconditionally supportive of women's worldly engagements. They emphasized, for example, the spontaneous and uninstitutional nature of their protagonists' good deeds.Yet they favored such social actions that took place in relatively private, often domestic, settings. Therefore, the penitent women should not be seen as antecessors of modern social workers and professional nurses. The Dominican hagiographers took, in some respects, a novel approach to women's *vita activa*, but, nonetheless, they depended on old church traditions and role models that underscored the notion that the active life's fruits were ultimately spiritual rather than social.

While the previous two chapters will have discussed Dominican lay piety from the viewpoint of its defenders, the subsequent chapter, *"Because the Internal and Mental Functions Are the Most Noble." Ambivalence and the Changing Emphasis Concerning Women's Public and Social Piety*, focuses on the criticism that penitent women's religious life in the world attracted. Penitent women's worldly piety was attacked by some of their family members and neighbors, even by some churchmen, for reasons that ranged from mere annoyance over penitents' daily habits to skepticism about the authenticity of their experiences and denial of social piety's value altogether. A study of these negative reactions illuminates inherent paradoxes in lay women's piety. While these women's beneficiary deeds and saintliness in the world earned them support, it was precisely these aspects of publicly manifested piety that attracted the most intense criticism as well. Women's prayerful, inner spirituality was clearly easier to accept than their active and socially displayed piety. This can even be seen, I suggest, in the cults of active saints themselves. When we study, for example, the medieval veneration of Catherine of Siena it is evident that contemplative and mystical aspects of her piety were more readily accepted than her active life. In this chapter I will thus examine the reasons for this controversy over the women's active lives.

The clearest sign of medieval penitent piety's tensions can be seen in the transformation that this movement underwent in the later part of the fifteenth century. While the earlier penitent saints lived in their private homes and found their religious perfection in the world, at the turn of the sixteenth century the saintly penitents withdrew to religious communities in which their contacts with secular people were limited. Even if these later penitents, such as Stefana Quinzani, Colomba of Rieti, and Lucia Brocadelli, still had numerous contacts

with the secular world where they had actually spent a good part of their lives, it was clear that the paradigm of penitent life was changing toward more monastic understanding of the religious life. In fact, by the mid-sixteenth century, under the influence of the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the reorganization of women's religious life meant that even penitent communities were encloistered, just as if their inhabitants would have been nuns. I finish my study by examining the reason for these new developments. In the light of these changes toward more contemplative lay life, we can also better see the characteristics of earlier secular penitent sanctity and appreciate the possibilities that the penitent life had opened to medieval women.

The timeframe of this study ranges between the late thirteenth century and the first decades of the sixteenth century. I begin when the first Italian Dominican penitent saints, Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Jacopina of Pisa, Margherita of Città di Castello, and Sybillina Biscossi lived. It was also at this time, in 1285, that the *Rule* for the Dominican penitent way of life was drafted. The decision to continue my study up to the first decades of the sixteenth century is based on the notion that the medieval forms of pious lay life continued to flourish up to this period. Historians have employed numerous ways of classifying the change from medieval to early modern period. While art historians tend to see that already the fourteenth century Italian Renaissance opened a new era, many historians regard such later events as the fall of Constantinople to the Turks (1453), Gutenberg's printed Bible (1455), the reconquest of Spain from the Moors (1492), or the discovery of America by Columbus (1492) as more telling signs of the new epoch. In the history of the Catholic Church, however, it has been seen by many that only the increasing pressure by the Protestant reformers in the 1520s and 1530s and the subsequent Council of Trent really opened a new period. My study has further encouraged me to consider the first decades of the sixteenth century as still medieval, because until this period many medieval forms of penitent life continued to exist.

While it is important to notice that the piety of such later penitents as Colomba of Rieti, Stefana Quinzani, and Lucia Brocadelli, each of who found semi-monastic communities, differed considerably from such earlier home-dwelling penitents as Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, and Maria of Venice, all the penitents I shall discuss still lived in a world where religious women's public participation was tolerated, even encouraged. Female saints, like the Dominican nun Catherine de'Ricci (1522–1590), who were born in the sixteenth century, grew up instead in a society were women's public presence was condemned, their open monasteries were encloistered, and their religious participation was limited mainly to prayer and other forms of inner spiritual life.

It has not been my intention to study all issues related to Dominican penitent piety during the medieval period. I have instead limited myself to the two previously discussed, interrelated themes, namely these women's secular presence and their active deeds. These themes play an important role in our understanding of penitent ways of life at large, yet they were by no means the only components in these women's religious lives. In penitent women's lives

asceticism, visions, and other mystical experiences, as well as prayer and contemplation, were fundamentally important as well. In fact, these phenomena were often the ultimate reasons why penitent women were seen as saintly. Therefore, my focus on the representations of social piety is not intended as a statement that other factors in penitent women's lives would have been irrelevant. On the contrary, I am aware of the importance of these phenomena and direct the readers' attention to the publications by, for example, Caroline Bynum, Peter Dronke, Bernard McGinn, Barbara Newman, Elizabeth Petroff, and Massimo Petrocchi whose works on medieval spirituality contain valuable insights to the inner lives of not only nuns, but penitent women as well.[6] My own training in history and philosophy has directed my interest toward religious experience's social and theoretical aspects, whereas I have felt less equipped to analyze expressions of women's spirituality, such as their mystical language and their visionary messages. Moreover, I believe that medieval religious women's active lives deserve to be studied more than is presently done. I acknowledge my debt to several fine publications on women's active piety, for example such anthologies as *Medieval Religious Women*, *Women & Power in the Middle Ages*, and *Women Preachers and Prophets* have shaped my approach to active women's lives.[7] Nonetheless, many questions concerning women's active religious lives have still remained undiscussed, or at least understudied. For example, there are still only a few attempts to systematize women's various active deeds, and, to analyze philosophical and theological foundations of women's active life.[8] I hope that my study may contribute to the analytical classification of women's *vita activa* in general and to that of Dominican penitent women in particular. Finally, I have focused on questions of women's public presence and social deeds because I believe that they are particularly important for our understanding of penitent women's piety since it was precisely this direct participation in the secular world that set these lay women apart from nuns and other religious women who withdrew from the world.

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6 Caroline Bynum has written on the bodily aspects of women's mysticism, particularly on their food asceticism, see BYNUM 1988 and 1990. Peter Dronke has studied the writings of medieval female mystics, see DRONKE 1984. Female mystics play an important role in Bernard McGinn's multi-volume series on Christian mysticism as well, see McGINN 1991 and 1994. Similarly Massimo Petrocchi has several entries on female spirituality in his three-volume history of Italian spirituality, see PETROCCHI 1978. Barbara Newman has written on literary topoi in the texts by and about medieval women, see NEWMAN 1995. Elizabeth Petroff has written on women's visionary literature, often from the viewpoint of Italian religious women, see PETROFF 1979 and 1994. She has also edited an anthology, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* 1986. Frances Beer has studied women's mystical experience, see BEER 1992. For other important article collections on medieval women's mysticism, see *Religiöse Frauenbewegung und mystische Frömmigkeit im Mittelalter* 1988 and *Scrittici mistiche italiane* 1988.

7 There are several articles on medieval religious women's actives roles in *Medieval Religious Women (*Vol. 1 *Distant Echoes*; Vol.2 *Peace Weavers*) 1984, 1987. On women's social and political influence, see *Women and Power in the Middle Ages* 1988. On women as teachers and preachers, see *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity* 1998.

8 Janet Tibbets Schulenburg has thematized early medieval women's public and private roles, see SCHULENBURG 1988. Peter Dinzelbacher has analyzed various components in Hildegard of Bingen's, Birgitta of Sweden's, and Catherine of Siena's political influences, see DINZELBACHER 1988. Gabriella Zarri has studied late medieval penitent women's various types of social and spiritual roles, see ZARRI 1990. Richard Kieckhefer has outlined the relation between contemplative, ascetic, and active sanctity, see KIECKHEFER 1990, 12–23.

The history of the Dominican penitent order has attracted surprisingly little attention. In fact, a comprehensive history of this movement is yet to be written. We have a few books that lead us to this medieval penitent order, but even all of them combined do not provide a satisfying overview to Dominican penitents in the Middle Ages.

Surprisingly enough the most industrious historian of the Dominican penitent order lived already at the turn of the fifteenth century. He was Thomas of Siena, the above-mentioned author of Maria of Venice's *vita*. Between 1402 and 1407 Thomas wrote a history of the Dominican penitent order, the so-called *Tractatus*.[9] Though this book in some aspects distorted the Order's history, for example by presenting the later medieval penitents as direct offspring from the antiheretical lay associations that had been formed by Dominic himself, it still remains a valuable exposition.[10] Thomas's account, which was actually inspired by Raymond of Capua's short treatise on penitent history in the *Legenda maior* of Catherine of Siena, has indeed influenced many later accounts.[11]

By far the best modern exposition of Dominican penitents is that by Gilles Gerard Meersseman who has studied the history of the Franciscan and the Dominican penitents in his *Dossier de l'ordre de la pénitence*.[12] Though this laudable book and its edited sources function as an indispensable guide to penitent history, it has little to say about the entire Middle Ages simply because the study is limited to the thirteenth century. Meersseman did return to the later history of Dominican laity in his study of medieval confraternities, *Ordo fraternitatis*, but at that point he was interested in the Dominican confraternities rather than the actual Third Order.[13] One looks in vain to find an equivalent of Meersseman's *Dossier* to the history of Dominican penitents in the later Middle Ages. In the writing concerning the Dominican Order's general history, the lay members have received scant attention. In William Hinnebusch's two-volume *History of the Dominican Order*, for example, the history of the penitent order number less than ten pages.[14] Fortunately there are a few articles that fill in some gaps. Fernanda Sorelli's studies on Venetian penitent order, particularly her introduction to *La santità imitabile*[15] and her *Per la storia religiosa di Venezia*,[16] and Gabriella Zarri's writings on late medieval saints, especially her *Le sante vive*,[17] shed light on the Italian Dominican penitent order more generally as well.[18]

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9 See Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938.

10 On the historical value of Thomas of Siena's claim that the Dominican Penitent Order would have stemmed from antiheretical lay fraternities of St. Dominic's time, see p. 35 and note 40.

11 For Raymond's short history of the Dominican penitent order, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 880–881. Pius-Thomas Masetti's concise nineteenth century historical commentary on the Dominican nuns and penitents, for example, was inspired by Raymond's and Thomas's versions, see MASETTI 1864. See also FANFANI 1924, 217–228.

12 MEERSSEMAN 1982.

13 Idem. 1977.

14 HINNEBUSCH 1965, 400–404.

15 SORELLI 1984a.

16 SORELLI 1984b.

17 ZARRI 1990.

18 The lack of studies on the Dominican penitent order is further underscored by the fact that

Only quite recently, scholars seem to have noticed the void in research concerning the Dominican penitents.[19] Though this realization has not yet produced studies and anthologies of the movement as a whole, there have appeared several valuable publications on individual penitent saints as well as re-editions of their *vitae*. Andrea Tilatti has researched Benvenuta Boiani.[20] Maria Lungarotti has produced critical study on both of Margherita of Città di Castello's legends.[21] Fernanda Sorelli has studied Maria of Venice whose Italian legend she has also edited.[22] Emore Paoli and Luigi Ricci have done a critical edition of Giovanna of Orvieto's *vita*[23] and Adriana Valerio has published on the semi-official Dominican penitent, Domenica of Paradiso.[24] There has also been a conference on Colomba of Rieti, which has produced a collection of articles: *Una santa, una città*.[25] Moreover, E. Ann Matter, Armando Maggi, and I are presently editing the *Visions* of Lucia Brocadelli of Narni. All these recent publications, as well as some further articles on individual penitents, have contributed greatly to our understanding of Dominican penitents, which previously was dominated by one single figure, namely Catherine of Siena.[26]

Given the recent contributions to the study of Dominican penitents, one may still wonder why this order's numerous penitent saints as a *communio sanctorum* have not attracted more attention. While I remain without an ultimate answer, I would like to suggest a few possible reasons. One reason may be found from the general character of the Order of Preachers. This order is emphatically clerical and thus also the historians have prioritized the experiences of the friars over those of the nuns and lay members.[27] On the contrary, the Franciscan order, for example, has historically been less priestly and thus the lay order has perhaps

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the Franciscan penitents have recently enjoyed considerable popularity. The Historical Institute of the Capuchins (*Instituto Storico dei Cappuccini*) has published numerous volumes on historical questions concerning the Franciscan penitents, see, for example, *Il Movimento Francescano della Penitenza nella società medioevale,* edited by Mariano D'Alatri. Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1980) and *I frati penitenti di San Francesco nella Società del due e trecento,* edited by Mariano d'Alatri. Istituto Storico dei Cappuccini, Roma 1977. Similarly, the Historical Commission of the Regular tertiaries (*Commissione Storica Internazionale T.O.R.)* has also published several studies on the lay Franciscans, the most notable perhaps being *Prime manifestazioni di vita comunitaria maschile e femminile nel movimento francescano della penitenza (1215–1447),* edited by R. Pazzelli and L. Temperini. Commisione Storica Internazionale T.O.R. Roma 1982. Moreover, the studies of Anna Benvenuti Papi, such as her *"In castro poenitentiae"* and Mario Sensi, such as his *Storie di bizzoche,* have focused principally, though not exclusively, on the Franciscan penitents, see PAPI 1990 and SENSI 1995. Finally, Giovanna Casagrande's surveys of the medieval penitents, for example the articles she has published in the journal *Benedictina,* have chiefly illuminated the Franciscan foundations, see CASAGRANDE 1980 and 1983.

19 See, for example, CASAGRANDE 1991, 109–110.

20 TILATTI 1994.

21 LUNGAROTTI 1994.

22 SORELLI 1984a.

23 PAOLI – RICCI 1996.

24 VALERIO 1991, 1992, 1994.

25 *Una santa, una città* 1991.

26 On the bibliography concerning Catherine of Siena, see p. 46 note 84.

27 Indeed, not only have the Dominican laity not attracted historians' attention, but also the Dominican nuns have been given only a marginal position in the Order's histories. Hinnebusch's two-volume *History of Dominican Order,* for example, devotes barely twenty pages to the history of nuns, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 377–400. On his treatment of penitent order, see p. 18 and note 14.

been regarded as a more integrated part of Franciscan piety than has been case with the Dominicans.[28] As shall be studied in Chapter Two, the Franciscan Order of Penance was given papal approval more than a hundred years before that of the Dominicans (1285 and 1405 respectively), which is reflected on the available documentation: the medieval Franciscan penitents were more self-conscious to save historical documentation concerning their foundations, deeds, and papal privileges, whereas Thomas of Siena was really the first Dominican to collect the Dominican penitent hagiographies, privileges, and historical information.[29] Surely the focus on Catherine of Siena has also played its role. As a patron of the Third Order and as its only canonized medieval member, Catherine has been taken as representative of the entire penitent experience and thus scholars have felt less need to study "minor" saints like Sybillina Biscossi, Margherita Fontana, and Magdalena Panatieri. Catherine of Siena indubitably stands forth as the most prominent saintly figure in my study as well, but it is one of my goals to answer whether or not her experience may be taken as representative. Can we indeed take Catherine as the standard of female medieval penitent life? To what degree would such decision be warranted?

The evident need for a general study about Dominican penitents in the Middle Ages shaped my goals for the *Worldly Saints.* While I focus on the thematic questions of women's public presence and *vita activa,* I hope that my study sheds light on the Dominican penitent order's institutional developments and on its less known saintly offspring as well.

Ways of Approaching the *vitae*

Worldly Saints operates on two levels. Firstly, this book aims to map the Dominican penitent saints' factual living conditions, ways of life, and actions. The hagiographies commonly relate such details as a protagonist's housing and family situation, her background, and daily routines, which help us to perceive the *de facto* situation of a given penitent woman and her companions. Secondly, and more importantly, I study the "world of ideas" that shaped the perception of these women's presence and actions in the world. Hagiographies reveal numerous ways of justifying and idealizing women's worldly participation. Already the hagiographers' selection of his material tells of certain values. This focus on two interrelated, but distinct, levels is related to general methodological issues concerning the hagiographies.

Presently medievalists frequently use saints' *vitae,* miracle collections, and canonization processes as source material for the history of the Middle Ages.[30]

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28 Moorman, for example, treats in his general history of the Franciscan order, the institutional developments of the second and third orders more extensively than Hinnebusch did, see MOORMAN 1988, 32-45, 205-225, 406-428, 548–568.

29 On papal approval of the Franciscan and the Dominican penitent orders' *Rule*s, see p. 36–38. On Thomas and his work among the Dominican penitents, see p. 54–55.

30 Though presently outdated, the extensive annotated bibliography in *Saints and Their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History* (Ed. Stephen Wilson, Cambridge

In fact, one could even speak of a ”boom” in hagiographic studies in general. This can be seen in numerous publications, periodicals, conferences, associations, and even internet discussion groups that are dedicated to the study of saints' cults.[31] Moreover, it is of interest to note that particularly historians and literary scholars, rather than theologians, have been active in using the hagiographies in their studies and in promoting new methodologies. The hagiographies have indeed been used in many ways in order to shed light on medieval thinking, even from surprising angles.[32]

Quantitative studies have illuminated saints' social and occupational backgrounds as well as shown the contours of their piety.[33] These studies that have covered wide geographical areas and long time periods, have been balanced by research on sainthood's regional manifestations and saints' roles in local politics.[34] Hagiographic sources, particularly miracle collections, have been used as sources for medieval daily lives and popular culture.[35] Saints' *vitae* and their canonization processes have been studied from the viewpoint of medieval group identity and power politics.[36] While some have focused on the religious

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University Press, Cambridge 1983) provides a good overview to the width of present hagiographic scholarship.

31 Recent international cooperation among scholars working with the hagiographic materials has, for example, produced a new journal, *Hagiographica* (1994–) and a multi-volume publication of regional manifestations of saints' cults, *Hagiographies: Histoire internationale de la littérature hagiographique latine et vernaculaire en Occident des origines à 1550*, edited by Guy PHILIPPART. (Turnhout, 1994-). There are also national and international associations for scholars working with hagiographies, for example the *Hagiography Society* (an international group), the *Associazione Italiana per lo studio della santità, dei culti e dell' agiografia, A.I.S.S.C.A* , and the *Arbeitskreis fûr hagiographische Fragen.* As an example of recent conferences one may mention that in 1999 the *International Medieval Congress at Leeds* has as one of its special themes the cult of saints (”Saints: Piety, Patronage, and Politics”). In the electronic discussion site *Medieval Religion (* http:// medieval-religion@mailbase.ac.uk), for example, topics pertaining to saints have appeared frequently. This *Medieval Religion* is also continuing discussion on the cult of saints at the *International Congress on Medieval Studies* at Kalamazoo 1999 with a topic ”Sanctity: Theory and Practice”.

32 On recent developments in hagiographic studies, see CUNNINGHAM 1992, PHILIPPART 1994, and LEHMIJOKI 1997.

33 Pitrim Sorokin, who compared the moral deeds of Christian saints with those of modern ”good neighbors,” was one of the first ones to produce quantitative analyses about medieval saints' backgrounds and deeds, see SOROKIN 1950. Michael Goodich has studied quantitatively saintly women's piety in the later Middle Ages, see GOODICH 1981. André Vauchez has analyzed medieval canonization records from 1198 to 1431, see VAUCHEZ 1981. Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell have produced statistics of sainthood in the Western Christendom between 1000 and 1700, see WEINSTEIN – BELL 1982.

34 Particularly Italian scholars have focused on local cults of saints. The articles in the collection, *Mistiche e devote nell' Italia tardomedievale* 1992, for example, focuses on local penitent institutions as well as on an individual saint's local influence. The focus on the relation between local institutions and penitent saints can be particularly seen in the writings of such scholars as Giovanna Casagrande, Fernanda Sorelli, and Anna Benvenuti Papi, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1982 and 1990, CASAGRANDE 1982 and 1994, SORELLI 1984b and 1989. On the cult of patron saints and the city identity, see GOLINELLI 1991. For an analyses of this regional focus as a characteristic feature in Italian historiography, see BORNSTEIN 1996, 11–14.

35 On medieval veneration of saints as a mass movement and a display of popular enthusiasm, see *Les saints et les stars* 1983. Hagiographies have been important sources to popular belief systems, see for example GUREVICH 1990.

36 The success of a saint's cult was dependent on the persistent efforts of the group who promoted the cult. Therefore, a cult not only tells about a saintly individual but also about the group behind her. This interrelation between a saint and her supporters has been particularly important

symbolism in saints' own writings and in their *vitae,* others have been interested in psychological aspects of sainthood,[37] and others yet have analyzed the hagiographers' role in the creation of new saints.[38] Saintly women have recently attracted proportionally more attention than male saints have. Saintly women's lives were carefully recorded, whereas ordinary women's experiences were under-represented in all historical documentation. Thus, the hagiographies have played a critical role not only in our understanding of saintly women's history but also that of women in general.[39]

The spectrum of scholars' interests has been wide, and practical research techniques have varied greatly. Still, most of these scholars have shared a few basic methodological presumptions. All of them agree that hagiographies provide us with valuable information about the past. Therefore, the legacy of nineteenth century historicism's that hagiographies were mere signs of churchmen's propaganda and medieval believers' credulity, and therefore useless as historical evidence, is no longer alive.[40]

Modern historians do not, needless to say, advocate that hagiographic narratives should be simply taken as objective evidence of what actually happened. Firstly, it is held that hagiographies convey a reality that was shaped not only by their authors' motivations but also by intertextual hagiographic conventions. Secondly, it is generally acknowledged that not only in hagiographies, but also in all narrative historical writing -may it be, for example, chronicles, letters, *belles-lettres,* or diaries- the form shaped the content.[41] Accordingly, the historian who uses any narrative sources is obliged to pay attention not only at *what* his sources convey, but also *how* the material is presented. Thirdly, the historians of today do not necessarily share the methodological presuppositions of the illustrious Jesuit scholars, the Bollandists, whose editorial projects have shaped the hagiographic scholarship in this field since the seventeenth century.[42] While the Bollandists held that meticulous

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for the so-called sociology of sainthood, see DELOOZ 1962. On the "making of saints" see also KLEINBERG 1989 and 1992. Peter Brown has studied the social function of saints; for example see BROWN 1981.

37 Saintly women's food asceticism, for example, has been a topic that has attracted scholars from various disciplines. Some have seen these women's fasting as neurosis (BELL 1985), whereas others have been interested in this phenomena's religious symbolism (BYNUM 1988).

38 For the hagiographers' task, hagiographic conventions, and different hagiographic techniques, see DELEHAY 1910, AIGRAIN 1953, GRÉGOIRE 1987, and HEFFERNAN 1988. On the hagiographers' cooperation with saintly penitent women, see COAKLEY 1991a, 1991b, and 1994.

39 For state of research on medieval women, see Elisabeth van HOUTS, "Women in medieval history and literature." *Journal of Medieval History* 20 (1994), 277–292. For some recent publications on female saints, see p. 16–17, notes 6–8. Remember also *Donne e fede* 1994, and *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe* 1991 and *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* 1992. While gender studies about female saints have been popular, a similar problematizing of male sainthood remains undone. For a rare attempt to discuss and employ the methods of gender studies for the interpretation of male sanctity, see COAKLEY 1994.

40 For the history of attitudes about the use of hagiographies as a historical source, see AIGRAIN 1953.

41 On hagiographies as a part of medieval historiography, see LIFSHITZ 1994.

42 The Bollandists have, for example, edited *Acta Sanctorum* (67 vols., 1643–), a collection of

unearthing of historically accurate hagiographies would provide readers with an objective account of saints' deeds and miracles, the historians are presently less interested in pinning down whether certain miracles, visions, or other saintly phenomena actually took place.[43] In fact, it is characteristic of contemporary scholarship to see hagiographies as sources to past people's religious beliefs, mentalities, and social strategies rather than as texts that prove God's presence in the world.

In other words, historians are presently focused in how medieval people *perceived* the saints and how these perceptions exemplify a medieval worldview and strategies of living. Yet, the hagiographies are also read as sources that reveal, often unintentionally, details of medieval life. Though the hagiographer focused his energy on those events that prove the saintliness of his protagonist, the text may produce valuable side-information to medieval people's living conditions as well. Thus, hagiographies, miracle collections, and canonization records have been used as sources to medieval family relations, housing arrangements, illnesses, and social concerns, just to mention a few. It is in the framework of these above-discussed methodological presuppositions that I operate in this study. I use hagiographies in part as a window to penitent women's *daily lives*, but mainly I study through them the *ideas* that shaped women's experiences about religious life in the world. These ideas lead us to the understanding of the religious framework within which the penitent women operated. Yet, alas, it is not easy to interpret who ultimately was behind these ideals: Women themselves or the men who wrote about them?

Yet, it is of vital importance to ask whose version of reality do the hagiographies relate to us? That of their authors or that of saintly women themselves, or perhaps even that of penitent women in more general? I answer: all of the above, and even more. The hagiographies also tell us about intertextual hagiographic conventions and ideals of saintly behavior that shaped the work of an individual hagiographer and influenced the behavior of saintly and ordinary penitents alike. Needless to say, these interlinked layers of meaning make hagiographies challenging, if not difficult, to interpret.

A hagiographic text was a product of an individual author whose selection of material, style, and motives left their personal mark.[44] Still, the author was not merely using his own imagination. He penned the story of a saintly penitent who had actually lived and with whom he had often had close personal ties. The saintly women were not docile individuals but strong personalities who impressed their hagiographers. Thus, it is reasonable to presume that the saint who we

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saints' *vitae* in Latin, and they publish *Analecta Bollandiana* (1882-), a journal about hagiographic scholarship. On the work of these Bollandists, see AIGRAIN 1953, 329–350 and DELEHAYE 1959.

43 The scholars working in the Bollandist tradition focused on the *historical value* of hagiographies in order to use them as *historical documents* to a saint's deeds. This can be seen, for example, in the approach and language of the early twentieth century Bollandist, Hippolyte Delehaye, see DELEHAYE 1910, 90-121, 154-166, and passim.

44 On the hagiographer's role in the creation of the text, see p. 22, note 38. See also DELEHAYE 1910, 90–99.

encounter in the hagiography resembles that woman who once lived.[45] Yet, it would be naïve to believe that the depicted saint would be identical with the person who once lived. The reality that the hagiographies convey is that of the *ideals* concerning women's spiritual perfection rather than the whole state of their own religious lives, which surely had human failings as well. The hagiographers idealized and manipulated the evidence so that the depiction of penitent women's lives suited the hierarchical church's goals.

Moreover, a hagiographer's and his protagonist's actions were conditioned by previous *vitae*. A hagiographer wanted to present the new saint in the likeness of her predecessors in order to show that she was not merely displaying her own heroism but also that she belonged to the collective family of saints (*communio sanctorum*). Finally, the saintly aspirant herself took models from earlier saints about whom she had learned in sermons, legends, and other church teachings. Therefore, specific *vitae* have to be read in the light of a collective hagiographic tradition as well.[46]

In many respects, for example in their visions, miracles, and extraordinary penance, the saintly individuals were simply exceptional. Even their morality was seen as an extraordinarily demanding form of altruism whose rigor was hardly attainable by ordinary human beings.[47] Thus, these deeds cannot be taken as portrayals of actions that could have been performed by any penitent woman. Yet, some of the religious ideals of the saintly penitents' were shared with ordinary penitents. For example, certain religious practices and daily customs were intended to be embraced by all penitents, saintly and less extraordinary alike.[48] Since my study focuses on non-miraculous manifestations of piety, such as moral deeds, religious practices, and daily behavior, it is particularly justified to expect that similar events, even if less rigorously practiced, could have taken place in the lives of ordinary penitents as well. In short, I have taken hagiographies as sources that represent multi-layered reality and lead us to experiences of hagiographers, saints, and ordinary believers, all of whom were nurtured by pre-existing religious traditions.

My study is thematic rather than chronological, which means that I am not moving from one saintly individual to another in their respective order. This thematic approach enables us to perceive the thought systems and daily necessities that shaped the experiences of all penitent women. My approach is principally

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45 Caroline Walker Bynum, for example, has repeatedly emphasized that mystical women were not mere victims of medieval misogyny but instead powerful leaders and spiritual reformers, see BYNUM 1988, 6, 14, 208–218.

46 On the importance of the *communio sanctorum*, see HEFFERNAN 1988, 114–119.

47 Saintly moral deeds were seen as heroically virtuous, or, in other words, supererogatory. In these heroic moral acts the moral agent suppressed all her self-interest, and for that matter self-protection, to the point that she was even willing to give her own life for the good of another human being. On the concept of heroic virtue, see HOFFMANN 1933. The 'heroic virtue' became an official criterion for sanctity only in the seventeenth century, but this Aristotelian notion influenced already the medieval understanding of saintly morality. On 'heroic virtue' and medieval sanctity, see DELOOZ 1962, 32–36.

48 Some saints' deeds, such as their miracles, were seen as such that an ordinary believer should only admire them (*ad admiranda*), whereas other acts, like moral behavior, was taken as imitable (*ad imitanda*), see KIECKHEFER 1984, 248.

qualitative, but I do produce a few quantitative analyses about Dominican saints' backgrounds and marital status, which help us, I believe, to understand these women's social situation. I base my study primarily on the hagiographies that are introduced in the following chapter. Nonetheless, I have perused other types of sources as well, such as chronicles, letters, and medieval fiction, which provide insights to penitent saints' place in secular society. Particularly important non-hagiographic sources to me have been the penitent rules which in many respects intimately complemented the hagiographies: for example, many of those religious practices that we encounter in the *vitae* were originally prescribed as ideals in the Penitent *Rule*. *Worldly Saints* bases its research on printed primary sources. In order to peruse these sources as systematically as possible I have presently decided to leave similar cross-analyses of available manuscript material aside. Nonetheless, I do acknowledge that the use of manuscripts, especially such non-hagiographic sources as testaments, would greatly enrich our understanding of those concrete realities that shaped Dominican penitents' lives. In fact, this is the line of study that I intend to follow in future. For example, such questions as dating the emergence of Dominican penitent women's communal housing simply cannot be satisfactorily answered without extensive research in local Italian archives. Nevertheless, in this present work I am operating primarily as a historian of ideas whose main concern is in the hagiographic representations of women's worldly piety.

This study includes the names of people and places in both Italian and Latin, and to some degree French and German. Since it is difficult to find a widely followed system of spelling, I present here my own orthographic guidelines. Principally, I use Italian spelling of people's names. For example, I write Giovanna, Villana, Chiara, Osanna, and Stefana. However, when we have a commonly used version of a given name in English, I am using it. For example, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Catherine of Siena, Raymond of Capua, and Thomas of Siena are used. All place names follow simply the English conventions. For the names of the few noble family lines, I use d'Este, de'Ricci, and of Savoy. When I refer to Thomas of Siena, I am speaking of the Dominican hagiographer, who may also be known as Thomas Antonii d'Nacci Caffarini, or simply Caffarini. Where there is a quotation in the main body of my work, I have, for the sake of smooth reading, provided my own translations in English, while the notes contain the original Latin and Italian passages. As is common practice, all the quotations that appear only in the notes have been left untranslated.

II "Attending the Celestial Spouse in Poverty and Humility."[1] The Panorama of Lay Piety

The Dominican penitent order was related to various other lay associations. Some preceded it, others were more or less contemporary, while still others were later influenced by it. Therefore, it is vital to sketch the historical origins of this penitent order and picture its place in the variety of religious organizations that were available for medieval lay people. Since this book is primarily about lay women, this chapter traces the historical origins of penitent orders principally through those lay associations that had an impact on women's lives. Numerous earlier lay associations, such as the Lombardian *Humiliati* and the transalpine Beguines influenced the mendicant penitents. The Dominican penitent order paralleled the Franciscan penitents; also the Augustinians and the Carmelites developed Third Orders to host their lay associates. In fact, most other religious orders, for example the Order of Servites, created organizations that incorporated lay people in their ranks as well. Even the traditional monasteries hosted lay people as the so-called *conversi* (men) and *conversae* (women). These lay peoples' main responsibilities concerned the practical affairs of the community, but they participated in the community's religious services as well.[2]

These institutions, which aimed for permanent lay membership in a religious order, were complemented by scores of religious confraternities and popular revivalist movements, such as the flagellants, that often were only loosely connected to ecclesiastical institutions.[3] Furthermore, there were numerous communities for single women and tiny huts for recluses that were never officially incorporated into any existing order.[4] Perhaps one of the best known independent lay associations was the fifteenth century foundation of the Oblates of Tor de' Specchi by Francesca Bussa dei Ponziani in Rome, also known as St. Francesca

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1 " In paupertate & humilitate sponso caelesti adherentes." Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* 1965, 1240.

2 For an overview to various types of penitent life in the Middle Ages, see GUARNIERI 1980.

3 In his *Ordo fraternitas,* Meersseman treats religious confraternities and penitent orders as offspring of the same penitential spirit, MEERSSEMAN 1977. On medieval revivalism, see DICKSON 1992. On medieval flagellants, see Idem 1989. Public acts of penance, such as self-flagellation during processions, were rarely performed by women whose penance tended to be more private instead, see Ibid., 238. Popular revivalist movements continued throughout the Middle Ages. On a later medieval popular movement, the White Penitents (the *Bianchi*), for example, see BORNSTEIN 1993.

4 Giovanna Casagrande, for example, emphasizes the polymorphity of medieval recluse life: While some recluses lived alone and rarely met with the externs, others lived in communities that were hard to tell apart from actual monasteries, see CASAGRANDE 1988.

of Rome.[5] Finally, many women made vows of chastity, but continued to live a life of an independent lay-religious in their private homes.[6] There were, indeed, an endless number of variations to the theme of medieval penitent life. So much so that it was often impossible for contemporaries, not to mention modern historians, to place the penitent women in any predetermined category. It is precisely this polymorphism and institutional fluidity that should be appreciated, and, furthermore, seen as a feature that epitomizes medieval lay piety.[7]

The presence of lay people in religious associations is particularly notable from the late eleventh and the twelfth centuries. Their demand for spiritual guidance had surely existed earlier as well, but it was principally from these centuries that the churchmen answered the lay folk's, including women's, call for religious life. Consequently, this period left us records concerning new types of lay piety.[8]

Medieval people saw membership in a religious association in both spiritual and social terms. Since confraternities, penitent orders, and independent religious communities typically obliged their members to provide mutual social care. They were important sources of social stability, particularly for the inhabitants of expanding urban centers. In fact, the decision to join a religious association was often connected to an individual's social needs. While the confraternities provided a network for urban craftsmen, numerous religious communities eased the lives of widows and other single women who easily found themselves left on the margins of medieval society. Of course, the motivations to join a religious organization were not simply social. They were also based on the members' spiritual needs.[9] These lay people sought basic religious instruction and spiritual guidance, and they also wanted to contribute to church life with their words and deeds. Many of them joined reforming churchmen to call for a return to the simple precepts of the early Christian church: evangelical poverty, apostolic preaching, humble manners, and rigorous asceticism.[10] The late medieval church

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5 On Francesca (d. 1440) and her community of religious women, see ESPOSITO 1992. On Francesca's social and political roles among the Romans, see ESCH 1982, 90–104.

6 One example of these independent pious women is Margery Kempe (d. ca.1440), a mother of fourteen children who then took vows of chastity though she continued to live in her marital home and never joined any religious order. Her autobiography, however, reveals several occasions in which this kind of autonomous religious life was not easy at all to carry through, see *The Book of Margery* 1989, 150. For a biographical study about Margery, see ATKINSON 1983. For Margery as a representative of the fourteenth century's pious lay women, see KIECKHEFER 1984, 182–201. The independent religious women were common in Italy as well. In Città di Castello, for example, there were numerous minigroups of independent religious lay women, see CASAGRANDE 1984, 147–150. Even as late as in the sixteenth century when the church was clearly against unprofessed, independent lay religious groups, some women managed to follow a religious life that was not strictly connected to any order, see for example BAERNSTEIN 1994, which discusses the religious choices of early modern unprofessed widows.

7 Katherine Gill captures well this unstructured nature of medieval lay piety in her doctoral dissertation, GILL 1994.

8 On lay women's religious life in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries see a classic, GRUNDMANN 1961.

9 Brenda Bolton, for example, has underscored that lay women's religious awakening in the thirteenth century was connected to both social and religious needs, see BOLTON 1973, 86–88 and passim.

10 On the reform spirit among the twelfth century churchmen, see CONSTABLE 1991, 37–67. On women's evangelical poverty, apostolic piety, and asceticism, see BOLTON 1973.

was, in fact, greatly enriched by the mystical and practical piety of its lay folk, especially that of its women. While women were excluded from the church hierarchy itself, the possibility to express their piety outside the cloister walls gave women considerably wider possibilities to direct their action to the larger community of believers.[11]

Varieties of Religious Lay Life

The mendicant orders were not the first ones to answer the lay peoples' religious demands; much less did they invent lay piety. As Herbert Grundmann has emphasized in his classic study *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (*Religious Movements in the Middle Ages*), the thirteenth century friars arrived on a scene that had already been laid out. In fact, fearing an overwhelming amount of pastoral responsibilities, the friars were initially reluctant to incorporate the great number of laity who wished to join their ranks.[12] As shall be studied in greater detail below, it was only several decades after the founding of the Franciscan and Dominican orders that these organizations officially acknowledged the need for formal Third Orders.[13]

The deep roots of the devotional life amidst the secular world actually lay in the early developments of monasticism itself. Though veiled nuns had been living in monasteries since the fifth and sixth centuries, it was not uncommon for these early medieval nuns to live temporarily, or, even permanently, in their private homes.[14] In fact, this practice continued even as late as the twelfth century, when the Second Lateran Council sought to standardize women's religious life and to gain firmer control of it by extinguishing the tradition of professed home-dwelling nuns in 1139.[15] Moreover, the earlier nunneries were not necessarily strictly encloistered. Nuns interacted with people from the secular world; they allowed these externs, particularly family members, to enter the cloister premises, and occasionally the nuns themselves left their religious house to recover from an illness, for example, or to take part in a family event.[16] Thus, relaxation of these ideals of active enclosure (that curtailed nuns'exits from monasteries) as well as passive enclosure (that prohibited ingression by outsiders) remained common.

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11 Female mystics', particularly lay women's, presence among the medieval saints grew considerably in the thirteenth century, see VAUCHEZ 1981, 414–417.

12 On the mendicant orders' *cura mulierum* in the thirteenth century, see GRUNDMANN 1961, 208–318.

13 See p. 36–37.

14 Since the fifth and sixth centuries the papacy's efforts to impose encloistered cenobitical life upon female monasteries were numerous, but not always successful, see SCHULENBURG 1984. On the early formulations of women's enclosure, see Ibid., 54–58.

15 The Second Lateran Council's (1139) Canon 26 (*Ut sanctimoniales in privatis domibus non habitent*) was directed against the home-dwelling nuns, see *Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta* 1962, 179.

16 The ecclesiastical legislators tried frequently to impose strict cloister on female monasteries, but the nuns themselves rarely obeyed fully, CAIN 1968, 254–268. Leclercq has argued that in reality the enclosure was rare until the end of the eight century, see LECLERCQ 1975, 1167–1170.

The hierarchical church was constantly attacking these frequent lapses in enclosure, but even the bull, *Periculoso,* of Pope Boniface VIII in 1298 which demanded strict enclosure for all female monasteries did not eradicate the old tradition of open monasteries.[17] In fact, these open monasteries *(monasteri aperti)* existed even as late as the sixteenth century.[18] Accordingly, the penitent life in the secular world, and later in open monasteries, was not a totally new form of religious life, but rather something that could be regarded as an echo of an age-old tradition.

Nonetheless, there is one considerable difference concerning the spiritual ideals between the penitent and the nun-like life in the world: penitent participation in the secular world was often seen as a spiritual goal, whereas for the nuns it was but a deviation from the existing norm of monastic seclusion. The religious *ideals* of professed nuns were inseparably connected to encloistered life.Thus, the home-dwelling nun could be tolerated, but not seen as saintly. The true novelty of the penitent life was, therefore, not the form of life itself, but the fact that women's piety in the secular world was seen as a sanctifying ideal.

Also another antecessor for the late medieval penitents can be found in monasteries, namely the male *conversi* and female *conversae*. These were lay people who were typically employed by monasteries to serve nuns and monks. They occasionally also served in mendicant convents, hospitals, parish churches, and other ecclesiastical institutions.[19] While the monks, and particularly the nuns, typically came from aristocratic families, where they were not used to hard manual labor, the *conversi* and *conversae* were the offspring of lower social groups who financed their stay in the community by working. They even enjoyed some of the monastic privileges: for example, they were held under ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and the community provided their daily needs. They also participated in some of the monastery's religious services, and they wore distinct clothing that marked them off from ordinary lay people. Still, their principal responsibilities concerned the community's quotidian necessities, such as manual labor in the monastery's fields, caring for cattle, and serving in the refectory. Moreover, if the monastery followed a rule of strict encloisterment that secluded the full members from the world, these *conversi* and *conversae* were in charge of the monastery's relations with this outer world. For example these lay people might distribute the monastery's food alms to the poor.[20]

These monastic lay folk had many aspects in common with the penitents. Both these groups had to find religious ways of life that enabled them to support themselves financially. While the *conversi* and *conversae* served in religious houses, the penitents worked in their secular homes, often with the support of

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17 The juridical and normative impact of *Periculoso* was, nonetheless, enormous. On its impact on later canonical writing, see BRUNDAGE – MAKOWSKI 1994 and MAKOWSKI 1997, 49–121. See also p. 156.

18 CREYTENS 1965, 45–49.

19 OSHEIM 1983, 378–379. The Dominican convents also had *conversi*, see CREYTENS 1949.

20 On the religious liberties of *conversi* and *conversae*, see OSHEIM 1983, 370–375. On their semi-religious and practical roles, see MEERSSEMAN 1977, Vol. 1, 273–275 and McNAMARA 1996, 184, 254–256. On the *conversi* and *conversae* as the role models for the penitents, see VAUCHEZ 1987, 105.

their families and neighbors. Both of these groups transformed their daily necessities into expressions of piety through neighborly service and humble tasks. Yet, the social expectations for the *conversi* and *conversae* were much more limited than for the penitent women. While the monastic lay-religious did not leave their mark in the history of medieval sanctity, many penitent women were praised for their mystical piety and extraordinary asceticism. This lack of fame has surely more to do with want of attention than any deficiency on the part of *conversi* and *conversae*. In fact, one part of penitent women's success was that they were able to develop intimate working relationships with their confessors who played the central roles in spreading their saintly fame, whereas the monastic lay-religious clearly missed such spiritual agents who could have promulgated their reputation outside their cloister's walls.[21]

The penitents of mendicant orders also echoed the ideals of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries' wandering preachers who called for spiritual and moral reform through evangelical poverty and acts of penance. The most famous of these preachers were certainly Robert of Arbrissel (d. 1117) and Norbert of Xanten (d. 1080–1134) both of whose preaching attracted a wide lay following of men and women alike. These preachers valued inner purity over ecclesiastical rank and devotional sentiment over clerical learnedness. In this hierarchy of values the simple believers had their important place, and originally both preachers intended to give lay people, women included, a considerable role in religious life. After Robert had found his community of Fontévraud in 1100 and Norbert had formed his community in Prémontre in 1119, the reality turned out, however, differently. After early years of cooperation between lay and religious, men and women, the spirit of collaboration waned, leaving these new orders suspicious of lay participation in general and women's involvement in particular.[22] Though these early efforts to incorporate actively lay people into ecclesiastical decision making ultimately failed, the legacy of their original message about lay participation and social involvement in the world may nevertheless be seen in the later religious movements.

The *Humiliati*, a movement that originated among twelfth century Lombardian craftsmen, were inspired by the ideals of evangelical poverty, interiorized piety, and industrious simplicity. They elevated the value of the lay-religious by practicing non-clerical preaching and by questioning the spiritual worth of corrupt clergy. Their open criticism of ecclesiastical hierarchies brought them in conflict with the papacy, with the result that they were banned by Pope Lucian III in 1184. Later, however, the *Humiliati* were reconciled back to the church by Pope Innocent III (1198–1216). In that time when the church was shaken by numerous lay religious movements, Innocent realized that the church needed to incorporate the less radical groups into its realm in order to be strong enough to fight the movements like the Cathars and the Waldesians, which were proclaimed to be outright heretical.[23]

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21 On penitent women's close ties with their confessors, see p. 38, 54, 157–158.

22 On the role of women in Robert of Arbrissel's and Norbert of Xanten's organization, see GRUNDMANN 1961, 46–50 and McNAMARA 1996, 242–243, 251–253.

23 On Innocent III's policy concerning the *Humiliati,* see GRUNDMANN 1961, 72–91.

The *Humiliati* were composed of three distinct groups. The first group was populated by tonsured clerics and veiled nuns, who lived in traditional monastic settings. The second division was for lay men and women, who lived in open monasteries without taking three solemn vows. The third group consisted of lay people who lived in their private homes. While the two communally organized *Humiliati* received a papally approved rule (*regula*) in 1201, the third group lived according to a so-called *propositum* that regulated their lives, but which lacked the status of an official rule. The *regula* and the *propositum* of the *Humiliati* were a source of inspiration for the future mendicant penitents. The mendicant orders did not, however, copy the multi-layered organizational structure of the Lombardian group. Instead they started off with an initial plan only for the home-dwelling *pinzochere.* It was only much later that these orders also developed communal alternatives. Still, the *Humiliati*'s ideals for simple and industrious living, almsgiving, mutual help, social peacefulness, and regular worship influenced profoundly the mendicant penitents.[24]

The religious way of lay life that was closest to that of mendicant penitents was undoubtedly that of the Beguines. The Beguine movement originated in northern Europe, chiefly in Brabant, Flanders, and in the diocese of Liége at the turn of the thirteenth century. This lay movement soon spread to the Rhine Valley and southern France. The Beguines, however, never really gained a foothold in the Mediterranean countries, where similar female groups were instead incorporated more directly to the mendicant orders. The Beguines typically came from the urban middle class, often they were widows and unmarried women who found themselves excluded from family-based social structures. The Beguines were complemented by a brotherhood of the so-called Beghards, but this movement never really attracted a wider following. Men's lives were institutionally more secure and the traditional hierarchical church was more open to their participation than that of women. Therefore, men had less need for such alternative social and religious solutions as that offered by the Beguine way of life.[25]

Beguine piety can be characterized by many of the same elements that had been present in the lives of the *Humiliati*, namely manual labor, humble manners, evangelical poverty, and neighborly service.[26] Still, Beguine piety in many respects manifested such features that had been absent, or at least latent, in previous lay movements. These women's extreme acts of penance and self-mortification, as well as their intensive mysticism, represented a new feature in female piety. The Beguine saints deprived their bodies of food, they flagellated themselves until they bled, they wore tight hairshirts that penetrated their skins, and they abstained from their nightly rest. Their self-mortification was motivated by a double-quest. In part they wanted to discipline their bodies to adhere to

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24 On the *Humiliati* and their impact on later movements, see GRUNDMANN 1961, 87–91 and MEERSSEMAN 1982, 84.

25 McDONNELL 1954 still remains the best overview of the history of the Beguines. On the Beghards, see Ibid., 246–265.

26 For a study of Beguine piety in the context of other religious movements such as the *Humiliati* and early Franciscans, see BOLTON 1973 and GRUNDMANN 1961, 319–354.

their will. Yet to a much greater degree, they practiced asceticism in remembrance and imitation of Christ's sufferings. These women's bodily mortifications were complemented by a mysticism that emphasized personal communication with particularly the second person of the Godhead. These spiritual aspects were accompanied by acts of neighborly love and manual labor. This mixture of ascetic, mystical, and yet practical devotion was to grow into a trend that profoundly shaped the medieval understanding of lay women's spiritual perfection.[27]

With the appearance of the Beguines the medieval church finally perceived the possibilities of the piety of non-aristocratic lay women as being saintly. Particularly the early thirteenth century preacher and bishop, Jacques of Vitry (d.1240) responded enthusiastically to the Beguines' ascetic spirituality and modest way of life. He also recognized the similarity among the various new lay movements such as the Franciscans, the *Humiliati*, and these Beguines.[28] To exemplify further this new type of life, Jacques wrote the *vita* of the Beguine Marie of Oignes (d.1213). Marie of Oignes's piety had a profound impact on the medieval understanding of lay perfection as ascetic, Christo-mimetic, hard working, and intensely mystical. The Dominicans themselves saw this Beguine as an antetype of their own way of life. Thus, for example, Vincent of Beauvais soon popularized Jacques's *vita* of Marie in his history of the Christian world, the *Speculum historiale*.[29] The popularity of Marie's model was such that Vincent's account was, in its turn, translated into Italian by other Dominicans, perhaps even by the reforming friar Giovanni Dominici (d.1419), to support the spiritual quest of lay Dominicans.[30] Vincent characterized the piety of the Beguines in words that fully capture the essence of this new movement:

> They [the Beguines] renounced carnal temptations for the love of Christ, and for the love of the celestial kingdom they shunned the riches of this world. They attended their Heavenly Spouse in poverty and humility, and they earned their meager living by doing manual labor.[31]

Originally the Beguines practiced their lives of penance and manual labor in their private homes, but by the end of the thirteenth century these women looked for greater institutional stability by settling into communities. These Beguinages were not, however, encloistered. Thus they were able to continue earning their living in the secular world. They also sustained themselves as teachers, servants,

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27 On Beguine piety and sanctity in the context of transalpine female mysticism, see BOLTON 1978, 266–269. On the contours of later medieval female spirituality, see BYNUM 1988, 23–30 and passim.

28 Jacques of Vitry, *Lettres de Jacques de Vitry* 1960, 71–78.

29 This popularized version of Marie's legend is in Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* 1965, 1240–1252. Marie was seen by some Dominicans as an antetype of their own piety, see for example Gerald de Frachet, *Le "Vitae fratrum"* 1988, 27.

30 It is uncertain whether Giovanni Dominici translated the legend of Marie into Italian. Nonetheless, Marie of Oignes was popular among Italian Dominicans since this translated legend was enclosed in a Sienese manuscript of otherwise Dominican saints, see SORELLI 1984a, 38–39.

31 "[The Beguines], quae spretis pro Christo carnalibus illecebris, & contemptis pro amore regni caelestis huius mundi divitiis, in paupertate & humiltate sponso caelesti adhaerentes, labore manuum tenuem victum guarebant." Vincent of Beauvais, *Speculum historiale* 1965, 1240.

and, most commonly, as textile manufacturers. These women were in fact so active in textile production that they even posed a threat to some male-dominated professional guilds. Manual labor was indeed an indispensable part of Beguine piety, a quality highly praised by their hagiographers.[32] This strong emphasis on manual labor is actually something that distinguished the Beguines from their Italian counterparts, the *pinzochere*. The Italian *pinzochere* too were praised for their physical work, but the professionalism that typified the Beguine life was never such an accentuated feature among the Italian lay-religious. As shall be studied in Chapter Four the mendicant orders, particularly the Dominicans, promoted a more moderate approach to women's working life.

The Beguines were never officially incorporated into any religious order. Therefore, these women always remained on the fringes of the hierarchical church. They were, for a while, able to find local supporters among the Cistercians, secular clergy, and mendicants. In the course of the thirteenth century, however, the Beguines' troubles with the established authorities increased. The churchmen claimed that these extra-regular women were anti-clerical, unorthodox, and even engaged in illicit sexual practices. Commonly the Beguines were grouped together with the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit, a lay movement that was deemed heretical principally for challenging the clergy's leadership.[33] Consequently, the Council of Vienne called for the suppression of the Beguines in 1311–1312. Though in 1318 the orthodox Beguines were rehabilitated back into the church with John XXII's bull *Ratio recta* and various local authorities continued to protect these women, the Beguines were never again totally free from suspicion.[34]

These accusations leveled against the Beguines reflected a wider suspicion that the church held against lay movements. Though the *mulieres sanctae* were encouraged by numerous churchmen, these women always had to tread a narrow path. The Beguines, the members of Third Orders, independent vowesses, solitary recluses, and for that matter any lay religious needed always to justify their way of life and to prove that their piety supported the powers of the hierarchical church. Moreover, these numerous lay institutions appeared quite the same to many on-lookers. The penitents were taken for Beguines, the Beguines for the Free Spirits, the independent vowesses for the mendicant tertiaries, and so forth.[35] Therefore, the accusations against one association meant, in practice, that all similar organizations were under suspicion. Accordingly, for example, the fifteenth century Dominicans were still trying to clarify the confusion concerning the relationship between the order's lay members and the Beguines.[36] Those

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32 McDONNELL 1954, 270–277.

33 LERNER 1972, 35–54.

34 McDONNELL 1954, 521–556; LERNER 1972, 61–84.

35 On the onlookers tendency to confuse various lay associations, see MASETTI 1864, 89–90.

36 As a Dominican reformer Thomas of Siena, for example, underscored in his treatise about the penitent order that the condemnations by pope Clement V in 1311–1312 were directed only against the Beguines, whereas the Dominican penitents were not implicated, see Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 16. This kind of clarification was necessary repeatedly since in reality the Dominican penitents were much like the Beguines.

penitents who managed to establish institutional contacts with mendicant orders survived best the accusations that plagued many who followed the religious lay life.

The Origins of the Franciscan and Dominican Penitents

Cooperation with the mendicant orders clearly brought institutional stability to lay associations. Yet, these contacts were not easily established, nor did they necessarily signal radical change in any given individual's life. The undefined institutional position of the medieval lay-religious, mendicant and non-mendicant alike, was reflected in the confusing terminology that was applied to these people.

The religious lay women were varyingly called *mulieres sanctae, mulieres religiosae, beghinae, virgines devotae,* or, even something as vague as, *dilectae Deo filiae*. In Italy the religious lay women were generically called *vestite, beate, devote, bizzoche,* and, particularly often, *pinzochere*. In Spain they were commonly called *beate.* While these appellations were interchangeable, describing all the lay-religious, non-mendicants and mendicants alike, the mendicants did later develop terminology that specified those penitents who were under their guidance. At first these penitents were not distinguished according to a specific mendicant order, but they were simply called *sorores et fratres de poenitentia.* Only from the mid- thirteenth century onwards might these penitents be classified according to their host order.[37] Accordingly, the Franciscans and the Dominicans respectively had *fratres et sorores de poenitentia sancti Francisci* and *fratres et sorores de poenitentia sancti Dominici*. Additionally, there were locally used names, for example the Dominican penitents in fourteenth century Siena were called *mantellate,* an appellation that derived from the word denoting their religious habit (*mantella*). Any terminology related to the official third order, such as *fratres et sorores de tertii regulae,* was, however, employed only rarely during the entire Middle Ages.[38]

I shall refer to the religious lay women principally as penitents, but occasionally also as *pinzochere*. I have chosen to use these two appellations because they are the most generic ways to identify religious lay women. I have favored the expression 'penitent' simply because it fits better into the English usage than *pinzochera* and will therefore allow the text to be read smoothly. I have consciously, however, avoided the use of 'tertiary', because, though these lay-religious are today most commonly known as such, contemporaries used this expression extremely rarely. Therefore, I have tried not to impose on the past a term with which the people themselves would not have identified.

