

“ACT THEREFORE TO BE A VIRAGO OF THE LORD”: ELEVENTH CENTURY  
ECCLESIASTICAL REFORM AND NEW FORMS AND PERCEPTIONS OF LAY  
FEMALE RELIGIOSITY

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## Abstract

ALEXANDRA M. LOCKING: “Act therefore to be a virago of the Lord”: Eleventh Century Ecclesiastical Reform and New Forms and Perceptions of Lay Female Religiosity  
(Under the direction of Marcus Bull and Brett Whalen)

Despite the extensive scholarship on the eleventh and twelfth century ecclesiastical reform movement, the roles that lay noblewomen played within the reform have often been overlooked. This thesis focuses on the correspondence between lay noblewomen across Europe and clerical reformers, chronicle excerpts, and several *vitae* of women from this period in order to study laywomen’s participation in all aspects of the reform movement. An analysis of these sources points to the emergence of a new perception of lay female religiosity, one built upon the belief in a politically and socially active female agent of the Christian Church who could use her position in her family and her rank as a member of the nobility to influence and support the efforts of the reform movement. This thesis contributes to the growing scholarship focusing on the role of gender in medieval religious history, and suggests that the importance of women within the reform dynamic was greater and more complex than hitherto suspected.

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## *Introduction*

In 1105 AD, Henry I's royal procession had just begun to wind through London when 200 married priests, barefoot and bedecked in their stoles, barred the king's path. Three years earlier, the Council of London had banned clerical marriage in England, but there had been no concerted attempt to enforce the council's decrees.<sup>1</sup> In 1105, however, the king launched a new effort to stamp out clerical marriage. Declaring that all married clergymen leave their wives or else face heavy fines and penalties, Henry stripped many priests of their parishes and threw others into prison; some even suffered torture when they could not afford to pay the fines. Now the assembled mob beseeched the king to take mercy on them and forgive the exorbitant fines they faced, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. According to the contemporary chronicler Eadmer, the king "untouched with any pity at their prayers, or at any rate in some way considering them as men devoid of any religion, undeserving of the courtesy of an answer, ordered them to be quickly driven from his sight."<sup>2</sup> Rejected by their ruler, the priests turned next to his wife, Queen Edith-Matilda, who rode beside him, imploring her to intercede on their behalf. Although she

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<sup>1</sup>For the Council of London of 1102, see Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, in *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores* 81, ed. Martin Rule (London: Longman, 1884) [hereafter Rolls Series], 141-44. Eng. trans. by Geoffrey Bosanquet, *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England* (London: Cresset Press, 1964), 148-152. See also Henry Mayr-Harting, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain 1066-1272* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2011), 72; and Norman F. Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture in England 1089-1135* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 162-66.

<sup>2</sup>Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, Rolls Series 81, 173; Bosanquet, *Eadmer's History of Recent Events in England*, 181-85: "... At ille forte, ut fit, ad multa divisus nulla ad preces eorum miseratione permotus, vel saltem quavis eos sicut homines omnis religionis expertes responsi honestate dignatus, suis obtutibus abigi festine praecepit."

sympathized with their suffering, she burst into tears, claiming that she was “too frightened to intervene.”<sup>3</sup>

As this episode reveals, the English Church in the early twelfth century found itself caught between traditional secular power and growing impulses for clerical reform, but it was not alone in suffering this phenomenon. Beginning in the mid-eleventh century, the papal reform movement began to change interactions and connections between the secular and ecclesiastical spheres throughout the Western Church, creating new tensions along the way.<sup>4</sup> The London procession of barefoot, ragged priests exposed several of these tensions. The reform’s ban on clerical marriage had thrown the priests’ lives into upheaval, just as the reform itself was changing the Western Church permanently. Crucial points of contention over common practices like clerical marriage, simony, and lay investiture led to rhetorical and physical battles between reformers and their secular and clerical opponents. Even as secular rulers like Henry I faced growing challenges with the emerging power of the papacy, they also confronted threats to their own authority over their local religious institutions. Moreover, women like the English queen Edith-Matilda frequently found themselves firmly entangled within these tensions and shifting dynamics. Even though Henry’s wife protested her helplessness, the priests

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<sup>3</sup>Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, Rolls Series 81, 173; Bosanquet, *Eadmer’s History of Recent Events*, 185: “...sed timore constricta ab interventione arcetur.”

<sup>4</sup>For an overview of the papal reform movement see Gerd Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. R.F. Bennett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), and *The Church in Western Europe from the Ninth to the early Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); R.W. Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages* (Harmondsworth, Eng: Penguin Books, 1970), 100-11; I.S. Robinson, *Authority and Resistance in the Investiture Contest* (New York: Holmes and Meir Publishing, 1978); Ute-Renata Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); selected essays in Michael Frassetto, ed., *Medieval Purity and Piety: Essays on Medieval Clerical Celibacy and Religious Reform* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998); F.D. Logan, *The History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 105-51; Kathleen G. Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and social change* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

turned to her for aid because they knew she, and women like her across Europe, played a vital role in the broader reform movement.

This thesis aims to explore the aspects of this role during the height of the papal reform movement. The English queen was not the only lay noblewoman to become actively involved in the reform movement. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, aristocratic women across Europe cooperated with their local clerical reformers. In 1073, for example, Pope Gregory VII wrote to the political leader of the reform faction in Milan to assure him of Countess Beatrice of Tuscany's efforts to mediate on his behalf with the German king.<sup>5</sup> In 1080, Beatrice's daughter and the reform papacy's strongest military supporter, Matilda, used her armies to try to prevent the emperor's invasion force from reaching Rome.<sup>6</sup> Countess Adela of Flanders received a letter from Rome commanding her to prevent any priest guilty of fornication (even within a legal marriage) from celebrating the Eucharist and instead find "such men to celebrate masses as serve God chastely."<sup>7</sup> Far away to the remote north, St. Margaret of Scotland cooperated with Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury to establish a reform-based church in Dunfermline, the church of the Holy Trinity.<sup>8</sup> Lanfranc's successor, St. Anselm of Canterbury, corresponded frequently with an extensive network of lay noblewomen, including

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<sup>5</sup>Epistle I.26, *Register Gregoris VII*, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Epistolae Selectae* t.2 f.1, ed. Erich Caspar (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1920), 43-44. Eng. trans. by H.E.J. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII 1073-1085: An English Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 31.

<sup>6</sup>Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy*, 72.

<sup>7</sup>Epistle IV.10, *Register Gregoris VII*; Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 219-220: "...tales ad missas celebrandas acquiratis, qui caste Deo deserviant."

<sup>8</sup>Lanfranc of Canterbury, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Helen Clover and Margaret Gibson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 161.

Countess Adela of Blois and Queen Edith-Matilda of England.<sup>9</sup> Both Adela and Edith-Matilda actively worked in their political and social spheres to promote the causes of the papal reform movement. Edith-Matilda even wrote directly to Pope Paschal II, demanding that he allow Anselm to return to England from exile despite Paschal's ongoing conflict with King Henry I over lay investiture.<sup>10</sup>

These are just a few examples of the forms of involvement taken by high-status women in the processes of the papal reform. This thesis argues that the participation of such lay noblewomen in the reform movement reshaped and influenced church leaders' perception of women and their proper roles in ecclesiastical affairs. By analyzing letters exchanged between the reformers and their female correspondents, in addition to a series of chronicles and charters, it will be possible to identify the forms that these women's involvement took, as well as the motivations behind the reformers' decision to actively recruit their aid. Next, the thesis discusses the effects of the reformist ideals on female religiosity, focusing particularly on marriage reforms, reformist rhetoric, and several key biographies of secular women that approached hagiographical status. The final section focuses on the growing importance of and emphasis placed upon lay noblewomen as caretakers of their local Christian communities and active agents in the budding movement towards pastoral care. This study argues that, though the ecclesiastical reformers initially targeted women of influence in the mid- to late-eleventh century as

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<sup>9</sup>Sally N. Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God: A Study of Anselm's Correspondence with Women* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepolis, 2002), 36-37. For the reform in England see Norman F. Cantor, *Church, Kingship, and Lay Investiture in England 1089-1135* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); Frank Barlow, *The English Church 1000-1066* (New York: Longman, 1979); Charles Duggan, "From the Conquest to the Death of John," in *The English Church and the Papacy in the Middle Ages*, ed. C.H. Lawrence (Surrey: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 63-116; Henry Mayr-Harting, *Religion, Politics and Society in Britain 1066-1272* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education, 2011).

<sup>10</sup>Edith-Matilda of England, in *Sancti Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt (Edinburgh: T. Nelson, 1963), 5.252-4.



potential recruits in order to take advantage of their strong political and familial ties, by involving them in the reformation of the Church itself the reformers had opened the door for a renewed interest among laywomen in spiritual matters. As a result, lay noblewomen did far more than simply offer political support to the reformers. They also used the opportunity to find new expressions of lay spiritual devotion and to encourage a change in the traditional ecclesiastical perception of women and their roles in society as a whole.

As one of the major turning points in medieval history, the eleventh-century reform movement has commanded the attention of scholars for well over a century. In the early twentieth century, historian Gerd Tellenbach introduced the idea of the reform and the resulting Investiture Conflict as a struggle to find what he termed “the right order” in the world; in other words, whether the final power to rule a Christian society lay with secular monarchies or with a priestly hierarchy.<sup>11</sup> Subsequent historians have focused on this idea of a battle over the “right order” predominantly in terms of political history, concentrating almost entirely on the power struggles between the papacy and the major secular rulers of the period, and especially the outright war between German Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Indeed, the available scholarship on the reform movement outside of the papacy’s immediate sphere of influence is scant in comparison to the German- and Italian-centric political historiography.<sup>12</sup>

In recent years, scholars working on women’s history, gender, and sexuality have approached ecclesiastical reform from radically different perspectives. Dyan Elliott’s

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<sup>11</sup>Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society*, 1.

<sup>12</sup>For some examples of scholarship on the papal reform in Germany and Italy, see Benjamin Arnold, “Germany and Its Neo-Roman Empire,” *Medieval Germany, 500-1300: A Political Interpretation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 75-125; H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII 1073-1085* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998); I.S. Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany 1056-1106* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

ground-breaking monograph *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (1993) focuses on the social conditions surrounding attitudes towards medieval marriage, using the reform movement to study the effects that the new insistence on clerical celibacy had on the traditional reverence for female lay chastity. Jo Ann McNamara, on the other hand, focuses on the image of masculinity promoted by the reformers, arguing that the reform created a model for a purely masculine public sphere that should be separate from both the private sphere and the polluting effects of feminization. Within the last few years, Megan McLaughlin has argued that the polemical literature produced by supporters and opponents of the reform served to construct precise definitions for acceptable gender roles both within the Church and in the secular world, tying the idea of femininity, especially, to themes of motherhood.<sup>13</sup> Gender history has offered not only a new approach but also a more complete view of the eleventh-century reform movement and its effects on medieval society, one that encompasses much more than the traditional, court-centered political history of the reform.

As a part of this interest in gender and women's history during the medieval period, women's roles in the movement have increasingly come under scrutiny. Several scholars have produced well-received monographs and biographies focusing on specific high-status women. Lois Huneycutt and Kimberly LoPrete have published biographies of Edith-Matilda of England and Adela of Blois, respectively. Matilda of Tuscany, too, has garnered much attention from historians of both women's history and ecclesiastical

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<sup>13</sup>See Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Megan McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform, 1000-1122* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Jo Ann McNamara, "Canossa and the ungendering of public man," republished in *Medieval Religion: New Approaches*, ed. Constance Hoffman Berman (New York: Routledge, 2005), 92-110 (originally published in *Render unto Caesar: The Religious Sphere in World Politics*, ed. Sabrina P. Ramet and Donald W. Threadgold [Washington, 1995]:131-150).

reform.<sup>14</sup> Yet so far these historical figures have been treated in isolation, often as exceptional women from an unexceptional age of women. However, the extant sources point to almost a dozen reform-active aristocratic laywomen across Europe, from the 1060s through the first decades of the twelfth century, who were very much part of a larger network of informational and ideological exchange with the Church. Studying these women as a group will help to create a clearer and potentially more accurate portrait of gender roles in the secular and ecclesiastical spheres during this tumultuous period.