In Italy there were Franciscan and Dominican penitents as early as the 1220s. Thus, the mendicant penitents emerged on the stage of medieval lay piety only

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37 The first mention of specifically Dominican penitents is from Bologna in the 1240s, see GUARNIERI 1980, 1725.

38 On the terminology concerning the penitents, see MASETTI 1864, 89–90, MEERSSEMAN 1982, 20–23, GUARNIERI 1980, 1723–1724, LAURENT 1938, VI, and SORELLI 1984a, 88–89.

some twenty years after their northern counterparts, the Beguines. The earliest mendicant penitent saint came, however, from outside Italy. She was Elizabeth of Hungary (1207–1231), a woman of noble descent and a widow of the landgrave of Thuringia. She lived in voluntary poverty, dedicating herself to extreme deeds of neighborly love and asceticism.[39] Though those penitents that were affiliated with the mendicants emerged soon after the actual creation of the Dominican and the Franciscan orders, the founding fathers, St. Dominic (d.1221) and St. Francis (d.1226) respectively, never themselves laid foundations for the lay branches of their order. These friars had enough trouble creating the order for the friars themselves, and thus little of their energy was directed to the second order professed nuns, not to speak of any possible lay affiliates.[40]

Initially the Franciscan and the Dominican friars shared their pastoral responsibilities toward the informally organized penitent groups that had turned to them to receive pastoral guidance. The first normative document about mendicant penitents stems from these early years of cooperation. This *Propositum*, a set of guidelines for the penitent life, dates back to 1221, but has survived only as the so-called *Memoriale* of 1228. This *modus vivendi*, a rule like document, regulated the penitents' clothing and eating, guided devotional practices, and it outlined peaceful social customs.[41]

The *Memoriale* prescribed modest, unembellished clothing of colorless material.[42] The penitents' diet was regulated by the calendar fasts and abstinences, but any severe food asceticism was not required, and ailing penitents were exempted from fasts altogether.[43] The *Memoriale* also guided the penitents to the life of daily worship: these people said their prayers, they said grace at meals, and they confessed three times a year, namely at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost.[44] In addition, the penitent commitment carried numerous social responsibilities with it that aimed for a harmonious coexistence among the inhabitants of the ever-growing urban centers. These people were to live at peace with their neighbors, they were not to serve in secular warfare, and, finally, they had mutual obligations to other members of their order, particularly toward the ailing and dying ones.[45] The taking of the penitent habit signified a permanent change in a person's life. Though the habit-bearers were not to return back to normal lay life, they were allowed to leave the penitent life for a religious

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39 Elizabeth of Hungary's *vita* was included in Jacobus of Voragine's *Golden Legend*, see Jacobus of Voragine, *Legenda aurea* 1969, 752–771.

40 Both Dominicans and Franciscans later laid the claim that their penitent orders were created by their orders' founders, but such claims tell of the later efforts to legitimize the existence of the lay order rather than of the historical events themselves. MEERSSEMAN 1982, 7, 143. The fourteenth century Dominican Raymond of Capua was the first Dominicans to claim, erroneously, that the Dominican penitent order would have stemmed directly from the *Militia Christi*, an antiheretical lay association created by Dominic himself. For Raymond's version, see *Legenda maior 1866*, 880–881. Thomas of Siena's version follows that of Raymond's, see Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus 1938*, 4–5.

41 It is printed as *Memoriale propositi* in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 92–112.

42 *Memoriale*, Ibid. 93–95.

43 Ibid., 96–99.

44 Ibid., 99–100.

45 Ibid., 101–106.

profession. Nonetheless, the group could expel disobedient members.[46] In practice these penitents had contacts with the friars, but the *Memoriale* as such does not mention any formal ties to either order. This document does, however, vaguely state that the penitents should be instructed by a member of some religious group when this was possible.[47] These early penitent groups consisted of men and women alike, but the mendicant penitent orders were soon to grow increasingly populated by widowed and other single women, while men found outlet for their religious and social needs elsewhere.

The *Memoriale* of 1228 set the tenor for penitent practices in the centuries to come. As shall be studied below, the later rules systematized the original regulations further by stating the clerical affiliations more clearly. Yet, the basic ideals about modest clothing, meager diet, regular worship, mutual care, humble living, and peaceful urban life remained intact. The later rules following from the *Memoriale* convey ideals of modest piety that by no means demanded extreme self-denial or heroic services for one's neighbor. While these rules prescribed the basic standards of the pious life, the hagiographies related the ideals of further spiritual perfection. Thus, the organization of any penitent order generally included the production of rules as well as of hagiographies. Accordingly, the Italian mendicants also came early on with the portrayals of saintly penitents: a transalpine Elizabeth of Hungary was soon accompanied by Franciscans Umiliana dei Cerchi (d. 1246)[48] and Margherita of Cortona (d. 1297),[49] and by a Dominican Benvenuta Boiani (d. 1292),[50] just to mention a few new saints. It is in these women's *vitae* that we encounter the uncompromising self-denial, rigorous asceticism, and dedicated acts of charity that would characterize the ideals of penitent perfection for the rest of the Middle Ages. Their acts were nurtured by the basic customs that were prescribed in the *Memoriale*, but brought into full bloom by a further desire to dedicate oneself totally to the service of God and one's neighbor.

Though the Preaching Friars and Minorites were involved in the lives of the lay-religious, these mendicants kept their lay followers at arm's length until the last decades of the thirteenth century. The friars' formal responsibilities were still next to nil, their collaboration with penitents remained limited, and their contacts with female penitents were particularly restricted by the superiors of their orders. Even as late as 1277, a Dominican preacher and Master General, Humbert of Romans (d.1277), preached about the penitents without even hinting that he saw penitents as a part of any mendicant order.[51]

Finally, in the 1280s, the mendicants officially incorporated the penitents in

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46 *Memoriale* in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 109–112.

47 "unum virum religiosum in dei verbo instructum si commode possunt." Ibid., 103.

48 Umiliana's *vita* was written ca.1248 by a Franciscan Vito of Cortona. It is printed as *De V B. Aemiliana seu Humiliana,* in *AASS*, Maii, Vol. IV, Parisiis & Romae 1866, 385–400.

49 Margherita's *vita* was written by Giunta Bevignati. It is printed as *Legenda de vita et miraculis beate Margarite de Cortona,* in *AASS*, Feb.III, (1658), 298–357.

50 Benvenuta's *vita* was written by an anonymous Dominican ca. 1292–1294. It is printed as *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis virgine et sorore tertii ordinis,* in *AASS*, Octobris XIII, 145–185. For the genesis of this *vita,* see TILATTI 1994, 4–5.

51 Humbert of Roman's *Sermon aux penitents,* is printed in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 125–128.

their orders. At this time the mendicants were also clearly distinguishing between those penitents who followed the Franciscans and those who were affiliated to the Order of Preachers. Soon the Franciscan penitents clearly took the leading position that they held throughout the Middle Ages. Paradoxically, the two orders that had initially shunned any formal responsibilities to the lay-religious, eventually ended up competing for this right to organize their religious lives.

In 1284 a Minorite, Caro, reorganized the *Memoriale,* creating a more rule-like document, the so-called *Rule of Caro*.[52] This *Rule*'s principal addition to the former document concerned the relationship between the clergy and laity. It stated that the penitents had *necessarily* to be supervised by a clergyman.[53] In this way the clerical dominance over these lay associations was secured. The Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV (1288–1292), would grant this *Rule of Caro* approval in his bull *Supra montem*, dated 18, August 1289. This final version of the rule, the *regula bullata*, made, however, one significant change to the *Rule of Caro*: it explicitly stated that the penitents were to be guided by the Minorites specifically.[54] Hereby the penitents were incorporated by the pope, himself a Franciscan, into the Franciscan order, and Nicholas firmly intended that this order would remain the principal provider for the lay people's spiritual needs.[55]

The Dominicans, of course, were all but pleased to hear about these Franciscan biases in the pope's decree. They too had accumulated a lay following, and they too had learned to appreciate the lay piety that had already produced numerous locally venerated saints. The Dominican Master General Munio of Zamora, a Spaniard, had composed a rule in 1285 that was based on the *Memoriale,* but which complemented it with a statement that the followers of that rule were to be supervised by a Dominican friar.[56] This *modus vivendi* much later became the official position of the *Dominican Third Order Rule*, but at first Munio's efforts were far from successful. Soon after the Dominican penitent rule was written, Munio was attacked by the Franciscan pope, Nicholas IV, who ordered him to resign. Nicholas's exact reasons and motivations are unknown, but it seems likely that the episode about the supervision over the penitents played some role in the unspecified accusations.[57] Munio resigned in 1291, and the

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52 This *Rule of Caro* is printed as *Regula fratrum de poenitentia*, in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 128–142.

53 " visitatorem habeant sacerdotem, qui alicuius approbatae religionis existat." *Regula*, in Ibid., 136.

54 " consulimus ut visitatores et informatores de fratrum Minorum ordine assumatur." This papal addition for Caro's Rule is printed in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 156.

55 MEERSSEMAN 1982, 28–29.

56 "habeant in magistrum et directorem aliquem idoneum fratrem sacerdotem de ordine Predicatorum." The Dominican penitents' *Rule*,in Thomas of Siena's *Tractatus* 1938,43. The *Rule* is also printed in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 143–156.

57 In his history of the Dominican master generals, Mortier argues that the conflict over the penitents as well as general rivalry between these two mendicant orders were the principal reasons for pope Nicholas's decision to depose Munio, MORTIER 1905, 278–293. In a more recent account Peter Linehan argues that the complaints about Munio's pastoral care among the Spanish nuns and religious women influenced significantly Nicholas's decision, LINEHAN 1997, 97–110.

papacy approved the Dominican version of the penitent rule only in 1405.[58] The awkward position of the Dominican penitents was to be made even more visible when the *Rule* of the Augustinian hermits, a much smaller organization than that of the Dominicans, was approved in 1399, six years before Munio's *Rule*.[59] In practice, however, scores of penitents were guided by the Dominicans, and these lay-religious followed this later version of rule long before it was approved. Nonetheless, a good part of the Dominican penitent order's history was overshadowed by this missing papal approval.

The mendicant friars' interaction with the penitents, and particularly with the penitent women, shows that their reactions were mixed. On one hand, they perceived their pastoral functions as one of their central duties. Accordingly, a number of Dominican and Franciscan friars formed close ties with their order's lay women. Peter of Dacia, Thomas of Cantimpré, Giunta Bevignati, Vito of Cortona and Raymond of Capua are just a few of the best known examples.[60] The mendicant friars recognized the laity's religious potential. They perceived particularly lay women's active and mystical devotion as complementary to their own administrative pursuits.[61] On the other hand, the mendicants, not unlike other religious orders, were unwilling to carry the full share of those obligations that the involvement with lay people brought about. Therefore, especially the early history of these orders is marked by numerous decisions that kept the lay people who searched for guidance at some distance. Ultimately churchmen always remained ambivalent about the laity's devotional activities, in part because they feared that the lay saints' popularity might contest their own institutional roles.

In short, the friars' reaction to *pinzochere* was an amalgam of admiration, suspicion, need, caution, interaction, and domination. These conflicting attitudes, present already in the early years of the penitent movement, continued to shape the friars' perceptions of penitent women throughout the Middle Ages. Accordingly, as I hope to show in the upcoming chapters, the Preaching Friars' reactions to women's active lives were complex, even paradoxical.

The fact that the Dominican penitent order remained without final papal recognition for more than a hundred years enhanced the Preachers' need to act cautiously in their pastoral activities concerning these penitents. They were not willing to smear their own reputation or to endanger the future of Dominican penitents. In fact, it is clear that the Dominicans promoted the penitent way of life that strove for greater moderation and institutionalization than that of the Franciscans.[62] The Dominicans emphasized the formal aspects of habit-taking,

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58 Pope Innocent VII's bull, *Sedis apostolicae*, is from July 1405, in *BOP*, *tomus secundus*, 1730, 473–76.

59 On the Augustinian penitents, see p. 40–41.

60 Peter of Dacia worked with Christine of Stommeln; Vito with Umiliana dei Cerchi; Giunta with Margherita of Cortona; Thomas of Cantimpré with Margaret of Ypres; and Raymond with Catherine of Siena. For the relationships between these and other mendicant confessors and penitent women, see COAKLEY 1991b, 447–450 and passim.; COAKLEY 1994, 91–99. For the Dominican confessors in particular, see COAKLEY 1991a, 223–243. See also p. 114–115, 157–158.

61 Women's presence among medieval lay saints was notable, VAUCHEZ 1981, 414–417.

62 MEERSSEMAN 1982, 23–25,

for example, and they kept away from the controversial topic of poverty. Thus their hagiographers brought forward carefully balanced accounts of lay devotion that supported the hierarchical church. The protagonists lived humbly, but their way of life did not call for absolute poverty. They were impassioned helpers of their neighbors, yet they shunned any revolutionary demands for social justice.[63] While the Dominican and Franciscan penitents partly shared their past through the *Memoriale*, and they shared ideals of humility, apostolic simplicity, and social benevolence with other lay groups, such as the *Humiliati* and the Beguines, each of these groups also produced its own interpretation of lay piety. There were many mutually held ideals, but the solutions that each organization came up with were not identical.

The main part of this book addresses the developments that took place in the Dominican penitent order since the late thirteenth century when the first Dominican penitent saints emerged. Therefore, I shall presently discuss briefly but one aspect of the later period, namely the emergence of penitent communities. The medieval *pinzochere* initially lived in their private homes as secular penitents (*sorores saeculares*). This way of life continued to exist throughout the entire Middle Ages, but, particularly from the fourteenth century, separate convents for the regular sisters (*sorores regulares*) arose to stand along side the traditional housing of the seculars in their own homes. In transalpine regions, the Beguines had moved into communities already since the second part of the thirteenth century, and in Germany many of these Beguine houses were soon to be transformed into Dominican nunneries.[64] In Italy the Franciscan penitents, some of whom lived in communities as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, led this movement toward the communal life. The Minorite penitents' more established institutional position allowed them to embrace a semi-monastic way of life earlier than the Dominicans. Indeed, among the Dominican penitents conventual housing was a significant alternative only from the fifteenth century onwards.[65] This communal life created, as shall be studied in Chapter Five, radically different circumstances for penitents than those found in private homes, and, accordingly, it produced a whole new set of spiritual ideals. These regular sisters emulated the collegial and liturgical spirituality of their monastic predecessors, whereas the secular penitents had seen themselves as ascetic hermits rather than as contemplative nuns.

The Franciscan and Dominican penitent orders produced several saintly offspring. Umiliana dei Cerchi, Angela of Foligno (d. 1309), Margherita of Cortona, and Angelina of Montegiove (d. 1435) are just a few examples of lay women whose religious life was inspired specifically by Franciscan spirituality. All these saints earned their reputations through their bodily mortifications, their Christocentric mysticism, their prophetic exhortations for spiritual reform, and their good deeds. In comparison to the Dominican penitent saints, the Franciscan

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63 For the Dominican lay women's charity, see p. 102–110.

64 On the transformation of German Beguinages into Dominican monasteries, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 377–378.

65 CASAGRANDE 1991, 112–114, 120–122. On the Dominican penitents' communal housing, see further p. 62–64, 146–156.

women gave a more central role, true to the spirit of St. Francis, to the religious value of poverty. Umiliana dei Cerchi and Margherita of Cortona, for example, dressed themselves in rags to manifest their penance. Also, the Franciscan saintly women were more inclined to operate in institutions for charity, even to found hospitals, whereas the Dominican penitent saints typically worked more privately, in part because the latter group's *Rule* expressed some reservations concerning the institutional obligation for charity.

Moreover, the periods of unprecedented vitality fell in slightly different eras for the Franciscan and Dominican penitent saints. While the Dominican penitent order produced several *beatae* in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, for the saintly Franciscan penitents the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries were particularly favorable times. Finally, as the Franciscan penitent order earned its official status earlier than the Dominicans, special attention that an emerging way of life earned came to them at an earlier period than to the Dominicans. Since the communal forms of the penitent way of life emerged much earlier among the Minorites than among the Preachers, they produced already in the early fifteenth century saints who were founders of regular penitent communities. Angelina of Montegiove and Colette of Corbie (d. 1447), from France, for example, earned their saintly fame as promoters of the communal religious life.[66]

The Dominicans and the Franciscans were not the only mendicants who hosted penitent orders, but their orders were surely the most significant ones. Nevertheless, it is important to notice also that the Carmelites, the Augustinian hermits, and the Order of Servites attracted lay followers. The penitent groups affiliated with these mendicant orders existed from the thirteenth century, but, as was the case with the Dominicans, their rules were formally approved only much later: the penitents of the Augustinian hermits received papal confirmation for their *modus vivendi* in 1399 and those of the Carmelites in 1452.[67] These penitents lived in their private homes as well as in separate religious communities. In comparison to the Dominicans and the Franciscans, the Carmelites and the Augustinians were slow to react to the sanctity of lay women. Nonetheless, the Augustinian penitent order produced two popular penitent saints, namely Elena of Udine (d. 1458) and Christine of Spoleto (d. 1458). As was typical for a number of penitents, both of these Augustinians were widows. Christine of Spoleto's piety was essentially ascetic: contemporaries commemorated her self-mortification done in remembrance of Christ's passions.[68] Elena of Udine's life was more active, particularly immediately after her husband's death, when she not only visited the ailing, but also lodged the homeless. Later Elena turned more toward contemplation and mysticism, and eventually she ended abandoning

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66 For a brief bibliography of recent studies about the Franciscan penitents and the order's saints, see p. 18–19, note 18. Concerning the differences between the Franciscan and Dominican penitents, CHARITY see p. 110.

67 The papal approval of the Augustinian hermits was granted with the bull *In sinu Sedis Apostolicae* (1399), see *Bullarium Ordinis eremitarum S. Augustini* 1628, 53–54. On the Augustinian discipline for the penitents, see the Rule of Udinese penitents in TILATTI 1991. On the papal approval of the Carmelite penitents, CATENA 1975, 514.

68 The three testimonies about Christine's sanctity, which were collected almost immediately after her death, focus on this saint's asceticism (her hairshirt, flagellation, and fasts) and ecstasies. These testimonies are edited in MOTTA 1893, 84–93.

the *vita activa* altogether for a more secluded communal life.[69]

It is simply impossible to determine how many *pinzochere* actually existed in medieval Italy. Yet, the scores of papal, hagiographic and archeological evidence, not to mention notarial records make it clear that these women were an essential part of medieval Italy's religious and social landscape. While there were penitents also in the more rural region of southern Italy,[70] the penitent presence was strongest in the northern and central Italian urban centers. For example Venice, Siena, Florence, Rome, Bologna, Orvieto, and Padua hosted large clusters of penitents.[71] From the viewpoint of the Dominican penitent order, Siena and Venice were perhaps the central venues. While Siena hosted atypically large conglomerations of penitents,[72] Thomas of Siena's efforts for the establishment of the penitent order took place in Venice, thus marking this city as an unofficial administrative capital of the northern Italian Dominican penitents.[73]

The penitent life unfolded in an urban environment, and its strategy was to create social networks and foster lay people's religious experiences. Despite friars' initial reservations and some contemporaries' skepticism (see Chapter Five), this way of life benefited many parties: the penitents themselves, their neighbors, and even the churchmen. The penitent associations made it possible for women to live respectable lives in the secular world, even as non-married women. These institutions supported their members, who, in their turn, helped their contemporaries in their spiritual needs and physical suffering. The mendicant friars nurtured women's spiritual lives, and in return these orders were blessed with a rich harvest of women's charity, mystical experiences, prophesies, miracles, and visions.

Saintly Dominican Penitents – A Survey

While I did my research for this book, I wished countless times that there would have been something like a handbook of the Dominican penitent saints. Ideally this handbook would have contained the names, dates, and places of origin for those medieval Dominican penitents who had enjoyed a saintly reputation. Moreover, it would have recorded the principal events that shaped these women's

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69 For Elena of Udine's piety, see TILATTI 1988, 24–68. Tilatti's volume contains also an edition of Simone of Rome's contemporary *vita* of Elena.

70 On the penitents in southern Italy, see GUARNIERI 1980, 1738–1741.

71 For a general city-to-city survey about penitents, see GUARNIERI 1980, 1725–1741. For penitent communities (as opposed to home-dwelling penitents) in Tuscany and Umbria see BENVENUTI PAPI 1982 and CASAGRANDE 1982 respectively. On the penitent establishments in various northern Italian cities, see also CASAGRANDE 1983.

72 In Siena the penitents of the Basilica of St-Dominic numbered seventy-four in 1336, ninety-eight in 1352, and 138 in 1378. For the membership catalogues of these Sienese penitents, see *Documenti* 1936, 11–12, 22–24, 47–49. The Sienese penitents also enjoyed the respect of their fellow citizens, which can be seen in the testament donations to them, see *Il Memoriale delle Mantellate Senesi* 1947.

73 Concerning Thomas's work for the Dominican penitent order, see p. 54–55. On the history of Venetian penitents, particularly in the fifteenth century, see SORELLI 1984b, passim. On the Venetian penitents in the context of the Dominican observant movement, see Idem 1989, 134–141.

lives, the names of their confessors, and, possibly, the dates of their beatification. Finally, I dreamed, this handbook would guide one to locate the medieval sources and research literature concerning each *pinzochera*.

This handbook has unfortunately never been created. Therefore, anyone who is interested in the medieval Dominican penitents *collectively* has to start from Serafino Razzi's *Vite dei santi e beati del sacro ordine d' Frati Predicatori, cosi huomini come donne* that dates back to the late sixteenth century, or, alternatively from a more recent, but less satisfying M.-C. De Ganay's *Les bienheureuses dominicaines (1190–1577)* from 1926. Both these collections, particularly that by Razzi, are useful starting points. Since Razzi wrote in the second half of the sixteenth century, he was almost a contemporary of such early sixteenth century Dominican penitent saints as Lucia Brocadelli, Catherine of Racconigi, and Stefana Quinzani, about whom he wrote with authority.[74] Though Razzi personally had not met these saints, he had spoken to eyewitnesses. Still, neither Razzi nor, much less so, De Ganay are likely to satisfy a historian of today. Razzi's book is a mixture of admirable scholarly endeavor and religious pursuit. This indefatigable historian of the Dominican order provides his reader with valuable historical information, yet he is often unspecific about his sources and his historian's craft is ultimately set to serve a religious goal: the glorification of the Dominican order. De Ganay, who relies heavily on Razzi's book, documents her sources poorly, and her primary motivation for historical research is also devotional. Moreover, neither of these studies is particularly helpful in guiding the reader to a quick reference of dates and other basic information, and, needless to say, they are too old to be of any help for unearthing the recent secondary sources.

Recently Gabriella Zarri's works on the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century religious lay women, particularly her thorough essay *Le sante vive*, have provided well-researched and updated information on that era's Dominican penitents as well.[75] Nonetheless, similar work with the earlier Dominican *pinzochere* is yet to be done. Today one may find a good number of Italian Dominican penitents in the multi-volume encyclopedia, *Bibliotheca Sanctorum*, but before this handbook is of much use, one must already be familiar enough with a certain saint to avoid searching the entire series for what one is looking. Moreover, several less known, but not unimportant, medieval *beatae* are not included in this encyclopedia. One looks in vain for example for such names as Pina of Pisa, Maria Sturion of Venice, Margherita Fontana, and Magdalena Panatieri.[76] One may also find *Scrittrici mistiche italiane* (edited by Giovanni

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74 I have principally used the first edition of Razzi's book from the year 1577, but since this volume does not yet contain the *vita* of Maria Mancini I have also perused the later, augmented, redaction from 1588 (in the 1605 edition).

75 Gabriella Zarri's *Le sante vive* has originally been published as Le sante vive. Per una tipologia della santità femminile nel primo Cinquecento in *Annali dell'Istituto Storico Italo-Germanico in Trento,* IX (1980), 371–445. See for the reprint in Zarri 1990, 87–163.

76 The recent encyclopedia about saints, *Il Grande Libro dei Santi* 1998–, from which the first volume has come out, seems to take also less known *mulieres sanctae* in closer consideration. Such less studied saint as Giovanna of Orvieto, for example, has earned an extensive treatment.

Pozzi and Claudio Leonardi, 1988) as a useful introduction to a few Dominican penitent saints, namely Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Villana Botti, Catherine of Siena, Stefana Quinzani, Lucia Brocadelli, and Osanna Andreasi. This book of Italian female mystics from various religious orders contains concise biographies of each saint and samples of texts that were written either by these saints or about them. Nonetheless, this collection also sheds light only to some Dominican women's lives.

The upcoming paragraphs are to function as a concise guide to the Italian Dominican penitent saints. It has not been my intention to produce a complete survey of the material pertaining to the Dominican penitent women. I am too aware that one would need years, if not decades, of further research to complete such an endeavor. Moreover, such an opus would not be meaningful within the framework of this present study. Yet, I hope that even this short chronological treatment is able to give the reader a sense of the panorama of the Dominican penitent order's medieval saints, some printed primary sources, and the research literature presently available. The main part of my study is thematic, rather than chronological, and, therefore the reader might occasionally find it beneficial to return to these pages to check for some biographical information. During the course of my study, I shall analyze, expand, and interpret the themes that I presently only list. I have also used material pertaining to two individuals who died as nuns, namely Maria Mancini and Margherita of Savoy, because these two women spent a considerable part of their lives as penitents. Therefore, their lives testify not only about the monastic life, but about lay piety as well. One may wonder why I have not included such sixteenth century penitents as, for example, Maria Bagnesi (1514–1577), when her contemporaries like Stefana Quinzani, Catherine Racconigi, and Lucia Brocadelli appear in these pages. I have simply chosen to discuss only those saints that were born before the turn of the sixteenth century and whose lives were mainly spent before the mid-sixteenth century Council of Trent (1545–1563), whose canons radically changed women's position in the church.[77]

Benvenuta Boiani (1255–1292) was an unmarried *pinzochera* who lived in her parents' home in Cividale. She came from a respected and well-to-do urban family. Benvenuta had close contacts with the Dominican nuns of St-Mary-of-the-Cell as well as with the local Dominican friars, particularly with her confessor, Corrado of Castellerio. Still, she never actually dressed in the habit of the Dominican penitent order. Benvenuta Boiani's life was marked by an illness that kept her bedridden for five years, until circa 1291. She attributed her cure to a miracle performed by St. Dominic, and as a token of her gratitude she made a pilgrimage to St. Dominic's tomb in Bologna. Otherwise Benvenuta lived a sedentary life that was marked by visions, prayer, and successful resistance to the devil's frequent temptations. Benvenuta's *vita* was written soon after her death (probably between 1292 and 1294), most likely not by her confessor, Corrado, but by another, anonymous, Dominican. This *vita* opens a view to the

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77 On the Counter-reformation and its impact on the women's position in the church and the society, see p. 156.

saint's spiritual life as it unfolded partly in her home, partly in the monastery of St-Mary. Her cult was popularized in the 1440s by Leonardo Mattei, who was also the first one to claim, incorrectly, that Benvenuta had formally dressed in the order's habit. Benvenuta was beatified in 1765.[78]

Giovanna (Vanna) of Orvieto (1264–1306) was an unmarried secular penitent, whose parents had died when she was only a child. Giovanna supported herself with her own work, living at a benefactor's home. She took the Dominican habit probably at the age of fourteen and wore it until the end of her life. This saint's spiritual life was marked by an intense imitation of Christ's passion and by such supernatural phenomena as levitation, miracles, and clairvoyance. Giovanna's Latin *vita* that was written a few years after her death by an anonymous local author, perhaps a Dominican Giacomo Scalza, focuses on the saint's inner life. Only a few references to the events and persons around her are provided. Giovanna's cult was popularized by Thomas of Siena, who translated her legend into Italian in 1400. Giovanna was beatified in 1754.[79]

Jacopina (Pina) of Pisa (ca.1279–ca.1370) has left only a few marks of her existence, but clearly she was seen as saintly by her contemporaries. She was a married, home-dwelling, saint who used her family's wealth to help the poor and the suffering. There is no *vita* dedicated to her and her cult was never officially recognized.[80]

The blind Margherita of Città di Castello (1287–1320), a descendant of a noble family, was deserted by her parents when she was only a child. Eventually she found her home in a benevolent family in Città di Castello. She wore the Dominican penitent habit, but there is no precise historical evidence as to who might have been her confessor or who was the author of her first, now lost, *vita.* The later hagiographers based their reductions on this earlier *vita.* They too remain anonymous. The longer reduction of these two, the so-called *recensio maior*, was probably penned by a local cleric, whereas the considerably shorter version, the so-called *recensio minor*, derived most likely from the pen of a Dominican, who did not hesitate to use Margherita's sanctity as a way to glorify the order at large. Margherita lived humbly, helping around her adopted house. She was seen to be endowed with such charismatic gifts as levitation, miracle-making, and supernatural learnedness. Her legends treat extensively her

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78 On Benvenuta's Life, see *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883. For a translation in Italian, see *Della vita della beata & devotissima Vergine Benvenuta* 1595. For a recent scholarly biography, see TILATTI 1994.

79 For the Latin version of Giovanna's *vita* see *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996. Thomas of Siena's translation is edited as *Leggenda della beata Giovanna* by Ludovico Passarini in 1879 (the reprint can be found in PAOLI-RICCI 1996). In this study I am referring to the Latin reduction. Giacomo Scalza has long been believed to have been the author of Giovanna's *vita*. Yet recently Emore Paoli has argued that it is impossible to prove who is the author of this text, see PAOLI-RICCI 1996, 5–16. For a recent study on Giovanna, her legend, and her cult, see PAOLI-RICCI 1996.

80 Jacopina of Pisa is mentioned by Thomas of Siena in his *Tractatus* 1938, 20: "In civitate etiam Pisana inter alias quedam soror domina Pina fuit exime pietatis et sancte conversationibus et fame..." Due to the limited source material, the only available biography of Pina contains very little information about Pina herself, see BARSOTTI 1904. Nonetheless, this booklet contains useful introduction to the history of penitents in Pisa. Moreover, it provides some edited documents pertaining to Pina's life.

posthumous miracles and the translation of her body when the local doctors discovered that Margherita's heart had miraculously sheltered three little stones, on which were carved the images of Joseph, Mary, and the Jesus child. Her cult was popularized by Thomas of Siena who translated Margherita's legend into Italian in 1400 on the basis of *recensio minor*, the version by the Dominican. Margherita was beatified in 1675.[81]

As a young orphan Sybillina Biscossi of Pavia (1287–1367) had quickly to earn her own living as a servant, but when she lost her sight she was no longer able to work. At the age of fifteen, Sybillina retreated to live as a recluse in her cell that was attached to a Pavian Dominican church. This rigorous ascetic enjoyed a prophet's reputation, and therefore her solitary existence was often interrupted by the seekers of advice. Sybillina's confessor, the Dominican Thomas of Bozzolasto, compiled a few years after the saint's death her short *vita* that focused on the saint's asceticism and visions after her seclusion. Sybillina was beatified in 1854.[82]

A Florentine penitent, Villana Botti (1332–1360), a wife and mother, was probably dressed in the Dominican habit only posthumously when she was buried in the Dominican church of Santa Maria Novella. Yet, this daughter of a merchant had numerous lifelong contacts with the Dominicans and the *pinzochere* of Santa Maria Novella. Villana's *vita* portrays, not surprisingly, her matrimony as a forced union that this pious girl was unable to evade. As a penitent she longed for solitude, poverty, and quiet meditation, which were broken by occasional good works. Villana's cult followed almost immediately after her death, but it picked up in earnest in the 1420s when her *vita* was written by a Dominican of Santa Maria Novella, Girolamo Giovanni, and when her grandson Sebastian, also a Dominican, worked toward the establishment of her fame. Neither of these authors had known the saint personally, but as members of the same religious community, Santa Maria Novella, they were interested in promoting the cult of this saintly wife. Villana was beatified in 1824.[83]

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81 The two reductions of Margherita of Città di Castello's Latin *vita* have recently been re-edited, see the *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio maior* 1994 and the *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio minor* 1994. While the former was perhaps produced by an erudite canon regular, the latter was probably penned by a Dominican. I refer principally to the *Recensio minor*, since it provides the Dominican viewpoint to Margherita's sanctity. These *vitae* have also been edited earlier, for *recensio minor* see *Vita beatae Margharitae* 1900 and for *recensio maior* see LAURENT, *La plus ancienne Legende* 1940. Thomas of Siena's Italian translation of Margherita's *Life* (based on the *Recensio minor*) is yet to be edited.

The genealogy of the two reductions has been debated. Laurent argued that the *Recensio minor* was based on the presumably earlier *Recensio maior*, see LAURENT 1940. Presently, however, it is believed that both of these versions derive from an earlier, now lost, reduction, see MENESTÒ 1984. Menestò also provides an introduction to Margherita's spirituality. See also the introductory essay in LUNGAROTTI 1994. For a comparison on the narrative strategies of Margherita of Città di Castello's *vita*'s two reductions, see SOLVI 1995. On the relationship between Margherita's visions and contemporary Christian art, see FRUGONI 1991.

82 On Sybillina's *vita*, see Thomas of Bozzolasto, *De B. Sybillina Papiensi* 1865. On her piety in the context of urban women's solitary life, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 396–400.

83 On Villana's *vita*, see Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868. This saint and her cult is also mentioned in a contemporary letter by Franco Sacchetti, a novelist, see *Delle novelle di Franco Sacchetti*, parte seconda, 1726, 227. For a scholarly biography, which also

Catherine Benincasa of Siena (1347–1380) is the only Dominican penitent who was eventually formally canonized. Accordingly, the life of this virgin saint is by far the best recorded. There are several contemporary *vitae*, a collection of testimonies, eulogies, letters, chronicle records, and papal bulls. Catherine heard the calling for the penitent life early: she took the habit when she was around sixteen. This youngest of perhaps twenty or more children of a dyer, Giacomo, and his wife, Lapa Benincasa, lived as a penitent in their home. Catherine's rigorous penance, frequent communions, apparitions, and Christocentric mysticism were complemented by active neighborly service, house chores, prophetic teaching, and political missions around Italy and in the papal court, first in Avignon in 1377, then in Rome in 1378. Catherine's later spiritual experiences were recorded by her first confessor and relative, Thomas Fonte of Siena (not to be confused with Thomas Caffarini of Siena, who is one of central figures in this study), whose texts were perused by Catherine's later confessor, Raymond of Capua, who completed Catherine's influential tripartite *Legenda maior* fifteen years after the saint's death. Raymond's *vita* on Catherine was a result of an intimate spiritual relationship with the saint. In fact, this extensive and detailed description of Catherine of Siena's life is one of the most important sources to medieval penitent women's religious experience. Thomas Fonte's writings have been lost, but besides the *Legenda maior* numerous other contemporary *vitae*, such as the other Thomas of Siena's abbreviation of the *Legenda maior*, the so-called *Legenda minor* (1412–1414), and his supplement, the *Libellus de Supplemento* (1416–1418), to it also survive. Thomas of Siena knew Catherine personally, but he was never in a daily contact with the saint. Therefore, Thomas's texts were mainly based on Raymond's authoritative *Legenda maior*. Catherine herself dictated a book, *Il Dialogo*, around 1378, in which she records her vision about the dialogue with God concerning Christian perfection and Divine Grace. Moreover, Catherine dictated close to four hundred letters that were addressed to popes, secular rulers, members of religious orders, and even the laity. Catherine had a wide following already during her lifetime, and her sanctity presented a point of reference for virtually all later Dominican *pinzochere*. Catherine was canonized in 1461 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1970.[84]

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illuminates the history of the Florence's penitent order in the fourteenth century, see ORLANDI 1955. On Villana's married life, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 171–203.

84 See Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866. On two reductions of Thomas Caffarini of Siena's *Legenda minor*, see Thomas of Siena, *Sanctae Catharinae Senensis Legenda minor* 1942. The twenty-four testimonies that Thomas of Siena collected for the Venetian inquiry about Catherine's sanctity in 1411–1416 can be found in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942. For Thomas's supplement to *Legenda maior*, see Thomas of Siena *Libellus de supplemento* 1974. The best edition of Saint Catherine of Siena's book *Il Dialogo della Divina Provvidenza* is by Giulia Cavallini (1968). A standard edition of Catherine's letters is by Niccolò Tommaseo, see Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere di S. Catherina da Siena* (1860). A meticulous, but incomplete edition *Epistolario di Santa Caterina da Siena* (edited by Eugenio Dupré Theseider, 1940) contains 88 re-edited and commented letters by the saint.
A collection of letters by Catherine's disciples illuminates well the early stages of this saint's cult, see *Leggenda minore di S. Caterina da Siena e lettere dei suoi discepoli* 1868. Thomas of Siena incorporated a brief *vita* of Catherine in his *Tractatus de Ordine de fratrum et sororum de penitentia sancti Dominici* 1938, 20–27. He also makes a few valuable remarks

Maria Mancini of Pisa (1350–ca.1431) died as a Dominican nun in the strictly encloistered monastery of St-Dominic in Pisa, but for about three years (ca. 1375–1378) this twice-widowed mother of eight, all of whom she lost early, lived a very active life as a secular penitent. As such Maria Mancini was engaged in providing assistance for her neighbors, but when her visions and ecstasies became more frequent she and her confessors found peaceful monastic life a more suitable surrounding for her. She first joined the local monastery of Santa Croce, where she met Chiara Gambacorta (d. 1419) who, in 1385, founded the said nunnery of St-Dominic, which was to house herself, Maria Mancini, and other reformed nuns. There had initially been a Latin *vita* about Maria by her anonymous confessor, but the only surviving version is Serafino Razzi's Italian translation in his *Vite dei santi e beati*. Maria was beatified in 1855.[85]

As a nubile girl Maria Sturion of Venice (ca. 1379–1399) was married to a rascal of a nobleman who soon deserted his bride. This young abandoned bride returned to live as a penitent in her merchant family's wealthy home. Maria's sanctity was manifested in simple manners, in a humble spirit, and in benevolence toward her neighbors, rather than in extraordinary acts of penance or miracles. Maria's confessor, Thomas of Siena, wrote this saint's *vita* around 1402 only a few years after her death from the plague. To encourage further other Venetian penitents in imitation of Maria's pious way of life, Thomas soon translated her legend also in Italian. Due to the intimate personal ties between Thomas and Maria, the *vita* captured particularly well the practices and concerns of late medieval penitent women. Maria's cult has never been formally confirmed.[86]

Margherita, from the house of Savoy (1380/1390–1464), died as a nun in the Dominican monastery of St-Mary-Magdalene (in Alba). Yet, this marquise of Monferrato also lived a long period as a penitent. After her husband's death, the young widow stayed at home to raise the children from his previous marriage, but after this period of administrative responsibilities, active charity, and family

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to Catherine's cult in his *Historia disciplinae regularis instaurate* 1749, 193, 197, 198. For the documents concerning the Sienese penitents, papal privileges to Catherine, and other relevant historical documentation, see *Documenti* 1936. For further contemporary accounts about Catherine, see for example *I miracoli di Caterina di Jacobo da Siena di Anonimo Fiorentino* 1936 and *Leggenda abbreviata di S. Caterina da Siena di fra. Antonio della Rocca* 1939.

As to the secondary sources the *Atti del Simposio Internazionale Cateriniano Bernardiano* 1982 is the most comprehensive recent collection. For Catherine's biography see Sophia BOESCH GAJANO and Odile REDON in Ibid. For a bibliography about the vast array of primary and secondary sources concerning Catherine, see ZANINI 1971 and 1985 as well as FAWTIER 1914.

85 Razzi's translation is printed as *Vita della venerabile Suor Maria da Pisa* in the second edition of his *Vite dei santi e beati*, see Razzi 1605, 651–659. This legend focuses on Maria's time as a penitent and ends in the year 1393. Thus almost forty years of Maria's life in the monastery of St-Dominic remains uncovered. For the best available secondary source to the little recorded life of this *beata*, see ZUCCHELLI 1914, 121–128. Moreover, his book contains a few edited sources pertaining to Maria's time in St-Dominic, see Ibid., 390–391, 401, 418.

86 On Maria's Latin legend, see Thomas of Siena, *Legenda cujusdam B. Mariae de Venetiis* 1749. I have, however, principally used the excellent modern edition of Thomas's Italian version that is edited by Fernanda Sorelli in her *La santità imitabile* (1984), see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984. Sorelli's introduction to this volume provides a thorough biographical and historical overview to Maria, her family and penitent companions as well as to her legacy, see SORELLI 1984a, 102–143 and passim.

engagements Margherita withdrew from the world to Alba, where she created a penitent community and lived for the next twenty years (ca. 1418–1448). During this time she and other women of her community engaged in acts of charity, but their orientation turned more and more toward total withdrawal and contemplation. Gradually their penitent community was transformed into the monastery of St-Mary-Magdalene: in 1445 the monastery was granted its privileges; in 1448 Margherita took her vows; in 1450 the community was encloistered. Margherita had close ties with the Dominicans, but they never actually wrote a *vita* about this *devota*, and, therefore her life has remained quite poorly documented. Margherita was beatified in 1669.[87]

Margherita Fontana of Modena (1440–1513) was a secular, unmarried penitent from a noble family. The *vita* of this rather unknown penitent was written half a decade after her death (ca. in 1585) by the Dominican Desiderio Paloni, who did not have personal contact with the *pinzochera*. Margherita made her vow of virginity as a young girl and early on she also dressed in the Dominican habit. Her contemporaries saw her as saintly, because of her dedicated acts of neighborly love, her asceticism, and a few miracles. Margherita's cult was never formally confirmed.[88]

Another unmarried secular penitent, Magdalena Panatieri of Monferrato (1443/1453–1503), a descendant of a noble family, was active in giving alms and helping her neighbors. This ascetic and devotee of the infant Christ was also a prophet and a teacher who reprehended sinners and gave spiritual guidance to other *pinzochere*. She was almost immediately venerated as a saint locally, but her cult never attained wider popularity, in part because her life remained for long poorly documented. Only in the late sixteenth century and seventeenth century various authors, such as Serafino Razzi, Giovanni Pio, and Domenico Marchese penned short *vitae* about her. Magdalena was beatified in 1827.[89]

Osanna Andreasi of Mantua (1449–1505), also a noble woman, was an advisor and a court prophet for the ducal Gonzaga family, who were also the main supporters of the saint's cult. Clad in her Dominican habit, Osanna helped around in her parents' home, but after she and her siblings were left as orphans, she ran the household on her own. Osanna advised the Gonzagas, particularly marquis Francesco Gonzaga and the marquise Isabella d'Este Gonzaga. But ordinary people also asked for her guidance and listened to her prophecies. Osanna's intensive Christocentric mystical experiences focused on the imitation of Christ's suffering on the cross. Osanna's closest ecclesiastical supporters were her

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87 In the case of Margherita of Savoy, I have unfortunately not been able to trace any primary sources. Therefore I have been forced to refrain to the available secondary sources, see ALLARIA 1877, 1879, De GANAY 1926, 251–277, and FEDELINI 1940. None of these sources, alas, provide the reader with a clear note apparatus, and, all of them replenish lacking historical evidence with flights of imagination.

88 For a Latin reduction of an original Italian text, see Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana Virg. Tertii Ordinis S. Dom.* 1868.

89 Magdalena's *vita* has been penned by Marchese, see MARCHESE 1679. The later Latin translation is printed as *De B. Magdalena de Panateriis, AASS*, Auctaria Octobris, 1875, 168*–173*. Due to the Italian version's priority, I have pertained to it. Magdalena's active life is briefly featured in ZARRI 1992.

confessors, the Dominican Francesco Silvestri of Ferrara and the Olivetan Girolamo Scolari, both of whom wrote version of her *vita* on the bases of their discussions with Osanna, only some years after the saint's death. Together with the Gonzaga family, they worked actively for this *pinzochera*'s canonization. Francesco Silvestri's *vita* in particular was an elaborate thematic study of the saint's various spiritual gifts. Similar to other contemporary hagiographers, such as Sebastiano Bontempi who wrote on Colomba of Rieti and Giovanni Francesco Pico who wrote on Catherine of Racconigi, Francesco wrote a *vita* that was not only a *vita*, but also a philosophical exposition about the phenomenon of sanctity. Osanna was beatified in 1694.[90]

Like Osanna, Stefana Quinzani of Soncino (1457–1530) was also a protégée of the Gonzaga family. Stefana was born in Orzinuovi, but most of her life she spent in Crema and Soncino. As a daughter of a poor family, Stefana earned her own living early on, and as an unmarried penitent she continued working as a servant. Stefana lived as a secular penitent for several decades, but her ultimate dream was to create a community for regular penitents. This dream finally came true in 1519, when she and some twenty other women moved to the community of SS.-Paul-and-Catherine-of-Siena in Soncino. Stefana was famous for her ecstasies, for her impassioned imitation of Christ's suffering, and for her humility. The Dominican friars Bartolomeo of Mantua and Battista of Salò, who occasionally also functioned as the saint's confessors, wrote soon after the saint's death Latin *vitae* about her experiences. Unfortunately, only the Italian version, which freely combined these two texts, has survived. Stefana was beatified in 1740.[91]

Lucia (Camilla) Bartolini Rucellai (1465–1520) was also a founder of a penitent community. In 1496 this lay woman received, together with her husband Rodolfo, a noble man, her Dominican habit from the hands of the visionary reformer Girolamo Savonarola (d.1498). On this occasion Camilla also changed her name to Lucia. Lucia does not have her own *vita.* Thus she is primarily known through her foundation of St-Catherine-of-Siena, a penitent house that she created in Florence at the turn of the sixteenth century. Her cult was never formally confirmed.[92]

Colomba Guadagnoli of Rieti (1467–1501), a virgin saint, lived a short, ascetic life, following *imitatio Christi,* and enjoying prophetic visions. She also held

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90 For the Latin *vita* by the Dominican author, Silvesti, see Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867. See also the Latin translation of Hieronymous Montolivetan's Italian *vita*, in *AASS*, Juni IV, 1867, 601–664. I have used the *vita* by the Dominican. For the best modern biography of Osanna, see BAGOLINI-FERRETTI 1905. It also contains an extensive appendix of Osanna's letters and of letters concerning her as well as of other sources pertaining to her cult. Osanna's role in the court of the Gonzaga family is discussed in ZARRI 1990, 87–163.

91 On Stefana's Italian hagiography, see *Legenda volgare de la beata Stefana Quinzani* 1930. For this saint's modern biography, see GUERRINI 1930. For a collection of Stefana's letters, see Stefana Quinzani, *Lettere inedite della B. Stefana Quinzani* 1937, 7–31. Stefana features also in ZARRI 1990, 87–163.

92 A historical commentary about Lucia Bartolini, see *De B. Lucia Bartolini Rucellai* 1883, 202-207. For the rules, which were written by Ubaldini, a Dominican, for Lucia's penitent community, see Roberto Ubaldini *Il Direttorio di Roberto Ubaldini* 1969. This edition contains also Creytens's valuable introduction that sheds light on the histories of Lucia Bartolini, her husband Rodolfo, and Roberto Ubaldini.

practical accomplishments such as successful direction of her religious community. She came from a merchant family. While still living in her parents' home Colomba dressed in the Dominican habit (in 1486), but only a few years afterwards, in 1490, she founded a thriving community for penitent women in Perugia. While some voiced doubts about this mystic's sanctity, Colomba generally enjoyed popularity in Perugia where she was supported by the ruling Baglioni family. Colomba's *vita* was written by her confessor, a follower of Savonarola, mathematician Sebastiano Bontempi, only a few years after the saint's death. In this *vita* Sebastiano approached Colomba's spirituality with a keen scholarly eye in order to analyze the interrelation of visions, asceticism, prophecies and other aspects of saintly piety. Colomba was beatified in 1627.[93]

Lucia Brocadelli (1476–1544) came from one of Narni's most notable noble families. Her early marriage, which ended with Lucia's one-sided decision to take the penitent habit in 1494, was followed by a life in penitent communities in Rome, in Viterbo, and, finally, in Ferrara where the Duke, Ercole I d'Este, donated a penitent house for the saint in 1501. Lucia Brocadelli's saintly fame and popularity rested on the stigmata that she received in 1496. When the signs mysteriously vanished in 1505, Lucia was almost totally forgotten. During the last year of her life (1544), Lucia captured on paper a set of seven visions about the glory of Christ and his Celestial Court, which shed some light to her spirituality and experiences in her community. Only after Lucia's death was her cult revived, but contemporary documentation about her is scarce and her sixteenth century *vita* has since been lost. Therefore, Serafino Razzi's late sixteenth century collection of a few testimonies remains as one of the first sources to the saint. Lucia was beatified in 1710.[94]

Catherine Mattei of Racconigi (1486–1547) was a secular, unmarried penitent who supported herself with her handiworks, especially with silk weaving. She lived in continuous poverty, but she was, nonetheless, known for her generous almsgiving and for compassion toward the victims of the numerous wars that ravaged northern Italy in her time. Catherine's visions, bilocations, and other supernatural experiences started when she was young, but she was already twenty-eight years old when she finally took the Dominican habit. Though she was admired by her contemporaries, Catherine's ecstatic experiences and active involvement in the events of her time often brought her in conflict with the local and ecclesiastical authorities, who, among other things, accused her of sorcery.

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93 For the *vita* of Colomba, see Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Colomba Reatina* 1866. A few events of Colomba's life are recorded by a contemporary chronicler Francesco Matarazzo, see his *Cronaca della Città di Perugia dal 1492 al 1503* 1851. Colomba features in ZARRI 1990, 87–163. Colomba's life is extensively treated in a collection of articles titled *Una santa, una città* 1990.

94 There has presumably been a contemporary *vita* about Lucia, which, however, has been lost (see ZARRI 1990, 134, note 65). Razzi writes briefly about Lucia on the bases of accounts that he collected from the eye-witnesses, see Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1577, 152–154. For this saint's recent biography, see PROSPERI 1972. Concerning Lucia's relationships with her contemporaries, see ZARRI 1990 and MATTER 1996. E. Ann Matter, Armando Maggi, and I are presently editing a Pavian manuscript that contains a set of seven continuous visions that were written by Lucia just before her death in 1544.

Eventually around 1523 this mystic was forced to desert her hometown and take refuge in Caramango where she remained for the rest of her life. Catherine's *vita* was initially written by her two confessors, Domenico Onesto and Gabriele Dolce, then revised by her supporter, Giovanni Francesco Pico della Mirandola, and finally completed by the Dominican Pietro Morelli. The version by Pico and Morelli, the *Compendio delle cose mirabili,* is a thematic study of various aspects of Catherine's sanctity, but the emphases lay on her visions, ecstasies, and her heroic resistance of the Devil's temptations. Catherine was beatified in 1808.[95]

Osanna (Caterina) Kosic of Cattaro (1493–1565) was a daughter of a poor family. Thus early on she earned her living as a servant. In 1514 she asked to be mured perpetually into a hermit's cell that was attached to a local Dominican church. At this point the saint took the name Osanna to commemorate the recently deceased, above-mentioned Osanna of Mantua. Like her namesake, the recluse also was devoted to the passion of Christ. Initially Osanna was guided by a Franciscan friar, but since she took her penitent habit as a Dominican recluse, she was then guided by a Preaching friar, Vincento of Bucchia. Osanna's fame as a mystic, visionary, and ascetic spread rapidly and soon local penitents started to gather around her hermit's cell. Eventually they even founded a penitent community by Osanna's solitary chamber in order to enjoy frequent communication with her. Osanna was beatified in 1927.[96]

These nineteen women represent the array of Dominican approaches to penitent perfection in the Middle Ages. Some of them were widely popular, whereas others were barely known beyond their immediate circle of supporters. While Jacopina of Pisa, Margherita of Savoy, Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, and Osanna of Cattaro have left only a few signs of their existence, Catherine of Siena, Osanna Andreasi, Stefana Quinzani, Catherine of Racconigi, and Colomba of Rieti are known to us not only through their long *vitae*, but also through other sources such as chronicles, papal bulls, and, more importantly, as is the case with Catherine, Osanna, and Stefana, through their own letters. Moreover, Catherine of Siena and Lucia Brocadelli both produced a book their visions.

Nonetheless, we typically know about a given penitent through one single *vita* that serves as our only viewpoint. Such is the case with Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Sybillina Biscossi, Villana Botti, Maria Mancini, Maria Sturion, Margherita Fontana, and Magdalena Panatieri. A few of these *vitae* record their protagonists' lives in great detail, yet those of Sybillina Biscossi, Villana Botti, Margherita Fontana, and Magdalena Panatieri cover but a few chapters. One of the saints, namely Margherita of Savoy, I have been able to approach only through the secondary sources, simply because the primary *vitae*

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95 Catherine of Racconigi's *vita* by GianFrancesco Pico and Peter Martire Morelli, see their *Compendio delle cose mirabili della venerabil serva di Dio Catterina da Raconisio* (1680). Razzi writes about the saint in his *Vite dei santi e beati* (1577), 108–135. On Catherine of Racconigi's social influence, see ZARRI, 1990 and Idem 1992, 182–187.

96 The original Italian version of Osanna's life has disappeared. The eighteenth century translation into Latin, the only surviving version, is edited in *Illyrici sacri* 1800, Tom. VI, 428, 491–494. A modern biography by Taurisano is uncritical, but it remains the only available secondary source to this little known saint, see TAURISANO 1929.

have not survived. Finally, some *vitae* were penned by the hagiographers only some decades, even a century after the deaths of their protagonists, and thus they witness not only the concerns of the saint's lifetime, but also those of their authors' time. This is the case with the *Lives* of Maria Mancini, Lucia Brocadelli, Magdalena Panatieri, and Osanna of Cattaro.

Given this situation, it is inevitable that some penitent saints attain greater presence in my book than others: the longer and the more contemporary the *vita*, the better is the view that it opens to the medieval Dominican understanding of penitent sainthood. Accordingly Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, Catherine of Siena, Maria of Venice, Colomba of Rieti, Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, and Catherine of Racconigi feature most frequently in this study. Catherine of Siena, about whom we have more material than perhaps any other Dominican, even St. Dominic himself, features inevitably as the most prominent figure.

These penitent saints came from varying social backgrounds and life situations. When these women are classified according to their marital status, it is obvious that virginity was still regarded as a more favorable condition for saintly women than marriage or widowhood. In fact, twelve out of these total nineteen Dominican penitent saints were unmarried virgins, namely Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, Sybillina Biscossi, Catherine of Siena, Margherita Fontana, Magdalena Panatieri, Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, Colomba of Rieti, Catherine of Racconigi, and Osanna of Cattaro. Still, the remaining seven were, or had been, married when they took the penitent habit. This strongly testifies that the Dominicans did not perceive marriage and sainthood as mutually exclusive. It is, however, striking that out of these seven married *pinzochere*, six - Jacopina of Pisa, Villana Botti, Maria Mancini,[97] Maria Sturion,[98] Lucia Bartolini, and Lucia Brocadelli -started their penitent lives while they were still at least formally married, whereas only one, Margherita of Savoy, took her habit after having been left a widow. Given the fact that the penitent order *de facto* attracted particularly widows, this absence of widows among the saintly penitents is simply amazing. As I shall discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three, the only possible explanation seems to be that a widow's choice to dress in a penitent habit was seen as a socially normal choice rather than as a sign of saintly disposition.