### *Lay Involvement in the Reformers' Church*

Any discussion of lay female participation in the papal reform movement must first identify the type of women involved. The women who engaged with the ecclesiastical reform movement did not appear from thin air; rather, they were already part of a network of secular families that had indivisible ties with the ecclesiastical world. The clerical reformers took care to choose their allies wisely, keeping in mind both their female correspondents' personal hierarchical status as well as the history which their families shared with the Church. Although these women lived scattered across Western Europe, they were often connected to each other through marital and familial ties. Edith-Matilda was Margaret of Scotland's daughter, for example; Countess Ida of Boulogne became Matilda of Tuscany's stepsister when Ida's father married Matilda's mother, and

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<sup>14</sup>See Lois Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland: A Study in Medieval Queenship* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003); Kimberly LoPrete, *Adela of Blois: Countess and Lord (c. 1067-1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); David J. Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa 1046-1115* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2008); Patrick Healy, "Merito nominetur virago: Matilda of Tuscany in the polemics of the Investiture Conflict," in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women 4: Victims or Viragos?*, eds. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2005), 49-56.

Ida's brother Godfrey IV of Lower Lorraine became Matilda's first husband. Many of their families were well-known for being publicly religious and important players in the ecclesiastical sphere. The brother of Beatrice of Tuscany's second husband (Ida of Boulogne's uncle) became Pope Stephen IX (1057-1058).<sup>15</sup> In the British Isles, Margaret and Edith-Matilda were descended from the same Anglo-Saxon dynasty that had produced Edward the Confessor, who would be canonized in 1161.<sup>16</sup> Clementia of Burgundy, cousin to Empress Agnes of Poitou, saw her brother become Calixtus II (1119-1124), the pope who oversaw the Concordat at Worms in 1122, which officially ended the German Investiture Conflict.<sup>17</sup> Adela of Blois's husband, Stephen, participated in the First Crusade, as did most of the men in Ida of Boulogne's family. Indeed, Ida's younger sons, Godfrey of Bouillon and Baldwin, became the first two rulers of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.<sup>18</sup>

In many ways the Church depended heavily on the support of such powerful secular families, but lay participation in ecclesiastical affairs often presented a problem for the ecclesiastical hierarchy.<sup>19</sup> Reformers believed that secular lords exerted a great deal of control over their local religious institutions, not only investing local clergymen

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<sup>15</sup>For Edith-Matilda and Margaret of Scotland, see Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 1-10; for Ida of Boulogne and Matilda of Tuscany, see Nora Duff, "Appendix H" in *Matilda of Tuscany: La Gran Donna D'Italia* (London: Methuen & Co., 1909).

<sup>16</sup>Edina Bozoky, "The Sanctity and Canonisation of Edward the Confessor," in Richard Mortimer, *Edward the Confessor: the man and the legend* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2009), 178-90.

<sup>17</sup>Karen S. Nicholas, "Countesses as Rulers in Flanders," in Theodore Evergates, *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 111-37.

<sup>18</sup>"Vita Idae," *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis Tomus II*, eds. A. Godefrido Henschenio and Daniele Papebrochoi (Paris, 1865), 143.

<sup>19</sup>Barbara Rosenwein's *To Be the Neighbor of Saint Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Property, 909-1049* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989) offers a useful case-study of the often-complicated relationships between religious institutions and their secular patrons.

with the symbols of their offices, but often giving those very offices to their political supporters as rewards or bribes, even if they were, strictly speaking, ineligible for clerical office. Lay investiture and the practice of selling offices formed a major source of power, influence, and funds for secular rulers across Europe, and such rulers were clearly reluctant to surrender their prerogatives.<sup>20</sup> Yet for a society that believed strongly in the idea that a holy life could only be achieved by leaving the secular world and retiring to a secluded existence in a monastery, this constant secular interference represented a threat to the Church's religious ideals.<sup>21</sup> From a reformist perspective, lay men and women living in secular society would necessarily be polluted by worldly influences like material greed, sexual lust, and a penchant for violence.<sup>22</sup> Supporters of the papal reform believed that association with such sins stained the ecclesiastical offices over which secular lords claimed control. The reformers specifically targeted this kind of lay involvement—practiced by secular lords across Europe—as a form of pollution within the Church that needed to be expunged.<sup>23</sup> Even in the secular sphere the need for ecclesiastical reform was seen: pious aristocrats began to participate in grassroots efforts towards reform as early as the tenth century. William I of Aquitaine, for example, founded Cluny in 910 with the stipulation that the monastery would answer directly to the papacy rather than to

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<sup>20</sup>For a recent discussion of lay investiture and simony, see Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century*, 105-7. See also Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany*, 10-15.

<sup>21</sup>Barlow, *The English Church 1000-1066*, 2-5.

<sup>22</sup>Some of the earliest grassroots movements towards reforming the Church's role in society were directed towards the rampant violence of the tenth and early eleventh century. These movements would eventually be called the Truce and Peace of God. See Cushing, "The 'Peace of God,'" *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century*, 39-54.

<sup>23</sup>For the issue of pollution within the Church, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992); Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999).

a local lord. Cluny's foundation charters were remarkable for officially removing all secular control over the new monastery, and Cluny became one of the leading centers of monastic reform.<sup>24</sup> In the following centuries, religious-minded lay noblewomen had to find ways, as William of Aquitaine did, to participate in a Western Church that saw itself as being injured by overweening aristocratic and royal prerogative and that faced increasing scrutiny from the reform papacy in Rome.

Prior to this period, the laity had a limited number of routes through which they could practice their religious devotion with the Church's full approval, short of taking monastic vows. The English chronicler William of Malmesbury clearly delineated the boundaries of lay devotion when he wrote that William the Conqueror was a "practicing Christian as far as a layman could be, to the extent of attending mass every day and every day hearing vespers and matins. He built two monasteries, one in England and one in Normandy."<sup>25</sup> Nobles like William the Conqueror were expected to display their religious devotion openly and frequently (especially since rulers often depended on the Church for political support). Moreover, publicly pious rulers were particularly revered, like the Anglo-Saxon king, Edward the Confessor, who reputedly took a vow of marital chastity with his wife, Edith, in an effort to emulate the holy monastic lifestyle. Edward and his queen represent an extreme case, however.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>C.H. Lawrence, "The Age of Cluny," *Medieval Monasticism: Forms of Religious Life in Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 2001), 83-106.