The penitent saints came from all social classes. While only one penitent, Margherita of Savoy (who later had enough wealth to found a second order monastery) came from the highest nobility, altogether six of them came from the urban lesser nobility, namely Benvenuta Boiani, Margherita Fontana, Magdalena Panatieri, Osanna Andreasi, Lucia Bartolini, and Lucia Brocadelli. The penitents from the well-to-do urban middle class form an equally large group. Altogether six saints were from urban merchant and crafts families, namely Jacopina of Pisa, Villana Botti, Catherine Benincasa, Maria Mancini, Maria of

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97 Maria Mancini was widowed later, but she initiated her penitent life while her second husband was still alive.

98 Maria Sturion was deserted by husband, but her marriage remained formally valid.

Venice, and Colomba of Rieti. Therefore, a great majority of Dominican penitents, twelve out of a total of nineteen, came either from the lower nobility or the affluent middle class. Yet, the remaining six *mulieres sanctae* – Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, Sybillina Biscossi, Stefana Quinzani, Catherine of Racconigi, and Osanna of Cattaro – lived in virtual poverty, or at least at the mercy of their patrons' good will, and dependent on their own work.[99] This suggests that while Dominican penitent sanctity tended to be most associated with the urban nobility and the well-to-do middle class, it was not at all exclusively limited to these groups. We cannot speak of Dominican ideals of penitent piety as 'democratic', but we cannot stamp them as exclusively aristocratic either.

All these women were seen as saintly by their contemporaries, but their formal beatification typically came a few hundred years after their deaths. Several of them were never even formally beatified, while only one of them, Catherine of Siena, was canonized. Yet, the Dominicans, and for that matter all mendicants, and local people did not shy away from revering these unofficial saints, even when the papacy was slow to respond to these penitent women's popularity.[100]

In this book I am not totally limiting myself only to these nineteen individuals. I am also extending my study to their less known penitent companions as well. The *vitae* and other sources pertaining to the saints contain numerous passing references to other penitent women who were seen as virtuous, even if not quite saintly. These references to the virtues of such minor figures as Catherine of Siena's sister-in-law, Lisa Colombini, and Maria of Venice's loyal companion, Astrologia, shed further light on the ideals of penitent life.[101] Yet, such Dominican saints that we know by name, but about whom we have no narrative evidence, have not been used. For example, though Thomas of Siena as well as novelist Francesco Sacchetti mention a certain Giovanna of Florence, they do not reveal any details about her life, and thus she remains a mere name, which as such does not help us to understand the Dominican ideals about religious lay life.[102]

Moreover, I have incorporated material pertaining to the controversial penitent saint, Domenica Narducci of Paradiso (1473–1553), who cannot formally be regarded as a Dominican tertiary. Yet, this prophet and mystic initially had numerous ties to the Dominican lay movement. At the turn of the sixteenth century, Domenica was attracted to Florence by the fame of the Dominican preacher, Savonarola, and thus she was originally guided by the Dominicans in

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99 Giovanna and Margherita had been born to noble parents, but the orphan Giovanna, had left behind all her relatives and the blind Margherita was abandoned by her family. Thus, I am taking also these two women as members of lower social classes since poverty and need shaped their lives.'

100 The formal distinction between unofficial saints, local *beate*, and papally canonized universally venerated *sancti* tells of papal efforts to control the admission into sainthood. Nevertheless, believers actually venerated canonized and uncanonized saints alike, VAUCHEZ 1981, 99–120. The mendicant friars also commonly venerated uncanonized and unbeatified local saints, Ibid., 110–111.

101 On Lisa Colombini, see *Legenda maior 1866*, e.g. 894, 937, 947. On Astrologia, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 206, 208, and 212

102 On Giovanna of Florence, see Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 19 and Franco Sacchetti, *Delle novelle* 1724, 227. For some time, a saintly Dominican, Emilia Bicchieri (1238–1314) was regarded as a regular penitent, but presently it is held that this saint was in fact a nun, see MEERSSEMAN 1954. Accordingly, Emilia does not feature in my study.

the convent of San Marco, a Savonarolan stronghold long after his death. Domenica also had strong loyalties toward the Dominican penitent order, and particularly toward the memory of Catherine of Siena. Still, she refused to be incorporated formally into the order, even after she had created her own community for penitent women in 1511. The numerous confrontations between Domenica and the Dominicans of San Marco led eventually to the total breakdown in their relations, and the Dominicans were prohibited from all interactions with the mystic. Domenica's wavering between Dominican inspiration (mainly for Catherine of Siena and Savonarola) and her refusal to be fully incorporated into the order provides a valuable insight to medieval penitent reality in which the lay people continuously needed to struggle to define their place in the hierarchical church.[103]

The success of a lay saint was virtually always tied to her confessor's or hagiographer's active support and promulgation of her cult. Benvenuta Boiani had Corrado of Castellerio, Osanna of Mantua had Francesco Silvestri, and Colomba of Rieti had her Sebastiano Bontempi, just to mention a few. Still, there were two friars who shaped the destiny of medieval penitent women more than anyone else, namely Raymond of Capua (ca. 1333–1399) and Thomas of Siena (ca. 1350–1434). Raymond's *Legenda maior* (written in the years 1385–1395) about Catherine of Siena was the standard text that created the matrix for all future portrayals of Catherine. More importantly, it influenced profoundly the later medieval perceptions about lay sanctity altogether. As shall be studied in Chapter Five, the later hagiographers used Raymond's account, albeit selectively, and thus this *magnum opus* set the tenor for the Dominican understanding about women's religious experiences.[104] Maria Mancini, Maria of Venice, Margherita of Savoy, Osanna Andreasi, Stefana Quinzani, Lucia Bartolini, Colomba of Rieti, Lucia Brocadelli, Catherine of Racconigi, and Domenica of Paradiso were all ardent devotees of the Sienese saint.

Thomas of Siena was an indefatigable popularizer and administrator who produced a vast corpus of documents and hagiographic materials pertaining to Catherine and other penitent saints. As has been seen above this friar created from Raymond's *Legenda maior* an abbreviation as well as a supplement, called the *Legenda minor* (1412–1414) and the *Libellus de supplemento* (1416–1418) respectively. Additionally, he was responsible for collecting the testimonies for the diocesan inquiry (the so-called *Il Processo Castellano)* into Catherine's sanctity (1411–1416). Thomas also translated into vernacular the *vitae* of Giovanna of Orvieto and Margherita of Città di Castello (both in 1400), and composed an original *vita* about Maria of Venice (1402). Moreover, Thomas wrote histories of the Dominican penitent order as a whole (*Tractatus de ordine*

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103 VALERIO's book *Domenica da Paradiso* (1992) is a well-researched recent account. On Domenica's roles as a teacher and a preacher, see Idem, 1994. On Domenica's confrontations with the Dominicans of San Marco, see POLIZZOTTO 1993.

104 For collection of Raymond's letters, see Raymond of Capua, *B. Raymundi Capuani Opuscula et litterae* 1895. On the registry that Raymond kept since 1386, see Raymond of Capua, *Registrum litterarum fr. Raymundi de Vineis Capuani* 1937. On Raymond's biography, see VAN REE 1963. On Raymond's literary production, see also KAEPPELLI-PANELLA (1980), vol. III, 288–290.

fratrum et sororum de poenitentia, 1402–1407) and the Observant reform (*Historia disciplinae regularis*, ca. 1403), which were created to justify the goals of the penitent order and of the reform respectively. Thomas's actions as the Master General's vicar for the Venetian and, later on, the entire northern Italian, penitents were finally rewarded in July of 1405 when pope Innocent VII formally approved the Dominican penitents' *Rule*.[105]

105 Thomas himself record his autobiography, see his *Libellus de Supplemeto* 1974, 402–412; *Historia* 1749, 231–234 and passim, as well as in his testimony to *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 28–29. For Thomas's biography see also LAURENT 1938; VISANI 1973, and SORELLI 1984a, 3–68. On Thomas's literary production, see also KAEPPELLI-PANELLA, Vol. IV (1993), 329–343.

III "In Church, at Home, and Wherever She Went."[1] The Secular World as a Forum for Religious Life

> Note thus that in her cell, a tiny room [in her father's home] were revived the age-old deeds of the Desert Fathers.
>
> Raymond of Capua on Catherine of Siena's pious life in her home.[2]

Religious experience is intimately connected with its exterior circumstances. A sacred place calls forth devotional sentiments, while secular surroundings seem to distract a person from spiritual pursuits. In the Middle Ages, not unlike today, consecrated places, such as churches, shrines, and monasteries, were seen as the most likely places to encounter the Divine. On the contrary, the profane world was often seen as the terrain of evil that a true Christian should shun and flee. Indeed, this contempt of the world (*contemptus mundi*) was the pivotal idea in medieval Christianity. Especially the advocates of monastic and eremitic piety perceived that physical separation from the impure world called forth spiritual purity. They saw that a person's devotional state of mind was closely tied to her external circumstances. Hence, membership in the secular world implied that a person was worldly, while a sacred space contributed to the spiritual perfection of its inhabitant.

Furthermore, the medieval churchmen often advocated that particularly women's spiritual perfection was best achieved in designated religious places, namely monasteries. The clerics perceived that women were less able to resist temptations than men were, and thus the shelter of a religious house was necessary for the peace of these women's minds. As a matter of fact, many monasteries proved to be fruitful for their inner lives, but surely not because they were locked away from temptation. Rather, women profited from the intellectual and spiritual stimuli that a well-to-do monastery was able to offer.[3] Inside a monastery the nuns lived in a relatively homogeneous world: a nun primarily met other women who shared her regulated way of life and her daily concerns.

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1 "in chiesa o in casa o dounche si trovasse...", Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 160.

2 "Noveris igitur, quod in hac cellula sive camerula suscitata suntanctorum Aegyptiorum Patrum antiquissima opera..." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 876.

3 On nuns' positive self-image and their importance for secular people, see JOHNSON 1991, 229–237. Caroline Bynum has also suggested that the nuns' self-image was generally more positive than that of lay women, in part because their actions were not constantly scrutinized, and possibly belittled, by men, see BYNUM 1988, 26–27.

The *pinzochere* lived a life that was in many respects at odds with traditional perceptions of women's spiritual perfection. They followed their religious calling in their homes, and they mingled with secular people. They did visit churches, shrines, and even monasteries, but a major part of their life was spent in the world. Their venues of piety were their homes, and even the streets and market places of the bustling Italian cities. Moreover, these women yearned for God amidst the crowds whose concerns were much more with their temporal well-being than with eternal salvation. In fact, the penitent women lived in strikingly heterogeneous surroundings: there were men and women, children and the elderly, who shared neither the penitent women's spiritual concerns nor their rhythms of life. For example, when others were asleep, a lone penitent woman held her nightly vigils,[4] and while the other family members exchanged stories around the fireplace, she would withdraw to her solitary prayers.[5] Finally, these women lived usually in surroundings where their religious calling was challenged. For example their family members often forced them to abandon their spiritual way of life for a marriage.[6]

Despite these numerous external challenges, the penitent way of religious life flourished in late medieval Italy. In fact, penitent women featured among the most beloved of saints. Even if these women were rarely canonized, a great number of them were seen saintly by their contemporaries and beatified by later generations. For example, from those twenty-seven medieval Dominican women that have been either canonized or beatified, sixteen, that is more than half, came from the lay order.[7] Indeed, this way of life fostered an alternative religious topology where secular spaces were perceived as religious options. Similarly, the temptations of the world were represented as useful tests of spiritual strength rather than as fatal blows to one's sanctity.

The degree of 'secularity' in penitent women's lives varied: some lived in their own homes (*in dominibus propriis)* as secular tertiaries (*sorores saeculares*), while others shared a semi-monastic house as regular tertiaries (*sorores regulares*). Yet, all medieval penitent women followed a religious way of life where a line between religious and secular space was not sharply drawn, thus they were not segregated from their non-religious contemporaries. This situation changed around the turn of the sixteenth century, however, when not only the communal (regular) life became dominant, but also claustration was the increasingly typical solution. At this time a number of penitents – Stefana Quinzani, Lucia Bartolini, and Lucia Brocadelli, just to mention a few – decided later in their lives to join open penitent monasteries (*monasteri aperti*). In the present chapter, I am, nevertheless, studying those periods in these penitents' lives when they were still living in their private homes and experiencing their calling in the secular world.

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4 See for example, Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875; *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 152.

5 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 153.

6 On the saintly girls' forced marriages as a hagiographic topos, see WEINSTEIN – BELL 1982, 87–90.

7 An updated Dominican "index hagiographicus" can be found in *Analecta sacri Ordinis fratrum praedicatorum*, 96(1988), fasc. 1, 161–169.

I shall evaluate the Dominican hagiographers' notion of these lay women's uncloistered religious life. To begin, I analyze the hagiographic evidence concerning the domestic circumstances of the penitent women. Moreover, I am interested of these women's urban "territories", namely the places they frequented, institutions in which they participated, and the people with whom they were familiar. My study makes no claims to be an all-encompassing view of the Dominican penitents' exterior form of living. The source material used here is limited primarily to hagiographic texts and some epistolary collections. Occasionally also chronicles and literary texts are used. Yet, a general overview would require a systematic study of urban chronicles, church documents, and even archeological evidence. Nevertheless, I believe that my study contributes to the survey of the Dominican penitents' form of living by systematically analyzing one *genre* of sources, namely the hagiographic narratives.

The focus of this chapter is on the Dominican friars' constructive efforts to overcome the exterior challenges found within the penitent life. I study their arguments that advocated that worldly activities did not harm their protagonists or draw them away from their contemplation. These hagiographers promoted religious ideals that questioned the traditional understanding of religious perfection as a withdrawal from the world. Therefore, they also had to come up with arguments, and even with new concepts, that supported their claim. Over the course of this chapter I proceed to answer the following questions: How did these hagiographers interpret the secular world religiously? How did the penitent women shelter themselves from worldliness? How were the penitent women positioned in relation to other people, such as their families, their neighbors, or other Dominicans?

While the early medieval *vitae* paid scant attention to specific places and times, the high and late medieval hagiographies provide us with ample spatial and temporal references. This increased precision was connected to the thirteenth century developments in papal canonization processes. Exactitude with such mundane issues as time and location served as a proof of the factuality of given events.[8] Thanks to these developments we are able to gain a sense of lay people's religious geography. Needless to say, these hagiographic texts cannot simply be used as documentary accounts that would reveal a complete picture of the penitent women's position in the secular world. The hagiographies recalled the events that displayed the sanctity of their protagonists. Accordingly, they remained quiet about the events that the authors considered unessential or unfavorable to their saint. In fact, even some later medieval *vitae,* like that of Giovanna of Orvieto, were very obscure about their protagonists' external situations. Furthermore, sometimes the sources might make references that are difficult to interpret. For example, some texts refer to penitent congregations (*collegium)*

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8 On the increasing precision of the late medieval hagiographies and on the role of detailed information about factual events in the authentication of sanctity, see KLEINBERG 1989, 186–188; Idem, 1992, 54–56. On the historical saints versus the mythical ones, see DELOOZ 1962, 22–27.

without specifying whether the term is refering to the penitents' meeting place or to their actual living-quarters.[9] Finally, the hagiographic sources tend to emphasize the religious experiences of unmarried girls who lived in their parents' homes over those of married and widowed women simply because a good part of Dominican penitent saints, twelve out of a total of nineteen, were young virgins. Therefore, the concerns of these young *pinzochere* easily dominate our perception of penitent housing. Nonetheless, the hagiographies of other saints – whether wives, widows, communally living regular penitents, or anchorites- do not remain silent of their protagonists' homelives either. In the course of this study, I pay special attention to the varieties of penitent experience even if the documents concerning some penitents, particularly wives and widows, are at the best cursory.

Housing for Penitent Women

As has been discussed above, the medieval Dominican penitents lived primarily in private homes, but at the turn of the sixteenth century semi-monastic communities became more and more common.[10] In addition, a few Dominican penitents lived as recluses in their urban anchorages. Therefore, one may say that the variations of Dominican housing reflected those three forms of housing that were also more widely available for lay-religious, namely open monasteries, their own homes, and hermitages.[11] Within the category of private living, there were chiefly four alternative types of penitent housing, namely the parental house, a marital home, the house of a benefactor, and the widow's own home. Let us start with these four types of private housing that were available for penitent women.

The penitents who dwelled in their parents' home were typically unmarried women. Benvenuta Boiani, Catherine of Siena, Margherita Fontana, Magdalena Panatieri, and Osanna of Mantua all had received a religious calling while still young girls. Subsequently, they refrained from marrying and lived with their parents and siblings. Benvenuta Boiani lived in her family home, where she was especially attached to her sister Maria.[12] Catherine lived almost all her life in the Sienese home of her father and mother, Giacomo and Lapa Benincasa. The only exception to her home life were the last two years of her life in Rome when she lived in an unofficial community of Tuscan female and male pilgrims.[13] Margherita

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9 For example, Thomas of Siena uses a few times an expression "at the house of the Venetian penitents" (apud collegium sororum de penitentia B. Dominici de Venetiis), see Thomas of Siena *Il Processo 1942*, 54, 59, 64; Idem, *Leggenda di Maria 1984*, 165, 166, 170, 193, 203, 211, 224. Since there is no other evidence that Venice would have hosted penitent communities in the turn of the fifteenth century, it seems likely that Thomas referred with such expressions as penitent house and penitent collegium to these women's meeting location rather than to an actual penitent convent, see SORELLI 1984a, 99–101.

10 On the housing for mendicant penitents in general, see MEERSSEMAN 1982, 20; MOORMAN 1988, 218–220; RUSCONI 1992, 14–15; BENVENUTI PAPI 1992, 98–101.

11 SENSI 1995, 4.

12 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 152, 156, 173.

13 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 937.

Fontana lived in Modena with her mother and brother.[14] Similarly, Magdalena Panatieri stayed all her life in her parents' home.[15] Osanna of Mantua, even after her parents' death when she was fifteen, remained in her natal home where she simultaneously took care of her siblings and pursued her religious life.[16] Even the young married women could return to their birthplace. After she was deserted by her newly wed husband, Maria of Venice returned to her wealthy Sturion home, where she dressed in a Dominican habit.[17] The *vitae* of these women who found their calling early and who shared a home with their parents are full of allusions to their family life. Their vehement struggles to remain unmarried and to find a respectable place in the home attracted the attention of the hagiographers who chiefly saw these confrontations as events that proved their protagonists' determination to dress in a religious habit.

Though married women rarely wore the penitent habit,[18] there were no legal obstacles in wearing it as long as the penitent could prove her spouse's agreement.[19] Generally, though not necessarily, these couple's lived in conjugal chastity (*castitatis coniugalis*), which seems to have been especially important for the wife's, rather than the husband's, spiritual life. The hagiographies generally represent marriage as a compromise from the protagonists' original choice to remain unwed, the conjugal debt was a burden that saints' initially submitted to, but they later found ways to emerge from the carnality of the wedded life.[20] The inherent spiritual conflicts in marriage concerned not only the carnality, but also the domestic duties that conflicted with these women's religious interests or, at least, consumed a good part of their day.

Even if the married life remained at odds with religious perfection throughout the Middle Ages, in the thirteenth century there was a clear change in the churchmen's attitudes toward marriage. While sanctity and marriage had previously been virtually incompatible, the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries saw a number of wives and mothers as saints.[21] Birgitta of Sweden (1303–1373), a mother of eight, and Dorothy of Montau (1347–1394), a mother of nine, are perhaps the most known examples of late medieval saintly wives. Moreover, some Dominican penitents pursued their religious calling in their marital home. When the Florentine Villana Botti, for example, decided to pursue the penitent life she was still married to Rosso Benintendi, by whom she had a child.[22]

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14 Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana* 1868, 136–137.
15 Marchese, *Sacro Diario* 1679, 413.
16 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 563–564.
17 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 157–158
18 BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 172.
19 The Dominican penitents' *Rule* stipulates: "Et eadem examinatio fiat de mulieribus huius ordinis ingressum petentibus; habentibus tamen viros, non pateat ingressus ad consortium dicte fraternitatis, nisi de virorum suorum licentia et consensu, de quo consensu fiat publicum instrumentum." The *Rule*, Ch.I, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatu*s 1938, 38.
20 Elliott discusses the ideal and practice of a chaste marriage, arguing that though married women had ultimately to submit to their husbands' decisions, they took active roles in coaxing their husbands to accept non-carnal marriages and finding room for their own religious practices, see ELLIOTT 1993, esp. 196–238.
21 GLASSER 1981, 3–4, 23–27, 33–34. ATKINSON 1991, 145, 164–165.
22 On Villana's conversion into penitential life, see Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 865.

Villana's biography is remarkably silent about her marriage, revealing nothing about her daily life, which was simultaneously comprised of marital and religious pursuits.[23] Evidently, this hagiographer chose totally to ignore the effects that Villana's marriage had on her religious life. Marriage surely did not match easily with the dedicated religious life, and thus a saint's marriage and children remained rather unexplored territory in the hagiographic genre. While the families of such unmarried women as Benvenuta Boiani, Catherine of Siena, and Osanna of Mantua gain a prominent role in these women's *vitae*, Villana's married family is virtually non existent.

Yet, some hagiographers were quite observant about the married women's daily concerns, and thus we are able to gain an insight to the married penitents' religious strategies as well. The author of Maria Mancini's hagiography, for example, relates several valuable insights to her married life.[24] Another example of a Dominican penitent mother to whose life we have a closer view was Lisa Colombini, Catherine's sister-in-law, who was simultaneously a penitent, a mother, and Catherine's travel companion. Raymond's *Legenda maior* relates to us that Lisa originally lived as a penitent with her husband, Bartolo, and their children in Catherine's parents' house. Later, however, she followed Catherine to Rome, where she remained even after Catherine's death.[25] Similar to Villana, Maria Mancini, and Lisa Colombini, Jacopina of Pisa, Lucia Bartolini, and Lucia Brocadelli also felt their religious calling when they were still married. Therefore, we are able to learn from their hagiographies some strategies of married women's pious life.[26]

A considerable number of Dominican lay women were well-to-do widows who were able to remain in their own homes. Indeed, it was common for widow-penitents to continue living in their own homes with a few of their personal maids.[27] For example Catherine of Siena's loyal companions, Alessia Saracini and Francesca Gori, were independently living women.[28] Similarly, Maria of Venice's fellow penitents and widows Catherina Marioni,[29] Astrologia Verzoni,[30] Isabetta Burlamacchi,[31] and Lucia Muscelini[32] enjoyed considerable autonomy. Widows enjoyed liberties that were out of the reach of married women and young girls – living in their own houses was one of them. In the hagiographies and other religious texts widowhood was represented as liberation of from the yokes of marriage and motherhood.[33] Yet, this autonomy was not solely a positive

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23 On Villana's married life as compared to that of other penitent women, particularly the Franciscan Umiliana dei Cerchi, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 184–191.
24 Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1605, 653.
25 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 894 and 947.
26 On the religious strategies of these saintly wives, see p. 66, 83, 129–130.
27 MEERSSEMAN 1982, 20. This independent life was a privilege that was practically limited to upper class widows, see KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1985, 121.
28 Ibid., 947.
29 On Catherine Marioni, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 177, 193, 195–196.
30 On Astrologia Verzoni, see Ibid., 193, 222.
31 On Isabetta Burlamacchi, see Ibid., 205–206, 211–212.
32 On Lucia Muscelini, see Ibid., 186.
33 ATKINSON 1991, 168–187.
34 On the ambiguous position of the medieval and early modern widows, see BAERNSTEIN 1994, 778–790. On widows' influence in medieval family politics, see CAMMAROSANO

position: it easily brought about economic troubles, and these women were seen as social anomalies. Therefore, many widows eventually chose to remarry or alternatively to join monastic or lay religious orders.[34] The autonomous lives of these secular widow-penitents present us with a problem of interpretation: proportionally the widows formed the biggest single group among the penitents, yet there are almost no longer narrative sources about them. There are surviving membership lists, charter collections, and anecdotal references in the *vitae* of other penitents that tell about the widows' substantial presence among the penitents.[35] Yet, there is not a single longer Dominican *vita* devoted to these home-dwelling penitent widows. This suggests that a widow's choice to dress in a penitent habit seem to have been considered a socially typical choice that was related more to a general respectability than to extraordinary sanctity.

A fourth type of private housing solution for the penitents was a benefactor's home. This solution was common among orphans, the poor, and sometimes disabled girls. Margherita of Città di Castello, who was blind, was abandoned by her parents. She was fortunate enough to find a safe home with Venturius and his wife Grigia. Dressed in a Dominican habit, Margherita shared this family's daily life and helped around the house.[36] Giovanna's parents had died when she was only a toddler. Initially she lived with relatives, but she escaped to Orvieto when, at the age of twelve, she was facing a forced marriage.[37] Once in Orvieto, Giovanna lived privately in a home of the local penitents' prioress. Though not explicitly stated, this prioress's home seems not to have been a penitent community, but a secular home that housed a few family members besides this unnamed prioress herself and Giovanna.[38]

The fifth type of housing was communal: women lived in a shared house and followed a quasi-monastic rhythm of life. The earliest example of a saintly Dominican who followed this route is Margherita of Savoy, who created a penitent community in Alba around the year 1432. This open penitent monastery was, however, transformed twenty years later into the encloistered nunnery of St-Magdalene.[39] It was only several decades later, however, that communal penitent housing became typical.[40] Indeed, in the late fifteenth century several penitent saints were founders of a tertiary community. Stefana Quinzani founded

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1975, 434–35. In early fifteenth century Florence, according to the 1427 *catasto* (census), it becomes clear that widows were often able to control their own property, at least their dowries, and to enjoy economically stable lives, see HERLIHY – KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1978, 60–61; 600–601. Nonetheless, widowed women formed a great part of the city's *miserabili,* see Ibid., 74. As Herlihy and Klapisch-Zuber sum up: "En Toscane veuvage féminin, solitude et pauverte etaient souvent associes." Ibid., 337. Widowhood was characteristically a female phenomenon: out of Florence's male population in 1427 3, 66% were widowers, while widows number in the same year was as high as 16, 94%. Ibid., table 60, 405.

35 For example the membership lists of Sienese penitents of the Basilica of St-Dominic attest that a major part of these women were *dominae,* a term that is used of married and widowed women. For these fourteenth century membership lists, see *Documenti* 1936, 11–12, 22–24, 47–49.

36 *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio minor* 1994, 95–96.

37 *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 142.

38 On Giovanna's housing, see Ibid., 151, 155.

39 FEDELINI 1940, 48–62.

40 On the conventual penitent life in the late fifteenth century, see p. 146–156.

the community of SS.-Paul -and-Catherine-of-Siena in Soncino in 1519,[41] while Lucia Bartolini Rucellai created the community of St-Catherine-of-Siena in Florence in 1500,[42] and Colomba of Rieti established a homonymous house in Perugia in 1490.[43] Furthermore, Ercole I d'Este founded the tertiary house of St-Catherine-of-Siena in Ferrara in 1501 to create a penitent community around the stigmatic Lucia Brocadelli of Narni.[44] Yet, all these women moved to their communities rather late in their lives. Lucia Bartolini took her habit in 1496 together with her husband of twelve years;[45] Lucia Brocadelli, also married, permanently joined a religious house only years after her initial vocation, in 1494;[46] Stefana Quinzani lived as a secular penitent until the foundation of her community in 1519 when she was already 62 years old;[47] Colomba of Rieti lived a penitential life in her parents' home until she was 23.[48] Thus, these women's later lives were spent in semi-monastic institutions, their *vitae* still attest to the penitent life in the world as well.

The houses that these women founded were often thriving religious centers that hosted great numbers of penitents and attracted the attention of religious and secular people alike. For example, the Perugian chronicler Francesco Matarazzo wrote admiringly about Colomba of Rieti's community, claiming that it had around fifty members.[49] Also Lucia Bartolini's community had, soon after its establishment, more than seventy inhabitants.[50] Still, the penitent communities rarely enjoyed sumptuous dowries that had given financial stability as well as independence to many monasteries. On the contrary, the penitent houses were dependent on their own work, and, even more so, on the magnanimity of their supporters. In the good times this meant that a community was abundantly funded. For example Ercole I d'Este's interest in Lucia Brocadelli insured that her community had a well-financed start. Yet, after this duke's death, Lucia was virtually forgotten, and her community no longer attracted special attention from the next generation of magnates.[51] Even Colomba of Rieti's Perugian religious house suffered from economic difficulties, even though it continuously attracted generous endowments from local people.[52] Several penitent communities struggled for their living. Stefana Quinzani's letters to the Mantuan marquise, Isabella Gonzaga, reveals that the saint's house was in great financial straits and that the sisters lived virtually in famine.[53] These religious

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41 GUERRINI 1930, 80.
42 *De B. Lucia Bartolini* 1883, 205.
43 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 173*–174*. On the founding of Colomba's community, CASAGRANDE 1991, 123–130. On Colomba's community in the context of Dominican lay movement, see ZARRI 1991, 101–105.
44 Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1577, 153. See also MATTER 1996, 171–172.
45 CREYTENS 1969, 127–128.
46 PROSPERI 1972, 381; MATTER 1996, 168, 171.
47 GUERRINI 1930, 80.
48 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 175*.
49 Francesco Matarazzo, *Cronaca della Città di Perugia* 1851, 6.
50 *De B. Lucia Bartolini* 1883, 205. On Lucia's community, see also Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1577, 169–173.
51 ZARRI 1990, 57–58; MATTER 1996, 173.
52 MONACCHIA 1991, 222–224.
53 Stefana Quinzani, *Lettere inedite della B. Stefana* 1937, 29-30, 31.

houses were dependent on secular supporters, but this dependence was not one-sided: the seculars felt, as shall be studied later, a need for the prayers and advice of these saintly individuals.[54]

In addition to these five common housing arrangements there was also a rarely used sixth option, namely an anchorage. In late medieval Italy there were only a few known cases of rural female hermits who deserted the social life altogether and lived their lives in uninhabited areas. Women were more attracted to seclusion inside cities, where they would live mured in their cell, but were still be able to enjoy the protection of a religious house or powerful secular patrons.[55] Yet, even this reclusive life in an anchorage rarely attracted Dominican penitents. While they cherished the ideals of simplicity, humility, and ascetic rigor that had shaped the lives of the early desert fathers, they did not favor actual seclusion from the world. In fact, only two saintly anchorites can be found among the lay Dominicans: Sybillina of Pavia and Osanna of Cattaro. Both these devotes lived the greatest part of their lives in cells that were annexed to a church of the Preaching Friars: Sybillina lived by a Dominican church in Pavia,[56] while Osanna was at first connected to St-Bartholomew and later moved by St-Paul. Though these women sought solitary living, neither remained socially unconnected. On the contrary, they both received visitors, and Osanna even directed a community of third order Dominicans from her cell.[57]

This great variety in penitents' actual living conditions created a need for elastic strategies of religious life in the world. Since the penitents' housing ranged from parental homes to anchorages and from widow's private dwelling places to religious communities, the ideals concerning their way of life had to be equally flexible. In fact, as is shown later in this chapter, the penitent strategies for pious life in the world based on flexible guidelines that were easily applicable to each penitent's needs.

The penitent women's secular lives – whether in their homes or in cities – influenced fundamentally their religious way of life, in good and in bad. The possibility to do penance and practice piety in secular homes gave many middle class and lower middle class women access to religious orders in various stages of their lives. Penitent women, unlike nuns, did not need to break radically with their earlier lives in order to be considered properly religious. They could instead continue with their previous lives and rely on the networks of families and friends that supported them in the secular world.

Still, the religious life in the secular world presented many challenges that the *pinzochere* had to overcome before they were comfortably settled in their lives.

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54 On saintly women's roles as teachers and advisors of their contemporaries, see p. 110–120.

55 See BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 305–314 and CASAGRANDE 1988, 484, 505. Several northern Italian cities hosted numerous urban hermits. For example Perugia had fifty-six female in 1290 and twelve male recluses and in 1320 there were even as many as ca. 260 female recluses; Foligno had sixty-two female hermits in 1370, see CASAGRANDE 1988, 489. On female hermits in Spoleto, see SENSI 1995, 71–105.

56 Thomas of Bozzolasto, *De B. Sybillina* 1865, 69. On Sybillina as a representative of women's urban reclusive life, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 396–400.

57 *B. Osanna Virgo Catharensis,* in *Illyrici sacri* 1800, 492–493. Jean Leclercq has emphasized that medieval hermits were not social outcasts. On the contrary, they often exercised social influence, see LECLERCQ 1987, 77–80.

Firstly, these lay women had to deal with the reality of crowded medieval households and boisterous cities where privacy and silence were rarely encountered luxuries. For example Catherine of Siena's house had well over dozen, if not more than twenty, inhabitants![58] It is easy to imagine that a home like this rarely calmed down or had much space for privacy. Yet, even Catherine found ways to retreat occasionally from the presence of other people. Actually Catherine was fortunate enough eventually to have a room of her own, where she prayed in relative peace.[59] Maria of Venice,[60] Margherita of Città di Castello,[61] and the young Colomba of Rieti also had their own spaces of some sort where they could spend at least a few solitary moments each day.[62] Villana Botti occasionally escaped to pray in the 'highest tower room' (*altissima domus sui turri*) of their home,[63] while Benvenuta Boiani found a peaceful corner in the rear of her family's garden.[64] As an antithesis to their actual lives, the penitents yearned for solitude. Indeed, most of them experienced phases when they wanted to escape the social life altogether and enjoy the peace of the eremitic life. These desires surely express a want for quietude that was not that easy to come by in their real lives; these wishes were perhaps further intensified by the fact that the desired state seemed unattainable.[65]

Secondly, the penitent women's daily life and devotional practices were dependent on their family and on other secular people. This meant that penitents had to negotiate with them concerning such daily religious routines as attendance in religious services and visits with other penitents. It was not self-evident that these women were granted the privileges to live differently from other members of their house. Since they belonged simultaneously to secular and religious worlds, they had to fulfill the demands of both of these worlds. Therefore, the seculars had expectations about penitents' daily input to the house chores, as well as about such customs as eating together and following shared daily rhythms. They did not always receive a penitent's request to have time for religious activities positively, especially since these activities did not support the family economy.[66] Even these women's church going could not be taken for granted. The ailing Benvenuta Boiani was later in her life unable to go to church, because

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58 This Benincasa household hosted the parents Giacomo and Lapa, their children (according to tradition twenty-four) from whom at least Catherine, Stephan and Bartholomeus remained home. For what we know Stephan remained unmarried (Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875), but at least Bartholomeus brought his wife, Lisa, and their children to his paternal home (Ibid., 894). One of Catherine's brothers, perhaps Bartholomeus again, had eleven children, all living in the Benincasa home (*I miracoli di Caterina* 1936, 18). Catherine's parents also fostered an orphan relative of the family, Thomas Fonte, who later joined the Dominican order and acted as Catherine's first confessor (Ibid., 871). Futhermore, at least one servant (Ibid., 893) and some employees of the father's dyehouse lived with the family (Ibid., 873).

59 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 876.

60 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 158.

61 *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio maior* 1994, 71–72 (only this reduction explicitly mentions Margaret's own room).

62 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 158*.

63 Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 868.

64 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis 1883,* 152.

65 On penitent women's eremitic role models, see p. 72–73.

66 On the families' negative reactions to a household member's penitent calling, see p. 128–131.

her sister Maria did not have time to escort her,[67] and Maria of Venice's church-going was limited by her own duties at home.[68] Especially the penitent mothers who still had their families surely had only little time to their own religious lives. One can picture the life of, for example, Lisa Colombini, whose days were filled with house chores in her marital home. In the evening this wife saw her husband and children off to bed, only to return back to the public quarters of the Benincasa house, where she guarded her sister-in-law Catherine so that she did not hurt herself during her numerous ecstasies.[69]

While private homes or, alternatively, religious houses were penitent women's principal territories, most of these women were not confined inside the walls of their habitations. Instead they also moved in their cities, chiefly to visit the homes of relatives and fellow-penitents or to attend church services. In addition some of them also worked, and many offered charity. These penitents contributed to the public devotional life of their cities, and people knew them. What is more, the chaste penitent women did not always rush quickly through the streets to reach their destinations: like Catherine of Siena, they might fall into ecstasy in public places where they remained for hours to the great wonder of passers-by.[70]

The lay Dominicans' urban terrain was to a great extent limited to their immediate neighborhoods. It even seems that their preferences for a church, and even their order were determined by proximity: Catherine of Siena,[71] Maria of Venice, [72] Stefana Quinzani,[73] Maria Mancini,[74] and Benvenuta Boiani,[75] just to mention a few, lived in the immediate neighborhood of a Dominican house. Characteristically these women had strong ties to one specific religious house; they rarely made pilgrimages to a more distant religious place. Their life of piety had a clear spatial focus, namely their homes, a near-by Dominican church, and the immediate neighborhood.[76] Not unlike the other religious rules the penitent rule also had expressed preference for this kind of stable life by stating that the penitents always needed special permission from their superiors if they intended to leave their cities, even if their goal was to make a pilgrimage.[77] A mobile lifestyle was associated with social unrest as well as with the circulation

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67 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis 1883*, 173.
68 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 162.
69 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 894.
70 On Catherine's publicly manifested spiritual experiences and piety, see for example Ibid., 861; 961–962; 907. See also SCOTT 1994, 107-109.
71 Catherine lived only a few hundred meters away from the basilica of St-Dominic, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 872.
72 Maria's home was close to the famous Dominican convent of SS.-Paul and John in Venice, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 158.
73 Stefana's parents served as lay helpers in St-Jacob, a Dominican convent in Soncino, see GUERRINI 1930, 78.
74 The Dominican church, St-Catherine, was close to Maria's marital home. In the mornings she used to attend this church's services, see Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1605, 653.
75 Benvenuta's *vita* relates that the saint lived in the immediate neighborhood of a Dominican church (*tantum distabat a domo sua [Benvenuta], quantum bis forte jactaret balistra*), see *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis 1883*, 154.
76 Even Catherine of Siena, who eventually traveled widely in her missions, lived a good part of her life in her immediate neighborhood, see BOESCH GAJANO – REDON 1982, 26–27.
77 *Rule*, Ch. XIII, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 41. Restrictions about the travelling

of heretical beliefs; thus the Dominicans advocated a religious way of life that was well rooted in a certain place, and, therefore easier to control.

Yet, these emphases on stability did not exclude the fact that, with permission from their superiors, some individual penitent women traveled extensively either to reach a pilgrimage site or to fulfill an apostolic mission. Benvenuta Boiani made the pilgrimage to St. Dominic's shrine in Bologna,[78] while Colomba of Rieti passed as a pilgrim through several central Italian cities (Viterbo, Spoleto, Foligno) before she founded her community in Perugia.[79] Lucia Brocadelli of Narni lived in Rome and in Viterbo before she settled in Ferrara.[80] The most mobile of all penitents was certainly Catherine of Siena, whose apostolic enthusiasm led her not only to various Italian cities (Pisa, Florence, and Rome), but also as far as the papal court in Avignon.[81]

Each living solution brought about slightly different challenges to penitents' lives. For example, younger penitent girls struggled to gain autonomy from their parents, wives tried to combine marital duties with their personal religious goals, and widows had to ensure that they were not forced to remarry and that they were not socially marginalized. In whichever situation they lived, all of these women also faced more public tensions: they had to be on guard that their appearances in public places were not interpreted as impious worldliness. Furthermore, penitent women were rarely able to draw material boundaries between themselves and other people. Therefore, they learned to build mental barriers that sheltered them from other people's inevitable presence. It was thus characteristic to the penitent women's religious development that they had to find their own paths amidst conflicting interests and expectations.

Challenges and Rewards of Worldly Presence

The Dominican hagiographers were aware of the tensions that their lay protagonists faced, and they addressed these issues sympathetically. Raymond of Capua, for example, pointed out that Catherine of Siena's life was even more admirable because she was able to carry through rigorous asceticism in her own home where she could not count on such ecclesiastical support and peaceful circumstances that the hermits and nuns enjoyed:

> As you, dear reader, may notice, this Abraham's daughter [Catherine of Siena] achieved a greater degree of perfection in her abstinence than anyone of them, not in a monastery or in the desert, but in the house of her own father, without anyone's help, and even while being hindered by all her family members.[82]

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were not only limited to the penitents, but to all Dominicans: even the friars themselves needed special permission to leave, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 365.

78 *De B. Benvenuta 1883*, 157-158.

79 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatine* 1866, 164*–165*, 169*–170*.

80 MATTER 1996, 168–169.

81 On Catherine's missions, see p. 114–118.

82 "hanc [Catherine of Siena] autem veram filiam Abrahae cernis, lector, non in monasterio nec in deserto, sed in domo propria paterna, absque cujuspiam hominis viatoris exemplo sive

The penitent women's hagiographers always represented the penitent life as a conscious decision that ultimately depended on God's explicit command. Lay status was not an obstacle on the road to perfection, but instead it was expressed in positive, indeed sanctifying, terms. Lay life and active works of piety were even explicitly portrayed to be higher in perfection than mere contemplation in secluded monasteries. The promoters of lay sanctity advocated that a life comprised of both the *vita contemplativa* and the *vita activa* was more perfect than a life that contained just one of these elements.[83] Furthermore, while secular people were portrayed as needing physical and spiritual help, the penitent women were represented as socially conscientious helpers who addressed the needs of this world. Other people's well being was these women's duty, whereas retreat from the world was, in this context, presented as an easy, almost an egoistic, choice. The advocates of lay piety admitted that living in the world was not an easy task, rather it was an ordeal. Yet, precisely for this reason, participation in secular travails was perceived as sanctifying.

Osanna of Mantua originally desired to retreat from the world altogether in order to enjoy the peace of a contemplative life. However, when she asked God to guide her choice, He strongly prohibited her from leaving her secular home behind. This is how Osanna's legend transcribed God's words:

> He said: "Daughter, do not turn away from these tasks since your path to sanctity is that, for the well being of the crowds, you turn to the world and to interaction with people."[84]

The passage expresses the belief that it was Osanna's duty to ensure that people around her were spiritually consoled. God's command emphasized that social life was more valuable than solitary existence. The fact that Osanna gave up her eremitic desires highlighted her altruism as well as her obedience to God.

Like Osanna, Lucia Brocadelli, Stefana Quinzani, and Catherine of Racconigi initially longed for the purely contemplative life, but God ordered them all to remain in the world. Catherine of Racconigi's *vita* reveals that she on the nineteenth of November in 1512 at four a.m. – as her biographer painstakingly reported- had packed her bags in order to leave for a monastery, but the voice of God stopped her: "Stop! Where do you think you are going? I do not want that you leave […] I did not give you so many gifts so that you might hide them in a monastery."[85] Stefana's legend, for example, relates that God preferred an active life to mere contemplation:

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auxilio, et cum multorum domesticorum impedimento, illum attigisse perfectionis gradum in abstinentia, quem nullus illorum attingere potuit." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 878.

83 For a closer defenition of *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* see p. 93–94.

84 "Noli, inquit, filia, hanc provinciam adoriri: mea enim lege sanctitum est, ut longa tibi, in multorum salutem et consolationem, cum mortalibus sit consuetudo, in sequloque versere." Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 563.

85 "Fermati; dove vuoi andare? Non voglio, che tu parti [...] non haverti datto tanto doni, perche si chiudesse in un Monastero ." Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 132–133.

> "I want that you practice the *vita activa*, because the life that contains both *vita activa* and contemplation is more perfect. Do not fear, my daughter, that you would lose the *vita contemplativa* or that I would in anyway abandon you." (Emphases mine)[86]

This passage also reveals another argument with which the hagiographers typically defended penitent piety, namely that in the midst of their various activities, the penitent women were able to keep up with their contemplative lives as well. The penitent women, their hagiographers argued, were not carried away by the practical affairs that surrounded them, but instead they managed simultaneously to entertain both practical and contemplative pursuits.[87]

These four sixteenth century *vitae* echoed an earlier Dominican *vita*, namely the *Legenda maior* of Catherine of Siena. This latter *vita* indeed functioned as the paragon of secular piety and of women's *vita activa.* The first chapters of the second book in the *Legenda maior* (chapters 118–130) contribute so fundamentally to the understanding of lay piety that it is worth studying this section step by step.[88]

The legend relates that the young Catherine, perhaps at 15 or 16 years of age, began spending three years in the solitude of her room.[89] During this time Catherine lived like a hermit inside her parents' home. Catherine in fact followed a contemplative life, in which her secular housing appears as a mere coincidence. Her *vita* even praises that "She found desert in her own home and solitude amidst the crowds."[90] She seemed to have found her hermitage in the lively Benincasa home, and she even seemed to have learned a technique to ignore the people around her altogether. This period culminated with Catherine's vision of her mystical marriage to Christ, which further emphasized Catherine's spiritual distance from the world. The bridal imagery at first suggests that Catherine had chosen to dedicate her life totally to the spiritual service of Christ alone. Indeed, bridal mysticism generally had strongly monastic connotations to it. The nuns were represented as the brides of Christ, who acknowledged with their withdrawal from the world, that it was impossible to serve simultaneously two masters,

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86 "io [God is speaking] voglio mò che tu tenga et exerciti *la vita activa* perchè di magior perfectione è la vita la quale in se contiene e *la vita activa* e la contemplatione. Non dubitare, figlia, che non perderai *la vita contemplativa*, nè io per modo alchuno ti abandonarò." (Emphases mine.) *Leggenda volgare de la beata Stefana* 1930, 154.

87 Lucia Brocadelli's *vita* stresses the importance of worldly participation with virtually the same arguments that we have seen in the hagiographies of Osanna and Stefana: "Venne una volta desiderio à questa beata [Lucia], quando anco era giovinetta, di andare alla solitudine, & heremo, & guivi à guisa de gli antichi padri servire in continuoue vigilie, digiuni, & orazioni, al signore. Ma uscita, che fu della città, le si fecero incontra due padri dell' habito nostro, san Domenico, & san Pietro martire, & mettendola in mezzo, la riconducevano a casa, con dirle che la mente di nostro signore Dio, suo sposo, non era, che stesse nell'heremo, & solitudine, ma nella vita sociale." Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1577, 152. On these and other penitent women's ultimate preference for the *vita mixta/vita activa* in the world over a contemplative life in seclusion, see ZARRI 1990, 104–106.

88 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 891–894.

89 "tribus annis continue silentium tenuit [...] intra clausuram cellulae habitabat continue." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 883.

90 "invenit ista [Catherine] desertum intra proprium domum, et solitudinem in medio populorum." Ibid., 883.

namely the world and God.[91]

Catherine's mystical wedding was, however, followed by another vision in which God commanded her to leave the cell and return to the world. The *Legenda maior* clearly envisioned that Catherine's solitary life had reached its culmination in the mystical marriage. It was time to turn to new directions. The passage makes interesting alterations to the more traditional Christian perceptions of spiritual perfection. Firstly, while the *sponsa Christi* was generally understood as a monastic image that denoted rejection of the world, Catherine's legend presents us with the bride of Christ as God's messenger in the world. Secondly, Raymond inverted the customary order between contemplative and active life. While the active life was traditionally perceived as a preparatory stage for the more perfect contemplative life, Catherine's experiences lead from contemplation to active deeds.[92] Clearly this inverted order highlighted the value of socially and publicly oriented piety.

To make his point even more clear Raymond presented two biblical allusions, one to Jacob and Rachel's love, another to Mary and Martha of Bethany. He wrote:

> Until this I have talked about Jacob and Rachel's embraces and about Mary's optimal role, but now it is time that we proceed to the fecundity [of Lea] and to Martha's assiduous service.[93]

Firstly, Raymond compared the contemplative life to the caresses of Jacob and Rachel, while Lea's fecundity symbolized the active life. This paragraph further emphasizes the fact that Raymond perceived active life as a fruit of contemplation. Just as Lea's fecundity was the counterpart of Jacob and Rachel's love, so did the contemplative life breed action. Secondly, Raymond symbolized contemplation with Mary of Bethany and world-oriented Christianity with her sister, Martha. It was time to leave Mary's contemplation (*optima pars*) and proceed to the more laborious piety of Martha. This passage strongly suggests that contemplation remained empty if it was not complemented by other aspects of Christian living.

According to the *Legenda maior* Catherine herself was not, however, at all delighted by the prospect of returning to the world. On the contrary, she had enjoyed the quietness of her solitary life, whereas secular activities felt like a yoke upon her:

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91 On the concept of the *sponsa Christi* in monastic literature and thought world, see BUGGE 1975, 80–110 and passim. See also LECLERCQ 1994, 125 and MARMION 1925, esp. 33–48. The idea of a mystic as Christ's bride stemmed in part from the medieval commentaries on the *Song of Songs*, see MATTER 1990, 122–150 and passim.

92 On the hierarchical order between the active and contemplative life, see MASON 1961, 103–104 and CONSTABLE 1995, 79. See also p. 93.

93 "Haec idcirco adduxerim in hujus secundae partis principio, quia cum huc usque tractaverimus de viri Jacob et Rachelis amplexibus, Mariaque optimam partem fuerim prosecuti; tempus est ut jam ad foecunditatem ac frequens ministerium Marthae ordinarie procedamus." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 891.

> Hearing the message of her Shepherd and Spouse, and having understood that she was called *from her sweet quietness to travails, from solitary silence to the clamor of the world, and from her chamber's privacy to public life*, she answered with a troubled voice: "I have already undressed the tunic of temporal worries, why must I put it back on?"(Emphases mine).[94]

The world is here depicted as laborious, noisy, uncomfortably public, and filled with worries. It is starkly contrasted with the peaceful solitary life. Still, it was precisely God's plan to hand "the tunic of temporal worries" back to Catherine. It was His design that Catherine would carry other people's troubles and show them the way to a better life. The *Legenda maior* portrayed this task as a demanding pursuit that required almost heroic courage from Catherine. Moreover, Catherine's eventual submission to God's plan underscored her willingness to sacrifice herself for other people. Raymond's firmly advocated that lay piety was even more challenging than solitary life. It especially demanded self-abasement and sacrifices. Finally, the endurance of hardships ultimately contributed to the sanctity of the protagonists themselves, and it helped produce the salvation of other people. Though Raymond painted the world in dark colors, he advocated that it needed to be saved rather than left alone. One can almost hear the echo of Jesus's words: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick"(Matt. 9:12).

After this discussion between God and Catherine, the *Legenda maior* proceeded to relate that God commanded Catherine's first task in public was to dine with others. This order particularly surprised Catherine, since she hardly ate anything except herbs and an occasional piece of bread.[95] God's command should not, however, be understood as a command to eat, but as an order to cultivate companionship with the seculars. The very word "companion" derives from the Latin words *cum* and *panis*, to share bread, to share the offerings of the table.[96] And in this context, dining with others summed up symbolically the passage's principal message about socially oriented piety.

The penitent women's presence in the secular world was balanced by a longing for eremitic life. Indeed, some penitents imagined themselves as hermits: Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, and Catherine of Siena were accompanied by Villana Botti,[97] Catherine of Racconigi,[98] and Lucia Brocadelli,[99] just to mention a few. The saint who most ardently longed for the solitude of the 'desert' was the one who at the same time was socially the most active: Catherine of Siena.

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94 "Illa vero, ex notitia vocis Pastoris sui et Sponsi, ab illo intelligens se vocatam, *de quietis dulcedine ad labores, de silentii solitudine ad clamores, et de cubiculi secretis ad publicum*, voce querulosa respondit: Exspoliavi me *tunica omnis curae temporalis* jam hactenus; quomodo jam abjectam a me, iterum resumam?" (Emphases mine) Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 891.

95 On Catherine's fasting, see Ibid., 876–877, and 960. See also BELL 1985, 23–53; BYNUM 1988, 165-186 and passim.

96 See, for example, *Il Nuovo Zingarelli. Vocabolario della lingua italiana di Nicola Zingarelli.* (Zanichelli, Bologna 1988), 408, "compagno."

97 Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 866.

98 Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 132.

99 Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1577, 152. See also, PROSPERI 1972, 381.

As a young girl she once escaped her home for a day to live as a hermit by one of the Sienese ports, only to learn in a vision that God wanted her to return home.[100] She, however, never totally gave up this ideal, but instead found her desert in her own room.[101] Moreover, Catherine venerated as her patron saint Mary Magdalene, one of Christian history's paragon solitary saints.[102] For penitent women like Catherine solitude was a counterpart for their social lives, silence was a temporary refuge from the demands of the day. The desert as a concept pointed to the solitude and, furthermore, to the ascetic vigor of early Christian spirituality.[103] The penitents were paralleled with personae from the Bible and early Christianity, which implicitly functioned as a critique against the lax manners of their contemporaries. The mendicant veneration for the early Christian saints was manifested in the popular legendaries like the *Vitae patrum* and Jacobus of Voragine's *Legenda aurea*.[104] These collections also inspired the penitent women who heard these legends. The *vitae* of Villana Botti and Catherine of Siena indeed relate that their protagonists were inspired by the *Vitae patrum* in their eremitic longing.[105]

This eremitic inspiration seems at first to be at odds with the penitent women's way of life. While these women lived in their private homes in the Italian cities, their role models had lived in the Egyptian and Syrian deserts. Moreover, the social orientation of the mendicant penitents seems to contradict the solitary premises of the eremitic life. These evident differences, however, dissolved in numerous parallels. Just like the mendicant penitents, so the early Christian saints had alternated between renunciation of the world and active service in society. The hermits were rarely total outcasts from their societies. On the contrary, their times of solitude enhanced their social charisma and clarified their mission in the world. In addition, as Peter Brown has shown in his studies about the cults of saints in late Antiquity, numerous early Christian solitaires displayed their renunciation of the world quite socially indeed, for example by erecting their pillars along the busiest crossroads.[106] The penitent saints were similarly portrayed balancing between the social and solitary life. Furthermore, the Italian cities in their secular rhythms of life, were maybe not so far from the largely pagan world of late Antiquity world. At least the hagiographies presented their protagonists as the sole champions of Christian perfection in their worldly communities.

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100 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 870.

101 Concerning Catherine's longing for solitary life, see Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de Supplemento* 1974, 46, 48, 299.

102 On Mary Magdalene as Catherine's role model, see p. 117.

103 The Desert Fathers symbolized simultaneously solitude, self-denial, successful battle against the temptations, and asceticism. On this ascetic model of the Desert Fathers for women, see BYNUM 1988, 82.

104 Elizabeth Petroff argues that the *Vitae patrum* presented a proto-text against which medieval friars measured the ascetic perfection of their female saints, see PETROFF 1994, 110–136.