<sup>25</sup>William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum I*, ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 492-3: "Religionem Christianam, quantum secularis poterat, ita frequentabat ut cotidie missae assisteret, cotidie uespertinos et matutinos himnos audiret. Monasteria, unum in Anglia, alterum in Normannia construxit." See also Rachel Stone, "In what way can those who have left the world be distinguished?: Masculinity and the Difference between Carolingian Men," in *Intersections of Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Middle Ages*, eds. Cordelia Beattie and Kirsten A. Fenton (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 12-33.

Laywomen like Queen Edith had, if possible, even fewer opportunities for participating in religious matters than laymen. Like their male counterparts, they could and did donate to religious foundations, but there were many ecclesiastical spaces and rituals which were forbidden to women.<sup>27</sup> A virginal life in a convent was by far a woman's safest route to religious salvation. Many laywomen, however, could not afford to take monastic vows, due to political, familial, and marital pressures. Some tried to compensate by taking part in what Dyan Elliott has termed "spiritual marriages"—that is, a marriage in which the husband and wife swore to preserve their chastity, even within their conjugal bond.<sup>28</sup> Beatrice and Matilda of Tuscany, for example, both desired to take the veil but could not abandon their positions as two of the most powerful and influential ruling nobles in Italy. So, as a second option, both countesses took oaths of conjugal chastity.<sup>29</sup> Oftentimes priests' wives took part in these spiritual marriages, in theory freeing their husbands from the sin of sexual acts.

Despite the popularity of such acts of lay devotion, one of the main effects of the papal reform movement—whether intentional or not—had a direct and negative impact on traditional female routes to religious devotion, both for lay and holy women. Because

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<sup>26</sup>In fact, Edward's lack of a male heir led directly to a long series of dynastic wrangling that eventually resulted in the Norman Invasion of 1066. Some historians believe that the rumor of Edward's marital chastity (a popular form of spiritual devotion among married laypeople) began as an attempt to excuse the king of any blame that his failure to produce a male heir might have resulted in. See Stephen Baxter, "Edward the Confessor and the Succession Question," in *Edward the Confessor: The Man and the Legend*, ed. Richard Mortimer (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 84–85.

<sup>27</sup>See Penny Schine Gold, *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 76-110; Gisela Muschiol, "Men, women and liturgical practice in the early medieval west," in *Gender in the Early Medieval World: East and West, 300-900*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M.H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004), 198-216.

<sup>28</sup>Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>29</sup>Patrick Healy, "Merito nominetur virago: Matilda of Tuscany in the polemics of the Investiture Contest," 50.

the reformers focused so much of their attention on ridding the Church of what they saw as polluting influences, women, still tainted by the story of Eve and the expulsion from Eden, fell by the wayside. As the Church began to promote clerical celibacy, traditional secular spiritual marriages became less popular and less meaningful. Men effectively took over the traditionally female topos of chastity—even of virginity. Opportunities for women to join monastic houses also declined. Cluniac monks, the principal movers behind the contemporaneous monastic reform movement, turned previously double monasteries that housed both monks and nuns into all-male establishments. Only one major female Cluniac house existed: Marcigny, a refuge in eastern France for the wives of the men who joined Cluny.<sup>30</sup> As Elliott says, “Women were the 'matter' that was out of place in the reformer's vision, the 'dirt' that imperiled sacerdotal purity. And so, like dirt, they were ruthlessly swept to one side.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite this closing off of customary routes of religious practice, however, it is undeniable that a significant number of powerful lay noblewomen became more deeply involved in ecclesiastical affairs, using their political support of the reform movement to get a foot in the door, so to speak. It did not happen immediately. Indeed, in the early years of the papal reform movement, from the pontificates of Leo IX (1049-1054) to Alexander II (1061-1073), chroniclers and reformers alike tend to be silent on the subject of ecclesiastical participation by laywomen. For example, only a single letter to a woman (Margaret of Scotland) is preserved in Archbishop Lanfranc of Canterbury's (1070-1089) episcopal register (Lanfranc's immediate successor, St. Anselm, in contrast, wrote countless letters to women during his episcopate [1093-1109], more than 60 of which

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<sup>30</sup>Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 220-1.

<sup>31</sup>Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 102.



survive in his register).<sup>32</sup> Even Gregory VII (1073-1085), often viewed as the most important reformer pope, was highly selective in his correspondence to laywomen. With some aristocratic women—Matilda and Beatrice of Tuscany, most notably—Gregory exchanged detailed and often highly political or theological letters, which will be discussed in detail below. The pope very clearly identified other lay noblewomen, however, as being less important. Matilda of Flanders, wife of William the Conqueror, warranted only two short, *pro forma* letters which commanded her to “be instant with your husband; do not cease suggesting things profitable for his soul. For it is certain that, if as the Apostle says an unbelieving husband is saved by a believing wife, even a believing husband is increased for the better by a believing wife.”<sup>33</sup> Although he addressed his letters to “Matilda, queen of the English,” Gregory made no mention of or allusion to Matilda in that role in the bodies of either of his letters; nor did he ask for her aid in his political dealings with King William I. Instead, in Gregory’s eyes she was no more than a wife whose Christian duty was to pray for her husband’s salvation, rather than a potentially powerful and influential supporter of the reform and the papacy.

From the later 1070s through the first decades of the twelfth century, however, lay aristocratic women figured more prominently in clerical reformers’ correspondence. Naturally, the survival rate of letters is uneven, even for those preserved in various collections. Moreover, it is impossible for modern scholars to know the motivation behind the preservation of particular letters in episcopal or papal registers while other

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<sup>32</sup>See Lanfranc of Canterbury, *Letters*, eds. Clover and Gibson, 161; Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 53.

<sup>33</sup>Epistle I.71, *Register Gregoris VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VI*, 75: “Insta viro tuo, anime utilia suggerere ne desinas. Certum enim est, si vir infidelis per mulierem fidelem, ut ait apostolus, salvatur, vir etiam videlicet per mulierem fidelem in melius augmentatur.”

letters were, apparently, deemed less worthy of permanent record. As a result, any perception of the intent of the author of such letters is necessarily selective and skewed by the availability of sources. Despite these complications, it is clear that more letters to and from women were being preserved in episcopal registers (though we cannot know the total number that were written and eventually lost). More importantly, the content of these letters moved far beyond the *pro forma* letter Gregory VII wrote to Matilda of Flanders to involve lay noblewomen directly in the Church's most important affairs.