105 On Catherine, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 870. Raymond presents here Catherine's imitation of the Desert fathers as a conscious choice, though he elsewhere wrote that Catherine imitated these early saints subconsciously, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 876. On Villana, see Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 866.

106 On the public presence of the hermits, see BROWN 1985, 186–190 and LECLERCQ 1987, 68.

These eremitic ideals were not limited to the penitents. On the contrary, the penitent echoed the wider mendicant world-view. The mendicants wanted to distinguish themselves from the ideals of monasticism that underscored stability (*stabilitas*) and communal religious practices. Instead they saw themselves as part of another Christian tradition, namely ascetic peregrination (*peregrinatio)* that emphasized each individual person's quest. Writing on the context of the thirteenth century Dominican authors in general, Alain Boureau sums up that the friars desired to associate themselves with the simple prestige of the Desert Fathers and Mothers. These friars portrayed, much in the same fashion as has been seen in the specific *vitae* of the penitents as well, the medieval cities as modern deserts: while the fathers had resisted the temptation and confrontations of the devil in the deserts, the friars endured similar tests in the cities. Moreover, the Preaching Friars used the allegories of the desert and of solitude as means to criticize the secular life styles their urban contemporaries, although these friars were themselves very much offspring of thirteenth century urbanization.[107]

The penitent women's *vitae* convey a positive, yet ambiguous, attitude toward the world and world-oriented piety. On one hand, a mission in the world was given as a specific task for many penitents whose spiritual perfection partly rested on these works for other people. On the other hand, however, the concept of 'world' (*saeculum*) itself still remained largely negative, and affairs in this secular world were depicted as wearisome. Even those mendicants like Raymond of Capua who favored active deeds portrayed the world as a stage of constant struggle.

In the Solitude of a Mental Cell

This ambivalence was reflected in a bifurcated conception about the penitent women's presence in the world: they were portrayed as physically present and active in the society, but mentally inhabiting the transcendent world. In other words, these women were represented as acting for the world's salvation, alleviating the people's sorrows, but never themselves living wholly in it in their hearts.

The hagiographers carefully represented their protagonists' ability to keep a devotional focus amidst a variety of secular situations. This focus was apparent when Benvenuta Boiani attended to her prayers while others in the house enjoyed entertaining pastimes around the fireplace,[108] or when Catherine of Siena remained in deep meditation in her room while her family celebrated the Carnival.[109] These women were not constrained from joining in by any exterior obstacles, but simply by their own will. Indeed, the worried families would have probably been overjoyed to see their saturnine offspring joining them.[110]

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107 BOUREAU 1987, 80–82, 93–94. Lester Little points out that by idealizing the eremitic way of life the mendicants criticized emerging urban life styles as well as old monasticism, see LITTLE 1994, especially 70–83.

108 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 153.

109 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 890.

110 On families' concerns for their daughters' asceticism, see p. 129.

The hagiographers naturally praised their protagonists for staying away. Furthermore, the writers saw it as especially virtuous that their saints not only voluntarily withdrew from worldly entertainments, but also were able to remain in their meditations in the middle of the merriment. This restraint showed the penitents' mental capacity to create non-material boundaries around themselves, a task that was, as their hagiographers emphasized, much more challenging than a mere subjection to outer constraints created by physical separation and monasteries' mures.[111]

This idea of a penitent saint's inner freedom from exterior circumstances was further developed by Raymond of Capua and Thomas of Siena, both of whom elaborated upon the theme of the 'mental cell'. When these authors referred to inner spirituality they often used such terms as 'mental cell' (*mentale cella*,[112] *cella mentalis*,[113] *cella in mente*[114]), 'spiritual cell' (*cella spiritualis*[115]), 'secret cell' (*cella segreta*[116]), 'inner cell' (*cella interiori*[117]), and 'not a manmade cell' (*cella non manufactam*[118]).[119]

Raymond's and Thomas's use of the concept of the 'mental cell' invokes the idea of inner solitude (*interna solitudo, interna vacatio*) that was achievable even without actual physical separation from other people. This idea of inner solitude as such was not new at all. In fact, it had been frequently used, surprising as it may seem, by the monastic authors. These writers did not, however, use the concept to clarify the principles of lay piety, but instead to defend the cenobitical monastic life that was frequently challenged by the advocators of eremitic life. While numerous medieval hermits advocated that religious perfection was possible only in total separation from other people, the defenders of cenobitical monasticism argued that a nun or a monk could attend a religious community and yet be mentally in solitude.[120] The spokesmen of lay piety transformed this idea yet a step further by arguing that a person could find mental quietude not only among other professed people, but even among the lay folk.

Raymond and Thomas used the concept of the 'mental cell' in the context of both Catherine of Siena's (about whom they both wrote) and Maria of Venice's (about whom Thomas wrote) attitudes toward the secular world. The mental cell for these two authors meant continuous meditation and mental prayer, a pursuit to keep God in one's mind everywhere and in each action.[121] While

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111 Sanctity in the world depended ultimately in the capacity to select from good and evil stimuli. As Sorokin has summed it: "Exposed to both positive and negative stimuli, the saint rejects the negative and accepts the positive. " SOROKIN 1950, 170–171.
112 Thomas od Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 164.
113 *Il Processo Castellano* 1938, 35.
114 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875.
115 *Il Processo Castellano* 1938, 35.
116 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 874.
117 Ibid., 875.
118 Ibid., 875.
119 Also the Bible speaks about the not a man-made Tabernacle (tabernaculum non manufactum, Heb. 9.11) and the Temple that is not man made (templum non manufactum, Mark. 14: 58). These biblical concepts, however, refer to the apocalyptic church, not to private meditation.
120 On the monastic idea of inner solitude, see CONSTABLE 1996, 27–34.
121 On the 'mental cell' as a continuous meditation, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 161.

sacred space and religious rites nurtured spiritual life, they were not its absolute prerequisites: the pious life could be lived even in the most profane places and during the most menial activities. Just as the actual monastic cells had been places for spiritual encounters with God for many of the predecessors of Catherine and Maria, these two women now retreated to the cells that they carried inside themselves. Raymond and Thomas advocated a radically interiorized piety as a solution that enabled women to remain spiritually pure in their various secular activities. In their texts the monastic cell was transformed into a metaphor about one's mental state.

Raymond wrote about Catherine:

> So that she would not be troubled by people's offences she, on the advice of the Holy Ghost, built herself a secret cell – a cell in her own mind. She dwelled in this cell and did not leave it during any of her external activities.[122]

Raymond's texts convey the idea that her 'mental cell' made Catherine, if not quite indifferent, at least immune to exterior challenges. Similarly, Thomas wrote that this saintly woman "went everywhere in a spiritual and mental cell."[123] In much the same fashion he wrote about Maria of Venice, who in public was always dwelling "in saintly meditations and also in the above-mentioned cell."[124]

This 'mental cell' did not depend upon place or upon external activities. It was portable. It was a state of mind that the penitents took with them always and everywhere. Raymond and Thomas clearly advocated that this life in one's 'inner cell' was a more sublime way of being in contact with God than to seek Him in the man-made cells of a cloister. Accordingly, Raymond wrote that Catherine, who often felt worn out from her secular activities, no longer yearned for the peace of her material cell when she had learned to retreat to her 'mental cell':

> So that she would not be troubled by people's offences, she, on the advice of the Holy Ghost, built herself a secret cell, a cell in her own mind. She dwelled in this cell and did not leave it during any of her external activities.[125]

Using the similar comparison between inner and outer cells, Thomas of Siena even launched a critique against those who superficially thought that a life in an exterior cell was a sign of inner perfection. To clarify the importance of this

122 "Nam in nullo mota ex omnibus his [peoples' offences], cellam sibi secretam fecit, Spiritu sancto dictante, in propria mente; de qua statuit, propter quodcumque negotium externius, non exire." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 874.

123 "ubicumque forent in spirituali et mentali cella." Thomas's testimony in *Il Processo Castellano* 1938, 35. Thomas also preached about the theme of the 'inner cell', see his *Historia disciplinae* 1749, 234.

124 "le santi meditaçioni et intra l'altre de la sua sopradecta mentale cella." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 164.

125 "In hoc hospite haec sacra virgo confisa, cellam non manufactam sibi fabricavit, ipso adjuvante ab intra, propter quem cellam manufactam ab extra positam perdere non curavit." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875.

mental adherence, this friar referred to God's words during one of Catherine's many visions: " Many are in a cell, yet they are outside the cell. I want that your cell is in the understanding of your own sins."[126] In short, these friars argued that since the 'inner cell' was the ultimate guarantee of piety, life in the secular world was as possible a place for spiritual perfection as any religious house.

Like Raymond and Thomas other Dominican hagiographers also wrote about their protagonists' uninterrupted spiritual focus in the midst of their secular and religious tasks alike.[127] Nevertheless, I have not found the term of the 'mental cell' itself from the texts of other Dominicans although they did emphasize the need for inner peace and solitude. What prompted these two contemporaries to use this image rather than the more general concept of inner solitude? Was Thomas influenced by the older and more authoritative Raymond, or were these men both inspired by someone else? It seems clear that the latter is true: the person who imprinted the image of the 'inner cell' in their minds was, in fact, Catherine of Siena herself.[128]

Even Raymond testifies in his *Legenda maior* that Catherine taught him about the 'mental cell': "The saintly virgin often taught me: 'Make a cell in your own mind and never exit from it."[129] We can also find this image of the inner house (It. *la casa del anima, abitazione della cella del cuore*) in Catherine's letters that she directed to other penitent women. Also Catherine used this expression to clarify the relationship between social life and the state of a person's mind, especially to illuminate the co-existence of secular activities and contemplation. To Daniela of Orvieto, for example, she wrote:

> Look everywhere for prayer, so that you can always carry with you the place where God in his grace inhabits and where we have to pray. This is the house of your soul.[130]

Catherine's 'house of the soul' was a place where one continuously prayed and desired to be in contact with God. Furthermore, she advocated that since this 'inner prayerhouse' was carried within the penitent, it made prayer possible everywhere this person went.

In Catherine's teaching the idea of the 'inner cell' was related to one of her own central themes in her letters and in her book, *Il Dialogo*: self-knowledge (It. *conoscimento di se*). Catherine emphasized several times the value of knowing one self. To her this self-examination did not, however, mean individualistic self-analysis, but knowledge about God's presence within each person. She saw

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126 "Multi sunt in cella et sunt extra cellam. Ego volo quod cella tua sit cognitio propria peccatorum tuorum ." Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de supplemento* 1974, 299.

127 For example, on Osanna and Stefana see p. 68–69, on Benvenuta Boiani see p. 73, on Catherine of Racconigi, see Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 136.

128 On the concept 'inner cell' in Catherine's own writings, see Catherine of Siena, *Epistolario* 1940, 4–5, note 6.

129 "sacra virgo me monebat saepius, dicens: Faciatis vobis cellam in mente, de qua numquam egrediamini. " Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875.

130 "In ogni luogo trova l'orazione, perchè sempre porta seco il luogo dove Dio abita per grazia, e dove noi dobbiamo orare, cioè la casa del anima nostra, dove ora continuo il santo desiderio." Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere*, vol. III, 1860, 198.

that proper self-understanding brought with it a realization of human dependence on God's grace. Catherine saw this retreat into one's soul as a path leading to the Godhead, which again implied that a person was always and in each social situation intimately communicating with God as well.[131] This was fundamentally the same idea that Raymond and Thomas referred to when they spoke about the 'mental cell'. In short, these two friars were inspired by Catherine in this particular choice of terminology.

This idea of inner piety, the 'mental cell', was a pivotal argument in support of lay piety. Yet, it was not the only one: the 'mental cell' did not exclude the need for religious practices. These medieval lay women, if you excuse the anachronism, were not like the later Protestant Puritans, whose piety demanded only a few external religious rites. On the contrary, the penitent women's 'inner cell' was complemented by a myriad of exterior devotional practices that facilitated these women's spiritual lives as well as shaped their relations with the secular world.

These exterior practices that fashioned the penitent life can be separated into two distinct categories: devotional rites and secular customs. While the prior category refers to such practices as the use of a religious habit and the participation in church rituals, the latter points to such social obligations as keeping peaceful relations with one's neighbor. These two categories should be seen as separate, but not totally without interaction: the religious rites had considerable social importance, while the secular customs were religiously inspired. In the context of my work these religious and secular obligations are studied from the viewpoint of their social impact. In other words, the focus is on the penitent-world relationship rather than the penitent-God relationship. Accordingly, the principal question shall be: "How did the religious habit and devotional practices, as well as certain secular customs (to be described below), facilitate the penitent women's world-oriented piety?"

The Social Functions of Devotional Practices and Moral Customs

Though penitent women did not retreat from the world physically, they employed tactics that drew non-material, yet visible, boundaries between themselves and their secular companions. While the *pinzochere* remained socially connected to the secular world, they separated themselves from other people by bearing the penitent order's distinct clothing, keeping up devotional rituals, and by following prescribed daily customs. Furthermore, the advocates of lay piety emphasized the above-discussed integrity of character and mental adherence to religious principles. All four of these factors – religious clothing, pious customs, devotional practices, and disciplined character – had one fundamental aspect in common:

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131 Catherine commonly linked the concepts of 'self-knowledge,' 'knowledge of God,' and 'inner cell' to each other. As an example see a letter to the abbess of St-Martha (Siena), in Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere* 1860, Vol. I, 129.

none of them were dependent on time or place. In other words, a dress, customs, and good character followed their bearer everywhere, even through the most secular spaces.

A passage from the *vita* of Giovanna of Orvieto illustrates well the importance that the defenders of penitent piety attached to establishing some mental distance from other people in the secular world. Giovanna's threatening experiences in Orvieto (two sexual attacks by elderly men) convinced her that it was no longer safe live with the "earthly scorpions".[132] She did not, however, intend to withdraw physically from the world, but rather to build a mental shield between herself and the world. Her legend describes Giovanna's resolution thus: "As soon as she understood that [that it was not safe to stay in the world] she started to think how she could resign from the world, not only in her heart, but also through her manners."[133] Giovanna's departure from the world was manifest in her inner indifference to people's presence, in her acts, and in her manners, not in monastic or eremitic seclusion.

For the lay members of the Dominican order the religious habit was the most distinct manifestation of their status. The importance of the Dominican penitent dress was underscored in the *Rule* of the penitents as well as in their *vitae*. The hagiographers often elaborated on the allegorical meanings of the colors in the Dominican habit – white dress and head gear with a black cloak – explaining that black symbolized mental rejection of the world, while white stood for inner purity.[134] The dress and its colors signaled that its bearer was not an ordinary lay person, but a member of a religious order.

The penitents' *Rule* provided clear guidelines about the appearance of the habit; the black and white dress should be made of coarse material and even the shoes should be modest. The humbleness of this dress expressed a lack of interest in the luxuries of the world. The *Rule* also addressed in detail the taking of the habit that meant the formal admittance to the Order. The dress was to be blessed by the Dominican friars and received in their presence. Since the penitents did not desert the world as a sign of their religious calling, the importance of the habit was accentuated. Indeed, the penitent *Rule* made no provisions about the housing for these lay people, whereas it included even the customary prayer for the blessing of the dress.[135]

The taking of the penitent habit was carefully recorded by the Dominican hagiographers, and, due to the moment's importance, they also generated standardized ways to emphasize this event. Firstly, they underscored their protagonists' reverence for the habit itself. Secondly, as a sign of the penitents' perseverance, the hagiographers pointed out the struggles that they went through to attain the dress. Thirdly, they highlighted the permanence of the taking of the

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132 "Cumque videret habitare cum scorpionibus non esse securum..." *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 142.

133 "cepit adhuc puellula [Giovanna] cogitare qualiter mundum, qui in eius corde marcuerat, actibus etiam exterioribus abdiceret." Ibid., 142.

134 On the interpretation of the habit's colors, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 882.

135 The Dominican penitents' *Rule*, Ch.II, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 38–39.

habit, thus fighting against those who took the dress only temporarily, for example between marriages.

The loyalty to the order and appreciation of the seriousness of the calling was embodied in these *vitae* by the devotion to a habit. The *vitae* of these penitents regularly included a section about the protagonists' ardor for the Dominican habit. Giovanna of Orvieto worked firmly toward receiving the Dominican dress,[136] Catherine of Siena burst into tears of happiness when she was finally allowed to dress into her religious costume,[137] and when Catherine of Racconigi dressed into her Dominican habit, her body emanated sweet odors and nearby people could hear angelic melodies.[138] The importance of the order's habit to the Dominican hagiographers comes forth clearly when one compares the two versions of Margherita of Città di Castello's *vita.* While her non-Dominican hagiographer mentions the habit only in passing, the anonymous Dominican pauses to emphasize that Margherita always wore her habit.[139] Perhaps the hagiographers in part felt a need to underscore their protagonists' Dominican attire, because it was a tangible sign of the Order's institutionalization when their *Rule* was not yet actually confirmed. Even after the formal approval of the Dominican Third Order *Rule,* the Preaching Friars continued to fight Franciscan dominance by emphasizing their penitent order's own habit. This strategy can, for example, be seen in Stefana Quinzani's hagiography. This *vita* narrates that the saint had a vision in which St. Francis tried to hand her the habit of the Minorite's Third Order, but he was stopped by St. Dominic who claimed that Stefana had done a vow to him, not to Francis. In this vision's conflict situation Stefana herself manifests her preference for the Dominican order "by staring at the habit of St. Dominic."[140]

This ardor for the Dominican habit was further emphasized by accounts of intense struggles that the penitents went through before they could persuade their relatives and convince the authorities of the local penitent organization to allow them to take the habit. Since respectable penitent organizations wanted to protect their reputation, it was not always easy to attain the formal sign of their membership. This process was not made any easier by the opposition of the aspiring penitents' relatives who often favored marriage over the penitent life. Consequently, the *vitae* elaborated all these difficulties in order to exemplify the firmness of their protagonists' calling. Catherine of Siena, Osanna of Mantua,

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136 "Disposuit itaque [Giovanna] divina providentia suggerente, habitum sororum vestitarum beatissimi Dominici primi fundatoris et patris ordinis predicatorum assumere," *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 142. See also PAOLI-RICCI 1996, 61.

137 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 875. On the importance of the Dominican habit for other penitent women, see also Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 163; Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 562; *Leggenda volgare de la beata Stefana* 1930, 99.

138 Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 188.

139 The *Legenda de beate Margaritae Civitate Castelli recensio maior* reads: "Ad ecclesiam Predicatorum, quorum habitum defferebat, omni die solicite properabat...", 73., while the *Legenda de beate Margaritae Civitate Castelli recensio minor* reads: " Semper habitum Ordinis Predicatorum portabat et in ecclesia Predicatorum Fratrum semper prima erat...", 97.

140 "guardando fixamente nel habito de sancto Dominico ."*Leggenda volgare de la Beata Stefana* 1930, 99.

and Stefana Quinzani fell seriously ill upon learning that their desire to possess the habit would not be fulfilled.[141] They recovered only after they were given permission to receive it. Giovanna of Orvieto had to flee from her relatives after she had dressed in her religious costume.[142]

The Dominicans underscored these women's life-long religious commitment. Therefore the penitent *Rule* as well as the *vitae* stressed that after the formal admittance to the order, the women were not to return back to their secular status. They could leave their penitent habit behind only if they chose to proceed to a monastic order. It was against regulations to return, for example, back to married life.[143]

Since the symbolic value of a religious costume was high, even those who did not belong to any religious order hoped to be buried in religious habits. Medieval people perceived a habit as spiritual protection, not only in this world but also in the next. The Dominican friars, however, generally championed the ideal that a habit was a symbol of a religious way of life, and, accordingly, it should not be granted posthumously. Nevertheless, penitent habits were occasionally used as burial costumes by secular people. Indeed, it seems likely that one of the Dominican penitent saints, namely Villana Botti, was dressed in Dominican habit only after her death.[144] She had been closely associated with the Florentine Dominicans, but formal affiliation to the order seems to have happened only after her death. Villana's penitential life, which was not expressed by a distinct costume, had actually attracted the attention of the Florentine novelist Francesco Sacchetti (d. ca.1400). He parodied Villana for wearing her ordinary clothes, yet claiming that she followed a Dominican way of life.[145] Sacchetti's jest reveals that a penitent without distinct clothing appeared in people's eyes as a hypocrite whose calling was not firm enough to manifest itself in exterior appearance.

The penitent habit was perceived to be more than an expression of a religious choice or of participation in a group: the habit functioned as a shield between a penitent and secular lay people. This habit, which covered its bearer from head to toe, hid the person from people's gazes, creating a sense of privacy amidst the crowds. Thomas of Siena in his *vita* of Maria of Venice particularly addressed this need for the penitent women to hide in their dresses when moving in public places. Thomas seems to have understood the habit almost as a sacred mini-space, which the penitent carried along wherever she went. In this space the penitent was able to continue her prayers despite possible outer distractions. Thomas wrote:

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141 On Catherine, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 879. On Osanna, see Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 562. On Stefana, see *Leggenda volgare de la Beata Stefana* 1930, 99.

142 *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 142.

143 See *Rule*, Ch. V, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 39.

144 On the probability that Villana was dressed in the penitent habit only posthumously, see Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana 1868*, 869, note b.

145 Sacchetti, *Delle novelle* 1724, 227.

> Because of this [the habit] the body of Christ's beloved [Maria] was all covered, and thus she could remain without any distraction, tranquil in her own mind.[146]

This passage evokes the image of the habit as a prayer house; it is just as if the dress would be a cloister where one entered to escape the distractions and to find tranquillity!

The religious habit was a confirmation of penitents' membership in the Dominican order, it was a protecting cover against other people, and it gave its bearer a non-spatial sense of sacrality. The habit was not merely a way to clothe oneself. It also was a mean to achieve a desired state of mind. Just as a secular person might dress up to feel festive, so the penitent wore a religious habit in order to strengthen her pious state of mind. It was not sufficient to experience such climaxes of spiritual life as ecstasies or visions. It was also necessary to remain constant in one's faith even in the most ordinary days. Continuous use of the religious habit supported this pursuit of perpetual piety.

Still, without adequate religious rituals the habit alone remained hollow. The Dominican penitents' *Rule* pronounced a clear set of minimum requisites for religious observance as well as for quotidian customs. Cornerstones for regular religious observance included daily recitation of canonical hours, frequent attendance at masses, and communion and confession four times a year. The Dominican *Rule* provided a coherent system to the penitent women's quotidian rituals by, for example, detailing the number of *Pater Noster*s, *Ave Maria*s, and *Credo*s that were to be recited. These three basic Christian prayers replaced the more complicated Psalter-readings that typically belonged to the Divine Office. The *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* come forth in the *Rule* as basic expectations for the penitents, while the *Credo* remained optional and limited to those who knew it.[147] The penitents, unlike the full-members of the religious orders, were not obliged to complete the communal recitation of the Divine Office. Moreover, in their lives the liturgical prayers were perfected by inner prayers that did not necessarily rely on any specific format. In fact, the collective liturgical prayer that was emblematic of the monastic orders never attained such a central place in the lives of the home-dwelling penitents.[148]

Confession and communion accompanied these liturgical and free form prayers. Confession and communion were to be performed at Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, and either during the Feast of the Virgin Mary's Assumption or of her Nativity. The *Rule* also championed regulated annual fasts and weekly abstinence: There were fasts from the first Advent Sunday to the Nativity of Christ and from Ash Wednesday to Easter Day itself. The penitents were to

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146 " per la qual cosa [habit] staendosi la dilecta [Maria of Venice] tutta ricolta quanto al corpo, molto vie più si trovava star sença nisuna distraçione a tutta ricolta e tranquilla quanto a la mente." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 164.

147 "Omnes etiam qui sciunt Symbolum Apostolicim scilicet "Credo in Deum" dicant." The Dominican penitents' *Rule*, Ch. VI, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 39.

148 On the centrality of prayer in monastic life and on its the social function, see ROSENWEIN -LITTLE 1974, 5-7. On the role of liturgical prayer in the lives of nuns and conventual penitents, see p. 94 and p. 152–3 respectively.

abstain from meat four days a week throughout the year (Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays).[149] The lay women's devotional practices centered on fasting and communion, whereas in the monasteries the collective recitation of divine office held the central place. These bodily practices were readily available to all lay women, even to those who were less well trained in the formal aspects of religious life or who were unable to participate regularly in the collective religious services. Moreover, fasting and communion emphasized an individual person's penance and examination of conscience. In fact, this personified piety that found its fulfillment in the private, ascetic practices of a penitent woman lay at the heart of penitent women's religious life.

This Dominican penitents' *Rule* gave structure to the lay members' religious observances as well as marked the distance between the penitent women and their non-religious contemporaries. The penitents were set apart from other lay people by these structured and supervised practices. These customs armored the *pinzochere* against their surroundings. Moreover, attendance in confession and communion strengthened the contacts between the churchmen and these penitent women. Communion was not only a celebration of Christ's mystery but also an affirmation of the intermediary powers of the agent of the ceremony, namely those of the priest.[150]

All these norms underscored disciplined, yet moderate, observance. The *Rule* prescribed penitents more rigorous observances than was expected from other lay people around them, yet the Dominicans did not advocate extreme asceticism. While an average practicing Christian was likely to abstain from meat two days a week (Wednesday and Friday), the penitents doubled the days of regular abstinence. Thus, the standards for the penitent life were rigorous, but not extraordinarily demanding. The Dominican *Rule* supported the way of religious life that was practicable by all its members and suitable for life-long observance.

The prescribed rituals were all adapted for the lay people's daily lives. For example the penitents' observance of canonical hours did not request gathering in church. On the contrary, the prayers could be recited while working, or even while resting at the night. Indeed, the *vitae* of lay saints reveal that many of their protagonists held their vigils in their bedroom, even in their beds, when they wanted to avoid attracting the attention of other household members. For example a passage from Margherita Fontana's *vita* illustrates well that the nightly ascetic practices that were so fundamental to the religious life were not necessarily that easy to practice in lay life:

> In the evenings she [Margherita Fontana] laid herself in the bed so that she would not cause worry to her pious mother with whom she shared the bed. But at that moment when mother fell asleep and the entire house was quiet, this pious virgin rose quietly from her comfortable bed and placed herself sometimes on the ground and sometimes on plain straw.[151]

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149 On these religious rites, see *Rule*, Ch. VI–XII, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 39–41.

150 On communion as an affirmation of priestly roles, see BYNUM 1988, 57–62 and RUBIN 1991, 148–150.

151 "Si quando, ne contristaret piam matrem apud quam cubabat et dormiebat, vesperi se in lecto collocabat, ea deinde hora, qua somnus matrem occupaverat, quaque tota domus erat in silentio,

Similar to Margherita, young Stefana Quinzani secretly snuck out of bed, did her nightly vigils, and in the morning she pretended to her parents that she had slept all night.[152] Margherita and Stefana, like so many other penitent women, had to see that their religious practices did not conflict with the daily rhythms of other people. [153]

Furthermore, these women were not necessarily able to halt their own daily tasks for prayer. The *vita* of Maria Mancini reveals that in her home this Pisanese mother breastfed her baby son during Matins, but instead of being distracted by this motherly activity, Maria used her own experience as an inspiration to contemplate how the Virgin Mary nursed the infant Jesus.[154] The Dominicans also took in account the special needs that working people faced. For example, the penitent *Rule* stated that persons who earned their living by manual labor did not need to wake for Matins. Instead they could say these prayers later in the day.[155]

The goal of these rules was to create a basic framework for the disciplined penitential life. Simultaneously, the saints' *vitae* functioned partially as illustrations of these norms: the saints fleshed out the ideals of the penitent way of life. This didactic usage was not, naturally, the only function of the *vitae;* the saints' lives were also written to show God's continuous presence and special grace in the world. In fact, the hagiographers did not set the intensity of any saint's deeds as a model for the reader, but they instead advocated that saintly excesses were gifts of grace rather than the result of human practices. Indeed, ordinary people were discouraged from launching into such saintly exercises without special permission and firm guidance by churchmen. Though the intensity of these saints' practices was unique, they nevertheless followed the same basic religious practices that the *Rule* had prescribed to all Dominican penitents. The uncompromised perfection of the saints clarified the basic messages of the Dominican lay life, thus complementing the *Rule*.

To illustrate further the religious practices of the penitent women, I have here chosen to take a closer look at one penitent woman's *vita*, namely that of Maria of Venice. There would be abundant material in the other hagiographies as well, but Maria's *vita* provides us an exceptional case of a common sense saint whose actions almost totally lack saintly excesses. Unlike so many other saints' *vitae*, Maria's life was not comprised of supernatural or miraculous occurrences, which would have signaled that Maria's deeds were caused by Divine intervention. Therefore her way of life could be emulated by more ordinary penitents as well.[156] Accordingly, it is possible to read Maria's *vita* both as an example of *what*

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pia Virguncula tacite ex delicatis plurimis se levabat, ponebatque se aliquando supra terram, aliquando super stramen nudum..." Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana* 1866, 136.

152 *Leggenda de la Beata Stefana 1930*, 97.

153 For further examples concerning the conflicts that penitent women's observance of daily religious rites provoked in their families, see *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 153 (Benvenuta Boiani) and Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1867, 878 (Catherine of Siena).

154 Serafino Razzi, *Vite dei santi e beati* 1605, 653.

155 *Rule,* Ch. VII, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 40.

156 SORELLI 1992, 167–168.

penitent customs meant and *how intensively* they might have been practiced by ordinary penitents. It seems quite obvious that Thomas of Siena, Maria's confessor and the *Life*'s author, used Maria's religious observances as a model for other penitents. He narrated religious habits in meticulous detail, clearly encouraging his readers to act similarly. Thomas's intentions to portray this saint's pious customs as advice for other penitents are further underscored by the differences between his Latin and vernacular reductions of the *vita.* The Italian translation relates in greater detail Maria's religious observances, which suggests that Thomas wanted to provide his lay readers a close-up picture of the actual practices of penitent piety so that they in their turn would know how a virtuous penitent life was successfully carried through.[157]

Thomas of Siena underscored Maria's enthusiasm for sermons, especially (not surprisingly!) those preached by the Dominicans and Thomas himself. Thomas praised Maria for arriving quietly in the church, hearing the sermon on her knees equally silently, and contemplating intensively on each day's message. In addition, Thomas was impressed by Maria's meticulous recitation of the Office of the Virgin, which she either uttered in home or in church. Maria had even bought herself a breviary in order better to perform her solitary prayers.[158] In other words, Maria was a model learner: always on time in church, responsive in her quiet way, and eager to continue learning at home.

Maria of Venice was an active churchgoer whose spirits were lifted by attendance in the services. Yet, she was not always able to attend them when she herself so wished. Like so many lay people, she needed to make a compromise between her home chores and going to church. Maria's interest in sermons was not just a question of her own priorities, but she also had to take care of her elderly father and, accordingly, fit devotional activities to the times that suited him and her mother. Therefore, Thomas underlined that Maria kept God in mind where ever she was: "She practiced them [the deeds that pleased God] in church, at home, wherever she went."[159] This idea that one could similarly serve God in church, at home, or wherever one was – in sacred and in a-sacred places alike – indeed rested at the heart of lay piety.

Maria's corporal austerity was inspired by Catherine of Siena. Though Maria's mortifications never reached the extremes of her role model, she refrained from meat, slept with her clothes on, wore a rough hairshirt, and scourged herself with a heavy iron whip.[160] Thomas praised Maria for following her austere life even within her luxurious parental home. Maria's valor was accentuated by the fact that she did not emulate the life of her parents who "had an especially luxurious way of life".[161] Indeed, the successful self-discipline and resistance to nearby temptations highlighted the strength of Maria's resolution.

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157 On Thomas's translations as more descriptive and pedagogic as the original text, see also SORELLI 1984a, 51–57 and PAOLI-RICCI 1996, 63–67.

158 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 160–163.

159 "Le [actions that pleased God] poneva ad essecuçione o in chiesa o in casa o dounche si trovasse." Ibid., 160.

160 Ibid., 165–166.

161 " tenevano vita speçialmente deliçiosa." Ibid., 166.

Another component to Maria's religious observance was her sacramental piety. When Maria's siblings fell mortally ill, she took special care, as Thomas wrote, to arm them with all the sacraments, namely, in this case, with the Eucharist and last unction.[162] Thomas wrote that Maria herself frequently refreshed her spirits with the Eucharist.[163] It is notable that Thomas of Siena presents us with a unique approach to the communion: While the hagiographers traditionally emphasized the Eucharist, Thomas stressed rather the preceding confession.[164] In fact, he came forth with general guidelines for an appropriate confession. Thomas began:

> Maria confessed in the way that I had taught her. She rarely burst out into bombastic words, and she recited aloud only those deeds that had directly offended her Heavenly Spouse since her previous confession. Then she finished by confessing in her heart all her general offences.[165]

Thomas of Siena had clearly taught Maria to avoid too verbose and vague confessions. Furthermore, he had instructed her to reveal in each confession only those sins that had happened since the last confession. He had seemingly also underscored that the focus was to be on concrete events rather than on any general sense of guilt. He clarifies this by returning to the two stages of confession. Firstly, the person was to acknowledge specific events of sinning in one's human relations. This was to be done by revealing one's active wrongful deeds, one's sinful thoughts, and one's avoidance to do good. Secondly, one was to confess one's more general offences against God, such as not having praised His works enough or having wasted one's time.[166] Thomas evidently used Maria as an embodiment of his own teaching, which he wanted to forward to other Venetian penitents and to other believers as well.

The *vita* of Maria of Venice exemplifies the religious practices with which the lay women ideally structured their religious lives. There were ascetic practices, prayers, masses, and sacraments. The other Dominican penitent women's *vitae* also highlighted these practices. For example, the *vita* of Margherita of Città di Castello narrates the story that this blind saint always arrived before others to the services, she recited her daily offices, and she confessed and took communion

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162 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 160.

163 Though frequent communion was characteristic to the penitent saints, the churchmen were ambivalent about daily communion, mainly because they wanted to ensure that the Eucharist would not be trivialized, see BYNUM 1988, 56–65.

164 The confession and Eucharist were complementary in that communion was generally preceded by confession, still confession could also take place without being succeeded by the Eucharist, see RUBIN 1991, 84-85.

165 "confessandosi [Maria] secondo quello *modo che da me era suta amaestrata*, faendo ne la sua confessione *poche parole* con grandi sentençie e recitando explicitamente quello in che le pareva singularmente avere offeso el suo celeste sposo da l'una confessione e l'altra e poi implicitamente conchiudendo tutte le sue generali offese." (Emphases mine) Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 167.

166 Ibid., 167–171. Thomas's detailed exposition about Maria's confession was rather unique within the hagiographic genre, at least no other Dominican *vita* treats confession in such detail as does Thomas. Thomas's interest in the structure of confession does reflect, however, a wider movement among the medieval churchmen. Since the thirteenth century the clerics and mendicant friars had strived to improve the laity's techniques of confessing as well as to create a uniform set of punishments for sins, see TENTLER 1977, esp. 82–162 and LITTLE 1981, 94–95.

as often as possible.[167] Needless to say these devotional practices as such were nothing new. On the contrary, they pertained to various forms of religious life, monastic, eremitic, and canonic alike. Yet, the way the penitents put these age-old customs in practice reveals a flexibility that was particular to these lay people only. Though the *vitae* portray the rigor of a saint's devotional practices, it is immediately clear that the formal aspects of these customs were deemed as less important than in the professed religious life. The lay people's ideals for religious practices had an elasticity to them that enabled people from various situations to embrace them.

The practices that the Dominican penitents followed had impact on these women's spiritual, ecclesiastical, and social lives. Spiritually, they created a matrix that encouraged interaction between a person and the Godhead. Ecclesiastically, these customary rites directed personal religious sentiments toward those articulated by the church. In addition, church going, particularly participation in the sacraments of confession and communion, created moments of direct communication between the clerical authorities and these religious women. Such frequent contacts were an opportunity for the local clergy and Dominicans to counsel and to control the penitents. The ecclesiastical meaning of the sacraments gained further importance in these later medieval times when several lay movements, such as the Lollards, the Hussites, and the Brothers and Sisters of Free Spirit, challenged the intermediary role of the priests.[168] The Dominicans underscored the need that their penitents revere the established church, believe in its sacraments, respect the counsel of the churchmen, and work in co-operation with them.

Religious rites had a manifold social impact as well. The sacraments of confession and Eucharist, for example, were ideally socially conditioned. Restitution with one's neighbor was a prerequisite for absolution. Therefore, a celebration of mass and successful confession was not only a celebration of God's glory and an examination of individual conscience, but also ways to solve social conflicts.[169] Social function of the religious habit and devotional customs was that they created group identity for the penitents, whose common identity was not manifested in such a clear sign as for example shared housing. Moreover, the religious observances also established an immaterial, yet visible, boundary between a penitent and her surrounding world.

These shared religious practices gave uniformity to the lives of penitent women, whose conditions otherwise varied greatly. Whether widowed, married or unmarried, living in a community or a private house, these women shared similar religious rites, which in turn separated them from their secular contemporaries. The requirements concerning the practice of these rites were adapted to the penitent women's secular status so that these women could continue with their daily secular tasks. Yet, the *pinzochere* still followed a rhythm that clearly differed

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167 *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio minor* 1994, 97.

168 LERNER 1972, esp. 228–243.

169 On the social function of the confession, mass, and other religious rites, see BOSSY 1975, 23–26; BOSSY 1983, BOSSY 1985, 45–48.

from their neighbors. Their lives were religiously more regulated, more ascetic, and these women had more contacts with the local churches than an ordinary lay person. Moreover, as members of a religious order, the penitent women were likely to have better access to a standard of religious teachings than most of their contemporaries. Women's possibilities for an education remained severely limited, a fact that also brought problems to many women's religious lives. For example, women, who were often kept ignorant of basic church teachings, did not know either the prayer formats or the teachings about the sacraments. Even if the *pinzochere* were not expected to master the liturgical prayers or church doctrine, they still formed a comparatively well-informed religious nucleus within the secular world.

The gamut of religious practices was complemented by a range of secular habits that were inherent to the ideals of the penitent way of life. With these secular customs, I mean, on the one hand, a religiously inspired civic morality, like peaceful living. The penitent *Rule* had a prerequisite that all candidates should make peace with their neighbor before they could be admitted to the Order. This regulation was in part designed to exclude unruly members and to protect it from secular feuds. Nonetheless, such ruling also benefited the community at large because the penitent orders created relatively peaceful and controlled social groups within the cities.[170]

On the other hand, secular customs could mean restrained manners, like keeping silence and finding respectful company. These customs shaped penitent women's lives toward peaceful, but also extremely restrained, social communication. The *vitae* of Dominican lay women open a view to a range of manners that these penitents from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century shared. At first sight they might sound as mere minutiae in the full scope of the religious life, but instead such habits as silent communication signaled profoundly controlled and regulated style of daily interaction. Silence, the control of one's speech, was followed by the control of one's vision by keeping one's eyes either on the ground or toward the heavens. It was indeed not at all insignificant where a penitent kept her eyes. As Thomas of Siena taught the readers of Maria of Venice's *vita*: " Where are one's eyes, there is one's heart and love."[171]

When Catherine of Siena wrote to Daniela of Orvieto to instruct this Umbrian penitent about lay piety in the world, she expressed this code of restraint:

> The eyes do not look where they should not be looking, but on the ground in front of you. The mouth avoids lazy and vain talking, and it is disciplined to announce only the word of God for the salvation of one's neighbor and to confess sins. The ears do not receive pleasant, luring, and destructive words, but focuses in the hearing of God's messages.[172]

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170 *Rule*, Ch. I in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 38.

171 "dove è el cuore overo l'amore, ive è e ll'occhio." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 185.

172 "E tutte le membra del corpo da ordine, accioche siano modeste e temperate: l' occhio non ragguardi dove egli non debbe, ma dinanza a sè ponza la Terra, e ' l cielo: la lingua fugga il parlare ozioso e vano e sia ordinata ad annunziare la parola di Dio in salute del prossimo, e confessare i peccati suoi: l'orecchia fugga le parole dilettevoli, lusinghevoli, dissolute, e di detrozione, che gli fussero dette: e attendra audire la parola di Dio, e il bisogno del prossimo, cioè volontariamente." Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere* 1860, vol. III, 192.

According to Catherine, seeing, hearing, and speaking were to be used only when they could be used in the service of God and one's neighbor. At other times one was to master a technique of non-communication.

Silence and down cast eyes also came forth as saintly manners in the *vitae*. While Benvenuta Boiani shunned from speaking about vanities that interested other women,[173] Catherine stayed almost three years of her youth in continuous silence.[174] Maria of Venice, who wanted to imitate Catherine, kept herself altogether silent at home as well as outside, communicating with people by using sign language instead of words.[175] Moreover, Maria always moved in public places while keeping her eyes fixed to the ground.[176] These manners filtered the secular stimuli that the penitents received in their public and social interactions. The penitent women were not necessarily able to control their exterior circumstances, but they had control of themselves and their bodies. Furthermore, these gestures signaled the penitent women's humility and their disinterest in such worldly vanities as pleasant sights and chats. The hagiographers emphasized their protagonists' humility and modesty, but they also were always careful to keep away from the heated debate concerning poverty. The Dominican penitents sheltered themselves against their families in their manner, yet they rarely ever rejected their families and these families' earthly goods altogether. The penitents lived plainly, but they never went around begging and, much less, did they call for absolute poverty.[177]

Good company provided a further protection for the penitent women in the world. Indeed even the penitent *Rule* stated that the lay Dominicans were not to move alone in the cities:

> One should not wander after the city's attractions. The penitent sisters, particularly young ones, should not move alone.[178]

Such regulation was in great part designed to protect the penitents' chastity and reputation as well as to control their movements within city in order to insure that they were not involved in any undesirable activities.

The hagiographers were careful to point out that their protagonists always had a few reputable companions with them. When an anonymous author wrote about Catherine's interrogation at the Dominican General Council in May 1374, he quickly pointed out that this saint had arrive to Florence with "having as her protection three other Dominican *pinzochere*."[179] Similarly Raymond stated that

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173 *De B. Benvenuta Bojanis 1883,* 153.

174 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 883.

175 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 166. Since St. Dominic had particularly valued silence this emphasis on silence was also an affirmation of these women's Dominican background, see *The Nine Ways of Prayer of St. Dominic,* in TUGWELL 1982, 101–103.

176 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 164.

177 Churchmen in general were strictly prohibitive about women's mendicancy, see BOLTON 1978, 262–263.

178 "Vagos curiososque discursus per civitatem non faciant; sorores vero sole non discurrant, maxime iuniores." *Rule,* Ch. XIII, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 41.

179 "Tre altre donne pinzochere del suo abito, le quali stanno ad sua guardia." *I miracoli di Caterina di Jacobo di Siena di Anonimo Fiorentino* 1936, 5.

Catherine's loyal companions, Francesca Gori, Alessia Saracini, and Lisa Colombini, were almost always with her.[180] Also Maria of Venice kept herself in the respectful company of older ladies, most often that of her mother, Giacoma Sturion, and her penitent friend, Astrologia.[181] The Perugian chronicler Matarazzo penned Colomba of Rieti's arrival in Perugia in 1488, revealing that this "second Catherine" was escorted by her mother and father.[182] Benvenuta Boiani left on a pilgrimage to St. Dominic's grave in Bologna with her fellow penitents, two sisters, and a brother.[183] The saints' companions were not unimportant secondary characters in the hagiographies. On the contrary, these companions were often used as witnesses for the protagonists' deeds, and thus they played a key role in verifying the claims of a new saint's sanctity. In addition, the presence of trustworthy chaperones was proof that a young penitent did not have illicit relations with the people that she met in public places.

Nuances of Secular Piety

The *vitae* of Dominican women often convey a nuanced, and sometimes a paradoxical, picture about women's religious lives in the world. On the one hand, the hagiographers perceived world-oriented piety as a spiritually rewarding way of life that comprised both the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa.* Thus the penitent experience was fuller than what might be attained through a mere contemplative life. This approach was especially poignant in the lives of Catherine of Siena, Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, Catherine of Racconigi, and Lucia Brocadelli. These saints' *vitae* relate how God explicitly commanded them to remain in the world and serve their neighbors. On the other hand, the hagiographers were sensitive to the tensions that their protagonists faced in the world. They described the domestic challenges of the home-dwelling penitents, as well as the numerous dangers and temptations of city life. Clearly the pious life in the world was not easy to attain. Accordingly, the *vitae* portray penitent women as simultaneously embracing the world, particularly other people's worries, and yet protecting themselves against it.

The penitent women's exterior circumstances varied greatly. Penitents were married, unmarried, and widowed; they dwelled in their homes and in separate communities; they came from the wealthy middle-class, even from the nobility, as well as from virtual poverty. Nonetheless, all these women's lives had a few basic features in common. Firstly, they followed their religious lives amidst secular people, whose rhythm as well as concerns of life were quite different from their own. Secondly, since the penitent women were simultaneously members in two *ordos,* the lay and religious, most of them needed to compromise

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180 On Catherine's companions in public places, see for example Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 937 (Lisa) and Ibid., 918–919 (Alessia).

181 On Maria's companions, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 158 (Giacoma) and Ibid., 195, 201 (Astrologia).

182 Francesco Matarazzo, *Cronaca della Città di Perugia* 1851, 5.

183 *De B. Benvenuta Bojanis 1883,* 157–15.

between secular activities and religious practices. And finally, these women's religious experiences often took place in secular spaces, thus contributing to a new sense of religious geography. Church as a sacred place was the focal point for the penitent women, but a great number of these women's spiritual experiences took place elsewhere, namely in their private homes or even in public, secular, places. These women prayed in their bedrooms, they fell into ecstasies in their kitchens, they did penance in their family gardens, and they received visions in public spaces. The places that were previously only terrain for secular activities were now transformed into stages of religious experience. All these circumstances called forth religious ideals that were adapted to these lay women's special needs.

In part the hagiographies reflected the Dominican precepts that were set by the penitents' *Rule*. This *Rule* simply made no comment whatsoever on the housing for the penitents, which strongly suggests that all the various types of housing were equally suitable. The *Rule* did, however, emphasize the use of the Dominican habit, and it also created a basic normative set of religious practices and secular habits. The religious rites included a recitation of daily canonical hours, weekly abstinence and annual fasts, as well as regular communion. The secular habits comprised living in peace with one's neighbor and keeping respectable company in public. Though the many penitents were, in practice, avid churchgoers, the only prescribed religious obligation that took place in the church was communion. All the other penitent practices could be performed just as well in their homes. The saintly personages performed their religious customs with atypical intensity, but behind their excessive actions and supernatural experiences lay the very similar religious and secular practices that were created to shape ordinary penitent women's lives as well.

These religious and secular customs had a spiritual as well as a social impact. Just as with any religious rite, these penitent women's practices gave shape to their spiritual quest. Moreover, the observance of prescribed religious practices created group identity and strengthened these women's ties to the Dominican order. Additionally, this array of rites and customs shaped the penitent women's relations toward the secular world; in part by making manifest their religious choice, and, in no lesser part, by providing these women a protection against the banality of the world. The religious habit, rites, and customs of social modesty were depicted by the hagiographers as an armor that shielded their protagonists against the world.

Yet, still the *vitae* went beyond these external practices by arguing that their protagonists' spiritual perfection rested ultimately on their inner contact with God. The hagiographers argued that this contact existed even when no external sign was indicating it. It invigorated the penitent women even when they were occupied by such mundane activities as cleaning their homes or preparing food for their families. It was a consoling idea for those women who sought religious perfection in the world, amidst secular activities.

The Dominican ideology for the penitent women's secular lives balanced approaches that often seem to have been contradictory. In the hagiographies, penitent women were presented as simultaneously present in the world and absent

from it; the worries of the world were given to them as a spiritual task, yet they kept mental distance from it. The emphasis on inner piety was balanced by descriptions of numerous diligently observed religious and secular customs. This insured that the penitents were firmly connected to the church and that they were not associated with sects like the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit and the Spiritualist Franciscans, both of whom challenged the role of the church altogether. The well being of society was given as the penitent women's duty, and the active service was seen as an enhancement to mere contemplation. Yet, the hagiographies reveal that many penitent women felt a need "to escape to the desert," that is, to flee totally the constraints of social life. This longing for the solitary life was antithetical to the penitent women's actual way of life, a longing that was augmented by its very unobtainability. This delicate balance between presence and absence, state of mind and exterior practices, as well as social living and solitary life, was characteristic to the Dominican conception of penitent life in the world.

Does this imply, then, that in penitent ideology the world and secular people were understood as good, or at least perceived more positively than in monastic spirituality? The answer in a word is, no. The secular world as such was still perceived negatively: it was seen as tumultuous, dangerous, and full of vanities. Secular people, like the penitent women's relatives, were more often than not presented as distracting forces in these women's lives. Though the world was not a paradise, the people in it were nonetheless represented as a penitent woman's duty. Ensuring other people's well being was one of these women's tasks, and controversies that were experienced in it were tests of their spiritual strength. The endurance of hardships perfected, rather than contradicted, the penitent condition.

Defenders of monasticism and eremitism advocated that a physical separation from secular people and vices of the world were necessary for the spiritual purity, especially that of the women who were seen weaker in their resistance to the temptations than men. The true novelty of penitent piety was that women were perceived as strong enough to face the temptations and challenges of the world. In fact, the defenders of penitent piety saw the relationship between a person and her surroundings in new terms. While monastic and eremitic authors claimed that a person's, particularly a woman's, state of mind corresponded to her physical surroundings – religious places brought about piety, whereas secular spaces hampered spiritual growth- the penitent hagiographers did not see the equivalence between the space and women's religious life. With a little help from their friends, in their costume, shielded with religious customs, and protected by their mental cell, penitent women could remain holy in the impure world.

IV "One Should Not Abandon Other People".[1] The Virtues of the Active Life

> Even if she worked with her hands, her mind sojourned in heaven.
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> On Catherine of Racconigi's attitude to work
> Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili.*[2]

The penitent women were active in their homes, in charity, and in guiding spiritually their contemporaries. This chapter examines the religious value of these social deeds of the home-dwelling Dominican penitent women. The *vitae* of those penitents who eventually chose to move away from their secular homes to penitent communities are also used whenever the related events pertain to the time when a given penitent was still living in the secular world. I am here interested in the sanctifying moral acts rather than other manifestations of sanctity, such as miracles and visions.

A contemplative life of prayer and withdrawal from the world continued to remain a basic expectation for religious women. Therefore, penitent women's active lives were not taken for granted. On the contrary, it had to be justified and defended. As John Coakley has summed up:

> Thus, whereas in women's *vitae* their renunciation constituted a given and their active service had to be demonstrated, in men's *vitae* it was active service that could be assumed, and it was renunciation that required the demonstration.[3]

In fact, penitent women's active service was for the Dominicans a topic that they clearly had to justify and explain. These women's active lives are in this chapter mainly analyzed through three questions: What types of social deeds were characteristic of the saintly penitent women? How were the social deeds of these penitents evaluated and defended by the hagiographers and other church authors? How did the active virtues of service and charity relate to contemplative ideals? Before I proceed to answer these questions, a mapping of the social world of the encloistered Dominican nuns is required. A cursory study of the monastic teaching on the active life is required to grasp the similarities between the monastic and lay religious life as well as to appreciate the differences.

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1 "che l'uno non abandonasse l'altro." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 184.
2 " Se lavorava con le mani peregrinava con la mente al cielo." Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 136.
3 COAKLEY 1994, 99.

The term *vita activa* (active life) appears frequently in this section. In this context *vita activa* refers to the religious way of life in which good works and apostolicism played fundamentally important roles. This active service toward one's neighbor was, in the Christian context, inseparable from contemplation and prayer. Therefore, the *vita activa* was also commonly called the *vita mixta* (mixed life), a life that comprised both deeds and prayer. On the contrary, the Christian life that strongly favored contemplative life of prayer and solitude over active participation was called *vita contemplativa.* The relationship between the *vita activa* and its counterpart the *vita contemplativa* can be understood in two rather different ways. On one hand, they can be seen as successive stages in Christian perfection. In this case the *vita activa* is seen as a lower spiritual level where the soul is purified by a person's own efforts to exercise the cardinal virtues (fortitude, justice, prudence, temperance) and by his/her ascetic practices. This active life of ascetic and moral practices was regarded as a preparatory stage for the contemplative life of inaction. The *vita contemplativa* in this context refers to a spiritual stage in which a person's spiritual life is no longer dependent on his or her own deeds, but is instead submerged into God's action. At this higher stage the person is guided by the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity. This perception of the *vita activa* and the *vita contemplativa* as stages in inner spiritual growth was especially characteristic to late antiquity and early Middle Ages.

On the other hand, this conceptual pair was understood as representative of two completely different ways of life (*vivendi modus / genus vitae*). In this latter sense the *vita contemplativa* pointed to the *genus vitae otiosum* - prayerful and contemplative life - while the *vita activa* referred to *genus vitae compositum/ vita mixta,* a life of deeds and prayer. This understanding of active and contemplative life as two distinct ways of life, rather than stages in the spiritual growth, was characteristic to the later medieval period. While the monastic orders were seen to represent the *vita contemplativa,* the mendicant orders and religious lay associations embodied the active way of life. Nonetheless, the monastic and mendicant orders were never merely contemplative or active respectively: the monks and nuns valued manual labor and the mendicants did not altogether abandon contemplation and prayer. In this study, I use the terms *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa* in this later medieval sense that referred to two distinct, if not mutually exclusive ways of life.[4]

The religious life of the Dominican nuns and the order's penitent women was in several ways similar: as members of religious communities they shared the ideals of humility, obedience, and sexual abstinence. The nuns and penitents were not unfamiliar with each other's spiritual type, and, indeed, penitents often had intimate ties to their nearby monasteries.[5] Therefore, also the understanding

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4 On the history of the concepts *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa,* see MASON 1961, esp. 39–45 and 109–115. On interdependence of these concepts and their importance for the later medieval writers, see PETRY 1952. On the role of active service in Christian sanctity in general, see KIECKHEFER 1988, 17–20. On mendicant orders and their active service, see McGINN 1996, 198–201.

5 See p. 147–149.

of penitent women's active life was in part shaped by monastic precepts.

In comparison to the *pinzochere*, the nuns were clearly more engaged in the liturgical life. In fact, the monastic life was inseparable from the recitation of the divine office. Yet, work and social deeds did also play a part in the lives of nuns. Accordingly, the constitutions of the Dominican nuns prescribed moderate manual labor: when the nuns were not engaged in praying, listening to Bible readings, or reciting the divine office, they were to pick up manual work (*opera manuum*). Their work not only provided material goods for the community, but it was also seen to benefit the nuns spiritually. Along traditional monastic lines, the Dominican nuns' constitutions stated that manual labor was spiritually necessary because it kept people away from laziness and leisure, which were seen to shelter idle cogitation, gluttony, sexual excitement, and other vices. Yet, this idea of leisure (*otium / quies*) had positive as well as negative connotations in the Middle Ages. On one hand, leisure was taken as a precondition to mental service of God: external inactivity freed the inner person to seek greater spiritual perfection. Monastic surroundings especially fostered this leisure that enabled a person to focus on prayer and contemplation. On the other hand, leisure was seen as a detrimental laziness that left a person easy prey for evil spirits. Thus labor was seen as necessary even in the monasteries where prayer and other spiritual pursuits were regarded as the primary obligations.[6]

Generally, the monasteries' constitutions did not state other spiritual reasons for the encouragement of manual work, but this avoidance of laziness. The institutions for the Dominican nuns of St-Sixtus (Rome) from the 1220s, however, provide an interesting exception by claiming that those who did not work should not expect to eat either ("qui operari noluerit, non manducet"). This allusion to the Bible (II Thess. 3:10) elevated the daily necessity of work into a biblically backed virtue. Nonetheless, this kind of work ethic seems to have been regarded as too radical a demand for the nuns who often were offspring of noble families, because it was omitted in all later versions of their constitutions and their *Rule*.[7] In short, it was characteristic for the rules of Dominican monasteries to emphasize the importance of spiritual discipline that manual labor produced rather than to praise hard toil as such.[8]

As for the other type of *vita activa*, the charity, the nuns were obliged to help concretely their fellow sisters, but the cloister kept them away from direct acts of mercy in the outer world. Thus such forms of charity as the donation of alms was a more available activity for them than personal aid to the ailing. In the

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6 On the history of the concept, *otium*, and its role in contemplative spirituality, see LECLERCQ 1963, passim. On work as a way to avoid laziness, see HOLDSWORTH 1973, 67–70.

7 Considering manual labor in the Institutions of St-Sixtus, see *Institutions des Soeurs de Saint-Sixte* 1918, 152. A standard constitution for Dominican nuns was Humbert of Romans's codification of nuns' constitutions written in 1259, see *Liber constitutionum Sororum* 1897, 337–348.

8 In the lives of Dominican friars, manual labor was clearly of secondary importance in comparison to their studies. In fact, Dominic had abolished the obligation for manual labor from the friars' religious life, HINNEBUSCH 1965, 121. In the nuns' lives scholarly pursuits were given lesser importance and, thus, manual labor was not altogether replaced by studies and teaching.

monastic world charity tended to be bifurcated: physical service was rendered to the members of the immediate community, whereas the wider world was reached through alms or, even more likely, prayers.

The *vitae* of saintly individuals illustrate further the monastic ideals of the *vita activa*. I have chosen four monastic Dominican saints to present a brief examination, namely Margaret of Hungary (d. 1270), Helen of Hungary (d.ca. 1270), Agnes of Montepulciano (d.1317), and Chiara Gambacorta (d.1419). All these saints were celebrated by Raymond of Capua, Thomas of Siena, and other Dominican Observant reformers who were also active in promoting penitent sanctity. Therefore, their *vitae o*ffer us the possibility to compare how the promoters of penitent piety received the active life of nuns.[9]

The *vitae* of these Dominican nuns focused on their visions, mystical experiences, and miracles. Yet their social virtues are also illuminated. Helen of Hungary was sometimes so busy sowing her monastery's farm ground and minding the miscellaneous chores that she did not have time to attend masses.[10] Margaret of Hungary, the daughter of King Bela IV, donated as alms all her queenly attire, and, in her humility, carried out the most servile tasks of her community: she swept rooms, served food, nursed the sick, and even emptied chamber pots.[11] Manual labor was not such an integral part of Agnes of Montepulciano's and Chiara of Gambacorta's lives as it had been for Helen and Margaret, yet their lives were not spent solely in contemplation either. As prioresses of their monasteries, their active lives consisted of administrative duties of creating a community, guiding the lives of the inmates, and monitoring the communication with the outer world. These administrative acts contributed significantly to their sanctity.[12] Agnes's and Chiara's *vitae* reveal compassion for their contemporaries, but these nuns did not engage in active service directly toward their neighbors, but rather they helped by donating alms and giving advice.

By and large, the *vitae* of Helen, Margaret, Agnes, and Chiara testify that in the monastic environment manual labor- gardening, sewing, book illustration, and cleaning- played a more vital part in their lives than other types of active service such as charity and apostolicism.[13] Almsgiving, rather than direct acts of service, was the principal beneficial activity for the nuns. Moreover, the saintly

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9 Thomas acquired for his collection of Dominican saints' lives a mid-thirteenth century *vita* of Helen of Hungary and the early fourteenth century *vita* of Margaret of Hungary in order to revive their cults in Italy, but also to support his claim that Helen of Hungary had received stigmata, see Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de Supplemento* 1974, 171–176. Agnes of Montepulciano's *vita* was written by Raymond of Capua, who, some decades after the saint's death, was the spiritual director for the monastery that had been founded by her. Chiara Gambacorta was a contemporary of Raymond of Capua and Thomas of Siena, and their companion in the reform. Chiara was the founder of the first observant Dominican female monastery, St-Dominic of Pisa. On Chiara's role in the Dominican reform, see p. 142–143.

10 *Legenda beatae Helenae* 1940, 16, 19

11 Garinus, *De B. Margarita Hungarica* 1863, 517–518.

12 Raymond of Capua, *D*e *S.Agneta de Monte-Politano* 1866, 793, 799–800; *Vita della b. Chiara Gambacorta* 1914, 379–380. The administrative duties of abbesses had traditionally been a highly esteemed form of women's *vita activa*, see SCHULENBURG 1988, 110–112. 114–115.

13 On fine crafts as the principal form of manual labor in Dominican nunneries in general, see FONTETTE 1967, 112.

nuns were more likely to pray for the souls of sinners rather than to address their physical needs. Finally, a very typical sanctifying active deed for a nun was the successful administration of a community or, even better, founding one.

Sanctifying House Chores

When we emerge from the nuns' world, we learn that some of their social ideals were shared by lay women, although there were nevertheless considerable differences. The most radical change was brought about by the differences in their physical surroundings: nuns lived in secluded monasteries, whereas penitents experienced their calling amidst the secular world. Consequently the *pinzochere* embraced different social strategies from their monastic counterparts. Keeping in mind the monastic emphasis on the *vita activa,* I now address the active life of the Dominican penitents. Later I shall return to compare the ideals of active life of lay women and professed nuns.

As an introduction to the Dominican attitudes about toward members' active lives, let us study the terms Thomas of Siena employed in his *Tractatus* when he described Catherine of Siena's public life:

> She entered the *public life*, and worked *corporally* for the good of *God and her neighbor*. She, for example, *presented* herself *personally* in pope Gregory XI's court.[14] (Emphases mine).

The expressions – *in publicum, propter Deum et proximum, in corpore, presentialiter* and *personaliter* – were surely not accidental. On the contrary, they outline some foundations of lay piety. It was a piety that was lived publicly (*publiciter),* not inside a walled community. In this way of life the neighbor and God were inseparable counterparts (*propter Deum et proximum*). Furthermore, the fact that the acts were performed physically (*in corpore)* and in person (*personaliter)* was vital to Thomas' characterization of Catherine.

These terms, or their equivalents, were often repeated in the *vitae* of other lay saints as well. Let us return for example to Thomas's words about Maria of Venice's active life:

> Therefore [Maria of Venice] worked with all her might for the well-being of her neighbor by doing *corporal and spiritual* good deeds […] She performed all the tasks that she possibly could: she not only gave alms, but she also *personally visited* ailing persons and *assisted* them.[15]

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14 " ex dominico precepto exisset *in publicum*, inter alia quodammodo innumera et admiranda, que *propter Deum et proximum* gessit *in corpore* hoc unum contingit ut videlicet coram papa Gregorio XI in Avinione *se presentialiter et personaliter* inveniret." Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 20. The Dominican authors also underscored elsewhere their protagonists' corporal service, see for example, Thomas of Siena, *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 42 and Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 899;

15 "ogni fatiga per la salute del prossimo e *corporalmente*, o *spiritualmente,* col meço dell' opere de la misericordia *corporali* o *spirituali* [...], mandando ad essecuçione prontamente tutto quello che per buono moda poteva, non solamente per sovvencione ma eçiamdio con *personale* visitaçione degl'infermi." (Emphases mine) Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 179. See also p. 11–12.

The friar underscored that spiritual acts such as prayer (*spiritualmente*) were accompanied by concrete acts of charity *(corporalmente).* Moreover, Maria addressed people's spiritual as well as physical needs (*opere de la misericordia corporali o spirituali*). Finally, Thomas emphasized that Maria not only gave alms (*non solamente per sovvençione)* but she also personally visited the ailing (*personale visitaçione*).

The penitent women's active life was manifested mainly in two activities, namely household chores and charity. These were the most readily available activities for medieval women, although occasionally the *pinzochere* also emerged from their homes to teach and to take part in the politics of the day.[16] Nevertheless, household duties consumed a great portion of many lay women's lives. The Dominican hagiographers were not ignorant about these real-life necessities of their protagonists. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, their texts reflected upon the circumstances of these women, and, by interpreting penitent women's presence in secular places religiously, they contributed to the creation of a new geography of piety.

The domestic service of penitent women is widely reported by the Dominican hagiographers. While Maria of Venice helped her elderly father,[17] Catherine of Siena took up miscellaneous tasks: she swept floors, prepared food, served at the table, and washed dishes, veritably substituting for her parent's maid.[18] Osanna of Mantua, as a fifteen-years-old orphan, undertook the responsibility of running the life of a big house. Osanna's hagiographer, Francesco Silvestri, praised the saint's prudence: her wise financial planning, the disciplined upbringing of her siblings, and the orderly running of the household.[19] The hagiographer also commented positively on Osanna's menial occupations such as cleaning, taking out the garbage, and making beds.[20] The motherly talents of Osanna were recognized even by the ruling Gonzaga family: when Frederico Gonzaga left for a war, he trusted his wife and children to Osanna's care.[21] Colomba of Rieti was always active in helping her mother around the house and she also did handiwork, which, as her hagiographer, Sebastiano Bontempi, pointed out, were fitting for a well-raised girl.[22]

Despite the fact that most Dominican penitent saints came from relatively well-to-do families, they were simply expected to contribute to the family economy by helping around the house. The house chores for the poorer *pinzochere* were, however, a question of profession. In fact, almost all indigent penitents supported themselves by working as domestic servants. The young

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16 Active deeds were commonly divided into manual labor, charity, and varing types of teaching. For example, the Venerable Bede listed tasks of active life to include feeding the hungry, curing the sick, teaching the ignorant, correcting the mistaken, and humbling the proud, see CONSTABLE 1995, 24.

17 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 162.

18 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 893.

19 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi 1867,* 563.

20 Ibid., 567.

21 BAGOLINI – FERRETTI 1905, 119. On Osanna's responsibilities in her own household affairs and of other people, see also HERLIHY 1990, 165–166.

22 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 155*.

Sybillina of Pavia was a servant before she lost her sight and eventually settled in her anchorage,[23] similarly the adolescent Osanna of Cattaro served as a maid in a home of a wealthy family until she was mured into her cell.[24] Though it is less clear whether Margherita of Città di Castello, Giovanna of Orvieto, and Stefana Quinzani worked as servants in their host families, it seems likely that they were given shelter in exchange for their work.[25]

The Italian *pinzochere* embraced various domestic tasks, either as family members or as servants. The urban professionalism that had marked the lives of *Humiliati* and Beguines was, however, almost totally absent from these penitents' lives. *Humiliati* and Beguines were commonly earning their living in textile production, and even, as was case with the Beguines, in education, whereas only a few Dominican penitent saints were working in the production of handicrafts – Giovanna of Orvieto worked for some time as a seamstress[26] and Catherine of Racconigi was a silk weaver.[27] Though these women's hagiographers praised their protagonists' professional activities, working outside homes remained an exception amidst the Dominican penitents. Moreover, such professions as child rearing and teaching, which several Beguines had embraced, rarely were options among the Dominicans. One independent penitent, Domenica of Paradiso, however worked as a governess for the six children of a wealthy Florentine family.[28] It may also be that Margherita of Città di Castello was employed as a governess for her host family's children, since her *vita* reports that she used to control the home works of her hosts', Venturino and Grigia's, children.[29] Be that as it may, these two *pinzochere* were sole examples of penitent women who earned their living, or part of it, by governing children.

These different professional strategies between *Humiliati*, Beguines, and Dominican penitents can mainly be explained by regional differences. *Humiliati* and Beguines typically came from Lombardy and the Low Countries respectively where textile manufacturing contributed significantly to the inhabitants' incomes. A good part of the Dominican penitent saints lived instead in Tuscany and Umbria where women's involvement in production outside their homes was less common.[30] Nonetheless, one does wonder whether Benvenuta, Villana, Colomba, and others were perhaps more involved in non-domestic works than is suggested in their hagiographies. Since we do not know of documents against which we could compare the hagiographers' accounts of their protagonists' work-like tasks,

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23 *De B. Sybillina Papiensi* 1865, 68.
24 *Illyrici sacri* 1800, 491.
25 Stephana Quinzani's *vita* mentions that the saint lived in homes of various noble families, which suggests that she, as a girl from an indigent family, was their servant, see *Leggenda volgare de la beata Stephana* 1930, 98, 99, 100, and 111. Michael Goodich has suggested, rightly I believe, that Margaret and Giovanna were at least initially servants in their adoptive homes, see GOODICH 1985, 130–131.
26 *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 141.
27 Razzi 1577, 117-118. On hagiographers' positive reactions to Catherine's professionalism, see ZARRI 1992, 185–186.
28 VALERIO 1992, 14.
29 *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio minor 1994*, 97.
30 HERLIHY 1996, 171. On regional differences in women's working life in the later Middle Ages, see Ibid., 154–184.

this question remains unanswered. Yet, the fact that the hagiographers rarely relate in detail how their protagonists supported themselves financially, tells that working for one's living did not play an essential part in the idea of Dominican lay sanctity. In short, the penitent saints were not, excuse the anachronism, working class heroes, but rather women who did their daily duties diligently.

It may also be that Dominicans' general reservation about the value of manual labor played a role here. While the traditional monastic orders had seen manual labor as an indispensable part of religious life, the Dominicans saw that it could be dropped from a friar's daily routines if it distracted his studies or preaching.[31] Though penitents were not exercising these priestly functions that shaped the friars' lives, it may still be that the Dominican hagiographers considered manual labor and professional duties as less significant simply because of their own upbringing that prioritized studies and other mental activities over physical work.[32]

Though the Dominicans were reserved about their penitents' professional activities, they did, as was seen above, praise the lay women's domestic work. The domestic underpinnings of Dominican lay saints' engagements meet the eye also if we compare their work profile with that of the nuns. While the manual labor in monasteries principally included crafts, gardening, and, possibly, book production, the penitents were active, for example, in cleaning, preparing food, and serving the tables. The lay members found perfection in their miscellaneous household activities, whereas the highborn nuns focused on more artistic and leisurely female activities.

In short, the Dominican penitents were active in house chores rather than in production or in education. These domestic concerns of their manual labor did not mean that their work input would have been insignificant. On the contrary, penitent women provided a considerable contribution to the Italian family economies.[33] Nonetheless, the Dominican penitent saints were only rarely portrayed as hard-toiling urban laborers. They were rather seen as virtuous women who also had to contend with numerous domestic responsibilities.

These household duties of lay saints were characteristically the most lowly of tasks (*opera servile*), which even in the less affluent families were commonly delegated to servants. In part, these house chores exemplify the daily tasks that medieval society imposed on any unmarried or widowed woman. Single women were regarded as additional expenses in households, and, because they lacked a clearly defined social position, they were often subjected to the basest jobs around the house. From the viewpoint of their families and other seculars, the penitents perhaps appeared just as another subcategory of unmarried women. Accordingly, these penitents took on duties that any other unmarried women would have taken upon themselves.[34]

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31 On the importance of manual labor within monastic orders, particularly the Cistercians, see HOLDSWORTH 1973, 60–64, 72–74, and passim.

32 On dispensation of manual labor in the Dominican Order, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 121, 339.

33 On semi-religious women's work profiles in later medieval Italy in general, see HERLIHY 1990, 158–166.

34 On unmarried women's roles in families, see BENVENUTI PAPI 1992, 88–89, 90–92.

And, yet, the menial tasks were also imposed on the penitents as a means of coersion As shall be discussed in further detail in the Chapter Five, many families were particularly antagonistic about a nubile girl's decision to remain unmarried. Thus they tried to turn a penitent's head away from the religious life by making her life unbearable at home. This was certainly initially the case at Catherine of Siena's home. When her parents learned that she was not going to submit to their marriage plans, she was punished with the most menial household duties. Raymond explained that Catherine's parents hoped that this would keep her away from prayer.[35] Similarly Colomba of Rieti's mother loaded her daughter with house chores with the hopes that this young virgin would have forgotten her spiritual calling and consented to her family's marriage plans.[36]

The hagiographers transformed these obligations and hardships into spiritual possibilities. Similar to monastic authors, they argued that one important aspect of the daily duties was that they kept the mind active, and therefore away from leisurely temptations. For example, Giovanna's legend explained that from the viewpoint of her spiritual life, the prime motivation for her employment as a seamstress was to keep her busy. As her biographer summed: "laziness particularly produces illicit thoughts."[37]

The activities in the home, however, not only assisted in the avoidance of sin. The house chores also had much more positively defined value: they were perceived as spiritual exercises of humility (*humilitas*) and self-mastery. The intrinsic value of humility was praised, and it is indeed apparent that the hagiographers related many acts of service with the intention of highlighting the humbleness of their protagonists. In fact, the hagiographers were less interested in evaluating the actual results of their protagonists' acts than by illustrating their mental disposition. Consequently, the stories of service were often grouped together with other examples that illuminated the protagonists' humility. The house chores represented self-abasement in the arena that was most available for women, namely the home. Osanna of Mantua's hagiographer, for example, saw the servile domestic tasks of this saint as signs of modesty and humbleness.[38] This willing subordination in menial tasks was, however, in the Biblically backed Christian value system coded to mean elevation in the spiritual rank: the servant-by-choice represented a higher spiritual position than that held by the worldly master (see for example, Luke 22:26–27). Therefore, the joyful exercise of menial tasks was seen as a show of a *pinzochera*'s spiritual grandeur through self-abasement.

Humility was a goal in itself, but it was also seen as a mediating virtue that made other virtues possible. The performance of domestic tasks represented a transition toward other active deeds of service, namely the acts of charity. Thus, the humble house chores functioned almost as an ordeal of initiation on a saint's path of the *vita activa*. In the *Legenda maior* Raymond called Catherine's house

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35 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1967, 874.
36 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Colomba Reatina 1866*, 158*.
37 " Quia vero otium libidinis causa esse solet..." *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 141.
38 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 567.

chores humble deeds *actis humilis,* and he explained that through performing them, Catherine ripened spiritually. Thus she was later able to assume greater responsibilities toward her neighbors. To crystallize his thought Raymond wrote: ”first the servile acts, then gradually the good deeds.”[39] The humble household tasks represented in this context the initiation to one’s active life.

Another way to elevate women’s daily experiences was to find established saintly exemplars who the aspiring saints could mirror. It was indeed typical of medieval hagiographers to back their arguments with examples from the *vitae* of long established saints that their own saints imitated. It was important for these writers to show that their saint was part of a tradition, that she did not simply represent her individual self, but was a member of a wider community of saints (*communio sanctorum*).[40] The established saints were also used as personified arguments: a saint was a crystallization of a complex set of thoughts. Accordingly, likening the new saints to these old figures was a compact way to defend their actions. It is important to study and decode such common hagiographic expressions as ”she was a second saint-X,” ”she imitated saint-X,” or ”like saint-X” since they provide us with an insight to the hagiographers’ modes of evaluating the *vita activa* of their protagonists.[41]

The most evident biblical type of female service was Martha of Bethany.[42] In the Scriptures she was presented doing her home duties, whereas many other aspects of the Christian active life, such as serving the sick and poor, or teaching, were absent from her character. Martha was concerned about the *temporalia* and filled with daily worries. Jesus seemingly ranked Martha’s tasks lower than the mental concerns of her sister, Mary, when he said: ”Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; only one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her.” (Luke. 10:41-42) The medieval Bible commentators commonly saw Martha and Mary as symbols for active and contemplative life respectively, and consequently they held that Jesus himself valued mental piety more than active deeds.[43]

Another biblical type for active service was Martha’s Old Testamental counterpart, Lea. Lea was the fecund wife of Jacob, but less beloved than his second spouse, Lea’s younger sister, Rachel. Allegorically, Lea’s fecundity was paired with the material products of Martha’s domesticity. The mendicants did not totally invert the value hierarchy between these two ways of life, but they did elevate Martha’s and Lea’s service roles to a somewhat higher status than these *figurae* had enjoyed in monastic spirituality. In their semi-religious way

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39 ”Unde primo actibus humilibus, deinde paulatim caritativis...” Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 893.

40 HEFFERNAN 1988, 129–133.

41 On the expressions that refer to ‘likeness’ see, for example, Catherine who ”coepit singulariter ad Magdalenam *affici*,” (Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 874); ”*sicut enim* Maria Magdalena triginta tribus annis stetit in rupe absque corporeo cibo” (Ibid., 908); ”in occultis eleemosynis Beatissimi *sequens* Nicolai vestigia” (Ibid., 897) (Emphases mine). On ‘likeness’ as a medieval thought category and argumentative device, see BYNUM 1984, 101.

42 For Martha in the Bible, see Luke 10.38–42; John 11:5, 11:20–44; 12:2.

43 On Martha and Mary as representatives of active and contemplative life respectively, see MASON 1961, 25, 32–36, 62–64, 91. On late medieval theological discourse concerning Mary and Martha, see CONSTABLE 1995, 99–130.

of life the *pinzochere* were portrayed not as failed Marys, but as simultaneously Marthas and Marys. Raymond of Capua, for example, paired Catherine with Martha, as did Catherine herself in her letters. Raymond also paired Lea and Martha, and associated Catherine's active service with their models. While Lea had been fecund and raised several children and Martha had cared of Jesus' well being, Catherine comforted people with her good deeds. [44]

The mendicants also sought more recent saintly exemplars who embodied the spiritual fruits of servile tasks. In this respect it is notable that Thomas of Siena mentions a few times that he preached about the "life and virtues of Zita of Lucca," who had died in 1278.[45] This saint embodied the sanctity of service and patience.[46] When Zita was twelve-year old, she moved to Lucca where she served the Fatinelli family for almost fifty years. She never joined any religious order, but earned her saintly reputation by faithfully serving her masters and distributing her few possessions as alms to those who were even poorer than she herself.[47] Thomas's sermon on Zita is especially poignant because otherwise he so rarely preached on characters not associated with the Dominican order. Therefore, the interest to speak on the women's daily tasks took precedence over his general tendency to promote only Dominican saints. Clearly the friar chose to promote the cult of Zita because so many members in his audience were penitent women who could relate to Zita's experiences, even model their own behavior to match the humility of this saint.

Charity: Nursing Christ in One's Neighbor

Private homes were the principal locales in the penitent women's lives. Yet, the Dominican lay women's lives were not totally confined to their own households. They visited their fellow penitents and relatives, they worshipped in the local churches, and sometimes they even ventured on pilgrimages. These women concretely took part in the lives of their communities, primarily by performing benevolent acts. Unencloistered penitents were able to distribute their alms personally, and they alleviated the physical suffering of their neighbors *in corpore*. The fact that these women participated in the community's life publicly and through concrete acts, represented a radical change in the paradigm of medieval religious thought. Previously worldly engagement and womanhood had been two ill-matched concepts, a combination that was rather associated with sin, rarely with religious perfection.

Dominican women displayed their neighborly benevolence not only by giving alms, but also by helping personally, that is through their acts, the destitute.

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44 Raymond uses term fecundity (*foecunditas*) to describe Lea's rewards, and, implicitly, Catherine's active spirituality, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior 1866* 891.

45 Thomas of Siena's testimony in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 30–31; Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de supplemento* 1974, 126.

46 For a typology of later medieval servant saints, see GOODICH 1985 and BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 267–282.

47 On Zita, see her *vita De S. Zita Virgine* 1866, 502–532.

Almsgiving was the most traditional form of Christian neighborly love.[48] This largesse was a typical sanctifying virtue, especially among the medieval nobility. In practice this meant that those who had more could also better display their magnanimity and, therefore, sanctity.[49] Yet, alms distribution was also pivotal in the social piety of penitent women, although they often had little, if anything, to offer. Catherine helped indigent Sienese families with food alms, and she donated her cloak to a beggar. In fact, she was so open-handed with the goods of her paternal household that her father had finally to restrain her by locking up all his possessions.[50] Thomas wrote that Maria of Venice was also generous with alms, but he did not reveal what she gave and how she distributed the goods.[51] Similar accounts can be read in various other lay Dominican *vitae*: Osanna of Mantua, for example, gave food and never ate without thinking of the poor.[52] Colomba of Rieti sent preserves, eggs, wine, and chicks to the ailing.[53] Catherine of Racconigi worked long hours so that she could help the people who were even poorer than herself. When she did not have anything else to give she cut off the sleeves from her own dress and donated them as alms.[54] Margherita Fontana, to her brother's great dislike, smuggled excessive quantities of bread and wine from her parents' home to feed the poor.[55] A rather interesting further example can be found in the documents concerning a lay Dominican, Jacopina (Pina) of Pisa, who expressed her generosity by donating ransom money to a Pisan prison, which bought the freedom of a certain Donato Empoli.[56]

Raymond's *Legenda maior* describes in detail Catherine's alms distribution, providing us with a valuable close-up of a penitent woman's bounty. Catherine delivered her alms by personally going to the houses of the poor or, alternatively, she presented them to the paupers who she encountered at the local Dominican basilica of St-Dominic. Her alms distribution was locally focused; directed to the people she encountered in her daily life. The goods that she distributed were generally food, wine, and clothes, although she also gave away a little silver cross. Catherine's alms present us with an illustrating example of the penitent women's donations. These women's gifts were not extravagant renunciations of property, in part because most of these saints depended themselves on the mercy of others. The Dominican saints' compassion for paupers was also tempered by the Dominicans' generally moderate position concerning the penitents' religious poverty. These women gave generously, but they were not expected to deny their own earthly goods as a sign of their religious vocation and neighborly love. Penitent women gave away basic domestic products; only rarely did they donate money. Finally, the penitent women encountered their recipients personally, or, if they wanted to remain anonymous, they delivered

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48 MOLLAT 1978, 171–177, 190–191, 321–322.
49 On female piety and almsgiving, see McNAMARA 1991, 203–212.
50 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 893–898.
51 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 179.
52 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 568.
53 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 156.
54 Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 112–113.
55 Desiderio Paloni, *De vita B. Margarita Fontana* 1868, 137.
56 On Jacopina's donation, see an edited notarial document in BARSOTTI 1904, 49.

their gifts secretly, but invariably in person. This kind of person-to-person relationship was available to unencloistered women, and it was the feature that set them apart from the less personal almsgiving practiced by the monasteries.

Often the penitent women's almsgiving was accompanied by visits (*personaliter visitabat*)[57] to homes of their sick or disadvantaged neighbors. Almsgiving was such a central concept to medieval understanding of charity that even acts of service were actually perceived as a subcategory of the alms. Accordingly good deeds were also called 'corporal alms' (*eleemosyna corporalis).*[58] As was mentioned above, Catherine personally assisted several terminally ill female patients, she attended to their funerals and often even buried the bodies herself (*propriis manibus)*[59]. Maria of Venice also visited the ailing and assisted at funerals. [60] While Stefana Quinzani and Magdalena Panatieri invited the poor to dine in their homes,[61] Maria Mancini created a shelter for the poor and ailing in her own home.[62] Villana Botti personally carried a pauper to the local hospital,[63] and Margherita of Savoy nursed the victims of Genoa's wars.[64]

Ideally Christian neighborly love was directed not only to all Christians but even to infidels. Needless to say, such all-embracing love was impossible to exercise in reality. The arenas where women were practicing their charity remained quite limited throughout the Middle Ages. The Dominican penitent women's good works were prevalently directed toward their families, to other members of their order, and to people who they met in their immediate neighborhoods. The penitent order's primary social function was to provide mutually obliging support to its members, and, accordingly, a great deal of these women's charity was aimed at the members of their very own sisterhood.[65]

Accordingly, as we focus on the gender and rank of the beneficiaries, we realize that even such a "super-saint" as Catherine actually personally nursed only Dominican penitents, or, alternatively, the members of her own family. Yet, the recipients of her alms represent a more heterogeneous group of people: there were unknown beggars and poor families who were not her relatives. Alms were obviously less intimate gifts than personal care, and therefore they reached wider circles of recipients. Maria of Venice's biographer, Thomas, also explicates in detail her compassionate love for her immediate and extended family, as well as for her fellow-Dominicans, whereas beyond these circles there are only vague

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57 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 899. On the significance of penitent women's personal participation, see p. 96–97.

58 See for example, Garinus, *De B. Margarita Hungarica* 1963, 518.

59 Thomas's testimony in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 42.

60 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 179.

61 *Legenda volgare de la b. Stephana* 1930, 155 (Stefana Quinzani); Marchese, *Sacro Diario* 1679, 410 (Magdalena Panatieri).

62 Razzi 1605, 653.

63 Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 866.

64 DE GANAY 1926, 254-256.

65 On penitents' necessary social obligations, see p. 110. Medieval social obligations concerned generally mutual help among members of various social and religious institutions, see MOLLAT 1978, 173, 321-322.

66 On the beneficiaries of Maria's good deeds, see Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 174–179.

references to the identity of the beneficiaries.[66] In fact, Thomas relates to us that Maria was particularly compassionate to *women* (rather than men) who were dying of plagues.[67] It is also important to note that the Dominican penitent saints were only rarely working in hospitals, hostels, or, for that matter, in other charitable institutions. These women's good deeds were spontaneous and private, fired by a personal sense of compassion rather than by semi-professional duties. Even in this respect the Dominicans seems to have held reservations about the penitents' involvement in the extra-domestic responsibilities. The Preaching Friars praised charity, but they did not champion professional nursing or "social work."

The penitent saints' benevolent acts were given further importance by paralleling these women's charity with the deeds of saints, biblical figures, and even Christ himself. The saintly models for Christian charity included two fourth century bishops, Saint Nicholas of Myra and Saint Martin of Tours. Saint Nicholas was remembered especially through the story in which he secretly donated a dowry for an impoverished family's three daughters. The characteristic story of Saint Martin's generosity was that in which he cut his cloak in half to cloth a naked beggar. Raymond of Capua, for example, drew a parallel between Catherine's acts and the deeds of Saints Nicholas and Martin. When Catherine secretly dropped parcels of food and wine to a poor widow's home, Raymond portrayed Catherine as "following Nicholas's manner" (*sequens Nicolai vestigia*); when she donated her cloak to a beggar, she acted "just like"(*assimilata*) Saint Martin.[68]

The fact that Catherine was portrayed as following Nicholas's and Martin's examples reveal some important aspects of how female sanctity was perceived. Women were not merely seen as the followers of the female saints only. They were compared with male saints, too.[69] Moreover, the largesse of the late medieval lay saints was still to a great part conceived through the old prototypes. From contemporary saints one might have expected at least Elizabeth of Hungary's (d. 1231) presence as a model. By Catherine's times, Elizabeth was perhaps the most popular example of lay women's largess, and besides she had been associated with the Dominicans since her confessor and hagiographer, Conrad of Marburg, had belonged to the order. By the mid-thirteenth century she must have already enjoyed a steady reputation since she was granted the honor of being the only medieval female saint to be included in Jacobus of Voragine's collection of saints' lives, the *Legenda aurea*. All the collection's other twenty-nine women were from the early Christian period.[70] Therefore, we might conclude that the archetypes of early Christian sanctity served as the best exemplars to defend this relatively new religious life of lay women.

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67 "ogni fiata ne riceveva nel suo cuore, che a tutte quelle *donne* che avesse vedute esser infermate de la decta peste, ne lo' mostrava singulare congratulaçione e festa, e videndo el bisogno, con ogni carità per Cristo graçiosamente lo' ministrava e serviva..." Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 185 (Emphases mine).

68 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 897, see also Ibid., 895, 919.

69 BYNUM 1982, 172–173.

70 Elizabeth's life in the *Legenda aurea* focuses on her *vita activa,* see Jacobus of Voragine, *Legenda aurea* 1969, 752–771.

Raymond, or for that matter any other hagiographer of Dominican penitents never, however, mentioned Elizabeth in his texts. In fact, he does not seem have sought any direct, same-sex comparison with Catherine's active life, but he rather seems to have looked for possibilities to elevate metaphorically her rank. It surely was of importance that Nicholas and Martin had both been bishops. A bishop, with his temporal and spiritual power, was traditionally seen as the "father of the poor, defenders of the widows and orphans" ("pater pauperum, defensor viduarum et orphanorum").[71] Therefore, when Catherine, in the image of Nicholas and Martin, was helping the poor, Raymond symbolically elevated this urban middle-class girl's deeds to the bishop-like acts of protecting the defenseless. In this context her acts could almost be interpreted as manifestations of episcopal power. This usage of episcopal images does not mean that Raymond and Thomas would have actually advocated radical changes in gender roles, but it does reveal that women's charity was not necessarily regarded as secondary to men's more institutional largesse. Charity, whether performed by men or women, manifested the benefactor's power, his/her ability to give.[72]

The example of using established saintly individuals as models for aspiring saints was vital for the understanding of penitent women's active life. But yet even more important were the teachings of the Bible. Accordingly, medieval hagiographies were imbued with allusions to the Bible, and the guidelines for medieval women's charity were mainly sought from within the Scriptures. Obviously the sayings of Jesus particularly influenced the perceptions of Christian charity (*agape)*. His words were sometimes enclosed as direct citations, yet the indirect allusions were more typical. One of the most common biblical reference on the subject of charity was found from Matthew 25:40: "And the king will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it [charity] to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.'" The Jesus's words left echoes throughout numerous penitent *vitae*.[73] In Christian acts of mercy the image of Christ was invoked in two different ways. On one hand, the destitute were themselves seen as disguised Christs. On the other hand, the act of helping was seen as a way to re-experience the passion of Christ.

The image of Christ as a pauper and as a patient enriched the Christian's perspective toward her neighbor's suffering. Indeed, medieval charity relied heavily on the thought that the sufferer was a disguised Christ. In the penitent women's hagiographies Christ was represented as literally present in the events, and his appearances often complemented the benevolent works themselves. In these apparitions Christ explained the significance of the performed acts and consoled the weary benefactor. Yet, it was also often revealed that He Himself had actually been the beneficiary. This interrelation between charity and Jesus's

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71 On saintly bishops as the defenders of the indigent, see GRÉGOIRE 1987, 274–275.

72 Though Judith Perkins studies the discourses of healing and charity in the context of early Christian hagiographies, her observation that in the Christian ideology power was manifested in healing, service, and even suffering, holds true also in medieval thinking, see PERKINS 1995, 104–141. For women's vicarious suffering, see p. 108–109, 116.

73 See for example, Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 895–896 (Catherine of Siena); Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 866 (Villana Botti). On the Bible as the context of hagiographies, see MATTER 1997, 1–2.

appearance can, for example, be perceived in the *vita* of Catherine of Siena. Catherine's donation of her cloak to a beggar was followed by Christ's apparition in which he thanked the saint for the gift that she had given to His *alter ego*, the pauper. As a token of His appreciation, Christ/pauper gave Catherine an invisible garment that was to keep her warm all year round.[74] Similarly, the good works of Stefana Quinzani, Lucia Brocadelli, and Catherine of Racconigi were rewarded by a vision where Christ Himself appeared to thank them.[75]

This idea that the benevolence was ultimately directed to Christ, depersonified the recipient of the aid. Christ was projected onto the disadvantaged; therefore the help given to the indigent was service rendered to Christ himself. The reality of medieval nursing was surely quite appalling, especially where lepers were concerned.[76] Yet, the mystics added a bearable sweetness to this endeavor by envisioning that they were aiding the suffering Jesus. The pauper was portrayed as the substitute of Christ (*vicarius Christi)* to whom the Christians were able to display concretely their devotion to the humanity of Christ.[77]

Moreover, this depersonification may have been important for the penitent women for reasons of prudence, especially when their charity was directed toward men. Since physical contact between a man and a woman remained suspect even when not illicit, medieval people were not at ease with the idea that penitent women were personally helping physically suffering men. Thomas of Siena, for example, wrote that he restricted Maria of Venice's active service because of her youth and gender. In other words, a beautiful young woman was in sexual danger even in her neighborly service.[78] Therefore when the patient was imagined as Christ, his masculinity was symbolically peeled away, or at least mollified. This solution, as well as the embarrassment that women felt when they helped men, is crystallized in a scene from Villana Botti's *Life* where the hagiographer reveals that a chaste women like Villana would have been ashamed to help a pauper had this man not in fact been Christ himself.[79] Since the pauper was symbolically Christ it was not obscene for a chaste lady like Villana to take physical care of him in public. Nonetheless, the sentence suggests that if Villana had been seen as helping a mere pauper, her chastity would have been questioned.

The image of Christ was, furthermore, evoked when the compassionate helper projected herself into the one she was helping. Compassion was a specifically emphasized idea in the medieval understanding of neighborly love: sharing the other person's suffering, whether mentally or physically, was as important as the actual acts of alleviation. When a helper identified with the suffering of her

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74 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 894.

75 *Legenda volgare de la b. Stefana* 1930, 155–156 (Stefana Quinzani); Razzi 1577, 152 (Lucia Brocadelli); Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 114–115 (Catherine of Racconigi).

76 MOLLAT 1978, 178.

77 Ibid., 149.

78 On the accusations concerning socially active penitent women's chastity, see p. 132.

79 "Nam cum semel ab ecclesia praedicatorum rediret, in ipsa ecclesiae platea aegrotum quemdam pauperem habuit obvium, quem longe majori studio, quam ceteros consueverat, refovens, mira cum devotione palam populis gestavit humeris, quod illum debito in hospitali quod de pinzocheris dicitur, collocavit. Quem quis dubitabit eumdem *ipsum Christum exstitisse, in speciem pauperis transformatum, quem ita coram omnibus pudica femina non erubuit amplexari."* Girolamo Giovanni, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 866. (Emphasis mine.)

fellows, she was also seen to suffer with Christ himself, who was symbolically present in the victim. Therefore, the helpers saw themselves simultaneously as imitators of their neighbor's and of Christ's passions (*imitatio Christi*). The hagiographies presented the helping of paupers and their illnesses as a way to re-experience Christ's passions. For example, meditating on the sores of a plague victim was a way to feel the five wounds of Christ in the present tense. Moreover, according to the hagiographies, the saintly helpers not only wanted to meditate upon the suffering of Christ and of their neighbors, but these saints also wanted to make their compassion tangible by offering to take upon themselves the pain of other people, and thus simultaneously, that of Christ.[80]

The penitent saints were experts in this kind of *imitatio Christi*, and indeed one of the characteristics shared by most female mystics was that they saw their own physical suffering as an alleviation of their neighbor's suffering and of Christ's.[81] As Stefana Quinzani's hagiographer wrote, "The Lord teaches that there is no greater form of love than sacrificing one's own body for the love of one's neighbor."[82] Almost with identical words the hagiographers of Catherine of Racconigi explained the importance of their protagonist's vicarious suffering: "The greatest act of charity is to offer one's own life for the good of beloved ones."[83] Catherine of Siena's patient neighborly service was rewarded with a vision in which God let her choose between two crowns, namely a diamond crown and the crown of thorns. By choosing the crown of thorns (specifically as she had just helped the terminally ill Andrea), Catherine expressed the fundamental thought present in medieval mysticism: that compassion toward one's fellows was a way to imitate Christ's passions on the cross. The Christian identified with the suffering of her fellow-beings; *ergo* she also suffered with Christ.[84] Moreover, saint after saint not only imitated Christ's passion, but also his patient and gentle actions. The hagiographers did not hesitate to portray women as the imitators of Christ Himself. On the contrary, *christomimesi al femminile*, as Anna Benvenuti Papi has called it, was a prominent spiritual trend in the Middle Ages.[85]

The deeds of charity, not unlike, say, asceticism, were ways for a Christian to do her penance and show that she humbled herself in front of other people and God.[86] The hagiographers perceived their protagonists' acts of charity as occasions that showed the saints' joyous and enduring character. As an echo of

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80 On the importance of compassion in the hagiographic literature, see KIECKHEFER 1984, 89–121.

81 BYNUM 1987, 175–180, 275–276.

82 "dice el signore che maggior amore non puo havere la creatura quanto en exponere el proprio corpo per amore dil proximo..."*Legenda volgare della B. Stephana* 1930, 115. The same theme of vicarious suffering is present in the *vita* of Osanna of Mantua, see Francesco Silvestri, *De beata Osanna Mantua* 1867, 564–565. On vicarious suffering as a manifestation of women's social power, see ZARRI 1992, 182–184.

83 "Maggior atto di charità non si può fare, che poner la vita per li suoi amici." Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 127.

84 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 901–902.

85 BENVENUTI PAPI 1990, 141–170. In her article 'Cristomimesi al femminile', Benvenuti Papi focuses on a Franciscan penitent, Margaret of Cortona, but she also discusses the phenomena among other female mystics. See also NEWMAN 1995, esp. 3–7.

86 PETROFF 1979, iii.

the biblical "Fruits of the Spirit", the saintly protagonists were filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal.5:22–23).[87] These mental dispositions were ultimately even of more interest to the hagiographers than the actual success of the good deeds. The hagiographers always pointed to their protagonists' disciplined active life, where hardships, fatigue, and an unwelcoming atmosphere only enhanced the saint's joy, gentleness, and patience. Therefore, the hagiographers were careful to record, for example, that Colomba of Rieti gave her alms joyfully[88] and Osanna received consolation of the miserable as an easy and dear task to her.[89]

Evangelical presuppositions were also at force when the hagiographers classified the recipients of penitent women's charity. When they wanted to create complete portrayals of their saints' charity, they aimed to cover those sufferers of the six types of affliction that were pointed out in Matthew 25:35-36: the thirsty, the hungry, the homeless, the naked (poor), the ailing, and the prisoners.[90] It was a hagiographic topos that saints concerned themselves with giving wine to the thirsty and bread to the hungry, as well as donating cloths to the beggars and caring for the ill. Less regular, but not unheard of, was to help prisoners and the homeless. We may turn to Catherine of Siena's *vita* to study the interplay of these various forms of good deeds. This saint donated bread, wine, and clothes for paupers, and she cared for the ailing people, particularly the members of her own family and religious order. Being herself dependent on her family for housing, the saint was unable to offer room for homeless, but according to Thomas of Siena, she did visit the prison to console a Perugian youth, Niccolò of Toldo, who eventually was executed, perhaps for treason.[91] These biblical paradigms dominated even the later medieval hagiographers' perceptions to such a degree that they hardly represented the more recent types of poor that were present in the new urban centers of society, namely the working poor, prostitutes, orphans, and the elderly.[92]

Clearly the penitent women's active benevolent deeds were an important part of their sanctity. These women were seen as holy because they took physically part in other people's suffering; they not only prayed for their neighbors, but they were also personally present by the ailing person's bedside or in a poor widow's hut. The benevolent acts were rendered meaningful through layers of allusions to the Bible and to Church teachings. The hagiographers underscored their protagonists' all-embracing compassion for their neighbors, even for their enemies, depicting these *pinzochere* as helpers of the hungry, the thirsty, the poor, the ailing, and the homeless. Nonetheless, the beneficiaries of penitent women's charity were principally their own families, other penitents, and their

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87 GRÉGOIRE 1987, 92–93.

88 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina 1866*, 156*.

89 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi 1867*, 564.

90 On grouping medieval beneficiaries according to this biblical scheme, see GRÉGOIRE 1987, 91.

91 Raymond's version of Catherine's *vita* does not mention Niccolo's case, but Catherine's meeting with him is mentioned in by Thomas of Siena, in his *Legenda minor* 1942, 92.

92 Michel Mollat has pointed out that medieval understandings of charity almost totally ignored such urban groups as the working poor, see MOLLAT 1978, 195–210.

immediate neighbors. Unknown passers-by were only secondary in importance and they received alms rather than more personal nursing and physical help.

The Dominican hagiographers did not represent their protagonists as semi-professional caregivers in charitable institutions, but rather as compassionate Christians who saw their Savior in a suffering person. While several Franciscan penitent saints, Margherita of Cortona being perhaps the most notable of them, founded institutions for charity, the Dominican penitents did not create hospitals or other similar institutions. The Dominicans generally were indeed rather reserved about any institutional forms of charity. Since the finances of charity associations had been a source of disputes, and even scandals, among many religious orders, the Dominicans as zealous organizers had taken a negative approach to institutional obligations for charity. In fact, the Dominicans' negative attitude about institutional charity was even reflected to their penitents' *Rule*. While the Franciscan version of the penitent rule had stipulated that the penitents had obligations to the urban poor in general, the Dominican *Rule* limited this responsibility only to the order's own members.[93] This does not imply that charity would have been regarded as unimportant for the Dominicans. On the contrary, the Dominican penitents too were engaged in beneficial acts that were not entirely limited to their immediate families and the order's members. Nonetheless, the Dominican *Rule's* reservation about extended obligations of charity suggests that they were cautious about penitents' public responsibilities and thus did not include such among the basic expectations.

Public and Private Teaching

Manual labor at home and good deeds in public were the two most prominent components of the *vita activa* of the Dominican penitents. There were, however, further aspects to the Christian active life, namely teaching, preaching, and apostolicism. Generally speaking these activities included educational, spiritual, and moral teaching, as well as lecturing in universities, preaching in churches and in secular places, and also moral guidance in more private groups. Furthermore, there was epistolary teaching and person-to-person "consultations." Preaching and teaching were particularly fundamental for the Dominican friars' religious identity.[94] Accordingly, William Hinnebusch, the author of a standard history of the Dominicans, has characterized these Preaching Friars followingly:

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93 The Franciscan Penitents' *Rule* stipulated that if a penitent group has more goods than it needed to sustain its own members, the alms should be directed to needy non-members, see the *Rule of Caro* , cap. XIII, in MEERSSEMAN 1982, 135. The Dominican *Rule* instead encouraged only members' mutual assistance, see Ch. XV, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 41. On the differences between the Franciscan and Dominican approach to charity, see also MEERSSEMAN 1982, 24–25.

94 Thomas Aquinas taught in his *Summa theologiae* that teaching was the most sublime form of active life (*Summa*, IIa–IIae), as discussed in MASON 1961, 94–97. On Thomas Aquinas's concept of active life, see also HINNEBUSCH 1973, 302. On the centrality of preaching and teaching among the Preaching Friars, see HINNEBUSCH 1965, 119–125.

> Its [the Dominican Order's] purpose is unchanged – it is still dedicated to the salvation of souls through preaching. Assiduous study of sacred truth and contemplation are still the fonts from which its preaching flows.[95]

Evidently, Hinnebusch was writing about male Dominicans. Yet, it can be asked whether these ideals of learning, teaching, and preaching were visible also in the lives of the female Dominicans, nuns and penitents alike.

Some Dominican nunneries formed great centers of erudition. The German monasteries of Engelthal, Töss, and Unterlinden were especially known for their book production and other intellectual pursuits. Books and reading played fundamental roles also in late medieval Italy, where women such as the Dominican nun Chiara Gambacorta emphasized the value of women's learning. In fact, in several occasions, Chiara encouraged women to read.[96] Chiara also did her best to gather books for her community, though judging by the lamentations in her letters, she may not have been successful.[97] The educated sisters taught other members of their community, and indeed learning about the basic principles of faith was seen as a safeguard against heresy. Still, all these endeavors differed greatly from the friars' activities, because the nuns' education was conducted entirely within the monastic communities, and the female teachers were allowed to teach only their fellow nuns. On the contrary, the friars were encouraged to study outside their religious houses, and they publicly taught men and women, secular and religious, alike.

As for the lay sisters, only a few of them were able to read, and they only exceptionally possessed books. Yet, these *pinzochere* were able to profit greatly from their secular status: they attended public preaching-events, and their close co-operation with Dominican confessors was mutually profitable. The confessors passed on to their female disciples orthodox theological learning, while these women were able to contribute to the relationship with their affective, visionary spirituality. Moreover, the penitents, who had fewer opportunities to education than the higher born nuns, were able to profit from urban networks of information: sermons, encounters with other religious reformers, or news from their neighbors.[98] Still, lay women's options to teach themselves were extremely limited. Indeed, all women's institutional teaching (*ex officio*) of church doctrine was strictly prohibited by canon law.[99]

Women had, however, an often used option to surpass these limitations imposed upon them, namely through charismatic teaching (*ex beneficio*). When a woman was perceived as a saint-when she represented God's grace instead of her own humanity – she was given tasks that surpassed the expected gender roles. [100] Teaching was one of those institutionally prohibited fields in which a

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95 HINNEBUSCH 1965, 169. Mendicant friars themselves were seen as saintly principally because of their apostolic activities, see VAUCHEZ 1981, 388–402.

96 Chiara Gambacorta, *Le lettere della B.Chiara* 1871, 18–19, 22, 27. On Chiara's patronage of education and the arts, see ROBERTS 1994, 125 and passim.

97 Chiara Gambacorta, *Le lettere della B. Chiara* 1871, 30, 34, 47.

98 On urban networks of information to which women actively contributed, see GILL 1994, 73–78.

99 McGINN 1996, 208–211 and BYNUM 1988, 235.

100 MUESSIG 1998, 147–148. Especially the later Middle Ages was an era of charismatic female

woman could occasionally be allowed to enter when she spoke in the name of God or passed her wisdom in private, preferably within her own family. In fact, the Dominican and other penitent women embraced the option of charismatic teaching. Charismatic teaching should be divided into two subcategories according to the act's publicity. Firstly, there was teaching that was exercised privately or without direct contact with the audience. Secondly, there was teaching in public. Of these two categories, the first was rather common among the medieval saintly penitents, whereas the latter was extremely rare, but not unheard of.

The first alternative, private teaching, was exercised through letters and messages delivered by go-betweens or, alternatively, by receiving visitors and instructing them privately. These exchanges were characteristically moral and spiritual exhortations. Seldom did women launch into doctrinal exegesis. Women taught as prophets who had received their message directly from God. Indeed, none of them made claims that their authority was gained by their own learning.[101]

Some women penned or, rather, dictated, their moral exhortations, practical advice and requests in epistles. Both Osanna of Mantua and Stefana Quinzani wrote to the Gonzaga family. Their letters contained practical and spiritual advice for the ducal family. Commonly they also forwarded other people's petitions to these rulers. Osanna asked for pardon for the imprisoned and financial support for impoverished widows,[102] while Stefana asked the marquises Francesco and Frederico to protect victims from intimidating creditors.[103] Both of these penitents also approached the Gonzagas with practical requests: while Osanna sought favors for her siblings who were about to enter into courtly careers,[104] Stefana solicited for financial support to her struggling religious community.[105] Catherine of Siena's letters form the largest surviving collection of the medieval Dominican lay women's epistles. Catherine, not unlike Osanna and Stefana, urged spiritual and social reform in her letters. Yet, the volume of her exchange and the spectrum of recipients remains quite exceptional among female and male writers alike. Catherine dictated close to four hundred letters to men and women, seculars and religious, the ruling and the lowly alike, whereas Osanna and Stefana – at least judging by the remaining collections – wrote mainly to their immediate supporters, upon whom they also depended for financial support.[106]

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prophets and mystics, see HERLIHY 1985, 15–16.

101 The prohibition that women were not to teach in public derived from the Bible, but it was further emphasized by such medieval churchmen as Gratian and Thomas Aquinas, who claimed that teaching was a clerical task that was to be exercised only by men. Women could, however, teach in private as mothers, abbesses, and advisors, see BÉRIOU 1998, 137–139, 143, note 18; MUESSIG 1998, 146, 154–155, note 5; PRYDS 1998, 161–162.

102 Osanna of Mantua, *Lettere della beata Osanna* 1905, lxxij, lxxv, lxxvij, lxxviij, lxxix, and lxxx.

103 Stefana Quinzani, *Lettere inedite della B. Stefana* 1937, 11, 28.

104 Osanna of Mantua, *Lettere della beata Osanna* 1905, lxiv, lxv, lxvj, lxij, lxviij, lxix.

105 Stefana Quinzani, *Lettere inedite della B. Stefana* 1937, 20, 25, 29–30, 31.

106 Catherine addressed her letters even to popes Gregory XI and Urban VI; to fellow Dominicans like Raymond of Capua, Thomas Fonte of Siena, and Thomas Caffarini of Siena; to members of other religious orders (e.g. the Benedictines, Carthusians, and Augustinian Eremites); to penitents; to secular rulers; to people of various Italian towns, and even to soldiers. See Catherine of Siena, *Le Lettere di S. Caterina* 1860. Most of Catherine's presently known 382

The holy penitent women also attracted those advice-seekers who came to hear a word of advice. These women instructed their (often reluctant) families as well as local people, and thus some of them became influential spiritual and moral guides in their communities. These meetings were typically private and spontaneous encounters, rather than formal catechizing events. People visited Osanna of Mantua "in great numbers" (*saepenumero).*[107] Osanna clearly appeared as an intercessor of her community, to whom people appealed to ask favors from the local magnates. Colomba of Rieti was in contact with the local lords, particularly the ruling Baglioni family, and she received advice-seekers at her penitent community as well.[108] Similarly, Lucia Brocadelli was a trustee for the people of Viterbo and Ferrara, as well as for Duke Ercole I d'Este.[109]

An earlier Dominican recluse penitent, Sybillina of Pavia advised the visitors of her anchorage so wisely that her hagiographer likened her to the ancient prophet Sybil."[110] Also the other reclusive penitent saint, Osanna of Cattaro, was consulted by women and men alike:

> Since many regarded her as saintly, all kinds of men and women sought her advice and assistance.

The fame of this recluse was such that a group of young noble women even founded a penitent community by her cell in order to be guided by the saint. [111]

Giovanna of Orvieto received female visitors who looked for consolation and guidance.[112] Magdalena Panatieri reproached sinners with passionate sermons that lasted as long as four to five hours. This mystic also promulgated her visions and political messages to the marquis of Monferrato, Guglielmo, who held such esteem for Magdalena that he called her simply *madre*.[113] Catherine of Racconigi received such aristocratic visitors at her home, as archbishops, bishops, and the lord of Racconigi, Claudius of Savoy, as well as ordinary people. Her biographers particularly praised her ability to adjust her messages according to her audience: " Within high-born people she acted as was decent with people of their status, with peasants as was fitting to them, and with burghers she acted bourgeois."[114]

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letters have been collected from various medieval epistolaries. Only eight original letters have survived, see DUPRÉ THESEIDER 1933, 119 and passim.

107 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 569.

108 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 177*, 198*–199*. For Colomba as an advisor of Perugians, see MENESTÒ 1991, 167–175 and NICOLINI 1991. For Colomba of Rieti as a civic saint, see DICKSON 1998, 7–8.