One of the most frequent and most important roles that reformers asked their female correspondents to adopt was that of mediator. Intercession was a traditionally feminine role, one that played up a woman's position of influence but still left her clearly subordinate to her male kin.<sup>34</sup> It was also a common religious role, associated with saints and Christian figures as important as the Virgin Mary.<sup>35</sup> A wife had the advantage of physical closeness to gain her noble husband's attention; likewise, a mother could potentially hold some authority over her sons, even after they had come of age. For example, at Gregory VII's behest, Empress Agnes traveled constantly between Rome and Germany in an effort to bridge the widening chasm between her son, Henry IV, and the papacy.<sup>36</sup> Countess Beatrice of Tuscany also often mediated on Gregory's behalf with the German emperor, who happened to be her cousin. Beatrice's daughter, Matilda of Tuscany, played her most famous role in the reconciliation at Canossa in 1075, convincing Pope Gregory of Henry IV's true repentance (though Henry's repentance did

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<sup>34</sup>See Lois Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: the Esther Topos," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 126-46.

<sup>35</sup>More on the effects of Marian ideology will be discussed below, 33-5.

<sup>36</sup>Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany*, 126.

not last the year).<sup>37</sup> In the northwest corner of Latin Christendom, Queen Edith-Matilda of England followed in the footsteps of these earlier aristocratic women in her efforts to reconcile her husband, Henry I, Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury, and Pope Paschal II during the English Investiture Conflict. Anselm also turned to Henry's sister, Countess Adela of Blois, as well as to his longtime supporter and friend, Countess Ida of Boulogne, for help with his clash of wills against the English king.<sup>38</sup>

Through their intercessory acts, these aristocratic women became key players in the battle over the reform's ultimate goals of banishing simony, clerical marriage, and lay investiture. Indeed, it was for these crucial, controversial issues that reformers in the Church specifically targeted lay noblewomen's support. Every secular woman to whom the reformers wrote was a "lordly woman"—that is, a woman in a position of influence in the secular world's power hierarchy, holding stations of considerable political importance, either through her marriage or her ties of kinship.<sup>39</sup> Reformers emphasized these women's roles as lords. In a letter urging the Tuscan countesses against taking the veil and retiring from the world, Gregory VII wrote:

In truth, from love of God and by holding dear one's neighbor to help the wretched and to assist the oppressed—this is something that I place before prayers, fasts, vigils, and other good works however many they may be, for I do not hesitate with the Apostle to set true charity before all virtues...if there were someone who in your stead would come to the aid of wretched and oppressed churches and would be of service to the universal church, I would be at pains to advise that you should leave the world with all its cares. But because you do not, like many princes, thrust God from your palace but rather you invite him by the

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<sup>37</sup>Hay, *The Military Leadership of Matilda of Canossa*, 1-15.

<sup>38</sup>Vaughn, *St. Anselm and the Handmaidens of God*, 63, 154, 220-230.

<sup>39</sup>For an in-depth discussion on the categorization of lordly women, see Kimberly A. LoPrete, "The Gender of Lordly Women: the Case of Adela of Blois," in *Studies on Medieval and Early Modern Women: Pawns or Players?*, ed. Christine Meek and Catherine Lawless (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2003), 90-110.

sacrifice of righteousness to come into it, we ask you and urge you as most dear daughters that you bring to a perfect end the good thing that you have begun.<sup>40</sup>

The ecclesiastical reformers needed publicly active “lordly women.” The three most highly-ranked women included in this study, Edith-Matilda of England, Margaret of Scotland, and Agnes of Poitou, were queens; Agnes had even been anointed as empress of the Western empire during her husband Henry III’s reign. Adela of Blois, Edith-Matilda’s sister-in-law, acted as regent in her husband’s comital lands during his absence on the First Crusade and following his death until their son Eustace came of age. Countess Beatrice ruled Tuscany following her husband’s death, and her daughter Matilda, her only surviving child, wielded as much lordly power as any of her male counterparts—more than most of them, in fact.

Empress Agnes of Poitou and the Tuscan countesses were, in a sense, the founding members of this network of reform-minded lay aristocratic women, the first to take prominent roles in the papal reform movement. As the widow of Emperor Henry III and the mother of Henry IV—the German king against whom Gregory VII literally went to war over investiture—Agnes naturally held an important place in German and Italian court politics, even after she retired to Rome and took the veil in 1064/5.<sup>41</sup> Likewise, Beatrice and Matilda of Tuscany were also Pope Gregory VII’s closest allies, figuratively and geographically. The anti-Gregorian faction in Germany would respond directly to the

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<sup>40</sup>Epistle I.50, *Register Gregoris VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *Register of Gregory VII*, 56; the full passage reads: “Ex amore quidem Dei proximum diligendo adiuuare miseris et oppressis subvenire, orationibus ieiuniis vigilis et aliis quam pluribus bonis operibus prepono, quia veram caritatem cunctis virtutibus preferre cum apostolo non dubito. Nam si hec mater omnium virtutum, que Deum de celo in terram, ut nostram miseriam ferret, compulit venire, me non instrueret et esset, qui miseris et oppressis ecclesiis vestra vice subveniret ac universali ecclesie deserviret, ut seculum relinqueretis cum omnibus eius curis, monere procurarem. Sed quia de vestra aula, ut multi principes, Deum non abicitis, immo sacrificio iustitie ad eam venire invitatis, rogamus vos et ut karissimas filias ammonemus, bonum quod cepistis ad perfectum finem perducatis.”

<sup>41</sup>Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany*, 45.

influence which these three women wielded in ecclesiastical matters by accusing Gregory of allowing the Church to be dominated by a “new senate of women,” an accusation which will be discussed in greater detail below.<sup>42</sup>

It may seem that the reformers’ reliance on lay noblewomen began merely as a coincidence: Gregory’s three strongest and most stalwart supporters in the immediate vicinity of Rome just happened to be female. Yet the way in which clerical reformers depicted such women belies any such notion. Indeed, Gregory purposefully held up Empress Agnes as an example to emulate for the younger Tuscan countesses. Gregory described the countesses as “disciples who faithfully imitate[d] their lady and mistress,” Agnes.<sup>43</sup> Addressing the empress, Gregory declared, “Through you, therefore, as a new example of an ancient joy—through you, I say, the women who once sought the Lord in the tomb often return to us in memory...so with pious love you before many—no, almost before all of the princes of the world visit the church of Christ...you are striving with all your powers, and as if instructed by angelic responses you are arousing others to the help of a struggling church.”<sup>44</sup> Decades later, the bishop of Norwich wrote in a similar vein to Edith-Matilda of England, praising her as an exemplar of lay piety by saying: “The odor of your religion has penetrated to the ends of the world and the strength of your integrity

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<sup>42</sup>See below, 20-1.

<sup>43</sup>Epistle I.85, *Register Gregors VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *The Register of Gregory VII*, 90: “...dominam et magistram discipule fideliter imitantes.”

<sup>44</sup>Epistle I.85, *Register Gregors VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *The Register of Gregory VII*, 90; the full passage reads: “Per vos itaque novum exemplum antique letitie, per vos, inquam, ille mulieres olim querentes Dominum in monumento sepe nobis ad memoriam redeunt. Nam sicut ille pre cunctis discipulis ad sepulchrum Domini miro caritatis ardore venerunt, ita vos ecclesiam Christi quasi in sepulchro afflictionis positam pre multis immo pene pre omnibus terrarum principibus pio amore visitatis et, ut ad statum libertatis sue resurgat, totis viribus annitentes quasi angelicis instructe responsis ceteros ad suffragium laborantis ecclesie provocatis.”

and chastity are known to the surrounding regions.”<sup>45</sup> The papacy’s reliance on the empress and the Tuscan countesses clearly served to open reformers’ eyes to possibilities for alliances that they might not have considered previously. If Agnes, Beatrice, and Matilda were the first to traverse the boundaries between the reformist circle and their own secular courts, their actions had significant repercussions for female religious involvement both within and without the reform movement.

### *The Emergence of a New Perception of Lay Female Religiosity*

One of the most important repercussions of lay female participation in the papal reform movement included the development of a new perception of an active lay female religiosity. During the last decades of the eleventh century, Queen Margaret of Scotland took an active role in the reformation of the Scottish Church, as well as in the anglicizing of her husband Malcolm’s “barbaric” court. In his *Vita* of Margaret, Turgot, the prior of Durham and Margaret’s close confidant, wrote of the queen that “All things which were fitting were carried out by order of the prudent queen: by her counsel the laws of the kingdom were put in order, divine religion was augmented by her industry, and the people rejoiced in the prosperity of affairs. Nothing was firmer than her faith, more constant than her countenance, more tolerant than her patience.”<sup>46</sup> Although Turgot’s portrayal of Margaret is, by nature of the work itself, highly biased and undoubtedly

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<sup>45</sup>Herbert Losinga, *Epistolae Herberti de Losinga primi episcopi Norwicensis*, ed. A. Robert Anstruther (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969), 48-50: “Penetravit fines mundi vestrae religionis odor et circumjacentibus regionibus vestrae integritatis et pudicitiae soliditas cognita est.”

<sup>46</sup>Turgot, “Vita Sanctae Margaretae Scotorum Reginae,” in *Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. H. Hinde (Durham: Andrews and Co., 1868), 238. Eng. trans. by Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*: “Omnia quae dicebantur prudentis reginae imperio agebantur. Ejus consilio regni jura disponebantur; illius industria religio Divina augebatur; rerum prosperitate populus laetabatur. Nihil illius fide firmitus, vultu constantius, patientia tolerabilius, consilio gravius, sentential justius, colloquio jucundius.”

exaggerated in certain parts, the *Vita* still provides a crucial insight into the perception of the new lay female religiosity that was developing during the papal reform movement. Turgot made Margaret of Scotland the pinnacle of female piety, which was all the more remarkable because she—an entirely secular figure—was well on her way to achieving sainthood.<sup>47</sup>

Margaret died in 1093, but Turgot did not write the biography until her daughter, Edith-Matilda of England, commissioned the work sometime between 1105 and 1118, towards the end of the most intense phase in the cooperation between lay noblewomen and clerical reformers.<sup>48</sup> This picture of Margaret’s religious perfection came at the height of the evolution of female lay piety that resulted from noblewomen’s involvement in the reform. It took decades for this clear portrait to emerge as reformers and lay noblewomen alike found the path to new female lay devotion shrouded in uncertainty and pitfalls. As discussed earlier, clerical authorities had traditionally relegated women to the margins of Christian society, especially secular women—how, then, could reformers rationalize this sudden inclusion of lay women into some of the most important ecclesiastical matters of the day? Stating the political benefits of such alliances was not enough in the face of the potential pollution a woman could bring to the Church; instead, the reformers and their female allies had to work together to create a new perception of the good Christian woman, one that transcended the separation between the secular and ecclesiastical worlds. They accomplished this through the greatest tool at their disposal:

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<sup>47</sup>Pope Innocent IV canonized Margaret in 1250. See Eileen Dunlop, *Queen Margaret of Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2005), 93.

<sup>48</sup>For the dating of the “Vita,” see Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 10-16.

rhetoric. It is in the reformers' letters and in works like Turgot's *Vita Sanctae Margaretae* that this new image of a pious laywoman emerges.

The participation of women in ecclesiastical affairs initially provoked criticism and uncertainty from both supporters and opponents of the papal reform movement. Peter Damian, the cardinal bishop of Ostia, had supported the papal reform since its inception and authored much of the polemical literature on behalf of the reformists.<sup>49</sup> He was also close personal friends with Empress Agnes of Poitou, taking the empress under his wing when she retired to Rome in order to take the veil. However, their friendship and Damian's desire for the reform to succeed did not stop him from criticizing Agnes for her continued involvement in political affairs. In 1067 he wrote to her during one of her many journeys back to her son's court in Germany, lamenting, "Why did I not oppose myself violently to your going? Why did I not seize the reins of your horse and slow your course with my hands as much as I could...May the court make you sick of imperial rule."<sup>50</sup> No one could have possibly questioned her political influence, but Damian saw her actions as a clear example of the very blurring of secular and ecclesiastical boundaries that the reform was trying to prevent. In Damian's eyes, Agnes ought to have given up all worldly concerns when she took her monastic vow.