109 Razzi 1577, 152–153. On the social and political roles of Lucia, Osanna, Colomba, Stephana and other saintly lay women in the Renaissance courts of the northern Italian nobles, see ZARRI 1990, 87–164.

110 " sicut vera Sybilla, prophetissa monstrata est." Thomas of Bozzolasto, *De B. Sybillina Papiensi* 1865, 69.

111 "Cum de illius sanctimonia magna esset vulgo opinio, multi ex utroque sexu, &omni civium ordine, ad eam vel consilij, vel auxilii petendi caussa confugiebat." *B. Osanna Virgo Catharensis,* in *Illyrici Sacri 1800*, 492–493.

112 *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 151, 153.

113 Marchese, *Sacro Diario* 1679, 410–411.

114 "con grandi s'accomodava come era condecente alla conversatione di simili persone; con rurali, secondo che à loro conveniva; con mediocri mediocremente..." Pico-Morelli, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 139.

These person-to-person encounters were a typical way for the Dominican penitents to promulgate their faith. The holy penitents enjoyed the trust of their communities and they clearly influenced the lives of many people with their words. *Pinzochere* actually held authority over churchmen as well, particularly their confessors. A spiritually gifted penitent and her confessor formed an interdependent pair: the penitent needed administrative support, and she also profited from the standard theological learning that her confessor could offer. The confessor was enriched by his mystic's deeper insights to Christian truths. In these relationships women emerge as teachers who prompted their male disciples to action and toward greater spiritual perfection. The churchmen, often laden with their practical responsibilities seem often to have been rather weary of their own piety. Their indifference was complemented by the mystics' heat. Accordingly, confessors perceived these women as teachers who embodied spiritual truths rather than possessed learned mental knowledge.[115] The penitent women's apostolicism was mainly limited to private encounters with friars, local rulers, family members, and advice-seekers. In fact, public teaching in which these women encountered wider audiences of both genders remained only a rare possibility.

Surprising as it may seem, there was only one single Dominican penitent who successfully completed her public missions, namely Catherine of Siena. While penitents were typically influential in a more private sense, Catherine was a public teacher who personally acted in some of the major political scenes of her time. The *Legenda maior* presents her as a saint who God sent to the secular world to disperse the arrogance of the learned, to advise the popes, to restore peace among the bellicose nobility, and to lead secular-minded contemporaries back to their Creator. Though Catherine remains as the only example of teaching Dominican penitent in public, she was nonetheless not altogether alone among the medieval female mystics since reputedly Hildegard of Bingen, Umiltà of Faenza, Rosa of Viterbo, and Birgitta of Sweden also preached successfully in public.[116]

Catherine's meetings were also often relatively private in the sense that she met with one or two people at a time. For example, according to Raymond, Catherine met pope Gregory XI privately with only Raymond accompanying her.[117] She herself often received pilgrims at her home privately as well.[118] One of these many advice-seekers was, for example, a Sienese notary, Gano Guidini, who contacted Catherine to consult with her about his marriage plans. Later this man was so devoted to the saint that he not only wrote memoirs of his encounters with Catherine, but he also named his youngest daughter after her.[119] Catherine did speak in front of larger audiences as well. She had enough authority to speak

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115 COAKLEY 1991, 224–225 and passim.

116 Concerning Rose of Viterbo, see PRYDS 1998, 162–166. Concerning Hildegard, see NEWMAN 1989. Concerning Birgitta, see SAHLIN 1997. Sahlin, however, argues that even Birgitta of Sweden spoke mainly in private occasions, while her confessors mediated her messages to the greater public, see Ibid., 30–32.

117 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 900.

118 Ibid., 921, 922, 942.

119 Cristofano Guidini, *Ricordi di Cristofano Guidini* 1843, 32–33, 40, 44–46.

in front of Carthusian monks on Gorgona Island, near Pisa,[120] and after the outbreak of the Schism in 1378, she even exhorted an assembly of cardinals to follow Roman papacy.[121] The saint was also sent out as a papal delegate of peace to the anti-papal city of Florence where a hostile and aggressive audience confronted her.[122] Catherine's missions were noted widely by her contemporaries, even secular observers were impressed by the saint's political acts. A Sienese emissary to Rome, Lando di Francesco, for example, reported to the his rulers about Catherine's close ties to the Roman pope, Urban VI.[123]

When Catherine's hagiographers explained their protagonists' sanctity, they relied heavily on the idea that the gifts of grace rendered gender differences insignificant. Thus, a female prophet could theoretically be as much a teacher as any man. This ideal was expressed by God during one of Catherine's many visions: "In my kingdom, where is no distinction between men and women, servants and lords, but everyone is equal, since everything is possible to me."[124] This kind of egalitarianism was deeply rooted in Christian ideals, but needless to say; the aristocratic and male dominated medieval church rarely put them into practice.

In fact, these egalitarian ideals alone would not have granted Catherine public success. The firm institutional support of her Dominican confessors was indispensable. In medieval society, a female mystic, however distinguished she was, did not succeed without her male supporters who were able to protect her against the common prejudices concerning women's religious and social participation.[125] This was especially true in the case of publicly oriented saints like Catherine. The success of Catherine's public missions depended especially on Raymond's support. This dependence is tangibly seen in the timing of Catherine's public appearances: they all occurred during the period when Raymond supervised Catherine, namely during the years 1374–1378. Catherine's first Dominican confessor, the her relative Thomas Fonte, was never influential enough to back Catherine's missions outside Siena. Indeed until the year 1374, when Raymond was assigned as her confessor, Catherine remained only a locally respected saint. Indeed, it was only during those four years that Raymond functioned as Catherine's confessor, that Catherine completed all her missions (to Avignon, Pisa, Florence, and Rome). It also seems likely that even Catherine's correspondence started only after 1374, when Raymond was able to provide the material and institutional framework for the saint's prolific letter-writing.

Raymond himself wrote extensively and in a positive light about Catherine's missions. True to his mode of reasoning he backed his arguments with references to the early Church. To him, Catherine put herself in the public sphere for the same reasons that the martyrs had stepped into the arenas: to die for the God and

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120 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 935.
121 Ibid., 945.
122 Ibid., 956–966.
123 *Documenti* 1939, 56.
124 "Non est apud me masculus et femina, nec plebeius et nobilis; sed cuncta aequalia sunt coram me, quia cuncta aequaliter possum." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 892.
125 On confessors as protectors of saintly women, see the works of COAKLEY. See also KIECKHEFER 1992, 110–112.

His Church. As a matter of fact, Raymond was less interested in pointing out the concrete fruits of Catherine's missions than in presenting her as an innocent victim before the brutal world. When Raymond evaluated Catherine's political deeds, his expressions were imbued with images of martyrdom. Catherine's peace mission to Florence, for example, was depicted as an event in which Catherine proved her willingness to be sacrificed.[126] Raymond emphasized that Catherine joyously hailed the adversities as possibilities for martyrdom. When Raymond, concerned for Catherine's safety, prohibited her intended mission to the schismatic Giovanna, Queen of Naples, the saint was outraged. She rebuked Raymond for not allowing her to die for the cause of faith. In Raymond's words she said: "If Agnes and Margherita, or any other virgin saints, would have thought about that[safety] they would have never attained the crown of martyrdom."[127]

Therefore, just as with her neighborly service, Catherine's peace making and apostolicism were also ultimately perceived as sub-categories in vicarious suffering. This vicarious suffering was seen as a powerful remedy for other people's physical illnesses as well as for social disorder. Consequently, the impact of the acts was spiritually of lesser importance than the unselfish motivations behind them: Catherine was not perceived as a saint because she was successful in her missions, but because those events fleshed out her uncompromising self-renunciation. In fact, Catherine's efforts to restore peace had brought few, if any, concrete results. She had urged the Florentines to reunite with the papacy, she had rebuked the local magnates for their unchristian manners, she had emphasized the need for a crusade against the Arabs, and she had urged pope Gregory XI to return to Rome. Yet, the Florentine magnates were at odds with the papacy even after the saint's mission; her vehement efforts never brought about a crusade; the Tuscanese nobility were yet to temper their bellicose ways, and after the outbreak of the Schism in 1378 the papacy seemed to be even worse off than it had been during the Avignon years.

Twenty-odd years later, Thomas of Siena also highlighted self-negation as the central factor in Catherine's missions, and he too compared Catherine with personae from the early Church. Thomas even continued Raymond's train of though about martyrs a step further, arguing that Catherine was similar to Christ Himself. To the appendix of his *Legenda minor*, Thomas created a list of fifteen characteristics that Catherine shared with Christ. Among these fifteen were one that particularly interest us here: Thomas compared Catherine with Christ because both of them taught disciples before their deaths. Evidently, Thomas put the highest value on Catherine's role as a teacher if he was ready to compare her exhortations with the acts of Christ at the Last Supper.[128]

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126 When Catherine was confronted by hostile Florentines, she stood, according to the *Legenda maior*, in front of the crowds firmly without fear because her ultimate dream was to die for the Church: " Illa vero martyrium sitiens, respondebat: Ego bene hic sto, quo debeo modo ire? Parata sum pro Christo et Ecclesia ejus pati: hoc est enim quod diu desideravi, et votis omnibus exquisivi." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 966.

127 "Si haec [worldly considerations for safety] cogitassent Agnes et Margareta, aliaeque virgines sanctae, numquam coronam acquisissent martyrii ." Ibid., 946. See also Ibid., 966.

128 Thomas of Siena, *Legenda minor* 1942, 190.

Thomas of Siena also compared Catherine's *vita activa* with the deeds of the apostles. As he wrote in his testimony to *Il Processo*: "in the feast of Philip and Jacob, I preached how the virgin had imitated the apostles."[129] Catherine was thereby shown as a companion of the first promulgators of the Christian faith. It is notable that the medieval preachers supported the notion of female apostolicism in theory, which was, for example, apparent in the medieval cult of Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria. One of Mary Magdalene's medieval manifestations was apostolic: she was even called *apostola apostolorum*. With this expression medieval believers referred to the probability that Mary Magdalene would have been the first witness of Jesus' resurrection as well as the first to pass the good news on to the other disciples.[130] This apostolic image of Mary was later enhanced as medieval legends developed a narrative that Martha, Lazarus, and Magdalene herself evangelized in pagan Provence. Mary Magdalene's reputed apostolicism and vigorous penance resulted to the fact that she was chosen as a patron saint of the Dominicans. Moreover, Catherine had taken her as a personal patron.[131] Similarly, another preaching female saint, Catherine of Alexandria, who according to her legend had stunned even the ancient philosophers with her wisdom, was seen as a patron of the Preaching Friars at large and Catherine of Siena in particular.

Yet, Mary Magdalene was used in Catherine's *vitae* as an example of rigorous penance rather than as an *apostola*,[132] and Catherine of Alexandria came forth as a bride of Christ rather than as a preacher.[133] Catherine's role as a contemporary apostle was rather seen as an imitation of her male predecessors, not that of the available female models Mary Magdalene and Catherine of Alexandria. The Dominicans perhaps perceived male prototypes as more elevating than possible female role models. Accordingly, they paralleled Catherine's public acts with these male heroes in order to root her in the firm and widely recognized (male-dominated) tradition.

Thomas also related that on the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, he spoke about Catherine as an evangelist:

> This virgin not only heard the Gospel and lived according to it and followed Christ teachings, but she even dictated an evangelical book of that was full of the Bible's wisdom, not to mention more than three hundred epistles.[134]

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129 "festum apostolorum Philippi et Iacobi predicavi ostendendo tunc qualiter virgo imitata fuit apostolos." Thomas of Siena's testimony in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 253.

130 On the history of the appellation *apostola apostolorum*, see JANSEN 1998. On mendicant friars and the cult of Mary Magdalene, see JANSEN 1995.

131 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 874.

132 Catherine as an imitator of Mary Magdalene in her penance, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 865, 874, 878, 893, 905, and 908. Mary was not represented as an apostolic model for Catherine, though the vision in which Mary Magdalene appeared with John Evangelist and Paul might suggest that Mary was in that context perceived as an *apostola*, see Ibid., 890.

133 The mystical betrothal of the two Catherines was paralleled, but otherwise the ancient saint was not represented as a model for the Sienese saint. On the mystical betrothal of Catherine of Siena, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 891.

134 " Ita hec virgo non solum audivit evangelium aut vixit secundum evangelium ac ymitata est modo precipuo Christum, sed etiam scripsit seu dictavit evangelicum librum multa

Catherine's letters and her book *Il Dialogo* were seen as part of the evangelical tradition: her texts were seen as directly inspired by God, or even dictated by Him, just as Christians saw the Bible itself. Again, the author portrayed Catherine as a practitioner of one of the very core functions of Christianity, a writer of the *evangelium.*

Both Raymond and Thomas saw Catherine of Siena as a teacher as well as a socially influential person. They compared her with the personae of the early Church: apostles, evangelists, martyrs, and even Jesus himself. It was fundamentally important for these two friars to represent Catherine's deeds – which were anything but commonplace in her era – as part of established church tradition. Moreover, they emphasized that Catherine was acting in the name of God and that she had originally stepped into the public arena precisely because of God's command, not because of her own ambitions. Therefore, Catherine did not represent her own womanhood, but God's powers in her.

Catherine too perceived herself as an apostle, a disciple of Christ. Karen Scott, studying Catherine's self-perception in the her letters and in *Il Dialogo*, argues that Catherine indeed perceived her social and political tasks as an imitation of Christ and his disciples. Like her hagiographers, Catherine also perceived that she was acting under God's auspices. However, unlike her hagiographers, Catherine did not emphasize the supernatural foundation of her mission. The hagiographers perceived Catherine's supernatural gifts such as as a basis of her mission, whereas Catherine saw herself rather as an ordinary person who was given a command to fulfill certain missions. Therefore, Catherine herself did not regard that her authority as a teacher was based on the supernatural gifts that she was showered with. Scott convincingly argues that while the male audience sought supernatural signs of sanctity as legitimization for Catherine's mission, Catherine rarely elaborated on her miracles, asceticism, or ecstasies.[135] An ordinary woman as a teacher, however, would have suggested the radical idea that any women could teach the word of God, a thought that the churchmen shunned. Throughout the Middle Ages, and for that matter well into the Modern Era, women's public exhortations remained a privilege of the charismatic few.

Catherine was a penitent saint who gained considerable temporal power. Much of her action was made possible by the very fact that she was neither cloistered nor obliged to monastic stability: She could leave her living-quarters and even her city without violating the principles of her religious way of life. Catherine's actions demonstrate that public catechizing was not entirely excluded from women's *vita activa.* Nevertheless, women's public apostolicism remained more a theoretical ideal than a practiced reality. Catherine remained alone on her podium: there was simply not another Dominican third order saint who would have preached openly to mixed audiences of men and women, secular and clerical, who could have traveled to-and-fro on missions, and admonished collectively the supreme leaders of the Christian church. Catherine was simply exceptionally

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evangelica pertractantem, epistolasque ultra trecentenas..." Thomas of Siena's testimony in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 254.

135 SCOTT 1992, 39–44.

active and successful. Therefore, as much as she has been held as a paradigmatic Dominican penitent saint, she was, in fact, atypical. Nonetheless, it would be an exaggeration to conclude that the other penitent women's *vita activa* had nothing to do with such activities as teaching, moral guidance, and political consultation. As I have argued above, typically this kind of social influence was exercised from behind the scenes by means of letters and sending emissaries, or meeting with the advice-seekers privately. These women's private roles did not challenge the position of men as public teachers, but rather complemented their tasks.

The friars' attitudes to the women teaching could well be summarized with a paragraph from Sebastiano Bontempi's *Life* of Colomba of Rieti:

> It is said that women should not speak aloud. This is true about public annunciation of doctrine, namely teaching and exercise of church authority, as particularly Saint Paul has taught. Nonetheless, in private they [women] are allowed to teach. As the Doctors of the Church say, women are not excluded from God's revelations: they can receive revelations just as men can since the grace of Holy Spirit does not discern between men and women.[136]

The Preaching Friars were not spiritual revolutionaries. They welcomed charismatic women's private teaching, but otherwise they held to the church's general belief that women should not teach in front of a wider public, even less should they hold institutional positions that included this function.

Finally, one may inquire whether penitent women's private and public exhortations had practical impact. In other words, did these women's advice change other people's way of life? Unfortunately, the hagiographic sources shed only little light on this question. As a matter of fact, the hagiographers were surprisingly disinterested about the actual influence of their protagonists' action. It seems that the hagiographers were more concerned to show their protagonists' reputation as advisors than to study the actual impact of their advice. Therefore, it remains hard to interpret whether penitent women's exhortations actually changed their disciples' behavior.

Nonetheless, something may be said concerning their impact. Catherine of Siena's advice, for example, were both cherished and neglected. While her Sienese supporter Gano Guidini for example chose another wife than the one recommended by the saint, Stefano Maconi did join the Carthusian order, just as Catherine had advised.[137] Moreover, as was discussed above, Catherine's political activities and apostolism seem to have been at best only partially successful. Her words may or may not have caused pope Gregory XI's return from Avignon to Rome in 1377, but the following Great Schism certainly set this move in a

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136 "Quod autem interdicatur, mulieribus loqui, non permittitur, verum est de publica annuntiatione doctrinae, eo quod docere praelationem dicit et praesidentiam ab auctoritate ecclesiae: et ideo signanter apostolus dicit. In ecclesia: private tamen eis permittitur. Sic dicunt sancti, quoniam a revelatione non excluduntur mulieres, quibus multa revelantur sicut viris: gratia enim spiritus santi non discernit inter virum et mulierum." Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 187*.

137 On Gano Guidini, see Cristofano Guidini, *Ricordi di Cristofano Guidini* 1843, 31–35. On Stefano Maconi see LAURENT 1942, xvii-xviii.

questionable light. While Catherine may have had a positive impact on creating peace between the pope and rebelling Florentines (by virtue of the fact that the peace accord between them subsequent was established in the summer of 1378, relatively soon after Catherine's mission in the city). Yet, it is clear that her attempts to form a crusade against infidels were simply a failure. Moreover, her efforts among the bellicose Sienese nobility remained futile.[138] As for the other saints, it has been suggested, for example, that Colomba of Rieti's close relationship with the Baglioni family did not actually change their ways of practicing local politics.[139] One may also argue that despite the Gonzaga family's close ties with such saints as Osanna of Mantua and Stefana Quinzani, the family members were hardly saintly themselves. In short, the fact that penitent women's advice was sought after did not necessarily imply that their words profoundly changed their audience.

Fruits of the *Vita Activa*

The penitent women's *vita activa* was manifested in three distinct ways, namely manual labor, charity, and spiritual catechizing through teaching and moral counseling. The most characteristic types of manual labor were the house chores, while charity was mainly expressed in donating alms and nursing the sick. These first two subcategories of the *vita activa*, namely manual labor and charity, often appear in the hagiographies side-by-side, and it is not always clear whether the hagiographers valued one over the other. Yet, it seems evident that charity, tended to be regarded as higher than manual labor, because the examples of saints' physical work were generally treated before charity, which implies that the latter was understood as the more perfect of those two since the hagiographers typically related their stories from less important events to more central issues. Furthermore, Raymond of Capua was explicit in stating that manual labor was preparation for the higher deeds, namely charity.

Apostolicism remained by far the most controversial activity in the *vita activa* of the *pinzochere*. Dominican lay women disciplined sinners, prophesized, urged moral political behavior, and Catherine of Siena even taught larger audiences in public. Yet, as shall be studied further in Chapter Five, the apostolicizing women were treading a narrow path: numerous such women were condemned for their activities, particularly if they taught in public. For example, Domenica of Paradiso, who, as an independent penitent, dictated about twenty sermons on theological topics, was confronted by the churchmen who attacked the

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138 On Catherine's participation in the politics of her time, see … Sofia Boesch Gajano has summed up in an entry about Catherine of Siena: " Difficile non parlare di fallimento complessivo dell' attività politica di Caterina…", in *Il Grande Libro dei Santi* 1998, Vol.1, 403.

139 NICOLINI 1991, 78–82 and passim. I have unfortunately been unable to consult the article by Rusconi that has in part influenced Nicolini's essay (R. Rusconi, Colomba da Rieti. La signoria dei Baglioni e la 'seconda Caterina'. In *Umbria sacra e civile.* A cura di E. Menestò e R. Rusconi. Torino 1989, 211–26.)

pinzochera's independent religious position as well as her public sermons.[140] The practical requirement for a female saint's successful mission was that she was backed by the churchmen or, alternatively, by powerful secular magnates. For example, Catherine of Siena was supported by a group of reforming Dominicans, while the later Dominicans such as Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, and Lucia Brocadelli of Narni were promoted primarily by secular princes. Several Dominican women were revered as advice-givers and teachers, but they rarely taught in public. Instead they advised the rulers and common people by writing them letters or alternatively meeting them in private, often by receiving these advice-seekers in their homes.

The Dominicans were supportive toward saintly women's private catechizing, but they remained reserved about women's open teaching. Nonetheless, these supporters did not advocate seclusion. On the contrary, they emphasized that in acts of charity as well as in teaching, women took part concretely in other people's troubles by visiting personally with the indigent and by meeting with the advice-seekers.

The beneficiaries of penitent women's corporal works and neighborly love were principally, though not exclusively, their families, fellow Dominicans (mainly the other penitent women), and other urban women, too. Indeed, it seems that most of their charity was focused on other women, namely other penitents, local widows, or female members of the family. Therefore, these women alleviated particularly the suffering and poverty of other women. Be that as it may, penitent women reached toward the wider social world, too. Through their contacts to confessors, advice-seekers, and powerful patrons the penitents were firmly connected with the world outside their homes and penitent organizations.

In comparison with the monastic ideals of the *vita activa*, the spirituality of secular penitents comprised principally three major changes. Firstly, and most obviously, the hagiographers of the penitent saints elaborated the issue of active life further than the monastic authors had felt the need. The former brought about several biblical and saintly models, they provided concrete stories concerning the active life, and they tailored biblical passages to address their contemporary needs. It is as if the hagiographers of penitent women were more urged to exemplify the reality of active life, whereas the monastic authors wrote on a more traditional religious way of life in which the issue of manual labor was already settled and interpreted primarily as a spiritual technique to keep one's mind occupied.

Secondly, the monastic concept of the *vita activa* focused on manual labor or, alternatively, administrative activities. Quite distinctly, the penitent ideals rarely touched the topic of administrative perfection that had especially been associated with the office of the prioress. While manual labor also remained important in the penitent women's lives, it was surrounded by other kinds of active piety, namely offering charity and apostolicism. Moreover, higher-born nuns' manual labor tended to be comprised of handcrafts and some gardening, whereas the penitent women's activities were more domestic and servile.

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140 On Domenica's sermons, see VALERIO 1992, 129, 133–137 and Idem 1994, 500–503.

Thirdly, penitent ideology stressed such ideas as *corporally*, *publicly*, and *personally* performed good deeds when the hagiographers described women's social participation. They underscored that corporal service like personally nursing the ailing differed from such spiritually exercised aid, as, for example, prayer and alms. In reality, as has been discussed, the Dominican friars were actually quite cautious about women's public roles. Still, it does not undermine the importance of the fact that they conceptually emphasized the different temporal and physical ways to serve God.

Penitent women's benevolent social spirituality was singled out by the hagiographers, and the directors of penitent women approved these corporally performed acts of neighborly love that were directed toward the physical well being of others. Yet, even in these cases of "concrete" help, the attention was never solely on the external alleviation of pain or poverty. It focused also on the spiritual relief pious helpers provided.

The biblical and saintly models were vitally important ways for a hagiographer to exemplify the characteristics of his new saint and to present her as a member of the *communio sanctorum*. The biblical and saintly figures stood for a complex set of ideas, and, though rarely explicit, they called attention to certain traditions and ways of seeing. This study has shown that even the medieval Dominicans favored the ancient saints and biblical figures over more recent personae. Moreover, they paralleled their female penitent saints with male characters and did not hesitate to compare them Jesus Himself. What might these analogies that the hagiographers used reveal to us about the late medieval perception of women's active piety?

I suggest that the publicly active women were such a controversial topic that they needed to be paralleled with the holy people who were not only firmly established but also universally venerated. Jesus held the paragon position as the model for Christian compassion. He was seen as present not only in the helper, but also in the beneficiaries. As for the saintly models, the ancient personae remained leading figures who were repeatedly evoked as examples of the *vita activa*. The *vita activa* was mirrored against the firmly established models of Christian past, because that way of life still had to be defended. It also seems to be much for the same reason that the active women were paralleled with the male saints. Seemingly, the comparison of a female penitent saint with a clerical or apostolic male saint was perceived as a way to elevate her status and to point out that she was an offspring of the prototypes of active Christian perfection. The analogy between a female penitent and her male predecessors is strikingly clear in the case of Catherine of Siena's *vitae*. While her penance and asceticism are paralleled with Mary of Magdalene and other female saints, her active life is exemplified mainly with references not only to such male saints such as Martin of Tours, John the Evangelist, but to the Apostles and even Jesus. Indeed, the biblical Lea and Martha were the only female reference points to Catherine's active life. The male references are absolutely dominating in the case of Catherine's wider public activities, which suggests that a missionizing woman was seen as a quasi-man. Apostolic deeds and teaching were such male dominated

activities that the categories of maleness were projected onto the woman who successfully taught and missionized.[141]

What then were the fruits of the active life? The penitent orders were socially beneficial to the participating women themselves as well as to their neighbors. As Katherine Gill has summed up this interrelation: "Women were served by and served others through the institutions they created."[142] Yet, it is evident that the medieval hagiographers did not focus their attention on the practical results of their protagonists' corporal deeds. A garden that was ploughed, a fabric that was manufactured, a patient who was soothed, or a pauper whose poverty was alleviated surely played an integral part in the active life itself. Nevertheless, the hagiographers' attention focused more on the benefactor than on her beneficiaries or the results of her acts. In part this bias was a narrative device. The hagiographer was, after all, writing about a saint rather than about the society surrounding her. Yet, I believe, there was a more far-reaching reason for this bias, too: Medieval churchmen perceived the active life principally as a spiritual exercise, and only secondarily as a deed with actual impact. Accordingly, they emphasized the acts' spiritual fruits over the concrete results. The friars may or may not have been insensitive to the people's physical needs, but they did not perceive the lay saints as equivalents to modern social workers or political reformers.

In a hagiographic context social service functioned to a great degree as a setting that concretely exhibited a benefactor's patience and humility. All the stories that treated Catherine's neighborly love in any detail involved an ungrateful and blasphemous beneficiary. The contrast between the recipients' behavior and Catherine's relentless perseverance highlighted the saint's patience. Thomas of Siena related that Maria of Venice thought kindly even of her negligent husband, whose departure had caused her so much social shame. These harsh conditions enhanced the virtuous patience and humility that was anyway manifested in the saint's willing submission to lowly tasks. Servile deeds and charity tested a benefactor's discipline, yet performing them manifested the patient and gentle disposition of the helper. This stoic endurance of the hardships that a saintly helper often encountered was manifested in the persistence to act in unpleasing conditions. This was as important a (if not more) saintly value as doing the acts themselves.

Indeed, the actual lives of the beneficiaries were perceived through thick layers of biblical metaphors and spiritual analogies, which also tended to draw attention away from the results of these acts. When a pauper or an ailing person was depicted as a *vicarius Christi,* the charity was ultimately seen as a service rendered to Christ himself. Accordingly, the beneficiary was seen to symbolize Christ's suffering rather than manifest his/her own individual pain.

The active piety of saintly Dominican penitent women was an important topic for their supporters who elevated these women's daily tasks, charitable deeds, and even supported a limited women's apostolate. This socially active piety was

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141 It was a widely used hagiographic topos to represent active women as masculine. For a recent study on this literal tradition, see NEWMAN 1995.

142 GILL 1994, 242.

emphatically perceived through spiritual concepts that highlighted the protagonists' piety rather than the result of their activities. Accordingly, the active life was perceived as a type of meditational life or as a possibility for inner perfection rather than as a question of social conscience or political reform. Given their reservations about public teaching and their tendency to spiritualize the fruits of the active life, the friars nevertheless regarded this religious life in the world as fitting for the penitent women for a good part of Middle Ages. It was only around the turn of the sixteenth century, as shall be studied in the upcoming chapter, that the attitudes toward women's *vita activa* changed radically toward the favoring of a more secluded, private, piety.

V "Because the Internal and the Mental Functions are the Most Noble."[1]

Ambivalence and the Changing Emphases Concerning Women's Public and Social Piety

A pious virgin should not go around so much.
Complaints concerning Catherine's travels
Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior*[2]

While the previous two chapters have discussed the positive and constructive approaches concerning the penitent women's presence and deeds in the world, this present chapter addresses the criticism that these lay Dominicans received from their contemporaries.

In the preceding chapters I have stressed that the Dominican hagiographies, as well as other related sources, convey sensitivity toward the penitent women's special concerns. A great part of these women religious lives took place in the secular world, and, accordingly, the ideals concerning their piety had to be adapted to this situation. The Dominican hagiographers did not lament their protagonists' daily obligations and the possible compromises that might be made in their religious life. On the contrary, these authors perceived the worldly temptations and controversies as useful tests of their lay members' religious calling. Moreover, the Preaching Friars championed the penitent women's integrity and spiritual strength to remain spiritually pure in the world. A myriad of external practices, such as the daily devotional observances, pious manners, and the use of a religious habit supported this quest by creating group identity, a rhythm of life, and mental distance from other lay people. Ultimately, penitent piety rested on an interiorized conception of the religious life. This notion of inner piety found in the hagiographies gained a special importance as a counterpart in these women's social lives: the idea of inner piety was used to argue that external activities did not interfere with the penitent women's inner balance.

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1 "Perchè le operatione interiori et mentale sono più degne..." Roberto Ubaldini, *Il Direttorio* 1969, 151.

2 "non decere religiosam virginem sic passim discurrere." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 945.

The Dominicans defended penitent piety by elevating the value of the *vita activa*. These women's deeds of active piety fell in three main categories, namely manual labor in homes (principally house chores), neighborly service, and catechizing. While the first two types were almost invariably found in the *vitae* of Dominican penitent women, the last one was clearly more exceptional. Direct public apostolicism remained an especially limited phenomenon in the women's lives. In fact, Catherine of Siena was the only Dominican tertiary who successfully taught men and women, lay and clergy, in public. Women did have, however, access to less open catechizing opportunities such as private consultation, exhortative letters, publicized prophesies, and teaching other women. These acts of more private apostolicism were present in the *Lives* of Giovanna of Orvieto, Magdalena Panatieri, Colomba of Rieti, Osanna of Mantua, and Stefana Quinzani, just to mention a few.

The ideals concerning the penitent women's presence in the secular world and their deeds of active service echoed those goals that the mendicant friars had set for themselves. The Dominicans, the Franciscans, even the smaller mendicant orders of the Carmelites and the Augustinian hermits, perceived the Christianization of the world as one of their tasks. To be successful in this quest the friars had to encounter secular people, rather than flee to the spiritual havens of locked away monasteries. The penitent women's way of life was a modified version of that of the friars. Needless to say, these women did not enjoy the same authority and education that the friars did. Still, the friars and the penitent women shared the fundamental ideal that the secluded monastic life was not a prerequisite for spiritual perfection. Furthermore, just like the friars themselves, the penitents conceived of their religious lives through eremitic concepts, which, in turn, were contrasted with the stability (*stabilitas*) of the monastic world. The friars and the penitents fashioned themselves as Christian champions in the desert of secular cities, defenders of the simple and pure forms of early Christianity.

Though this mode of religious life had many challenges, the penitent women were in some respects more fortunate than their monastic counterparts. Whereas the monastic saints remained often known only to the inhabitants of their community, numerous penitents enjoyed firm popular support and local fame that carried their memory to the next generation. Furthermore, the Italian friars' pastoral care, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was clearly focused on the lay women, with whom they formed ties of mutual dependence. In fact a great number of popular female saints, whose cults might or might not have been confirmed officially, were penitent women. This reveals that the *pinzochere* enjoyed the support both of their communities and of local friars.

This present chapter addresses those challenges that the penitents faced in the world. Firstly, other lay people frequently had negative reactions toward the *pinzochere*. Though the local communities were often behind penitent saints' cults, these 'living saints' faced numerous challenges from their families as well as from their communities. Some violently attacked the whole idea of the penitent way of life. Other confrontations were reactions against a specific individual or complaints about some of their habits. Secondly, the Preaching Friars themselves

expressed reservations. These friars, who on the one hand dedicated much of their time to the concerns of lay women, were, on the other hand, ambivalent about these women's presence in the secular world. Sometimes the same authors, who in some of their works vehemently defended the active lives of their protagonists, displayed in other texts reservations and perhaps complete disinterest. Such tension can be clearly found, for example, in Raymond of Capua's and Thomas of Siena's production. In the fifteenth century, moreover, there was also a clear shift of balance in the Dominicans' attitudes concerning the 'secularity' of their penitent women.

Such concepts as 'world' and 'action' that had received ambivalent interpretations from the Christian authors since the times of the early Church continued to puzzle the believers in the late Middle Ages as well. The ambivalence and inner tensions about lay piety that the Dominicans also displayed, does not undermine the seriousness of their efforts to articulate positive approaches toward women's presence in the secular world. Just as any pivotal religious, social, or for that matter, moral idea is constantly redefined and adjusted, so also were the ideals concerning women's social piety constantly moving. Nonetheless, since the beginning of the fifteenth century the direction of the movement was clearly toward a more secluded female piety.

Not all the criticism that the penitent women faced was directed specifically against their *lay* way of religious life, but instead manifested a wider skepticism about intense religious experiences in general and about those of women in particular. Individuals with a saintly reputation (whether lay people or members of holy orders) attracted not only admirers, but also critics. Though the veneration of 'living saints' laid at the heart of late medieval religious and social culture, contemporaries also held reservations about saintly excesses. Thus any individual who rose above habitual religious practices was likely to receive negative public attention, perhaps even to be attacked violently. The penitent saints repeatedly faced charges of faked sanctity – the food ascetics were accused of clandestine eating, the miracle-makers were charged with forging their miracles, and the prophets' visions were interpreted as the dreams of a sick mind - but they were not the only persons to be attacked.[3] On the contrary, such impassioned preachers as Meister Eckhard and Bernardino of Siena, such fierce visionaries as Hildegard of Bingen, and such intellectuals as Abelard, just to mention a few, were all also questioned publicly and even charged in their lifetimes of heresy. Since the charismatic visionaries, whether women or men, lay or clerical, stepped outside the common ground of religious practice they were always walking a narrow path that could lead them to fame and salvation as well as to social and religious condemnation.[4]

Women's options for religious expression were, in general, more limited than

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3 On skepticism concerning the experiences of female mystics in general, see DINZELBACHER 1988, 268–275. Jean Gerson, the chancellor of the University of Paris in the early fifteenth century, for example, was a vehement critic of new female saints, especially Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena. He saw these female visionaries as frivolous women who were driven by a desire for worldly fame, see Gerson, *De probatione spiritum* 1987, 92.

4 For 'fake saints' and accusations leveled against them, see *Finzione e santità* 1991.

those of men, which meant that spiritually gifted women were prone to step beyond their expected gender roles. Since penitent women had virtually no institutional or scholarly outlets for their religious fervor, their fame of sanctity rested in their affective spirituality, compassionate acts, and their supernatural gifts of the spirit. This implied that penitent women were characteristically seen through spiritual extremes, which brought them admirers, but also singled them out for criticism.[5]

What then were the accusations specifically leveled against the *penitent* way of life? I suggest that the principal confrontations concerned the penitents' roles in their families, their mobility as well as their public presence.

Families as the Penitents' Enemies?

As was discussed earlier in this study, the penitent calling was at odds with the social expectations of medieval families. In a society in which marriage was a principal means of creating economic ties and bonds of loyalty, unmarried women were, if not always marginalized, at least in a liminal social position. Though the celibate religious life was highly praised, marriage still remained the primary social expectation of medieval women.[6] A nubile girl's or a widow's affiliation in a penitent order did not necessarily strike her family as a profitable enough social bond, especially since this membership did not guarantee these women an income. Therefore, the families of Giovanna of Orvieto, Villana Botti, Catherine of Siena, Maria of Venice, Colomba of Rieti, Osanna of Mantua, and of countless other young penitent aspirants surely considered themselves simply prudent in their efforts to marry of their daughters.[7] To medieval families, their daughters' resolution to remain unmarried even appeared as an unexpected economic burden. Thus, the most concrete challenge that the penitent women faced came from their own families, who attacked their daughter's resolution to live as a penitent, partly because they doubted its practical rationale.

The families were also clearly taken aback by the penitent women's devotional practices. Specific religious customs, like vigils, charity, and abstinence that bolstered the religious lives of the penitents themselves, easily undermined family unity. Margherita Fontana's brother, for example, saw the saint's excessive largesse as an effort to undermine her own family's economic stability and well

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5 Women also expressed their piety psychosomatically, for example, through fasting, see BYNUM 1990, 171–175. The ambiguity of sainthood can be seen, for example, in the fact that toward the later Middle Ages, the portrait of a saint resembled in many respects that of a sorceress, see BYNUM 1988, 21–23.

6 KLAPISCH-ZUBER 1985, 119.

7 On these families' strong preference for their daughters' marriage over the penitent life, see *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 142 (Giovanna of Orvieto); Giovanni Girolamo, *De B. Villana Bottia* 1868, 865 (Villana Botti); Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 873 (Catherine of Siena); Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 157; Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 158* (Colomba of Rieti); Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 562 (Osanna of Mantua). On conflicts between a family and a saintly nubile girl as portrayed in the *vitae* see also WEINSTEIN-BELL 1982, 73–77.

8 Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana* 1868, 137.

being.[8] In fact, many families expressed annoyance, even fury, at these women's efforts to follow a rhythm of life that differed from their own. For example Benvenuta Boiani's and Catherine of Siena's families voiced strong disapproval of their daughters' refusal to share the meals with the other family members, which these penitents resolved by pretending to eat like the others over family meals though they actually did not swallow their food, but hid it in their mouths, only to afterwards spit it away.[9] The hagiographers underscored the heroic resistance of their protagonists, but the reader can also grasp the family tensions that a penitent's way of life brought about. The penitents differentiated customs strained family cohesion, which was based on shared daily habits, and concerns. It did not help that these women saw their religious community as their new family to whom they owned their loyalty rather than to their biological families. From the viewpoint of the families, this order of priorities that ranked them only in a secondary position was surely not always easy to tolerate.[10]

Often the clashes in a penitent's family reveal that the parents were simply concerned about the well being of their daughter. While the saintly penitents saw their own happiness in spiritual terms, their families still perceived bodily nutrition, a good night's sleep, and physical refreshments as the basis for good living. Accordingly, for example, Catherine of Siena's worried mother, Lapa, tried to supress her young daughter's asceticism. Lapa brought Catherine with her to the Fontebranda baths in order to give her some bodily refreshment, to which Catherine responded by burning herself under the hot water stream.[11] Lapa's efforts to oversee Catherine's sleep were similarly unsuccessful: as soon as Lapa fell asleep the daughter sneaked out of the bed to continue her nightly prayers and flagellation.[12] Raymond of Capua saw Lapa and worried mothers of her kind as "operating for the devil's cause" ("hoste humani generis operante").[13] The reader, however, can also sympathize with these worried parents, who surely simply hoped that their daughters would have been happy rather than saintly.[14]

As to the married penitents, their social position was possibly even more challenging. Similar to the situation of the unmarried women, these women's pursuits also taxed family unity and the tolerance of the other household members. These women had, however, an additional problem in their lives: their husbands. While the young virgin's chastity was threatened in public, the married woman

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9 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 153 (Benvenuta Boiani); Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 906 (Catherine of Siena).

10 In the Middle Ages religious groups were commonly seen through family terminology. Catherine of Siena and the Franciscan penitent, Margaret of Cortona, for example, were represented as mothers who exhorted their children. These spiritual families challenged the primacy of biological families, see HERLIHY 1980, 928–929 and Idem 1985, 122–124.

11 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 879.

12 Ibid., 878.

13 Ibid., 878.

14 Catherine's complex relationship with her mother, Lapa, has been analyzed by Rudolph Bell, who approached *Legenda maior* as a document for Catherine's psychological development, see BELL 1985, 23–49. On the relationship between Lapa and Catherine see BOESCH GAJANO – REDON 1982, 20–22. Lapa was not the only worried mother of a saintly child. See for example, Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Columba 1866*, 158* (Colomba of Rieti) and Desiderio Paloni, *De vita B. Margarita Fontana* 1868, 138 (Margaret of Fontana). On families as normalizing forces in the saints' lives, see KIECKHEFER 1987, 192–193.

faced this threat inside her own home. These women needed their husbands' consent in order to join a religious order. Obviously, they were dependent on their husband's willingness to take vows of chastity. Once again the penitent life challenged the expectations of secular family life, where a marriage by default brought about a husband's right to possess his wife's body.[15]

Those married women who joined penitent orders successfully negotiated their way into a new social situation. This, however, did not automatically imply that their husbands' remained consistently behind their original promises. Though Maria Mancini, for example, managed finally to coax her husband to accept marital chastity after they had had six children together, this husband returned after some time to share a bed with his wife.[16] Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, who had taken a religious habit together with her husband Rodolfo, was more successful than Maria Mancini was. When Lucia's husband absolved his religious vows and returned to claim back his marital rights, Lucia was already firmly settled in a communal penitent life, where she profited from the support of her spiritual sisters.[17] The married penitents who continued a family life were easily ridiculed as hypocrites by outsiders who doubted the integrity of marital chastity. Spiritual resolution was clearly not seen by many as a strong enough barrier to separate the spouses *de facto*. Accordingly, the moralist Francesco of Barberino wrote in his *Del reggimento e de' costumi delle donne* that the married penitents, if compared with widows and even young girls, encountered exceptional challenges, since they tried to protect their chastity from their husbands inside their own homes.[18] Moreover, Francesco of Barberino doubted strongly whether the women themselves had enough mental power to resists these daily temptations that surrounded them.[19]

The *vitae* of *pinzochere* illustrate that these challenges from families were concerned mainly with conflicting social expectations. While the penitents themselves saw a life in a religious habit as their personal choice, their families had plans for them that had make been laid out long before the penitent's own choice was made manifest. The very same customs that from the viewpoint of a religious life had brought unity to the penitent associations and strengthened the penitent calling, appeared to secular families as cracks in their unity. Moreover, the penitents' families in general seemed to have perceived marriage as a rational social choice, whereas the penitent life, especially for nubile girls, appeared as a socially anomalous way of life. Finally, secular families judged happiness and success in different terms than their penitent daughters. While zealous penitents set spiritual perfection as their goal, their families saw asceticism as a lack of

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15 Penitent women's married lives varied from a successfully chaste co-existence with their husbands to unwilling submission to their spouses sexual approaches, see ELLIOTT 1993, 208–211, 219, 225–228.

16 Razzi 1605, 653.

17 See the *Chronicle* of St-Catherine-of-Siena as cited in CREYTENS 1969, 127–128. These difficulties to keep a chaste marriage were experienced by many saintly women, for example by two well-known fourteenth century pious wives Margery of Kempe and Dorothy of Montau, see ATKINSON 1991, 185.

18 Francesco of Barberino, *Del Reggimento e de' costumi delle donne* 1815, 211.

19 Ibid., 216.

prudence, and bodily maintenance, or even simply as unhappiness.

The *vitae* of Dominican penitents display these family tensions, and particularly the *Legenda maior* centers the narration of Catherine of Siena's youth upon this saint's troubles to convince her own family, especially her mother, Lapa, of her religious call's seriousness. Yet, the Dominican *vitae* lack the extremely violent clashes with the family that characterize several Franciscan hagiographies. The Italian scholar, Alessandro Barbero, has plausibly suggested that while the Franciscan *vitae* followed the model set by St. Francis's violent break from his natural family, the Dominican *vitae* portrayed, at least relatively speaking, more harmonious family solutions.[20] Indeed, Giovanna of Orvieto and Margherita of Città di Castello seem to come forth as sole examples of Dominican penitents who totally broke away from their natural families. While Giovanna escaped the home of her relatives, Margherita was deserted by her parents, who seemingly did not want to bring up a blind daughter.[21] The other Dominican penitents, however, had more luck: Benvenuta Boiani, Villana Botti, Catherine of Siena, Maria of Venice, Magdalena Panatieri, Margherita Fontana, Osanna of Mantua, Lucia Brocadelli of Narni, and Colomba of Rieti were, though initially challenged by their families, also eventually supported by them.[22]

In short, the family life of Dominican women shows that confrontations and support were not mutually exclusive, but simultaneously present. Maybe the very fact that the Dominican authors did not negate their penitents' continuous relationships with their families emphasized the challenge that these women faced. While penitents could not totally turn their back on their families, they had actively to encounter the controversies either by successfully defending their choice or by making compromises.

Women's Public Piety under Attack

The penitent women's regular social contacts reached beyond their immediate families to other penitents, to their neighbors, to unrelated people of their home town, and even to those from far away regions. These contacts provided much positive support for the penitents, but they also brought about criticism. Let me start from the inner tensions inside the penitent organization itself. The penitent women supported each other's spiritually, socially, and even physically. But, just as in any closely-knit organization, this co-existence was not always harmonious.

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20 BARBERO 1991, 285.

21 On Giovanna's and Margaret's background, see p. 44.

22 Catherine's mother Lapa, who outlived her daughter almost by ten years, was a central witness for Raymond when he compiled the *Legenda maior*, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 869, 870, 871, 872, 878, 880, 897 and 898. Lucia Brocadelli of Narni entered the monastery of St-Catherine-of-Siena (Ferrara) together with her mother, MATTER 1996, 172. Villana of Botti's cult was initiated by her grandson Sebastiano, see ORLANDI 1955, 27–31. Margaret Fontana lived all her long life (seventy-three years) in her natal home, see Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana* 1868.

The most tangible reason for discontent within a group of penitents was, as one could expect, an individual member's immoral behavior. A penitent member's transgression shattered the association from within, thus also hurting its honorable reputation without. In fact, it seems that the representatives of the Dominican penitent order were even more concerned about their order's reputation than more established Franciscan penitents. Since the Dominican penitent order was formally approved only in 1405, it was under a constant burden to show that members were religiously orthodox and morally impeccable.[23] Therefore, entrance to the penitent order was limited to "persons of generally recognized good disposition".[24] The group also held the right to punish its members in the case of both venial and mortal sins, and, when necessary, even expel the transgressors.[25]

A reputable penitent group held ardent social control of its members. Accordingly, a good part of the criticism that an individual penitent might face surfaced within her own order. Catherine of Siena's chaste reputation was at least twice strongly questioned. Both times the skeptics, Tecca and Andrea, came from within her own order. While Tecca claimed that Catherine's long stays in the Dominican church were inspired by her desire to pass time with friars, Andrea spread rumors that Catherine was no longer a virgin. The elders of the penitent order took such rumors seriously; they even called Catherine to a public hearing in which the saint did manage to clear her name.[26] These events reveal that penitent women themselves, like so many churchmen, phrased their suspicion concerning other women's behavior around sexuality. Women were not only attacked by men, but also by other women, as lustful and unable to control their instincts. The fact that penitents had frequent interaction with the people of their cities and with their confessors appeared even to some penitents themselves to provide dangerous possibilities to cross the limits of decent interaction.

Pinzochere also exercised other types of control over their compatriots. In the early sixteenth century, for example, a popular semi-official Dominican penitent, Dorothea of Lanciuolo, was attacked by another semi-official Dominican penitent visionary, Domenica of Paradiso, for having made public her visions and fasting. Domenica claimed that Dorothea was eating in secret and that this woman was misled by her confessor to believe that she was having real visions. Domenica's attack on Dorothea was simultaneously a jibe against on those Dominicans who supported Dorothea. Rather than attacking the powerful friars directly, Domenica directed her words toward a more vulnerable opponent, a visionary peasant with no official status.[27] The visionary penitent women with public reputations, yet

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23 On the delayed approval of the Penitents *Rule* and its effect on the Order, see p. 37–39.

24 "Personarum bene dispositarum plurimum noscitur." *Rule*, Ch. I, in Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 38.

25 The *Rule*, Chs. XIX and XX, in Ibid., 42–43.

26 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 898 (Tecca's accusations); 901 (Andrea's accusations and Catherine's hearing by the elders).

27 On Domenica of Paradiso's motivations, see POLIZZOTTO 1993, 503–504. In the end Domenica got her victory: Dorothea was denounced as a false prophet. Furthermore, Domenica was granted by an episcopal decree the right to remain independent of San Marco's

without any institutional position, were easy targets for skeptics. Even the women themselves took advantage of other women's vulnerability.

Perhaps the fundamental source of concern within a penitent organization was any individual penitent's "singularity," which often was manifested by extraordinary penance, sacrificially good deeds, and frequent communion, as well as through an intensive visionary life, miracles, and other signs of sanctity. While a penitent order ultimately profited from the saintly fame of any of its members, the extraordinary actions of individual penitents also caused concern for fellow penitents, for mother- superiors, and for friars. There was a concern not only about false sanctity, but also about the motivation of penitents who attempted extraordinary acts. The distaste for excessive penance lay partly in the fear that an individual was possessed by a desire for earthly fame rather than by an inner spiritual burning. In fact, the *vitae* of female mystics show that friars were in general initially if not negative, at least reserved, about excessive penance, prophesies, and altruism. In a word, as a Dominican author, Roberto Ubaldini, summed this suspicion in his *Directions* for the penitents of St-Catherine-of-Siena in Florence, " All singularity can be a sign of pride."[28] Therefore, fearing an individual's pride and willingness to show off, the Preaching Friars tried to subdue any excessive penance and public acts of piety, unless the person's motivations were scrutinized and approved by a confessor.

The sympathetic hagiographers, however, painted both those superiors and the members of a penitent order who tried to restrain the saints' ardor in intensely dark colors. Catherine of Siena's fellow penitents were shown as the chief adversaries of this young penitent. The moderation in the acts of penance that was actually suggested by the *Rule* appeared to Raymond as nothing but envious superiors' wickedness and misjudgment when they tried to curb Catherine's enthusiasm. Catherine's fellow penitents also disapproved of her frequent communion, her spiritual excesses, and her mobility.[29] It may be that contemporary penitents were disturbed by Catherine's singularity, as Raymond suggested, simply because they were envious of this young saint's perfection and fame.[30]

Yet, individualism in such collective organizations as medieval religious orders was regarded negatively also because it was often also socially straining. In successful cases, an exceptional personality functioned as a source of energy for her penitent group. Such was clearly the case with, for example, Colomba of Rieti, Stefana Quinzani, and Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, all of whose spiritual fervor was successfully channeled to a creation of cohesive religious communities.[31]

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Dominicans, Ibid., 518–519. Domenica's fierce reaction may have been also caused, as has been suggested by Adriana Valerio, by her desire to set her own prophetical pronouncements apart from Dorothea's more emotional spirituality, see VALERIO 1991, 132–138.

28 "Ogni singularità è sospetto di superbia." Roberto Ubaldini, *Il Direttorio* 1969, 154.

29 On Catherine's confrontations with the members of her own order, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 909, 941, 961–963.

30 Ibid., 962.

31 On Colomba's, Stefana's, and Lucia's foundations, see p. 62–63. Colomba of Rieti, for example, was loved and admired by the members of her community, which can also be seen in the increased number of professions during her time in the community, see CASAGRANDE 1991, 138–143.

Nonetheless, a charismatic personality could also destroy the harmony of her social group simply by being unlike her fellow penitents and by forming a competing social group. Margherita of Città di Castello was expelled from the Monastery of St-Margaret, because her fervent spiritual life distracted the daily lives of her less disciplined monastic sisters.[32] Lucia Brocadelli of Narni's popularity among the Ferrarese and other lay people created friction inside her own community.[33] Later when her stigmata vanished she was totally isolated by her penitent community's women, who perhaps saw this visionary as a sickly nuisance rather than a reputable saint.[34] The strong-willed visionary Domenica of Paradiso was always at odds with any religious group she tried to fit in.[35] A penitent who rose to public fame could even be virtually forgotten by her own group. For example, Catherine's inner circle of supporters was comprised of representatives of various religious orders, of influential lay men, and of some penitent women, whereas her initial social group, the Sienese penitents, was, to start with, clearly at odds with her.[36] It seems that by moving on to what one could call inter-order and international operations, Catherine further alienated herself from other Sienese penitents. Her supporters Lisa, Francesca Gori, and Alessia Saracini remained loyal, but most contemporary penitents of her own Fontebranda region seem not to have been particularly devoted to Catherine. In fact, even the saint's death was ignored by keepers of the penitents' registry, who enrolled Catherine as a living member in 1384, although she died four years earlier.[37] The singularity of a pious member that could bind social groups together could also burden them or distance a charismatic leader from her original religious background.

In addition to the penitents' families and their fellow *pinzochere*, other secular people around the penitents were also dumbfounded by their holy public experiences and deeds. Stories of a penitent's public appearances, ascetic fervor, altruistic neighborly love, supernatural acts, and even her quite common religious observances circulated among city people who were hungry for spiritual solace. Yet, these same people were also eager to pass on negative rumors and attack those who stuck out from the crowd. The penitent women's physical presence in the secular world made their religious lives transparent, almost like public property. Secular people observed penitents engaged in charity, they encountered

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32 *Legenda beate Margarite de Civitate Castelli recensio minor* 1994, 95.

33 PROSPERI 1972, 382.

34 Razzi 1577, 153. See also, ZARRI 1990, 57–59.

35 Domenica of Paradiso tried unsuccessfully to live as a convert (*conversa*) in two of her home town's monasteries (the Augustinian monastery St- Maria-di-Candeli and the double monastery of St-Bridget), see POLIZZOTTO 1993, 492–493; 504–509.

36 The breadth of Catherine's following can be seen in the witnesses for the episcopal inquiry into her sanctity, the so-called *Il Processo.* Testimonies were give by 16 Dominicans, 2 Carthusians, 2 Benedictines, 1 Cistercian, 1 Franciscan, and 2 laymen, see LAURENT 1942, XI-XXXIX. For the letters written by Catherine's followers during her life time, see *Leggenda minore di S.Caterina da Siena e lettere dei suoi discepoli* 1868, 266–291. On Catherine's spiritual family, see TAURISANO 1950 and CHIMINELLI 1941.

37 A Sienese penitent registry lists Catherine as a living member in 1384 with following words: "Monna Lapa fu di Jacopo tintore e Caterina mantellata e Monna Lisa", see Document XXIV, in *I Documenti* 1936, 59.

these women in churches, they saw penitent saints in ecstasies, and they visited these women's homes. These publicly known acts were welcomed by many, but so too were many alarmed.