In a more colorful episode during the early years of the Investiture Conflict, German bishops loyal to the imperial cause accused Gregory VII of having a torrid affair with Matilda of Tuscany. They cited the countess's repudiation of her first husband as proof and suggested that no woman would have such say in the papal court without

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<sup>49</sup>McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform*, 30.

<sup>50</sup>Peter Damian, "Epistolarum Libri Octo," *Patrologia Latina* 144, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris, 1853), cols. 446-47: "Immo cur egredienti me ipsum non violenter opposui? Cur non equorum frena corripui, et cursum vestrum vel obviis manibus, in quantum licuerat, non tardavi...Ingerat tibi nauseam aula regalis imperii."



sharing the pope's bed.<sup>51</sup> For a man so concerned with freeing the Church from sins of pollution, this was indeed a low blow. These accusations and criticisms serve to highlight the troublesome nature of laywomen's involvement in the reform movement. On the one hand, religious-minded lay noblewomen had proven themselves to be indispensable to the reform; on the other, reliance on such women left reformers vulnerable to attack.

In the same letter to Gregory, the anti-Gregorian bishops complained that "[T]he general complaint is sounded everywhere that all judgments and all decrees are enacted by women in the Apostolic See, and ultimately that the whole orb of the Church is administered by this new senate of women."<sup>52</sup> From this letter it is clear both that the anti-Gregorians were extremely alarmed by the agency lay noblewomen like the Tuscan countesses were taking within the Church and that such lay noblewomen were having an important impact on the reform movement.<sup>53</sup> As a result, the anti-Gregorians lashed out, throwing accusations like the one above against the reformers for allowing women to pollute the Church.

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<sup>51</sup>"Absageschreiben der deutschen Bischöfe an Gregor VII," *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Deutsches Mittelalter: Die Briefe Heinrichs IV*, ed. Carl Erdmann (Leipzig: Verlag Karl W. Hiersemann, 1937), 65-66. Eng. trans. by Patrick J. Geary, "Renunciation of Gregory VII by the German Bishops," in *Readings in Medieval History* (Lewiston, NY: Broadview Press, 1989), 640-41.

<sup>52</sup>"Absageschreiben der deutschen Bischöfe an Gregor VII," *MGH: Die Briefe Heinrichs IV*, 66; trans. Geary, "Renunciation of Gregory VII by the German Bishops," 641: "In qua re verecundia nostra magis quam causa laborat, quamvis haec generalis querela ubique personuerit, omnia iudicia, omnia decreta per feminas in apostolica sede actitari, denique per hunc feminarum novum senatum totum orbem ecclesiae administrari."

<sup>53</sup>One telling example of women's influence within the Church lies in a letter Gregory VII sent to Matilda of Tuscany in 1074. Gregory confided to Matilda his hopes of leading an expedition to Constantinople to aid the Christians in the East. In the letter, Gregory specifically stated that he was depending on both Matilda and the Empress Agnes to accompany him overseas and to encourage other nobles to join this proto-crusade, while Matilda's mother, Beatrice, would remain in Europe and protect their interests. See Gregory VII, *The Epistolae Vagantes*, ed. and trans. H.E.J. Cowdrey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 10-13. For more on Gregory's proto-crusade, see H.E.J. Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII's 'Crusading' Plans of 1074," reprinted in *Popes, Monks and Crusaders* (London: Hambledon Press, 1984), X (originally published in *Outremer: Studies in the History of the Crusading Kingdom of Jerusalem Presented to Joshua Prawer* [Jerusalem, 1982], 27-40).

However, even the opponents of the papal reform movement were forced to recognize the usefulness and resourcefulness of regional lay noblewomen. For example, Adelaide of Turin, marchioness of four counties in northern Italy, had important ties to both camps. Henry IV of Germany married her older daughter Bertha (whom he eventually tried and failed to repudiate), while Rudolf of Swabia—who set himself up as an anti-king against Henry in 1077 with the backing of the papacy—married her younger daughter, also named Adelaide.<sup>54</sup> Letters from both reformers and imperialists to Adelaide of Turin have survived. In 1064, Peter Damian commanded her to take on the duty of not only ridding her counties of clerical marriage, but also of preventing the wives of priests from entering churches, lest they “compel the ministers of the altar to minister to their own lust.”<sup>55</sup> More interestingly, Benzo, bishop of Alba—a stalwart supporter of Henry IV’s imperial rights over the German Church—petitioned Adelaide to aid the German king, writing in one letter, “You will sit in tranquility under the king in the seat of royal majesty...rise to the heaven of royal benevolence, to be admired in all the ends of the earth;” and, more damningly of the papacy and Gregory VII’s grab for power, “do not add a fourth person to the trinity.”<sup>56</sup> In another letter, Benzo put the fate of the Church—threatened, as he argued, by Gregory’s reforms—squarely into her hands:

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<sup>54</sup>Robinson, *Henry IV of Germany*, 109-10.

<sup>55</sup>Epistle 114, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Die Briefe der Deutschen Kaiserzeit, IV, Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Kurt Reindel (Munich, 1988), 295-306: “...ministros altaris propriae luxuriae ministrare compellunt...”

<sup>56</sup>Benzo of Alba, “Benzonis Episcopi Albensis,” *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum XI*, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hanover, 1864), 654; the full text reads: “Certe, si dignaris credere consiliis meae parvitas, cum tranquillitate sedebis sub rege in solio regifice maiestatis, et videbis ante te duces cum principibus, orbis terrarum opes tibi ministrantibus. In hoc quidem placito nichil omnino erit periculi, si fiet secundum dispositionem mei consilii, sed erit perpes gaudium domus tuae in seculum seculi. Quid plura? A die etenim exitus de ventre matris non venit super te visitatio talis. Itaque tu, dilecta Deo et hominibus, ascende in coelum regalis benivolentiae, admiranda in cunctis terrae finibus...non addas quartam personam trinitati.”