The public nature of penitents' lives contradicted one fundamental New Testamental ideal, namely that true acts of piety should be hidden from the public.[38] Accordingly, the penitent women were accused of a desire to show off and to bolster their earthly reputation. Benvenuta Boiani's hagiographer was surely aware of these accusations when he underscored that his protagonist blushed from shame every time her ecstasies were seen.[39] Similarly other *vitae* report that several saints' experiences were hidden from their contemporaries so that these women could not be accused of pride. Giovanna of Orvieto, for example, begged her prior not to make her visions public.[40] Catherine of Siena distributed her alms secretly.[41] Osanna of Mantua's wedding ring from her mystical marriage to Christ remained invisible to the public so that this special favor would not create envy and polemic among people.[42] The hairshirt that had penetrated Margherita Fontana's flesh was revealed only after the saint's death.[43] Nevertheless, many of these penitents' deeds and experiences were publicly known and seen, and, indeed, these women were accused of pride, duplicity, and public disorder alike.

One may study Catherine of Siena's *vita* to understand the wide spectrum of negative reactions to public acts of penitent piety. The public manifestations of Catherine's singularity in penance, charity, and spiritual fervor alarmed people. In the spring of 1375 she received a letter from a Sienese poet, Bianco, in which the poet warned this mystic about the secular pride that was, as the poet understood it, almost by default present in public acts of piety.[44] Bianco was not the only one who was taken aback by Catherine's prominence. Other Sienese people were also alarmed by Catherine's rigorous asceticism and Eucharistic fervor, and many demanded that Catherine should be disciplined to adhere to the generally shared moderate practices. These skeptics claimed that Catherine was possessed by demons rather than filled with the Holy Spirit, or that she was eating in secret and claimed rigorous ascetic practices only to gain public fame.[45]

To these accusations that principally centered around forgery and lust for power was added the annoyance about Catherine's excesses. When this charismatic mystic's behavior interfered with people's daily routines, they easily reacted with intolerance. Since Catherine's impassioned sobbing during the mass distracted other churchgoers, her first confessor, Thomas Fonte of Siena, who feared people's anger, placed the saint in the back of the church.[46] Catherine's frequent ecstasies in the church of St-Dominic also strained people's patience,

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38 See for example, Matt.6:1–6, 16–18.
39 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 171.
40 *Legenda beate Vanne* 1996, 151.
41 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 867.
42 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 579.
43 Desiderio Paloni, *De B. Margarita Fontana* 1868, 138.
44 TAURISANO 1950, 129–136.
45 Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 908.
46 Ibid., 941.

especially that of the maintenance persons who had to wait until this mystic's rapture was over before they could remove her and close the church. According to the *Legenda maior* the Sienese people were so distraught by Catherine's open ecstasies that they threw her violently out the church "like garbage". One lady even gave the saint a good kick.[47] Moreover, Catherine's physical presence in these male dominated public forums encouraged negative rumors about her chastity and spiritual integrity. Some contemporaries saw all contacts to men as suspicious, even when they were churchmen with good reputation or dying patients.[48]

Finally, Catherine was criticized for her frequent travels. Medieval people had numerous negative attitudes toward a mobile individual, especially a woman. Such individuals were accused of heresy, of social unrest, as well as of sexual promiscuity. A man or a woman on the move was free from those systems of social control that tightly knit communities exercised on an individual. Accordingly, it was easy to claim that this individual abused her liberties.[49] In Catherine's case there were frequent complaints about her missions. The confrontation between the Sienese people and Catherine in the autumn of 1378 was surely a climactic moment. Raymond of Capua had at that time invited Catherine to Rome, where he was one of the supporters of the Roman pontiff, Urban VI, but Catherine hesitated to accept because the Sienese had turned against her travels. The *Legenda maior* relates that Catherine had contacted Raymond, because the Sienese where complaining that religious women should not be running around like Catherine did. Why exactly these people were so distraught is not explicitly revealed, but there seems to have been concern for Catherine's safety and her chastity. The Sienese people, who were distraught by the saint's behavior, yet aware of her fame, perhaps even feared that Catherine would die in Rome, as indeed happened, thus depriving her home town from much cherished relic of her body. Raymond's side won out, however, and Catherine left Siena in October 1378, never to return to her hometown.[50] Raymond surely was later conscious of the anomaly that the hometown of this saint did not possess the relic of her body, which he compensated around 1385 by giving the gift of Catherine's mummified head to the friars of St-Dominic.[51]

Hypocrisy, individualism, public disorder, and sexual promiscuity were the most common negative rumors that the lay people passed around about the penitents. One of these skeptics was Francesco of Barberino. His portrait of a fictional penitent saint, Amabile, in *Del reggimento e de' costumi delle donne* is worth noting because it embodies popular concerns about penitent piety and draws a fictional alternative to factual penitents. Francesco of Barberino opens his scene with praise for Amabile's firm resolution to take the penitent habit as

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47 "tamquam quoddam abortivum…". Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 962.

48 On rumors about Catherine's unchaste relationships with men, Ibid., 953.

49 On the restriction in penitents' travelling, see p. 66.

50 On the dispute about Catherine's departure to Rome, see Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 945.

51 When exactly and in which manner the relic of Catherine's head was returned to Siena has been a much discussed, but still unsolved problem, see GIUNTA 1986.

young virgin. The author underscores that Amabile was an uncommon representative of her sex, since generally, so Francesco believed, women were not able to resist temptation: "I have never met, nor heard about, such strength in a woman, nor do I believe that I ever will."[52] This Amabile determinedly guarded her chastity: she was always accompanied by her old wet-nurse, even when she was confessing: "She wanted rather that her wet-nurse heard her confession than that she would have remained all alone with a man."[53] Thus, Francesco of Barberino suggests that even the relationship between a confessor and a penitent was suspicious.

Amabile ate only when necessary, she wore a hairshirt, she avoided the merry company of the other members of the household. Amabile never saw anyone outside her private home, and indeed, even windows to the outer world were her enemies. This fictional saint's daily activities consisted of prayer, of masses in her private chapel, of reading prayer books, and of creating subtle handcrafts, which also brought her some extra income.[54] While Amabile's ascetic and devotional practices were similar to a real-life penitent like Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, or Margherita of Città di Castello, Francesco's ideal portrait was in many respects an implicit attack against real-life penitent women. While factual penitents attended masses in local churches together with other people and formed intensive relationships with their confessors, Francesco preferred the fictional Amabile who had her private chapel and who never encountered her confessor privately. Whereas penitents engaged in neighborly service, Amabile's active piety centered upon her handicrafts in her private room. In a word, the image of Amabile was crafted in the likeness of a virgin nun rather than a penitent: her devotional life and activities were private, secluded, and utterly restricted. The qualities that Francesco of Barberino attributed to Amabile indirectly questioned the lives of real penitents, who were seen in the public and who interacted directly with their contemporaries. Similar to Francesco, numerous penitents' critics would have rather seen these women sheltered away from the world, partly because they feared for these women's safety, but in no lesser part because they doubted the firmness of penitents' character.

The Flight from the World

The promoters of penitent saints' cults and those who criticized these *mulieres religiosae* were engaged in a multi-layered dialogue. The defenders were fully aware of the skepticism that the *pinzochere* encountered. In fact, as we have seen, a good part of these antagonistic reactions has reached us only through the accounts of the hagiographers themselves. The hagiographers did not try to suppress these confrontations. On the contrary, it was in their interest to weave

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52 "Non vidi mai tal fermezza di donna; nè mai udio, nè credo di udir potere." Francesco of Barberino, *Del Reggimento e de' costumi delle donne* 1815, 216.

53 "Volea innanzi, che la balia udisse/ ciò che confessava,/ Che trovarsi con omo a sola a sola." Ibid., 216.

54 On the entire story of Amabile, see Ibid., 212–216.

the negative events into the narration because these incidents highlighted the willpower of the protagonists, their strength in suffering, and their saintly disinterest in earthly success. While the hagiographers' intention was to use these confrontations as props for the saints' laudable character, the historian can trace popular reactions from these events. It would, however, be naive to believe that hagiographers wrote down all the people's possible reactions. These writers were skilled image-makers who incorporated only those incidents that served their principal goal, namely the sanctification of their protagonist. Yet, it would be equally rash to conclude that the hagiographies are worthless sources concerning opponents' accusations. These texts still convey numerous confrontational events, through which a reader must realize to get beyond the hagiographers' intentions. For example, when the hagiographers label parents' marital plans as mere wickedness, a reader can go further to ask the parents' possible practical rationales or parental instincts. Or, when the hagiographer portrays the skeptics as narrow-minded individuals, one can read from the event the tensions in a relationship between a charismatic and the average person.

The hagiographers' narrations were surely crafted in part with the reactions of the antagonistic audience in mind. Therefore, the arguments for penitent piety were in part underscored because of the awareness of the existing counterarguments. Thomas of Siena, for example, surely pronounced the positive aspects of the penitents' public deeds (*publiciter*), personal involvement in charity (*personaliter*), and corporal deeds (*corporaliter*) so emphatically, precisely because these issues drew such strong reactions from contemporaries.[55] Similarly, Raymond's focus on the multi-layered dialogue between God and Catherine upon the initiation of Catherine's public life surely addressed so explicitly the issues of women's public participation and the *vita activa* precisely because of their controversy.[56] For a further example, Villana Botti's *vita* emphasized that this penitent saw Christ, not the pauper himself in the man she helped, perhaps because people had doubted whether a female helper and a male patient could keep a chaste relationship.[57]

Nevertheless, the secular penitent life was challenged, not only by skeptical lay people, but also by the Dominican friars, and even by certain penitent women themselves. These Preaching Friars, as well as the Franciscans, and for that matter any churchmen, were naturally fully aware of the long-lasting Christian tradition that had matched women with contemplative and cloistered spirituality. Moreover, the papal conception of female sanctity clearly emphasized women's contemplative and mystical spirituality over their active involvement in public affairs: despite the popular support for the lay saints, the pontiff continued to favor monastic piety by canonizing mostly nuns.[58] In fact, even the Dominicans and the Franciscans had rigidly opposed the idea that their own apostolic way of life would serve as a model for their second order, namely the professed nuns. Therefore, those Mendicant orders' women who had formally taken three

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55 See p. 11–12, 103–104.
56 See p. 69–71.
57 See p. 107.
58 VAUCHEZ 1981, 435–446.

religious vows of obedience, poverty, and chastity lived a prayerful life in more or less strict cloister.

Given these settings, it is hardly surprising that even the confessors of penitent women would come to question the secular premises of penitent piety. How was the Dominicans' ambiguity about secular piety then manifested? What were the specific reasons that caused the Dominicans to be sensitive to the problems of these women's secular presence? These are the two principal questions that I shall try to answer in this part of the study. I shall firstly proceed to study the uneasiness with the Dominican order itself as they surfaced at the turn of the fourteenth century and then again at the end of the fifteenth century. Later in the chapter, I shall analyze the churchmen's reasons for caution about women's active piety. While I have hitherto presented a cross-analysis of common elements concerning women's public lives in the *vitae* of the penitent women from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, I shall presently move to analyze the changes that took place over this period of time. Though the *vitae* from the thirteenth to the early sixteenth century display several shared ideals, there is a definite shift of focus in the later part of the fifteenth century. I shall examine the manifestations of this change as well as the reasons that brought it about.

Paradoxically, the internal tensions of secular penitent piety became clearly apparent around the same time that the Dominican penitent order's reputation was at its peak. In the history of the medieval Dominican penitent order there are clearly two periods of outstanding activity. The first of these periods falls between the years 1374 and 1434, which mark respectively the beginning of Raymond of Capua's and Catherine of Siena's fruitful co-operation and the death of Thomas of Siena. The second exceptionally active period starts in the last years of the fifteenth century, when the fame of Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, Colomba of Rieti, Lucia Brocadelli of Narni, Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, and Catherine of Racconigi spread in the north Italian cities and particularly in the palaces of regional magnates. This era came to an end with numerous restrictive rulings by the pontiff and the Dominicans alike in the 1530s, when the order's attention also turned to such entirely contemplative mystics as Catherine de'Ricci.

The era from 1374 to 1434 was in many respects a golden age for the Dominican penitents. This period marked the heyday of Catherine's mystical and apostolic life (1374–1380), Catherine's and Raymond's intensive co-operation (1374–1378), and the creation of Raymond's influential *Legenda maior* (1385–1395). Possibly even an more important role was played by Thomas of Siena, whose life was devoted to the penitent cause: he was particularly active in the period from 1395, when he took active role in distributing the *Legenda maior*, to 1418, when he finished the Supplement (*Libellus de supplemento)* to Raymond's book. It was only in this period that documents and histories concerning the Dominican penitent order were systematically collected, papal approval of penitent rule was attained (1405), and the fame of saintly individuals

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59 On Thomas of Siena's activities, see p. 54–55.

like Giovanna of Orvieto, Margherita of Città di Castello, and Maria of Venice were promulgated.[59]

Yet, the actions of these two prominent promoters of the penitent way of life, Raymond and Thomas, suggest that even they were ambivalent about women's secular piety. In fact, it seems that despite such massive achievement as the *Legenda maior* Raymond's interest in the penitent cause lessened soon after Catherine's death in 1380. Some detachment from the questions of penitent piety in the world seems to have happened in the case of Thomas as well, though only after he had achieved the papal approval of the penitent rule in 1405. Later in their lives both these friars were clearly more interested in the monastic and purely contemplative forms of female piety. While Raymond channeled his energy into the promotion of Dominican nunneries, Thomas popularized Catherine's cult by emphasizing her mysticism rather than her social acts.

Raymond's role as Catherine of Siena's confessor (1374–1378) and as this saint's hagiographer (1385–1395) contributed greatly to the penitent cause. Moreover, the *Legenda maior* addressed in detail Catherine's actions in the world. Raymond clearly regarded Catherine's lay sanctity and penitent piety positively.[60] There is no doubt that the *Legenda maior* was the fundamental contribution to the penitent movement.

Still, Raymond's activities that were not related to Catherine convey a definite skepticism about women's *vita activa*. This friar is today principally remembered for his connections to Catherine, yet, to his contemporaries he was much more: a descendant of one of the greatest Sicilian noble houses (the delle Vigne), a successful administrator, an advisor to female monasteries (particularly the Dominican house in Montepulciano), the long-running Master General of the Dominican order (1380–1399), an ally to popes Gregory XI, Urban VI, and Boniface IX, and a reforming observant Dominican (especially between 1389–1399).[61] It can be questioned how central a place did the penitent issue in fact have in Raymond's heart?

Catherine herself certainly was a central person in Raymond's life. This can be seen in the *Legenda maior*, but also in the surviving letters that show also that Raymond urged others to work on behalf of securing Catherine's cult and the position of the Dominican penitents as a whole.[62] Catherine personified the penitent order to Raymond. Yet, only four years (1374–1378) of this Dominican's

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60 Some scholars, principally Sofia Boesch Gajano, Odile Redon, Alessandro Barbero, and Karen Scott have argued that Raymond emphasized Catherine's contemplative and private life over her active deeds, see respectively BOESCH GAJANO – REDON 1982; BARBERO 1991; SCOTT 1992. While it is evident that mystical and contemplative aspects of Catherine's piety ultimately confirmed her sanctity, it seems to me that Raymond's approach to Catherine's active religious life remained positive. This can be seen, I would argue, in his detailed treatment of Catherine's conversion to active life and of the active deeds themselves, see p. 69–71. Raymond's positive attitude to Catherine's social obligations comes even clearer when one compares his text with later accounts that tended to marginalize Catherine's active piety, see p. 153–156.

61 For Raymond's biography, see p. 54.

62 Raymond urged, for example, in a letter from 18 of June 1391 that Neri of Landoccio and Gabriel Piccolomini should unite the Sienese people behind Catherine's cult, see Raymond of Capua, *Opuscula et litterae* 1899, 73–74. He also ordered that together with Giovanni Dominici, Thomas of Siena should work for the establishment of the Dominican Third Order, see his *Tractatus* 1938, 34.

fifty-four year career (from his profession in 1345 to his death in 1399) were spent with the Sienese saint. Moreover, there is little other evidence to suggest that the lay order would have been particularly close to Raymond's own heart. Before encountering Catherine, Raymond had not been in contact with the penitents, but he had instead experience with working as a confessor for Dominican nuns.[63] After Catherine's death, the contacts with the penitents seem to have been equally sparse. Raymond's registry as Master General, which he had kept since 1386, in fact reveals that Raymond rarely interested himself in the issues concerning the *pinzochere*. His prevalent interest in the *cura mulierum* was clearly the reform of women's monasteries.[64] One may also argue that Raymond took a long time to write Catherine's *vita*, which was completed (partly with Thomas of Siena's help) only fifteen years after the saint's death.[65] This delay perhaps suggests that Catherine's *vita* was not highest in his list of priorities. In fact, Raymond himself laments that other tasks had hindered him from writing Catherine's *vita* earlier when her words and acts would have been still fresh in his mind:

> Know thus that I cannot remember exact words that Catherine used during our many meetings when she spoke to me about various topics. After her death I was overcome by many activities, and unfortunately due to my own negligence and forgetfulness, these words and many others have escaped my mind.[66]

As the Master General, Raymond launched the reform of the Dominican order in November 1390.[67] He was principally concerned with re-establishing the original rigorous discipline and spiritual fervor of the early Dominicans to the convents of the friars and to the monasteries of the nuns. In the case of the women, the reform was another name for strictly enforced encloisterment in which egresses from a monastery and entrances into it were restricted. Indeed,

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63 Raymond himself had served as confessor for the Dominican nuns in Montepulciano from 1363 to 1367, see VAN REE 1963, 166–167.

64 Raymond's registry shows that his chief concern was in the religious life of friars. In it is mentioned the names of 1229 friars, whereas only 185 women are mentioned by name. Out of these women, almost all were Dominican nuns, see Raymond of Capua, *Registrum litterarum* 1937, index.

65 Thomas of Siena himself wrote in a letter to Neri Pagliaresi that he helped Raymond in the writing of *Legenda maior*: "Et licet reverendus Magister Ordinis esset multum occupatus, attamen continue quotidie ipsum molestabam offerendo me ad omne adiutorium michi possibile pro expeditione illius legende, propter quod tandem cepimus illam secundam partem nondum perfectam corrigere: deinde ulterius scribere, ipse dictando et ego scribendo." In *Leggenda minore di S. Caterina da Siena e lettere dei suoi discepoli* 1968, 328.

66 "Nunc igitur noveris [reader], quod de quibusdam materiis ipsa mecum saepe ac saepius est locuta, nec memorari possum formaliter de omnibus verbis ejus [Catherine], tum propter negligentiam, et proh pudor! ignaviam meam; tum quia occupationes quae mihi supervenerant, postquam eam non vidi, haec et alia sustulerunt de mente mea." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 893. See also, Ibid., 906–907, 912.

67 Pope Boniface IX's bull for the confirmation of the Observant reform from January 1391 contains a copy of Raymond's letter, see BOP, vol. II, 315. See also, Raymond of Capua, *Opuscula et litterae* 1899, 51–56. For the historical background for this reform, see MEERSSEMAN 1955. On the reform in Venetian and other northern Italian convents, see ALCE 1984. The reform was called 'observant' because it emphasized the close observance of the original Dominican customs, see DIP, vol.6 (1980), 679 (entry 'observantia').

the Dominican histories, [68] the papal bulls to the newly established reformed nunneries,[69] and even *vitae* of the founding saints repeatedly presented the reform as synonymous to encloisterment.[70] These documents also address in detail technical aspects of the cloister, such as the thickness of its doors, the number of locks needed to lock women away from the world, and the covers of the windows, as well as the regulations concerning visitors.[71] Raymond himself followed closely the reforms of St-Dominic in Pisa (1385), the first observant nunnery, Corpus Domini in Venice (1394), and the return to the original rigor of the German nunneries like that of St-Catherine in Nuremberg (1397), and St-Catherine in Strasbourg (1398).[72] In fact, a great part of Raymond's activities in the 1380s and 1390s took place in the German province rather than in Italy. This region gained such importance in the reform, because it was from there that such eastern European regions as Hungary, Bohemia, Poland, and the northern Dacia were controlled. Moreover, Germany itself was in the midst of its own religious turmoil: it was particularly torn between the Avignon and the Roman papacy. In this fractured empire heretical sects, particularly the Hussites, had a strong foothold. Therefore, it was necessary for the Dominicans to secure their representation in the region.[73]

In Italy itself Raymond's new spiritual female companion was Chiara Gambacorta (1362–1419), the founder of the strictly encloistered St-Dominic of Pisa, mentioned above.[74] Though this Pisanese nun never gained such a position in Raymond's life as Catherine had, the Master General followed the spiritual life of this newly reformed monastery. Once, upon Chiara's request, he also sent Giovanni Dominici to preach to the Pisanese nuns.[75] Giovanni Dominici, who Raymond had named as his Italian vicar, was also familiar with the spiritual life of the reformed nuns. He was the confessor for the strictly encloistered nuns of Corpus Christi in Venice.[76] Chiara Gambacorta and Giovanni Dominici had

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68 Thomas of Siena, for example, praised the reformed monastery of Corpus Domini chiefly because of its rigorous claustration, see his *Historia* 1749, 173.

69 The papal confirmation bull for the newly established St-Dominic in Pisa ("Ut inter," 25.7.1387), for example, addressed primarily its encloisterment, see BOP, vol. VII, 65. Similar focus on the details of encloisterment is evident for example in the bulls concerning the reformed Dominican nunnery in Schönsteinbach (BOP, vol. II, 361) and in San Sisto, Rome (BOP, vol. II, 378).

70 *Vita della b.Chiara Gambacorta* 1914, 377–378.

71 This is, for example, how Chiara Gambacorta's *vita* describes the encloisterment of her St-Dominic: "Volse la Beata Chiara, et l'altre Suore che alla grata si mettessi un panno grosso, et incerato, acciò chè volendo parlare con le genti di fuora non fussero viste, nè potessino altrui vedere: volseno ancora, che la porta con tre chiavi fussi serrata, et che drento nessuno potessi entrare, se non per necessità del Monasterio, altrimenti fusse scomunicato, nè anco i Frati potessino entrare, se non per caso di necessità, cioè per ministrare i Sacramenti in caso di morte..." *Vita della b. Chiara Gambacorta* 1914, 378. Strict encloisterment meant that the sisters had no physical contact with the outer world, and even direct contact with confessors was limited to the last rites.

72 MORTIER 1907, 583–601.

73 For the Dominican reform in Germany in general, see BARTHELMÉ 1931, 25–30 and HILLENBRAND 1989.

74 For Chiara's biography in general and for the reform of St-Dominic in Pisa specifically, see ZUCCHELLI 1914.

75 Thomas of Siena, *Historia* 1749, 198–199.

76 Giovanni Dominici Banchini (1355/6–1419) was Raymond's vicar (1391–1399) in Italy and responsible for the Italian Observant reform, see Ibid., 171. From 1394 he was also the spiritual

both personally met Catherine, and they cherished her memory.[77] While Chiara's monastery of St-Dominic was embellished with a painting depicting Catherine's mystical marriage,[78] Giovanni Dominici contributed to *Il Processo* with a testimony about two miracles that he attributed to Catherine.[79] Yet, neither of these reformers had the cult of Catherine as their primary interest, even less were they concerned about the penitent way of life at large. They too were principally concerned about the women's contemplative and strictly cloistered religious life.

In short, the spiritual focus of the leading Italian Dominicans clearly shifted away from the penitent cause toward the monastic forms of female piety around the late 1380s. Raymond himself, though still in the process of writing the *Legenda maior*, was, in fact, a major force behind the renewed Dominican interest in the cloistered female piety. Raymond's new interests do not nullify his substantial contribution to the cult of his penitent saint, Catherine. On the contrary, his *Legenda maior* still remains the paramount apology for secular penitent piety. Yet, his firm support for cloistered female religious life strongly suggests that he had an ambivalent attitude toward women's secular piety. On the one hand, Raymond had given his full support to women's *vita activa* in the world by functioning as a spiritual guide to a secular penitent like Catherine and by incorporating detailed descriptions of the saint's active life in the *Legenda maior*. On the other hand, however, he too was skeptical about women's capabilities to remain spiritually and physically intact in secular society, which is manifested in his later insistence of encloistering them.

Raymond's companion in the penitent cause, Thomas of Siena, devoted the greatest part of his life to the promotion of the penitent women's cause. Unlike Raymond, Giovanni Dominici, and countless other observant Dominican friars, Thomas was never actively involved in the spiritual guidance of cloistered nuns. The penitents remained close to his heart even in the times when other leading Dominicans were chiefly concerned about the reform of the convents and monasteries. Nevertheless, I believe, Thomas of Siena's production also manifests ambivalence about the penitent women's secular lives, especially the actively social aspects of it. His reservations about public penitent piety become tangible in his accounts about Catherine of Siena.

Thomas was a practical man who had a talent for church politics. When he discussed Catherine or other penitent women, he moved with caution. When

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director of the reformed nuns of Corpus Domini in Venice. A collection of his letters to these nuns has survived and has been published, see Giovanni Dominici, *Lettere spirituali* 1969, 61–102. See also Giovanni Dominici's account (the so-called *Iter perusinum)* on the founding of Corpus Domini, Ibid., 186-193. For a modern biography, see CRACCO 1963, 657–664.

77 It is probable that Catherine met Chiara during her Pisan soujourn in 1375. She later wrote to Chiara two letters, see Catherine of Siena, *Le lettere* 1860, vol. III, 106–108, 416–421. Giovanni Dominici had seen Catherine in Santa Maria Novella (Florence) in 1374 and in Pisa in 1375. See Giovanni Dominici's letter to his mother Constance, see his *Lettere spirituali* 1969, 226–227 (also published in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 444–448).

78 ROBERTS 1994, 130.

79 Giovanni Dominici attributed the healing of his stuttering and the healing of his aching leg to Catherine, see his testimony Giovanni Dominici, *Lettere spirituali* 1969, 226–227 (also published in *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 446–448).

there was a need for clarification or for apology, he provided it. The fact that Thomas explained over and over was the very same one that he sometimes totally omitted: Catherine's public life.

The early history of Catherine's cult was entwined with several delicate issues. When the Preaching Friars were in the middle of the Observant Reform (launched in 1390), the status of the Penitent Order still remained unclear until 1405. In this setting the blooming veneration of an uncanonized Catherine was surely regarded by many as a rather odd phenomenon: she was a Dominican tertiary before papal approval of their *Rule*, and she represented active sanctity in the time when the Dominicans were moving toward contemplative ideals of female piety. Moreover, Catherine's political actions seemed to have had little, if any, practical effect. There was not a hint of a crusade against the infidels that Catherine had so actively preached for, and during the Great Schism in the Western Church (1378–1431) the state of papacy was even worse than it had been in the years of its residency in Avignon.[80]

The delicacy of the issue of Catherine's public activities is revealed in *Il Processo* where Thomas corrected the testimony of a certain Minus Iohannis ser Mini. This Sienese follower had enthusiastically claimed that Catherine brought about Pope Gregory XI's return to Rome.[81] This was a cherished notion among the later followers of Catherine. Thomas was, however, not at all happy about Minus' statement. Indeed Thomas was so troubled that he immediately included a correction to Minus' testimony in which he wrote:

> One cannot conclude from this that the virgin would have recommended the above-mentioned return, but only that she revealed to the pope his own secret oath.[82]

Thomas pointed out that Catherine had not compelled the pope to return to Rome, but that she had only revealed to the pope that she was aware of his secret intention to leave Avignon. The fact that Catherine was able to read the pope's heart would then have strengthened his decision to return. Thomas continued that he was actually surprised to hear that people would attribute the pope's return directly to Catherine. The return to Rome and the outbreak of the Schism were seen in causal relation. Thomas knew that if Catherine could be perceived as the cause for the pope's return, she would also be blamed for the Schism.

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80 According to Raymond, the principal reason for Catherine's mission to Avignon in 1377 had been the promotion of a crusade, whereas Gregory XI's return to Rome had been only second in the list of her priorities: "Equidem fateor verum esse, quod haec sacra virgo semper desideravit, ut fieret sanctum passagium, et pro desiderii sui complemento multiplicer laboravit: istaque fuit causa principalis quodammodo, quare ad dictum dominum Gregorium XI usque Avenionem accessit..."Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 934. Raymond was aware of people's skepticism about Catherine's prophesies and the efficacy of her actions, but defended Catherine fiercely, Ibid., 933-935.

81 Minus Iohannis ser Mini stated: "Et quia per dicta sua [Catherine] curia de Avinione venit Romam, videre cogit quantum et qualiter gratia Dei erat in illa [Catherine]." *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 429.

82 "Et sic ex hoc non habetur quod virgo [Catherine] suaserit de dicto accessu [to Rome], sed quod solum votum secretum summi pontificis revelavit." Ibid., 431.

There is also a touch of this more circumspect approach in Thomas' other productions related to Catherine, namely his *Legenda minor*, his own testimony in Il *Processo*, and his *Supplementum*. In the *Legenda minor*, Thomas abbreviated Raymond's *vita* so that the local scenes as well as the miraculous aspects were highlighted, whereas wider political events received less attention. In Thomas' book Catherine is also less situated in time and place than she was in the *Legenda maior*.[83] Thomas's long and rambling testimony in the *Il Processo* used every possible approach to defend Catherine's case. Her saintly reputation (*fama sanctitas*), the fact that she was already venerated by number of people, was here used as an essential, if circular, argument.[84] Another approach was to collect sayings of the ecclesiastical writers whose statements could be used to support Catherine's sanctity. Thomas approached Catherine's sanctity thematically, but he included only a few entries to Catherine's active life.[85] As a result, Catherine's active life appears rather like an accidental quality that embellished her fundamentally mystical and contemplative essence.

The most strikingly unique portrayal of Catherine was Thomas's supplement to Raymond's *Legenda maior*. This *Supplementum* was a delineation of Catherine's inner spiritual life. The focus was on eucharistic piety[86] and on the stigmatization of Catherine and other contemporary saints.[87] On both these matters Thomas made considerable additions to the *Legenda maior*, but he had almost nothing new to add to Catherine's *vita activa.* In fact, there are only a few suggestions that Catherine even ever had a social life. [88] If a reader were only familiar with this *Supplementum*, s/he would think that Catherine was a contemplative nun. It may be that Raymond had already told all the imaginable events about Catherine's social life, and thus Thomas had nothing to add in that respect. Yet, it is more likely that Thomas made a conscious choice to emphasize the contemplative and mystical aspects of the saint's life. It seems that to him inner piety was far more pivotal in Catherine's sanctity than her good deeds and public acts. Surely this contemplative and mystical withdrawal from the world also better fit the traditional expectations of female piety as prayerful and contemplative. Thus Thomas may have chosen to underscore in his adaptations these elements that were more acceptable than Catherine's rather atypical public activities.

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83 As a concrete example of these two friars' treatment of Catherine's active life, one may study their account of Catherine's peace missions to Florence in 1378. Raymond treats them in detail on numerous occasions (*Legenda maior* 1866, 927–928, 945, 964, 965–966), whereas Thomas makes only two passing remarks (*Legenda minor* 1942, 108, 148). On Raymond's and Thomas's different emphases, see SORELLI 1992, 163–164.

84 Thomas repeatedly used the existence of Catherine's cult, her *fama sanctitas*, as a sign of her sanctity, see *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 28–31, 58–66.

85 *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 42–44, 49–54, 147–151, 171–175.

86 Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de supplemento* 1974, 75–120.

87 Ibid., 121-266. Imelda Foralosso suggests that this treatise on stigmata was written separately, see her introduction in Ibid., xxxvi.

88 Thomas briefly (in less than two printed pages) narrates only four events in Catherine's active life, namely the donation of her habit to a male beggar, a similar gift given to a female beggar, the drinking of the puss of Andrea's wound, and frequent visits to unnamed ailing women (perhaps Andrea, Tecca, and Palmerina). Only the gift to the female beggar was not mentioned in the *Legenda maior.* See Thomas of Siena, *Libellus de Supplemento* 1974, 33–34.

Thomas of Siena, any more than Raymond, did not denigrate the penitent way of life. Still, these friars fought an inner conflict about the public aspects inherent to it. While Raymond later supported religious models that limited interaction between religious women and secular people, Thomas popularized Catherine's cult by marginalizing social and political events that had been present in Raymond's *Legenda maior*. Raymond and Thomas were not alone. The religious atmosphere among the Dominicans, as well as in the whole of western Christianity, in the last decade of the fourteenth and in the first decades of the fifteenth century was increasingly ambivalent toward women's public roles in the church. Paradoxically, the cult of lay saints was at its peak at the very time that the Observant reforms of various religious orders strongly challenged the premises of secular piety.[89]

Yet, it is noteworthy that even with these evident tensions, this era did not yet witness the bloom of cloistered ideals for the Italian penitent way of life. Though religious lay women, mainly from Beguine backgrounds, had in Germany and other transalpine regions moved into communities as early as in the second half of the thirteenth century, in Italy the "monastication" of lay Dominicans did not take place for a few more centuries. Raymond, Thomas, and their contemporaries lived in a time when the Dominican penitent saints in the Italian peninsula still lived in their secular homes. These friars, although they called for the encloistering of nuns, did not yet include such an ideal about communal, or, even less, cloistered, housing for their penitents.

The Emergence of A Semi-Monastic Penitent Life

When the regular penitent orders received papal approval in 1517, there were already several Dominican penitent houses in Italy. Yet, it is unclear when the expectation of communal living surfaced among the Italian Dominican penitents. This important aspect in the order's history is yet to be studied in detail. While I acknowledge the need for a survey study about Dominican penitent communities, it has been beyond the scope of this present study to collect data about this phenomenon. Scholars who have researched Franciscan penitents have shown that communal housing emerged among these penitents as early as the second half of the thirteenth century, but particularly in the fourteenth century. By the fifteenth century communal housing was the common, if not necessarily typical, choice among the Franciscan penitents. Accordingly, the *vitae* of such popular Franciscan penitent saints as Margherita of Cortona (d. 1297), Angelina of Montegiove (d. 1435), and Colette of Corbie (d. 1447) reflect the ideals of semi-cloistered penitent life.[90]

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89 On the observant reform in the various late medieval religious orders, see *Reformbemuhungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen* 1989.

90 On the Franciscan penitent communities in Tuscany and Umbria, see respectively PAPI 1982 and CASAGRANDE 1982. On the papal documents as sources to the early history of penitent communities, see ODOARDI 1982. On the emergence of communal housing among the penitents in general, see ZARRI 1991, 92–95.

In the Dominican context, however, this regular way of life seems to have become popular only in the fifteenth century, particularly during the 1490s.[91] By the middle of that century there were some communal houses for the Dominican penitents, for example in the community of St-Lucia in Florence[92], in the parish of St-Stefano in Perugia,[93] and in the parish of St-Martino in Venice.[94] A few communities, such as the Dominican penitent house by St-Maria-Novella in Florence, were founded as early as in the first half of the fourteenth century.[95] Though further studies might reveal that community housing among Dominicans was more common than is presently assumed, there seems to have been considerable difference between the Franciscans and the Dominicans on this issue.[96] The delay on the Dominican side was surely in part related to their penitent order's unsettled official position. The creation of semi-monastic penitent communities may have been regarded as too institutionalized a development for a religious way of life that was yet to be papally sanctioned.

Still, Dominican hagiographic ideals about the regular, that is communal, penitent life were almost nonexistent until the late fifteenth century. Until then virtually all the Italian Dominican penitent saints lived in secular homes. In fact, Margherita of Savoy remains the sole example of a regular Dominican penitent saint from the period preceding the last decade of the fifteenth century. Even Margherita can only marginally be considered as a regular penitent since in 1448 she transformed her penitent community of St-Magdalene into a traditional second order monastery.[97] As for the earlier penitents, there is no indication that Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Sybillina of Pavia, Margherita of Città di Castello, Villana Botti, Catherine of Siena, Maria of Venice, Margherita Fontana, Magdalena Panatieri, or, for that matter, any of their companions would have intended to found or even join a penitent community. This absence of hagiographic portrayals about regular penitent life reveals that such living did not grow to be a religious *ideal*, a spiritual necessity, for Dominican penitents but in the last years of the Middle Ages.

Though the communal penitent life was neither a typical solution nor a hagiographic ideal until the late fifteenth century, it should not be concluded that the penitent women themselves were not at all attracted to the communal forms of religious life. In the case of the Dominican lay women, the communal alternative was not initially found in the open penitent houses, but instead in the traditional second order monasteries. In fact, several penitent women left their secular life behind to enter such a monastery. To these women, the penitent

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91 On the emergence of Dominican penitent communities, see CREYTENS 1976, 195. Unfortunately Creytens is more than vague about this phenomenon and its early phases. On the 1490s as a transitional period from secular housing into communities among the Dominicans, see CASAGRANDE 1991, 121. Guarnieri's entry of 1980 concerning Italian *pinzochere* fails to address the Dominican penitents' communal housing altogether.

92 DI AGRESTI 1980, 21.

93 CASAGRANDE 1991, 109–116.

94 SORELLI 1984b, 99–101. I wish to thank Fernanda Sorelli for kindly lending me a microfilm on the notarial material concerning St-Martino's penitent community.

95 ORLANDI 1955, 20.

96 CASAGRANDE 1991, 113–116, 121–130.

97 FEDELINI 1940, 58–66; DeGANAY 1926, 263.

habit turned out to be only a temporary solution, a passage on a journey to more traditional religious life.[98]

From the hagiographic sources we learn that several Dominican women entered a second order monastery after a period of time spent as a penitent. The Pisanese widows Maria Mancini and Chiara Gambacorta had both been penitents, though Chiara only for a short period and unofficially, before they first entered the monastery of St-Cross together around 1378, and then the strictly cloistered, reformed St-Dominic in 1385.[99] Some ten years later the Venetian penitents Isabetta and Astrologia, Maria of Venice's companions, also joined this latter religious house.[100] Thomas of Siena wrote in his testimony to *Il Processo* that many other women who were inspired by Catherine of Siena's example also took the penitent habit, but later exchanged it for the nun's garment.[101] The monastic life was seen as desirable by these women and their hagiographers for the possibilities that communal life offered for prayer and contemplation. These women's ultimate choice to join monasteries manifests the concept that penitent status did not always provide a clear enough separation from the world and that for many women this life in the world still remained an obstacle in one's efforts to live a spiritually fulfilling life.

The calling of the monastic life was even heard by those who actually never left behind their penitent status. Thomas of Siena speculated at length on Maria of Venice's desire to join the local, strictly encloistered monastery of Corpus Christi. Thomas stated that Maria herself would surely have joined this institution had it been possible to nullify her marriage to her absent husband.[102] Osanna of Mantua occasionally deserted her own home, which attracted too many visitors, to rest in the local convent of St-John.[103] Similarly Benvenuta Boiani had close ties with the nuns of Cividale's St-Mary-of-the-Cell. In fact, she even had her own room in this monastery, where she frequently withdrew to pray in peace.[104] Even Catherine of Siena might have regarded the cloistered life as the practicable ideal for women. For example, when one of her Sienese supporters, Nanni di Ser Vanni, donated the castle of Belcaro, one of his estates in the outskirts of Siena, to Catherine, she did not create there a haven for her fellow penitents, but

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98 TREXLER 1972, 1334, note 29.

99 Chiara Gambacorta's *vita* relates that for some time after her husband's death, she lived as a *pinzochera* in her father's home. Only after a long struggle her family finally gave her permission to enter the monastery of St-Cross and later to found St-Dominic in Pisa (1385) see *Vita della b. Chiara Gambacorta* 1914, 368–377. Maria Mancini followed a penitent life with her second husband and continued after his death. After an intense sequence of visions and ecstasies, Maria felt that contemplative monastic life would suit her better, Razzi 1605, 653–658.

100 Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 198.

101 "Quedam vero alie de dictis virginibus post habitus de penitentia B. Dominici assumptionem, in monasteriis tam Predicatorum, quam aliorum sub regulari observantia constitutis, tam in Senis quam in Pisis intrantes.", *Il Processo Castellano* 1942, 40.

102 "se non fosse suto el legame del marito, ella [Maria] per lo suo excessivo fervore sarebbe, penso, intrata nel monastero del Corpo di Cristo…" Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 198.

103 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 574.

104 *De B. Benvenuta de Bojanis* 1883, 158–159. On Benvenuta's close ties with the monastery of St-Mary-of-the-Cell, see also TILATTI 1994, 51–54. It was rather common for medieval monasteries to offer temporary boarding for non-members, TREXLER 1972, 1335.

instead founded a fully cloistered monastic community.[105]

Finally, the penitent vitae reveal uneasiness about the fact that penitent women did not formally take the three religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. It seems that, as compensation, the hagiographers frequently underscored was that their penitent saints mentally took these vows, and that they lived as if they would have been tied by the same commitments as the nuns. Raymond of Capua, for example, wrote about Catherine of Siena:

> As it was the saintly virgin did not take the three solemn vows when she took her habit (since, as has been said, these vows were not expected from the penitents). Nonetheless, she voluntarily promised firmly to follow them all.[106]

The solemn monastic vows clearly were taken as a sign of a fuller religious commitment than the simple vows of the lay people. Therefore it was still the monastic obligations that set the standards against which the perfection of the penitent life was measured. In fact, it seems that in this respect the penitent life was regarded as an incomplete version of a more obliging and binding monastic life.

These incidents reveal that the boundary between the monastic and the penitent ways of life was not rigidly drawn. The penitents imitated the commitments of the second order women, and some of them even actually entered monasteries as professed nuns. Despite the success of penitent way of life, its *raison d'être* was constantly challenged even by some penitent women themselves. Even if medieval penitent women and their hagiographers had found numerous ways to defend the pious life in the world, the presence of secular people and domestic concerns were still factors that many wanted to escape for a traditional contemplative life in a monastery. For these people the religious habit, devotional customs, and mental distance were, after all, not enough of a barrier between themselves and the world. The communal life in a traditional monastery was surely the most obvious alternative, although the possibility to enter religious houses remained limited.

By the turn of the sixteenth century another alternative for the secular penitent life had come into being, namely the communal way of penitent life. Indeed, at this time almost all those Dominican women who were revered as saints lived in the open monasteries of regular penitents. This shows that the ideal about penitent perfection had clearly changed from that of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries when the penitent saints still lived in their private homes. In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, Lucia Brocadelli of Narni, Colomba of Rieti, and Stefana Quinzani were all founders of open monasteries

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105 On Catherine's petition to the representatives of the Sienese *popolo* to attain the right to found her monastery, see *Documenti* 1936, 41–43. On the Belcaro monastery's privileges, see Thomas of Siena, *Tractatus* 1938, 25.

106 "Licet in sumptione dicti habitus, sancta virgo tria principalia religionis non emiserit vota (quia, ut dictum est, hoc in se status ille non habet) nihilominus firmiter proposuit in se ipsa, omnia illa vota servare perfecte." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 882. See also Thomas of Siena, *Leggenda di Maria* 1984, 171–173.

for penitents. Colomba of Rieti established her Perugian house in 1490, Lucia Bartolini created a penitent community in Florence in 1500, Lucia Brocadelli moved into her monastery for penitents in 1501, and Stefana Quinzani formed her religious community in Soncino in 1519.[107] Similarly, Domenica of Paradiso, as an unofficial Dominican penitent, was a founder of a penitent house in Florence. These women's new foundations coincided with the general increase of the religious houses. For example, while in 1428–29 there were only twenty female monasteries inside Florence's city walls, by 1543–45 there were already fourty-two houses for women.[108] This considerable increase of monasteries was in part simply connected to the overall population growth. Nonetheless, the time's economic and social instability also influenced the fact that life as a nun was seen as the safest available profession for unmarried women.[109] Therefore, the communal orientation of penitent women was part of a general orientation that favored collegial solutions for women's religious life.

The contacts between the regular penitent sisters and other lay people were clearly more restricted than those between the secular penitents and their contemporaries. The constitutions of Colomba of Rieti's religious house, for example, stipulated that the sisters should not leave the house but in extreme necessity.[110] The regular penitents took leave from their open monasteries principally to attend religious services, to work, and to perform charity. In the first decades of the sixteenth century the seclusion from the secular lay world was not yet strictly enforced. Therefore the houses of penitent women still remained at the crossroads of the secular and the monastic worlds. Moreover, Lucia Bartolini, Lucia Brocadelli, Stefana Quinzani, and many of their companions entered their communities only at a later age, after they had already experienced penitent life in the secular world, worked for their living, and possibly had been married and widowed. These regular penitents were, therefore, familiar with the religious life in the secular world, and they had formed firm social ties with the local communities. Nevertheless the fact that from this period's penitent saints only Osanna of Mantua and Catherine of Racconigi, as secular penitents, and Osanna of Cattaro, as a recluse, continued to pursue their lives outside a religious community conveys that the ideals about the penitent life had clearly gone through a transformation toward communal life. Sanctity and communal life were now clearly inter-linked, whereas in the earlier decades the saintly penitent life had taken place in the secular world.

The person who had strongest influence on the fates of the later Dominican penitent women was Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498), a Dominican friar from Ferrara, a visionary and a religious and political reformer of Florence in 1490s. This friar's influence on the Dominican religious life was enormous in northern

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107 See p. 62–63.

108 TREXLER 1972, 1333.

109 ZARRI 1984, 233; Idem 1986, 364–366.

110 " Ultimo voleva [Colomba] non se ne andasse fuora del monasterio senza grande necessità et maxime le più giovene et le feste non voleva che se andasse fuora excetto a la chiesa …[?] audire el divino hofitio e le messe et prediche et dettece…" The Constitutions of Colomba, Ch. 21, as edited in CASAGRANDE 1991, 147.

Italy, even after his execution as a heretic and a traitor.[111] Savonarola was interested in the piety of secular and religious women alike: he created spiritual treatises for women, made plans for the reform of Florentine religious houses, wrote letters of spiritual guidance to his female followers, and preached sermons of spiritual reform to large crowds of women.[112] Accordingly, a good number of Savonarola's contemporary penitent women were either directly or indirectly connected with him and his followers. Lucia Bartolini Rucellai received her habit from Savonarola's hands,[113] while Lucia Brocadelli's patron Ercole I d'Este held correspondence with the Ferrarese friar, his compatriot.[114] Osanna of Mantua's two biographers, Francesco Silvestri and Girolamo Scolari, were both influenced by Savonarola, as was Sebastiano Bontempi, Colomba of Rieti's hagiographer.[115] Also Stefana Quinzani's spiritual life was nurtured by the Savonarolan spirit of moral and political reform, apocalyptic visions, and disciplined devotional practices.[116] Finally, Domenica of Paradiso, though ill at ease with the Dominicans of San Marco (Florence), was also deeply influenced by Savonarola's message.[117]

Savonarola preached to lay and religious women alike, but he perceived these two estates clearly separated from each other. While the secular people could, according to Savonarola, live moral Christian lives in the world primarily by avoiding luxurious costumes and vain pastimes, the perfect religious life took place in separation from the world. Therefore, Savonarola perceived that all religious women, whether professed nuns or penitents, better achieved their spiritual goals when they were physically set apart from secular society.[118] Savonarola emphasized women's prayers, visions, and contemplation over their actions. Their visions had often political implications and their prayers were seen as protection for society, but their direct physical involvement was seen as detrimental to their spiritual focus.[119]

The changing ideals were also manifested in new norms for the penitents. Munio of Zamora's original *Rule* for the Dominican penitents (1285) served as the unchallenged basis to the penitent life for over two centuries. This *Rule*, however, made no stipulations concerning communal life. Its author had clearly not anticipated that the home-dwelling penitents would one day live in semi-monastic communities. Accordingly, this first *Rule* gave no guidance to the

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111 The classic biography about Savonarola is RIDOLFI 1952.

112 On Savonarola and the reform of women's religious life specifically in Florence, see KENT 1983, 335–341. On Savonarola and women's reform in general, see POLIZZOTTO 1996 , 229–244 and Di AGRESTI 1980, 19–26.

113 CREYTENS 1969, 127–128.

114 Girolamo Savonarola, *Lettere* 1984, 96–97, 116–117, 125–127, 141–144, 170–172, and 203–204.

115 ZARRI 1990, 120–122. On the Savonarolan spirit of Colomba of Rieti's prophesies, see LEONARDI 1991.

116 GUERRINI 1930, 76–78.

117 VALERIO 1994, 500–501. See also Idem, 1992, 15.

118 POLIZZOTTO 1996, 232.

119 On Savonarola's influence on the segregation of religious women from secular society, see POLIZZOTTO 1996, 235–236 and VALERIO 1992, 107. Savonarola wrote in his *Regola a tutti i religiosi* that prayer, contemplation, and claustration were basic elements in any religious life, Di AGRESTI 1980, 26.

rituals and customs of communal life.[120] Therefore, the emergence of penitent houses created a need for a new set of rules. Presently it seems that the constitutions that were drafted for Colomba of Rieti's community in Perugia in 1490s represent the first *modus vivendi* for communal penitents. This constitution focused on the practical delegation of tasks: from its total of twenty-four chapters fourteen (chapters 2–15) treated community's various offices.[121] The more full-fledged *modus vivendi*, that shall also be analyzed here, came from Lucia Bartolini's community in Florence. When Lucia was founding her penitent community in Florence, she turned to the nearby Dominicans of San Marco to receive guidance for a regular penitent life. As a result of this request she and her associates received a set of mandatory precepts, the so-called *Directions* (*Il Direttorio*), from a friar of San Marco, Roberto Ubaldini.[122] Initially this text did not have a rule's authority, nevertheless it was put in practice in Lucia Bartolini's community. Finally, in 1542 it was conformed as the official rule for all regular penitents.[123]

How did Ubaldini's *Directions* then differ from Munio's original *Rule*? Firstly, a comparison of these two texts shows that the new 'rules' emphasized much more the liturgical life than the earlier version had done. The regular sisters of Lucia's St-Catherine-of-Siena house performed the entire Divine Office, and they were requested to take the Eucharist at least eighteen times a year, whereas the secular sisters were obliged to recite only modified parts of Divine Office and to receive Eucharist four times annually. Moreover, the regular sisters' liturgical prayers were communally performed in the church choir, while the earlier penitents could recite theirs privately.[124] Thirdly, as one could expect, the *Directions* contained numerous stipulations about the communal life such as its daily rhythm, distribution of tasks, and shared possession of goods, all of which were lacking in the earlier *Rule*.[125] Communication with secular people was restricted to supervised meetings and absences from the community were limited to religious purposes and to charity. The use of the Dominican habit was naturally prescribed, but the habit as an emblem of the religious life had much less weight than it had had in the secular life.[126]

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120 On Munio of Zamora's *Rule* for the Dominican penitents, see p. 77–83.

121 On the dating of the Perugian constitutions, see ZARRI 1991, 102–104 and CASAGRANDE 1991, 135–137. For the printed constitutions of Colomba's house, see CASAGRANDE 1991, 142–147.

122 On Lucia Bartolini's community, see CREYTENS 1969, 128–130. On Roberto Ubaldini himself, see Ibid., 131–141. On the comparison between the Perugian text and that by Ubaldini, see CASAGRANDE 1991, 130–137.

123 CREYTENS 1976, 197.

124 Roberto Ubaldini, *Il Direttorio* 1969 Ch. II, III, IV, 148–150 (on divine office); Ch. V, 151 (on communion). On Dominican penitents' *Rule*, see p. 80.

125 The community was supervised by a prioress, a subprioress, and their vicars. There was also a mistress for novices, an assigned nurse, and a gatekeeper. On this delegation of tasks, see Roberto Ubaldini, *Il Direttorio* 1969, Ch. XVII, XVIII, XX, XXIII, XXIIII, 149–164. As to the daily rhythm, the sisters had set times for resting and they ate communally, see Ibid., Ch. VII, 153 and Ch. XI, 155.

126 Ibid., Ch. X,154 (taking of the habit); Ch. XXII, 163 (blessing of the habit). As a sign that the habit played a proportionally lesser role for the regular penitents than for the secular, one may take the fact the habit is mentioned fairly late and only briefly in Ubaldini's *Directions*,

Even the understanding of manual labor moved toward monastic conceptions of work. While the secular penitents had characteristically engaged themselves with domestic tasks, the regular sisters were to produce handiwork, or bind and illustrate books, just as scores of nuns had done before them.[127] Finally, the customs of regular penitents imitated those of nuns. For example, these sisters shaved their heads like the professed nuns, and they were encouraged to observe the three monastic vows.[128] Though the secular sisters, as was studied earlier, tended to behave as if they had taken the religious vows, their *Rule* had prescribed nothing of the kind. Moreover, the secular penitents did not shave their heads officially, though many young girls voluntarily answered their calling by cutting of their hair.[129]

Ubaldini's *Directions* reflects the sentiments of its time. It called for a semi-monastic life style and for penitent women's imitation of the encloistered nuns. It called for restricted interaction between the penitent women and lay people. It called for firmly described rites and it underscored the liturgical aspects of the religious life. Yet, these *Directions* did not prescribe strict encloisterment. The women's physical contact with the secular world was still seen spiritually beneficial for their surrounding communities, and for women themselves, on the condition that this contact was regulated and directed for good causes. It was still part of the regular penitents' daily lives to interact with local people and to take part personally in their community's lives.

The cult of Catherine of Siena offers one further point of view to the new emphasis placed on the penitent ideals in the early sixteenth century. This Sienese saint was canonized in 1461. By the end of that century she was the unchallenged symbol for Dominican piety, which is hardly surprising, since she was, and still remains, the only canonized medieval Dominican *pinzochera*.[130] For the new aspirants of this piety, Catherine personified the Dominican lay order. Accordingly, it is a repeated feature in the *vitae* of the later penitents to narrate a vision in which they received the penitent habit directly from Catherine herself. It is as if Catherine would had been the order's heavenly gatekeeper whose personal favors were necessary for legitimate entry. Colomba of Rieti, Stefana Quinzani, and Domenica of Paradiso perceived the Dominican Third Order habit as the habit of Catherine of Siena.[131] Even secular contemporaries saw the

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whereas Munio's *Rule* for the penitents had started with a lengthy description about the taking of the habit, see p. 78–80.

127 Ubaldini describes regular penitents' appropriate occupations: "Li exercitii vostri sieno honesti come è filare oro, seta, lino et simil cose, texere, cucire, incannare, addoppiare et simili altri, scrivere anchora, miniare et ricamare." Roberto Ubaldini, *Direttorio* 1969, Ch. XV, 158.

128 Ibid., Ch. XII, 156 (tonsure); Ch. XXV, 164–166 the (the three vows, which were still taken only semi-officially).

129 Catherine of Siena shaved her head to show her parents that she was serious about her religious calling, Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 874. Colomba of Rieti imitated Catherine in this act, see Sebastiano Bontempi, *De b.Columba Reatina* 1866, 157*.

130 Catherine was enormously popular even beyond the Italian peninsula. In Germany, for example, she stood as an emblem of Dominican observant reform. Werner Williams-Krapp has argued that in medieval Germany Catherine's popularity exceeded even that of Dominic himself, see WILLIAMS-KRAPP 1998, 149, 159–165.

131 *Leggenda volgare de la beata Stefana Quinzani* 1930, 99 (Stefana Quinzani); Sebastiano Bontempi, *De b.Columba Reatina* 1866, 163* (Colomba of Rieti); VALERIO 1992, 14, 105 (Domenica of Paradiso).

Dominican penitent order through Catherine. For example, when a Perugian chronicler wrote about Colomba of Rieti, he described this young saint in the following way: ”she followed Catherine of Siena’s path and footprints.”[132] Domenica of Paradiso’s claim that she had personally received the Dominican penitent dress as a gift directly from the Sienese saint was a most striking declaration, since she otherwise claimed independence from the order.[133]

Furthermore, Catherine was evoked as a heavenly protector of the houses for regular penitents. At least in Florence, Ferrara, Pistoia, Ferrara, Perugia, and Soncino there were penitent communities bearing the name of Catherine of Siena in the beginning of sixteenth century. It is emblematic of the spirit of the times that Catherine, a secular penitent herself, now stood as a common patron for the houses of regular penitents.[134]

The Dominican penitents also mirrored their religious lives on Catherine’s experiences. Saints like Colomba of Rieti, Osanna of Mantua, and Stefana Quinzani have even been called ‘second Catherines’ by their contemporaries.[135] It is indeed clear that these saints from the turn of the sixteenth century strongly identified themselves with Catherine. When we inquire further, however, it becomes evident that these women were selective about which aspects of Catherine’s sanctity they associated themselves. The evidence suggests that while the later *beatae* commemorated Catherine’s mysticism and her visionary spirituality, her active piety was deemed less important. The similar trend can also be found, as Sara Matthews Grieco has suggested, in the iconography depicting Catherine. While the saint was represented in the fifteenth century art as an active saint, the later iconography focused on her ecstatic spirituality.[136] .

The early sixteenth century penitent vitae contain numerous parallels with Catherine’s *Life*. Similar to Catherine, Osanna of Mantua experienced her own mystical marriage to Christ, she changed hearts with her heavenly spouse, she carried the pains of Christ’s passion in her body, and finally she received the stigmata.[137] Colomba of Rieti imitated Catherine’s food asceticism, the cutting

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132 ”questa [Colomba] seguiva la via et vestigi di Santa Catherina da Siena.” Francesco Matarazzo, *Cronaca della Città di Perugia* 1851, 5.

133 POLIZZOTTO 1993, 505–506 and VALERIO 1992, 15. The Dominicans reacted strongly against Domenica’s self-authorized use of penitent habit. Domenica later distinguished her habit from the traditional Dominican vestige with a red cross in the breast of the dress. Nevertheless, the Master General, Thomas Caitani, forbade all communication between friars and this self-styled Dominican in 1509: ”Item sub simili praecepto, nullus adeat dictam sororem Dominicam, nec ei ministret sacramentum aliquod, nec loquatur, nisi forte in transitum unicum verbum respondendo ad interrogationem; nec possit in aliquo collegio, monasterio vel loco ordinis recipi.” Thomas Caitani, *Registrum litterarum fr. Thomae* 1935, 122.

134 Lucia’s foundation, St-Catherine-of-Siena in Florence (1500) was preceded by two homonymous houses in Ferrara and Pistoia, see *De B. Lucia Bartolini Rucellai* 1883, 205 and CREYTENS 1969, 129–130. The second house in Ferrara that was dedicated to Catherine of Siena was founded by Ercole I d’ Este for Lucia Brocadelli in 1501, see MATTER 1996, 171. Colomba’s St-Catherine-of-Siena in Perugia dates back to 1490, see Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 175*. In 1519 Stefana Quinzani founded her house that was named after saints Paul and Catherine of Siena, see GUERRINI 1930, 80.

135 Particularly Gabriella Zarri has emphasized these similitudes, see ZARRI 1990, 69, 90, 95, 97, 104, 109, 112, 114, 119, 120, 121, 122, and 123.

136 GRIECO 1994, 317–320.

137 Francesco Silvestri, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1867, 578–580.

of her hair as a sign of her vocation, and by her nightly flagellation.[138] This saint even died as Catherine did: at the age of thirty-three with horrible pains that resembled Christ's pains in the cross.[139] While Stefana Quinzani and Catherine of Racconigi experienced their mystical marriage to Christ in the presence of Catherine herself, [140] Lucia Brocadelli too relived the mystical betrothal to Christ,[141] and her stigmata were presented as a personal favor from Catherine.[142] Moreover, it was common for all these saints to receive visions about Catherine.[143] In short, Catherine was indubitably a saint with whom the later Dominican penitent saints associated themselves. In fact, Catherine's model was even cherished by mystics from other orders as well. For example, an Augustinian tertiary Elene of Udine (d.1458) modeled her behavior in likeness of Catherine.[144] Penitent women relived Catherine's mysticism, and they were guided by her in their visions. And yet, there is no indication that they would have directly taken Catherine's active way of life as their role model. Though Osanna, two Lucias, Catherine of Racconigi, and Stefana Quinzani also performed acts of charity (directed toward bodies as well as toward souls) there is no explicit reference in the *vitae* that they would have seen themselves as 'second Catherines' in these acts.

Osanna, Stefana, Colomba, Lucia Bartolini, Catherine of Racconigi, Domenica of Paradiso, and Lucia Brocadelli were spiritual guides for their local communities and the advisors of ruling families. Yet, the ways in which they proceeded in these tasks were distinct from those of Catherine of Siena. Firstly, these women had close ties mainly to their immediate supporters and local communities, whereas they felt less concerned about the overall state of Christianity. They were concerned about the well being and political stability of their cities, rather than about such global issues as the unification of Christendom for a crusade that had been so important for Catherine. Similar to Catherine, Osanna, and Stefana also wrote letters of spiritual guidance, but their recipients were primarily their patrons.[145] Moreover, Stefana, Osanna, Colomba, both Lucias, as well as the recluse saint Osanna of Cattaro were also much more sedentary than their Sienese predecessor was. They all were familiar with the secular life in which they had remained until early adulthood, but as religious they settled in one definite place from which they also exercised their communal roles. Unlike Catherine, they rarely took part personally in political negotiations. They rather

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138 Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866 156* (food asceticism), 158* (the cutting of her hair), and 160* (nightly flagellations).

139 Ibid., 211*-214*.

140 *Leggenda volgare de la beata Stefana* 1930, 92-93 (Stefana); Morelli-Pico, *Compendio delle cose mirabili* 1680, 6–9, 23–26 (Catherine of Racconigi). .

141 Razzi 1577, 151.

142 ZARRI 1990, 59.

143 Colomba was consoled by a vision of Catherine in her deathbed, Sebastiano Bontempi, *De B. Columba Reatina* 1866, 214*. Osanna had visions about Catherine and Colomba together, *De B. Osanna Andreasi* 1866, 574, 585. Catherine of Racconigi had a vision of her namesake in which this saint brought her white and red roses that symbolized respectively purity and Christ's love, Razzi 1577, 128–129.

144 TILATTI 1994, 125.

145 On these saintly women's correspondence, see p. 112.

made their visions public through reliable messengers and supporters. These early sixteenth century saints were also characteristically known for their visions and prophesies rather than for direct acts of conversion (curing souls) or of charity, both of which had been so characteristic for Catherine. Whereas Catherine's *vita,* the *Legenda maior,* devotes almost the whole of the lengthy second book (of three) to her acts directed toward other people, the *vitae* of the sixteenth century saints emphasize visions and the soul's private interaction with the Divine.

Yet, these penitent women were still quite different again from the saintly women revered by the Counter-Reformation church after the 1530s. While Stefana, Osanna, Colomba, both Lucias, and Domenica of Paradiso had principally interiorized Catherine's mystical and contemplative spirituality, they still exercised, though less directly than Catherine did, communal and even political roles. The real change of paradigm in the Dominican order, as Gabriella Zarri has pointed out, can be observed in the Dominican nun Catherine de'Ricci. Catherine de' Ricci (1523–1590) too was an imitator of Catherine, but her life was that of pure contemplation and mysticism, lived out in the monastery of St-Vincent in Prato.[146] In Catherine de' Ricci'a lifetime the entire Catholic church was moving toward an ever-strengthening preference for the encloistered communal life.

Finally in the 1560s encloisterment was universally extended to encompass the open monasteries of regular penitents as well. The constitution *Circa pastoralis* (29. May 1566) that obliged the religious houses of the nuns and the penitents alike to accept full enclosure was the final step in this gradual process.[147] At this time it was actually the papacy, rather than the religious orders themselves, that pushed forth the ideals of absolute encloisterment for all female religious houses. In fact several religious orders, among who were the Dominicans, favored more a lenient approach that would have allowed some houses to remain open. The representatives of mendicant orders were all too aware that numerous female houses of theirs did not have sufficient financial means to endure strict encloisterment.[148] Nonetheless, the hierarchical church remained firm in its resolution to establish universal encloisterment for its penitents. In practice numerous religious houses did manage to remain at least semi-open, but in doing so they were acting contrary to the pontiffs' resolutions.

Marginalizing Lay Women's Religious Contributions

The development of the Dominican penitent order toward a more contemplative, communal, and, eventually, cloistered life can be traced through its numerous manifestations. It is, however, much more difficult to decipher why exactly this

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146 ZARRI 1990, 97–98.

147 On the *Circa pastoralis*, see CREYTENS 1965, esp. 62–70. On the gradual strengthening of cloister legislation, see CAIN 1968, 267–270 and MAKOWSKI 1997, particularly 122–129.

148 CREYTENS 1965, 58–59; 75.

development took place. While medieval hagiographers addressed reasons for a penitent's choice to remain in the world, they evidently felt little need to explain why some penitents eventually decided for a communal and less secular way of religious life. Clearly the secular penitent life in homes needed to be defended and explained, whereas communal life away from the world was seen, despite the fact that it obviously marked a radical change in the penitent order, as a religious choice that needed no further justifications. Likewise strengthening the standards of encloisterment, first for the second order houses, later for those of penitents, was treated by the Dominicans as a matter that barely needed further explanations. Needless to say, my portrayal of penitent piety in the world would remain incomplete if I were not to try to understand the reasons that might lay behind these later communal developments, even when the medieval authors fail to provide us with their own reasoning. Why was contemplative female piety less controversial than women's *vita activa*? What did the cloister stand for besides the segregation of women from men, and religious from secular?

The Dominicans were not alone in their increasing segregation of religious women from the world. On the contrary, other religious orders and the hierarchical church at large were underscoring women's contemplative piety. In fact, in these sixteenth century reforms, religious orders lost some of their earlier autonomy to the episcopacy and accordingly transformation in Dominican women's religious lives did not reflect only, or even primarily, the attitudes of the Dominicans, but also those of popes, bishops, and secular clergy.[149]

A proper incorporation of the home-dwelling penitents to the Dominican order had necessitated the friars' active involvement in these women's lives. The confessors were penitent women's principal contacts with the order. When the confessor was active, the penitent was likely to have strong ties with the Dominican family, whereas a negligent confessor easily alienated the penitent from the order. Indeed, many Dominican confessors formed strong bonds with their penitents: Conrad of Castellerio with Benvenuta Boiani, Raymond of Capua with Catherine of Siena, Thomas of Siena with Maria of Venice, Francesco Silvestri with Osanna of Mantua, just to mention a few examples of the mutually rewarding relationship between a Dominican friar and a female mystic. The confessors' obligations toward home-dwelling penitents, when performed diligently, were time-consuming. On some occasions, such as at masses and in collective meetings, it was possible for the friars to address the penitents as a group. On most other occasions, however, the confessors addressed the needs that arose from individuals' specific concerns: a young penitent would need support in convincing her family about her calling, a saintly individual begged for the right to receive frequent communion, an impoverished penitent had nowhere to lodge, a wife needed help in keeping her husband at bay, just to mention a few examples. The variety of penitents' individual concerns surely consumed the confessors' time and brought them in personal relationships with

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149 ZARRI 1986, 383–385, 427. On the pressure for enclosure in other female orders, also in such new sixteenth century creations as the Ursulites, see Idem 1994, 208–215.

the penitent women.[150] These close ties did not, however, appear all that pleasing to some Dominican officials.

There were the perennial concerns about chastity in the context of these relationships that involved close male-female co-operation, even when both partners were in religious orders. The Dominicans, not unlike the other religious orders, had tried to regulate the interaction between the friars and religious women since the order's founding years. One of the reasons was that *cura mulierum* was detrimental for the peace of friars' minds. This underlying tendency had, however, not hindered the Dominicans from actually creating intimate ties with spiritually oriented women. Therefore it seems hardly convincing to me that the changes at the end of the fourteenth century, when *nuns'* strict encloisterment was emphasized, and in the end of fifteenth century, when *penitent* communities became popular, could be explained merely as newly rekindled distrust about women's sexuality. In fact, it seems that reasons for the development toward communal penitent life can chiefly be found in the late medieval attempts to standardize and rationalize women's religious lives.[151]

One of the chief problems in *cura mulierum* from the friars' viewpoint was that it was time-consuming and seemed to take away from their primary obligations, namely study and preaching.[152] The religious communities simply demanded less of friars' time than did the secular penitents, especially if the communities were strictly encloistered. While the needs of individual home-dwelling penitents, visits to their homes, and the monitoring of these women's orthodoxy demanded personal input and time from the friars, the supervisors of religious houses hardly ever met the sisters privately. The strictly encloistered nuns heard masses collectively and received communion through the grate, the only time a sister actually met with the community's confessor was at her death bed, when she received the last rites. Since a major concern in the Dominican order after the Black Death was the shortage of trained and disciplined recruits,[153] it is hardly surprising that Observant reformers welcomed such religious alternatives for women's religious life that called for less attention from the friars. Though the early penitent communities did not call for the extreme measures of strictly cloistered monasteries, they, nevertheless, required less personal care from the friars. Consequently the tradition of intensive relationships between friar confessors and female mystics waned. Indeed, the hagiographers of communal penitents reveal far less personal involvement with their protagonists than earlier writers, such as Raymond and Thomas, did. This

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150 On the cooperation of Dominican friars and female mystics, see p. 38 and note 60.

151 Gabriella Zarri has emphasized that the reform of women's religious life has to be studied in the context of the contemporary political and institutional changes, see ZARRI 1986, 380. Along the same lines, Katherine Gill has argued that the discussion about women's encloisterment needs to move away from their sexual natures to underlying economic reasons, particularly to changes in women's political and social roles, GILL 1996, 178. For a recent collection of essays that study late medieval Italy's female monasteries from the viewpoint of their institutional structure, local impact, and social history, see *Il monachesimo femminile in Italia* 1997.

152 On Dominican friars' earlier reluctance to incorporate penitent women in the order, see p. 36–37.

153 HINNEBUSCH 1965, 327–330.

increasing distance between regular penitents and their confessors was, for example, reflected in the production of hagiographies. The identity of Stefana Quinzani's biographer is altogether unknown,[154] and several other communal penitent saints – such as Lucia Bartolini Rucellai, Lucia Brocadelli, not to mention their less known saintly companions – never formed intimate ties with a confessor who would have created a hagiographic document of their lives.[155]

Administrative rationalization, as churchmen perceived it, was one of principal reasons that called for a communal, and eventually cloistered, penitent life. Another organizational need was of no less significance, namely the need to impose greater social control on the penitent women. It was difficult, if not impossible, to impose strict control over the home-dwelling penitents. Though there are rarely any indications that the Italian penitents would have encountered similar difficulties with secular and clerical authorities that the Beguines of northern Europe did, the concern for heresy also kept the Italian churchmen alert about penitents' activities.[156] Especially during the restless times of sixteenth century, when Protestant criticism shattered the universal Catholic church, the need to ensure the loyalty of the Catholic church's own members was made all the more manifest. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that the mid-sixteenth century Council of Trent imposed strict encloisterment, and thus greater control, on all its female houses, penitent and monastic alike.

Finally, enclosure should be understood in the context of the medieval church's constant efforts to define and redefine what it meant to be 'religious', as opposed to a member of the laity. The mures of the cloister drew a clear line between the seculars and the religious by keeping the lay people away from the sacred space (the so-called 'passive enclosure'), and, correspondingly, limiting the monastery's inmates' exits to the secular world (the so-called 'active enclosure'). Thus, these two estates were marked farther apart from each other than had been possible in the case of the secular penitents who mingled with religious and non-religious alike.[157] The enclosure was indispensably connected with another aspect of religious life, namely with the three solemn vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience.[158] Therefore the reforms were not only directed to encloistering religious communities, but also to attaining vows from their inmates. The irreversibility of the solemn vows in its turn meant that a community was likely to enjoy a greater economic and social stability because the vow of individual poverty brought about the communal ownership. While the medieval church had encompassed a variety of religious professions, the church at the turn of the sixteenth century looked for more exclusive and uniform ways to define what

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154 GUERRINI 1930, 71–74.

155 There has apparently been a contemporary *vita* of Lucia Brocadelli, but it has since been lost. This hagiography was not, however, created by a confessor who would have based his account on personal encounters with the saint, but instead by a certain Archangelo of Vidana who was moved by a more general interest to write hagiographies of Dominican female saints, see ZARRI 1990, 134, note 65.

156 On various conflicts between Beguines and churchmen, see p. 33. On the Italian penitents' better relationship with the authorities, see GUARNIERI 1980, 1721.

157 On the sixteenth century's reform as the creation of clearer boundaries between secular and religious, see PROSPERI 1977, 159–163.

158 CREYTENS 1965, 75–77.

being a religious meant.[159] Whereas the medieval church had given considerable attention to the semi-religious female groups, such as the secular penitents, the early modern church insisted on the importance of the three solemn vows, communal possession, and enclosure as signs of religious vocation. Therefore also the penitent order was increasingly seen in these monastic terms.

In the last decades of the Middle Ages the penitents were not the only semi-institutional lay associations that were threatened by the reforms. Also other lay associations, such as monasteries' *conversi*, independent anchorites, and Beguines, were losing their foothold among the officially sanctioned forms or religious life.The uninstitutionalized lay associations had created flexible conditions for the lay religious life, but it turned out to be precisely this elasticity that created conflicts with some of the authorities. Speaking in the context of *conversi* Duana Osheim sums up the dilemma that troubled several other lay associations as well:

> This desire for an elastic loosely defined [religious] status was running counter to perhaps the most important trend in late medieval society -the movement within both secular and ecclesiastical institutions to define the border between secular and religious society and to define the relationships of individuals to institutions.[160]

The economic and institutional reasons for the communal and also the cloistered life were supported by spiritual ideals. Though penitent piety had challenged the supremacy of a purely contemplative life, encloisterment was still seen as a means to protect the purity and focus of religious life.[161] The defenders of the cloister saw segregation from the world as a freedom rather than as a restriction. Though the defenders of the penitent life had emphatically argued that vagaries and secular occupations were not a hindrance on the road to perfection, the age-old ideal that spiritual perfection required a cessation of external, practical, activities was favored by many.

In fact, the religious communities were often profitable to women's spiritual and social lives, and thus many women themselves had actively worked in founding communities. In a nurturing community women were able to attain an autonomy that they rarely found in their secular homes. These communities also protected their members from unsolicited approaches and created an atmosphere that stimulated not only spiritual but also artistic expression.[162]

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159 In the early modern era the polymorphism of the Catholic religious life was seen as a problem not only by Protestants but even by Catholic reformers themselves, see ZARRI 1984, 207. Since the fifteenth century the churchmen had aimed at defining religious life more narrowly and institutionally than in the earlier centuries. These re-definitions excluded women, a tendency which was clearly strengthened in the course of the sixteenth century, see Idem 1994, 179–183, and passim.

160 OSHEIM 1983, 386.

161 The spiritual benefits of the cloister have, for example, been outlined by the Dominican historian William Hinnebusch: "For both friars and nuns the cloister had wider purposes than the protection of chastity. By preventing the frequent visits of externs, it safe-guarded the atmosphere of prayer, recollection, silence, and mortification that were so necessary for the perfect fulfillment of the monastic life." HINNEBUSCH 1965, 135.

162 On the positive impact of monastic life on women, see p. 56 and note 3. See also JOHNSON 1991, 142–149. One example of a reknown Dominican artist and a nun can be found from the

Nonetheless, the increasing segregation of women's communities from the world made this collegial housing economically and socially challenging for women. Strict encloisterment forced communities into a dependence upon public assistance, often with the unfortunate result of the monastery falling into extreme poverty. Also the fact that encloisterment sealed women away from their families was undesirable for both the nuns and their families, both of whom lost important social contacts.[163] Moreover, encloisterment easily implied that a community was deprived not only of its economic means and social contacts, but also of its spiritual guidance. Accordingly, several female communities struggled, often successfully, to maintain the privileges of their open monastery. Therefore the universal encloisterment of female houses remained more a clerical ideal than a reality even in the sixteenth century.[164]

It seems that emerging religious movements rather welcomed women's active input, whereas the established organizations were more hostile toward women's direct social roles. The uninstitutionalized movements had a fluidity that widened women's freedom of expression. Indeed, the state of religious or social transformation was often a moment when women were able to emerge from their traditional roles. Moreover, numerous new movements tended initially to permit women's and men's co-operation, as well as interaction between lay people and religious. The institutionalization of these movements, however, often brought about demands for greater segregation between the sexes and social groups.[165] For example such wandering preachers of the eleventh and twelfth centuries as Norbert of Xanten and Robert of Arbrissel initially encouraged their female followers to take active roles. Soon after the foundation of Robert's community at Fontevrault and Norbert's at Prémontré the women were marginalized. While these organizations had initially welcomed a wide range of women's religious expression – women's prayer and meditation were complemented by their administrative tasks, neighborly service, and even pastoral care, – they soon grew to favor female piety that was predominantly contemplative.[166] Similarly, I would argue, the Dominican penitent order developed more restricted roles for women only after the third order was institutionally established. Communal housing was a means to separate the sexes from each other, as well as to draw a clearer boundary between the laity and the members of the penitent order. While this need to distance women from direct

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St-Catherine-of-Siena in Florence (the same house that had been founded by Lucia Bartolini Rucellai), namely Plautilla Nelli (1523–1587/88). On Plautilla Nelli, see Chris Petteys: *Dictionary of Women Artists.* G.K. Hall & Co., Boston, MA 1985.

163 Women remained dependent on their families' support even inside monasteries, see ZARRI 1986, 386. The poorer the monastery less likely it was to follow strict cloister that would have sealed the inmates away from their families and other supporters, Ibid., 388. The interconnection of strict enclosure and economic difficulties of female monasteries had a long history, see SCHULENBURG 1984, 77–78, and passim. On women's protests against strict enclosure, see ZARRI 1994, 208–210.

164 On the monasteries that avoided encloisterment even in the sixteenth century, see CREYTENS 1963, 70–74; 77–78. On open monasteries in the preceding centuries, see GILL 1996, 177, 179–193.

165 On the negative effects of the Church's institutionalization on women's religious lives, see BOLTON 1973, 77–81.

166 See p...

social involvement was characteristic to the established Dominican penitent institution of the fifteenth century, it had not been typical in the organization's earlier stages.

The emphasis on women's visionary and prayerful religious life was not only a question of the changing religious atmosphere. On the contrary, as was discussed before, the penitent women faced a great deal of criticism from secular people already from the beginning of the order's existence. However, at the turn of the sixteenth century, the negative attitudes about women's social actions were more pronounced than ever before. One reason for this was simply that the ways of organizing society were changing. The emergence of modern professionalism particularly challenged the importance of women's active social roles. In the Middle Ages female healers, visionary advisors, and spiritual teachers had complemented existing male-dominated institutions. By the turn of the sixteenth century the emerging medical, educational, and political professions challenged the previous co-existence of institutional and extra-institutional power centers, with the result that many traditional social activities of women were marginalized, even demonized.[167] Medical doctors monopolized the healing institution partly by condemning women's roles in curing. Some of those women who, in previous decades, might have been seen as powerful healers, were in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries condemned as witches. The political advisors of kings displaced saintly visionaries at court, and university-trained teachers strengthened their position as the standard-bearers of professional education.[168]

This professionalization was one further reason behind the growing distrust toward women's active roles in society. Women's spiritual roles, such as prayer and contemplation, continued to be accepted because they interfered less directly with the new social institutions. Nevertheless, secular institutions of the early modern era never totally marginalized the social influence of the religious orders. In fact, from the second half of the sixteenth century established religious orders were sided by new religious associations that were created to fulfil relatively narrowly defined social tasks. While the Ursulites, for example, were primarily responsible for women's education, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, the Barnabites, and the Angelites focused on charity.[169] These new orders of the early modern era took up many responsibilities that the older orders had fulfilled in the Middle Ages by specializing in some specific tasks. Thus the ideal of *vita activa* in secular society was not totally eradicated from the church, but it rather found its way to new professionalized religious orders.

167 On *pinzochere* as healers, see HERLIHY 1985, 164–165

168 On the negative impact of professionalization and modernization on women's working life, see HERLIHY 1990, 185–191. Joan Kelly has argued, primarily in the bases of literary images and control of women's sexuality, that already since late fourteenth century, but particularly in the fifteenth century women's social options were narrowing, see KELLY-GADOL 1987. As a reconsideration of Kelly's famous question " Did women have renaissance?", Herlihy has argued that inside religion the later Middle Ages was still an era of charismatic female prophets and mystics, see HERLIHY 1985, 15–16.

169 On social and spiritual roles of The Order of the Visitation, the Barnabites, the Angelites, and othe new religious associations, see *Religious Orders of the Catholic Reformation.* Edited by Richard DeMolel. (Fordham University Press, New York 1994).

Paradoxes in Lay Piety

At the turn of the sixteenth century the *vitae* of Dominican women, as well as related prescriptive sources – such as papal bulls or new *modi vivendi* such as the *Directions* of Ubaldini – show a clear change in the spiritual atmosphere. The penitent order that initially consisted of home-dwelling lay-religious women was, by the beginning of the sixteenth century, an institution that favored communal living in open monasteries. This change was reflected in the ideals of penitent sanctity as well: in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Dominican order produced numerous secular penitent *beatae*, whereas later on the regular penitents epitomized lay perfection.

This trend toward more secluded and contemplative ideals of penitent life is notable. Still, it should not be deemed as an organic evolution or as a total reversal of ideals. On the one hand, as we have seen, criticism about women's public lives was already present in the earlier stages of the penitent order's history. Indeed, it is already clear from the first penitent *vitae* that women's publicly manifested spiritual yearnings and pious acts attracted negative attention from their families, local townspeople, and even their religious companions. Therefore later criticism was not something that had never before been voiced. Furthermore, the Dominicans from the beginning had taken a moderate stance toward women's active lives. These friars had glorified their acts of charity, domestic chores, and even women's teaching, but they never saw the *pinzochere* solely as saints of active service. Instead the active aspects of these women's sanctity were always accompanied, and often overruled, by mysticism, supernatural phenomena, and contemplation. Additionally, the Dominicans tended to restrict the beneficiaries of penitent women's active service. These lay-religious principally interacted with and served their families, fellow penitents, and their immediate neighbors. They were also more likely to serve other women than men, in part because direct interaction with the opposite sex was deemed dubious even though it was non-sexual.

The change from home to religious community should not be seen as an absolute break away from secular society. The open monasteries were never totally prohibitive about women's public lives. Communal housing clearly decreased the importance of the *vita activa*. It also moved women farther away from the public sphere. Still, the first regular penitents were not ignorant to the ways of the world. Numerous regular penitents' lives in open monasteries were preceded by years, if not decades, of penitent calling in the world. Accordingly, these women's *vitae* relate numerous incidents about active involvement in their homes and in their cities. Furthermore, the open monasteries did not initially ban all communication with the external world, but instead allowed women to engage in charity and in earning their livelihood. Even the papal resolution to encloister all religious houses, though strictly held as an ideal, in practice allowed exceptions. Finally, even the strictly encloistered nuns were rarely totally cut away from the surrounding society. Though their possibilities to act directly *in* the world were limited, their indirect participation through prayers was cherished

by their contemporaries. In short, the movement toward non-public penitent piety should not be seen as an evolution in which earlier developments were totally extinguished to give way to a totally new species of religious life. What one encounters is rather a shift of balance toward semi-monastic forms of penitent life.

This shift of balance, however, clearly reveals the paradoxes of lay religious life. The possibility of combining the religious life with private housing and a personal income had opened the doors of the religious estate to scores of middle class and lower middle class women. Their own families and secular patrons were the principal providers for penitent women; thus they enabled these women to fulfill their calling. Nonetheless, this direct tie between an individual and her supporter remained also a source of discomfort for the Dominican friars as well as for the women themselves. The penitent women remained economically dependent on their families. Therefore many churchmen, and religious women themselves, perceived a communal life that freed an individual from day-to-day dependence on the secular world as a preferable alternative. The communal life was designed to give an individual freedom from daily economic worries, as well as from direct loyalty to the secular world. Though this happy carelessness about the economic necessities was a luxury that, in reality, only the well-to-do social class enjoyed, churchmen tended to return to communal life as a solution for the conflicts that penitents faced in the world. Whereas the secular penitents were forced to negotiate on a daily bases for their religious choices, the regular penitents were seen as more able to dictate their own rhythms of life and predict the course of their lives.

While the medieval church was willing not only to tolerate but also to cherish semi-institutional forms of the religious life, it simultaneously tended to steer women toward encloisterment and religious life that defined by three solemn vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Numerous members of semi-religious groups were seen as saintly, yet their associations remained institutionally only in a secondary rank. Therefore, the movement toward communal housing, and possibly toward full profession and encloisterment, were means to elevate penitent women's official status.

Finally, the attitudes toward women's active and public lives remained highly paradoxical, even incoherent, throughout the Middle Ages. The Dominicans, and for that matter the church at large, as well as secular magnates and ordinary people welcomed women's active input, particularly during times of crises. Women made their prophecies and visions public. Their deeds of charity and their service work in homes complemented the tasks of male-dominated institutions. Yet, it was precisely this active piety that was the first to go when the churchmen refashioned the goals of women's spiritual perfection. Mysticism, paranatural religious experiences (such as healing miracles, stigmata, and levitation), and fervent contemplation remained steadily in the heart of women's sanctity, whereas the importance of active deeds fluctuated greatly.

What then did the communal life add to and, respectively, take away from the penitents' lives? Needless to say, inhabiting a religious community reduced and

regulated women's contacts with the secular world. While the secular penitents spent their daily lives with lay people whose concerns and daily rhythms were quite different from their owns, the regular penitents lived in homogeneous groups. These groups spent a good part of their lives with other women. They followed similar quotidian rhythms, shared meals, and gathered for liturgical services. In these communities the liturgies, particularly the recitation of the divine office, gained a greater significance than it held in the lives of home-dwelling penitents. The communal life in open communities, not to mention in encloistered monasteries, changed radically the notions of charity, teaching, and working. While communal housing in an open monastery reduced the significance of charity as well as teaching and working outside the premises of the religious house, strictly enclosure was simply incompatible with these public deeds. Those women who lived in communities were serving each other rather than someone from the outside. In fact, the donation of alms to needy outsiders replaced the direct acts of service on their behalf. Moreover, these women were accumulating income by selling their handiworks rather than by working outside their communities. Finally, these women's served their neighbors principally through intercessory prayers that they could recite in the chapels of their own communities.

The ways in which the regular penitents drew the boundaries between themselves and the world were also quite distinct from the means employed by the secular penitents. The secular penitents had imagined themselves as hermits, lone champions of faith in the urban deserts of temptation. The regular penitents associated themselves totally with another paradigm, namely with monasticism. They shared the monastic ideals of withdrawal to a religious community. Their quest emphasized the cohesion of a group over the heroic deeds of an individual. Therefore, the eremitic ideals that had functioned as a point of reference for the friars as well as for the secular penitents lost their significance among the regular penitents. Their way of life was paralleled with that of traditional nuns, not with hermits. The regular penitents also demarcated the dividing line between themselves and the secular world more concretely that their home-dwelling counterparts. While the secular penitents manifested their separation by their religious habit, devotional practices, and mental indifference toward external events, the regular penitents added the actual physical withdrawal to their arsenal. In this respect they were also much like nuns, whose form of life required total, rather than only mental, separation from the world.

VI Conclusion

> Tertiaries, lay converts, and penitents chose to risk their chastity in dangerous engagement with the world, sustaining the poor, caring for the sick, comforting the dying, promoting peace, and performing other works of mercy.
>
> Bornstein 1996, 3.

> There was no female equivalent of the friars, no sanctioned way for nuns to live the *vita activa***,** characterized by radical renunciation of property and an active urban apostolate.
>
> Brundage – Makowski 1994, 152.

> ...the only form of religious life available to women was contemplative.
>
> Petroff 1979, 12.

> This emphasis [flight from the world] began to change in the early thirteenth century with the first stirrings of a process of democratization and secularization that was to grow over the next five centuries... By secularization, I mean that flight from the world was not a necessary precondition for attaining such divine grace-God could be found in the secular realm and in the midst of everyday experience.
>
> McGinn 1996, 198.

These four citations express their authors' different outlooks on medieval people's, particularly women's, possibilities for *vita activa* and public life. Bornstein, who has researched late medieval lay piety, characterizes lay women as socially active, practical helpers. His view underscores the idea that women, particularly the lay-religious, actively embraced their possibilities to act for the good of their neighbors. Brundage and Makowski, who have studied medieval canon law, see women's possibilities for active life as non-existent. On the bases of the restrictive statements of medieval canon law, they claim that there simply was no female equivalent to the friars' active urban apostolate. Similarly to Brundage and Makowski, Petroff, who focuses on women's mystical literature, perceives that contemplative piety was virtually the only way of religious life that was open to medieval women. McGinn sees that the thirteenth century marked a new era of in the western religious life: the flight from the world was no longer necessary for a religiously fulfilling life.

These conflicting statements echo the wider state of research concerning women's active life. Some historians emphasize women's active participation in their societies as aristocratic rulers, conscientious helpers, and urban apostles, whereas others see women's primary contribution as spiritual. Many studies state that particularly the thirteenth century opened an era full of active lay women who were simultaneously mystical and practical, while the preceding centuries,

and again the sixteenth century, were less tolerant of women's social piety. These interpretations are often connected to the used source material: those using legal texts and the statements of medieval theologians, for example, tend to see women's options for action as severely limited, whereas those who study exceptional individuals, such as saints, readily argue that medieval society granted women considerable freedom of action. Source material concerning lay piety in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries is so rich that lay life in these centuries has attracted exceptionally much attention. Consequently, it has been hard to discover whether the lay religious life in the preceding and following centuries was less encouraged or merely less documented.

The study of nineteen Dominican penitent saints – Benvenuta Boiani, Giovanna of Orvieto, Jacopina of Pisa, Margherita of Città di Castello, Sybillina Biscossi, Villana Botti, Catherine Benincasa, Maria Mancini, Maria Sturion, Margherita of Savoy, Margherita Fontana, Magdalena Panatieri, Osanna Andreasi, Stefana Quinzani, Lucia Bartolini, Colomba Guadagnoli, Lucia Brocadelli, Catherine Mattei, and Osanna of Cattaro – offers us a view to women's active and public lives in which the possibilities for action and limits of movement coexisted. The Dominican approach to lay women's public piety was nuanced, but also internally paradoxical. We do not find unconditional praise of women's *vita activa*, but nor do we encounter total negation of their benevolent and apostolic deeds, or of their presence in secular society. The defenders of women's active life in the secular world clearly felt a need to prove this life's acceptability, whereas the seclusion from the world to a cloister was still understood as a choice that did not need further explanations from the churchmen. Nonetheless, the medieval Dominican penitents did live their religious lives successfully in the world, which is also seen in the great number of penitent saints. Only in the last decades of the Middle Ages did the paradigm of secular penitent life change to a penitent life in more secluded, semi-monastic, communities. Therefore the study of Dominican hagiographies supports the claim that the period from the thirteenth to the early fifteenth century was particularly favorable to lay women who chose to serve in these urban centers, whereas in the following century the penitents were seen almost exclusively in monastic terms.

It simply is impossible to approach women's active lives as a monolithic concept: the *vita activa* consisted of various actions, each of which was evaluated differently by the authorities and by women themselves. Thus in this study I have conceptualized the phenomenon of Dominican lay women's active lives by grouping their deeds into three distinct categories, namely manual labor, charity, and apostolic activities. Though the hagiographers rarely discussed explicitly the internal hierarchy among these actions, it is evident that manual labor was regarded as the lowest and apostolism as the highest form of active life, leaving charity occupying the intermediate position. Consequently, manual labor was taken as an action that was open even to less esteemed penitents, whereas catechizing was available only to those who had already attained a more distinguished position in their societies. Charity remained as an activity that was embraced by most Dominican women, provided that these good deeds

were not deemed as too daring.

Within the category of manual labor, the Dominican *pinzochere* were clearly focusing in such house chores as cleaning, cooking, and serving their families. These activities reflect the domestic circumstances of penitents and reveal that these women found their sanctity in an arena that was most open for lay women, namely in their homes. These women also engaged themselves in other types of manual labor, primarily hand work. Nonetheless, handcrafts or gardening, which had featured as the most prominent components in the nuns' active lives, were not so pivotal activities for the penitents. The penitent hagiographies prioritized women's service over their production of goods and, accordingly, the hagiographies directed notably little attention to such issues as how penitent women actually earned their living. The sanctity of work was not found in the work itself, but in the mental dispositions that a job, particularly a servile occupation, created. Manual labor was laudable because it tested the humility and patience of a saint rather than because it produced goods or eased the practical conditions of living. The importance of work was subjected to mental considerations, and thus manual labor was ultimately understood as a spiritual exercise.

The second category of women's active life, namely charity, was praised by the Dominican hagiographers, but they remained cautious as to what acts women embraced, whom they helped, and how they proceeded. These benevolent deeds should be divided into two subcategories, which also helps us to recognize the true novelty of penitent piety. Firstly, there was the form of charity that could be exercised without any actual encounter between beneficiary and benefactor, namely almsgiving. This type of charity was at the heart of Christian altruism: it was exercised by monks, nuns, hermits, secular rulers, penitents, and the ordinary laity alike. Secondly, there were those acts that necessarily took place in the actual presence of the beneficiary, such as nursing the ailing, visiting the poor, hosting the homeless, and burying the deceased. While these acts were uncommon among the inhabitants of the monasteries, they were typical for the lay people. Thus, it was these good deeds that took place in the concrete encounters that set the lay women's service apart from that of the nuns. In fact, the Dominican hagiographers underscored that their lay protagonists were also *personally* and *corporally* involved in alleviating the suffering of the destitute rather than merely sending alms. Nonetheless, as this study has shown, the Dominicans' support for deeds of service was not unconditional. The saintly *pinzochere* were seen as compassionate individuals who principally helped their families, members of their own orders, and their immediate neighbors. These women were, however, not presented as nurses or as social workers in any "professional" sense. Indeed, the Dominican penitent saints rarely worked in the hospitals and hostels that hosted the urban destitute. These women's assistance was instead more sporadic and private, and thus less tied to institutional obligations outside their religious association and homes.

Though charity was pivotal an act for the Dominican penitents, the hagiographers were actually not primarily focusing on the easing of the

beneficiaries' suffering, but on the altruism and sacrificial willingness of their saintly protagonists. Thus, the focus of the hagiographic narration was, as was the case with house chores, on the humble and sacrificing mental disposition of the performer rather than on the results of her acts. Furthermore, the acts of charity were rendered meaningful through numerous allusions to the acts of biblical figures, particularly Jesus himself, as well as to the early Christian saints. These biblical teachings and examples of Christian models legitimized the deeds of aspirant saints.

This narrative strategy that emphasized the interrelation between the acts of the new saints and their predecessors had, however, further implications as well. By placing their protagonists in the meta-narrative of Christian charity, the hagiographers removed them from their real-life situations and, for that matter, from the sufferer. Though the Dominican hagiographies on the one hand emphasized the concreteness of their protagonists' acts, they, on the other hand, removed the events from their factual settings in order to highlight the timeless Christian teachings. Therefore, we should be careful not to represent medieval lay women as semi-professional helpers who reacted to the troubles of their times or who devoted all their energy to improve the living conditions of their neighbors. In fact, these women and their hagiographers were primarily interested in the spiritual importance of each given act. Concrete social impact held only a secondary position in their hearts.

The third category of women's *vita activa*, apostolism, was clearly regarded as the highest, but also as the most exclusive, form of active life. Numerous Dominican penitent women influenced the people of their times with their words, spoken as well as written. Nonetheless, these women's access to verbal authority was much more limited than that of men. In fact, it was virtually impossible for women to teach professionally in secular and ecclesiastical schools or to preach publicly to mixed audiences of men and women, particularly about church doctrine. Yet, there remained a few modes of teaching that women were able to exercise, namely moral and spiritual exhortation as well as charismatic prophetic announcements, given that these acts took place in private and non-institutional circumstances. The Dominican hagiographies show that saintly penitent women were seen as privately acting teachers who exercised influence over their confessors, families, patrons, and other supporters by inflaming their sense of repentance and their desire to praise God. Indeed several Dominican penitents – Giovanna of Orvieto, Catherine of Siena, Magdalena Panatieri, Osanna of Mantua, Stefana Quinzani, Colomba of Rieti, Lucia Brocadelli, Catherine Racconigi, and Osanna of Cattaro – taught their contemporaries Christian moralityby consulting the advice-seekers either in private meetings, often in their own homes and religious houses, or by writing them letters. Yet, only one of these saints, namely Catherine of Siena, stood publicly in front of wider audiences that consisted of women and men, clergy and laity. Therefore, one may draw a conclusion that the Dominicans were permissive about their penitents' private, moral exhortations, but they remained, not unlike the rest of the church authorities, restrictive about women's public teaching.

All in all, the Dominican penitent women's *vitae* convey the idea that within all three types of *vita activa* – manual labor, charity, and apostolism – these women exercised public influence primarily through rather private roles. They contributed actively with their work to the daily lives of their natural, married, and host families, but they were rarely seen as saintly in professional work outside their homes. As for charity, these benevolent acts were also directed principally, though not exclusively, to a limited group of beneficiaries that consisted of penitents' family, immediate neighbors, and fellow penitents. Charitable institutions such as hospitals were only rarely frequented by the saintly Dominican *pinzochere*. Furthermore, these women's apostolic activities were characteristically private; women exercised their verbal authority over individual advice-seekers, but they did not possess any formal rights to teach. Finally, the penitents' possibility to teach at all was practically dependent on their reputation as holy and, thus, one may presume that ordinary penitents had even more strictly limited options to exercise verbal authority.

These private ways of acting did not, however, mean that penitents would have been hidden away from the rest of the society. On the contrary, they remained in the midst the secular people to whose lives they contributed with their acts and by whom they were personally known. Secular society played a fundamental part in penitents' lives and sanctity, even if these women did not have limitless access to all its forums.

The reaction to lay women's active *deeds* was inseparably connected to the attitudes concerning their *presence* in the secular world. As was studied in the third chapter of this book, the Dominican hagiographers employed numerous ways to defend their protagonists' worldly presence. The foremost argument for secular piety was that a life comprised of both active and contemplative piety was higher in perfection that a mere contemplative life in seclusion from the world. Thus, the hagiographers argued that the *vita activa* and involvement in the affairs of the world did not disrupt a person's spiritual balance, but instead essentially contributed to her religious life. Since the Dominican penitent saints lived almost exclusively in private homes until the last years of the Middle Ages, this hagiographic ideal of spiritual perfection in the world supported well the factual situation of home-dwelling penitents.

Nonetheless, a successful life as a secular penitent was not attained automatically. Instead it required strategies that were fitted to create a pious atmosphere even amidst the most secular of situations. This study of Dominican hagiographies has shown that penitents employed both mental and external practices that together created a boundary between the penitents themselves and secular people.

There were chiefly three external practices that showed that a penitent, though present in the world, was also a member of a religious estate: the wearing of a religious habit, the practice of devotional practices, and the exercising of restrained customs. The Dominicans underscored the value of the penitent habit, which they saw both in symbolic and concrete terms. Symbolically this habit was a sign of penitents' religious affiliation. Concretely it was a shelter that protected these women from the gazes of other people and created a sense of

privacy and sacrality in the bustle of their daily lives. The devotional practices that consisted of mental and liturgical prayer, frequent confession and communion, and ascetic habits were adapted to meet the demands of lay life. The penitent women did not, for example, necessarily gather to church to say their prayers, but they imagined their own rooms or any quiet corner in their homes as their chapels. The penitents' confession and communion were, however, emphasized because these moments strengthened a penitent's ties to the hierarchical church by creating frequent contacts between her and the church authorities. The restrained social customs were a further technique that the penitents employed in order to remain spiritually pure in the secular world. The Dominican hagiographies relate that their protagonists closed their eyes, ears, and other senses from undesired secular impulses: in streets these women did not, for example, look restlessly around, but instead they fixed their eyes to the ground and surrounded themselves with reputable companions. These restrained customs showed the saints' modesty and their disinterest in the vanities of the world. They filtered the impulses that penitent women were likely to receive in their numerous encounters with secular people.

The Dominican hagiographers emphasized that a mental distance from worldly curiosities accompanied these external practices. According to the defenders of the penitents, these women had integrity that kept their inner selves untouched in all their engagements with the world. This idea of inner quietude was termed by Catherine of Siena, Raymond of Capua, and Thomas of Siena as 'mental cell' into which one's inner self withdrew to pray and meditate, even when this person was externally involved in secular activities.

The period from the thirteenth to late fifteenth century was a golden era for the secular, home-dwelling *pinzochere* (*sorores saeculares*). This can be, for example, seen in the fact that virtually all Dominican penitent saints, with the sole exception of Margherita of Savoy, lived in private homes where they mingled rather freely with non-religious lay people as well. Nevertheless, as was discussed in Chapter Five, this penitent presence in the world was not without its critics. Though saintly penitents were venerated by their contemporaries, their way of life provoked many, not least their own families. A religiously oriented household member set her priorities and organized her daily rhythm differently from the rest of the family, and thus she challenged the family unity that was often based on shared customs, schedules, and priorities. A saintly penitent could also create conflicts among her fellow penitents simply by rising above her rank and by gaining special attention. Moreover, the penitent presence in the secular world attracted criticism from the crowd, who distrusted penitent chastity, doubted the sincerity of their publicly manifested piety, or merely considered an ecstatic and prophesizing individual as a disturbance to orderly life. Thus the penitent way of life, which in many respects was a response to the needs of the penitents themselves and their contemporaries, not only spread harmony to surrounding society, but it also created discord and tension. Therefore, one should be careful not to portray naively penitents as God's little helpers who were unconditionally loved by their families, neighbors, and other contemporaries. These women were

often strong-willed, uncompromising, and even eccentric. Penitents' ways of life were demanding not only for themselves but for other people as well. Accordingly, people both admired and resented them.

Regardless of the criticism, the penitent life in the world remained as the leading paradigm for the Dominican lay women until the turn of the sixteenth century. At this time, however, the Dominicans clearly started to favor penitent life in the semi-monastic communities. In fact, most of this period's saints were regular penitents (*sorores regulares*) who sought to separate themselves not only with their manners, but also by literally withdrawing from the world to secluded religious houses. While Colomba of Rieti, Lucia Bartolini, Lucia Brocadelli, and Stefana Quinzani eventually founded religious communities and Osanna of Cattaro lived in an anchorage, only Osanna of Mantua and Catherine of Racconigi continued to live all their lives in the world.

As was studied in Chapter Five, this radical change from homes to semi-monastic, and eventually encloistered, religious houses was brought about by numerous factors that reflected wider transformations within late medieval society. The principal explanation can be found from the ecclesiastical and secular authors' need to establish clearer boundaries between various groups of people and numerous segments of life. Consequently, the religious and the secular groups, the professional and the unprofessional sectors, men and women, were drawn wider apart from each other than had been case during the previous centuries. While earlier penitent women had been able to encounter secular people, even men, and fuse their religious precepts with secular demands, the penitents who lived at the dawn of the early modern era followed a way of life where contacts between the opposite sexes and different estates were much more restricted. Moreover, the options for women's spontaneous charity, catechizing, and other forms of active life were limited by the ever-strengthening position of professional teachers, doctors, and administrators. This tendency to simplify the society's and church's institutions and reserve authority to formally trained professionals was an evident setback for women who had been able to enjoy a greater, though not by any means unlimited, freedom of movement in a medieval world where boundaries between various institutions and estates were less sharply drawn.

Hagiographic portrayals show us a world of ideals and exceptional individuals. One may wonder whether the saints' *vitae* actually reveal much of anything about the ordinary penitents' possibilities and life strategies. While it is true that the saints' experiences do not correlate directly to those of average penitents, one might still mirror through their *vitae* the concerns of less exceptional individuals. This book has focused on the saints' deeds and ways of life rather than on supernatural manifestations of their sanctity, such as miracles and visions. While supernatural phenomena were simply saintly, moral conduct, religious customs, and daily habits were shared by the saintly and non-saintly individuals alike. Therefore, the medieval churchmen taught that even if such exceptional gifts of grace as miracles and strenuous asceticism were only to be admired (*ad admiranda)* by the ordinary people, the saints' moral behavior was to be imitated

(*ad imitanda)*. The degree of a saint's perfection in these latter acts was presented as higher than that of the ordinary penitents, yet the acts themselves were surely seen possible and recommendable for both parties. The saints did, however, enjoy greater authority and freedom of movement than ordinary penitents did, and thus one should perhaps see the saints' acts as boundary marks which set the course for other penitents, but which they were not expected or, even allowed, to cross. Therefore, if we regard, for example, women's apostolic activity, we may reason that since public apostolism was rare even among the saints it simply was not an option for any other penitents. Yet, we can expect instead that the deeds of charity, for example, that were common for saintly Dominicans were also exercised by their fellow penitents, though with less intensity.

The study of Dominican penitent *vitae* as a group has, needless to say, both advantages and disadvantages. The greatest drawback is perhaps that that individual features of each text, as well as its specific historical context, attain less attention than those elements that can be seen in most, or at least in several texts, at a time. As is commonly the case with the studies that sketch contours of a certain larger phenomenon, the present study has also surely flattened the experiences of individual penitent saints, simply because it is impossible, and for that matter, meaningless, to bring forth all aspects and details of each saint.

Nonetheless, I believe that this study of Dominican penitent *vitae* as a collective entity is a methodologically justified way to bring forth general thematic issues that influenced the perception of active lives of medieval lay women. The hagiographies as historical sources tend to emphasize similitude over difference and, thus, several saints look surprisingly alike, even when they lived decades, even centuries, apart. Moreover, the hagiographies about a certain group of individuals, in this particular case the Dominican penitents, tend to be interlinked to each other through their common use of references. As has been seen in this study, the *vitae* of Dominican penitents commonly cherished, for example, the models of sanctity that were found from the *Lives* of the Desert Fathers and Mothers.

Therefore, the penitent hagiographies created a textual universe that can be studied as an entity that reflected the ideals that were shared by different generations of saints and consequently by their more ordinary fellows as well. These ideals were not, however, entirely stagnant. On the contrary, the individual *vitae* varied a shared theme by emphasizing the given elements differently. For example, the Catherine of Siena who we encounter as a model in the hagiographies of later penitents was portrayed as a much more contemplative saint than the active one who inhabited the pages of the *Legenda maior*. And, as a further example, the *vitae* of those saints who lived at the turn of the sixteenth century show a new feature that was absent in the previous Dominican hagiographies, namely the living of a semi-monastic penitent life. The cross study of Dominican penitents from Benvenuta Boiani (d. 1292) to Osanna of Cattaro (d. 1565) enable us to perceive the shared strategies for pious lay life as well as to appreciate the variations in solutions that emerged within this period.

A religiously successful lay life was seen as an amalgam of old and new

elements. In fact, the penitents perpetuated several customs that derived originally either from the monastic or the eremitic way of life. Therefore, their piety was in part seen as a modified version of that of nuns and hermits. Though the Dominican penitents lived amidst other people in medieval cities, they imagined themselves as solitary desert saints who found their God in private prayer, ascetic penance, and in their personal struggle against temptations. Similar to hermits who had faced spiritual challenges alone, the penitents were portrayed as fundamentally lonely, even with their families who thought and acted so unlike they themselves. Though the penitents were not obliged to take the three religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, or to shave their heads as a sign of religious vocation, many chose to imitate these customs to show their total dedication to the religious life. Unlike the nuns, the penitents were not expected to sing the entire divine office. Nonetheless, the collective liturgical prayer was not entirely alien to the *pinzochere* either; they just modified this monastic custom to suit their daily needs.

What then were the truly novel religious customs that gave lay piety its unique character? Penitent piety's fundamental contribution to medieval religious thinking was the idea that the pious life was not necessarily seen as connected to a specific religious space but rather to mental integrity, devotional practices, and disciplined customs. This non-spatial religious life rested on another idea that was of no lesser importance, namely that the internal spiritual state need not equal the external circumstances. Therefore, one could encounter her God even in utterly secular activities. These two notions of internalized piety were particularly radical ideals when applied to women's lives since traditionally churchmen had argued that women lacked inner strength to resist outer temptations. Last, but not least, comes lay women's *vita activa*. Even if the Dominican penitents were not radical social reformers or professional helpers, their personal encounters with the urban destitute and their willing submission to do servile deeds gave this lay life its particular touch. The spirit of this lay piety that reached its full bloom in the encounter with one's neighbor is epitomized in a few sentences found in Catherine of Siena's *Legenda maior* where God explained why He sent the saint to her public missions:

> In no manner do I intend to separate you from me. On the contrary, the love of your neighbor will unite you even more firmly with me. Know thus, that I request two kinds of love, namely love of Me and love of your neighbor. My Law and Prophets command these two and I want that you fulfill this command: you do not walk with one but with two feet, and with two wings you fly to heaven.[1]

. . . . . .

1 "Non enim intendo te a me quomodolibet separare; sed mediante caritate proximi, te mihi unire fortius satago. Scis, duo mea esse praecepta dilectionis, scilicet mei et proximi: in quibus, me teste, pendent Lex et Prophetae. Volo te horum praeceptorum justitiam adimplere, ut non uno sed duobus pedibus ambules, duabusque alis voles ad coelum." Raymond of Capua, *Legenda maior* 1866, 892.

Table of Abbreviations

AASS	Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur, 67 volumes. Paris and Rome 1643-
AB	Analecta Bollandiana. Brussels 1882–
AFP	Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum. Rome 1931–
ASOP	Analecta Sacri Ordinis Praedicatorum. Rome 1893–
BOP	Bullarium Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum. Edited by T. Ripoll and A. Bremond. Rome 1729–1740
BS	Bibliotheca Sanctorum, 12 volumes. Rome 1961–70.
DIP	Dizionario degli Istituti di Perfezione. Edited by Guerrino Pelliccia and Giancarlo Rocca. Rome 1974–
DBI	Dizionario Biographico degli Italiani. Rome 1960–
KAEPPELLI -PANELLA	Scriptores Ordinis Praedicatorum Medii Aevii. 4 volumes. Edited by Thomas Kaeppelli OP and Emilio Panella. Rome 1979–1993.
MOPH	Monumenta Ordinis Praedicatorum Historica. Louvain, Rome 1896-
OP	Ordinis Praedicatorum (The Order of Preachers)
QF	Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte des Dominikanerordens in Deutschland. Leipzig, Vechta, Cologne 1907 ff.

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