“Offer your right hand to sinking Rome, help the king looking to you with pious eyes. In these two hangs the whole church; see what you may do, holy Adelaide.”<sup>57</sup>

Benzo’s letters to Adelaide are some of the few examples of correspondence from opponents of the papacy that specifically tried to recruit lay noblewomen to their cause. It is possible that more existed but were lost over the centuries. Although Adelaide may serve as the exception that proves the rule, considering both the vituperative response of the German bishops to Gregory VII’s cooperation with the Tuscan countesses as well as Adelaide’s marital ties to the German king, neither faction could deny her potential usefulness: the reformer Peter Damian wrote to her because she might prove to be another powerful noblewoman working in favor of the reform, while the imperialist Benzo of Alba saw her as the king’s mother-in-law and thus inevitably an influential political ally in the battle over reform.

Although secular female involvement in the reform became somewhat more accepted as the decades passed, even as late as Edith-Matilda’s reign clergymen were still struggling with finding the proper way to deal with such women. For example, Eadmer, the biographer and close friend of Anselm of Canterbury, was clearly conflicted over Anselm’s close association with lay noblewomen such as Adela of Blois, Ida of Boulogne, and Edith-Matilda. In his account of Anselm’s episcopate in the *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, Eadmer paid some attention to the roles that laywomen—the English queen especially—played in Anselm’s career, however brief and grudging that attention might be: “I will only say briefly this of the queen herself; that no earthly concerns, no pageantry of this world’s glory could keep her from going on before to the different

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<sup>57</sup>Benzo of Alba, “Benzonis Episcopi Albensis,” *MGH Scriptorum* XI, ed. Pertz, 655: “Porrigere dextram Romae mergenti, succurre regi piis oculis te respicienti. In his duobus pendet tota aecclesia, vide quid facias sancta Adelegida.”

places to which Anselm was coming...she went on ahead and by her careful forethought saw to it that his various lodgings were richly supplied with suitable furnishings.”<sup>58</sup> Here Eadmer placed Edith-Matilda within the private sphere of the household rather than in a public setting. In the more personal *Vita Anselmi*, on the other hand, Eadmer carefully and deliberately omitted any mention of Anselm’s interactions with women. He praised the archbishop for attending to men of all classes, saying, “He spoke to monks, to clerks, and to laymen, ordering his words to the way of life of each,” but women clearly did not belong in Eadmer’s portrayal of Anselm’s private life.<sup>59</sup>

Oftentimes the lay noblewomen who participated in reform aggravated the situation between the ecclesiastical and secular political spheres, making the reformers’ need to present their female allies in a positive light that much more difficult. Although the clergy often referred to the women as their spiritual daughters—clearly promoting a sense of familial as well as religious duty to the Church and the reform—these women were anything but biddable political puppets.<sup>60</sup> Instead, they acted as powerful lords who took their own initiative in dealing with the reform in their local religious institutions, sometimes to the displeasure of the reformers themselves. The spring of 1074, for example, found Pope Gregory VII writing a furious letter to Beatrice and Matilda of Tuscany, chastising them severely for their recent actions. Gregory, “in great confidence,” had commended Bishop Werner of Strassburg, one of the few German

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<sup>58</sup>Eadmer, *Historia Novorum in Anglia*, Rolls Series 81, 183; trans. Bosanquet, *Eadmer’s History of Recent Events in England*, 196: “...de ipsa regina hoc breviter dixerim, quia nec terrena negotia nec pompa saecularis gloriae ulla poterant eam detinere, quin virum loca diversa adeuntem praecederet...ipsa procederet, hospitiaque ejus sua providentia dignis apparatus adornaret.”

<sup>59</sup>Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, ed. and trans. R.W. Southern (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 54-55: “Ille monachis, ille clericis, ille laicis, ad cuiusque propositum sua verba dispensabat.”

<sup>60</sup>For example, see Lanfranc of Canterbury’s letter to Margaret of Scotland in *Letters*, ed. Clover and Gibson, 161; see also *Register Gregors VII*, I.50 and VIII.22.

bishops to ask to be reconciled to Rome during the papacy's efforts to enforce reform measures in the German Church, to the care of the countesses during his travels in Italy, asking the women to see to the bishop's safety. Beatrice and Matilda, however, seized Werner and imprisoned him for his unspecified crimes against his ecclesiastical office. The tone of Gregory's subsequent letter to the women, begging them to release the bishop, is one of shock and anger: "Consider in your minds, I beseech you, how shameful to yourselves, how dishonoring to me, and how disgraceful to blessed Peter and the apostolic see, is what you have done to him."<sup>61</sup> Gregory's greatest concern in the Bishop Werner affair was that both his enemies and his allies would think him complicit in the bishop's capture because his trust in Matilda and Beatrice was so implicit and well known; in a way, they were the face of the papacy outside of Rome. In this episode, however, they betrayed his plans for reconciling with a recalcitrant branch of his Church.

Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury found himself in a similarly unexpected and uncomfortable position when dealing with his most powerful spiritual daughter. For a brief time in 1106, Malmesbury Abbey dominated Edith-Matilda's attention and efforts in the English Investiture Conflict. Henry I may have given Malmesbury to Edith-Matilda as part of her dower along with several other religious houses; she certainly showed a keen interest in this particular abbey during her reign.<sup>62</sup> Abbot Godfrey of Malmesbury died in 1105, and in 1106 Edith-Matilda named her own candidate to the abbacy, her former sacristan of Winchester, Aedulf.<sup>63</sup> Prior to this event, the queen had limited her

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<sup>61</sup>Epistle I.77, *Register Gregors VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *The Register of Pope Gregory VII*, 80-81: "Ceterum, quod vos fecistis in eum, quam inhoestum bovis quam mihi verecundum quamque beato Petro et apostolice sedi contumeliosum sit..."

<sup>62</sup>Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 64-5.

<sup>63</sup>Edith-Matilda of England, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.326-7.

involvement with the reform movement to that of a mediator, trying to convince her husband of the necessity to support the reformist ideals. When Edith-Matilda stepped forward and named her own candidate to the abbacy of Malmesbury, she suddenly re-entered the English Investiture Conflict as a secular lord in her own right.

Her actions concerning Malmesbury shocked her allies in the Church because previously she had worked diligently to bind herself to the reform movement in most matters, yet suddenly she appeared to practice the very lay investiture that had become the hallmark of pollutions in the Church. In 1106, she wrote to Anselm: “Relying on the support of Your Holiness, therefore, I have entrusted the abbacy of Malmesbury to Aedulf, monk of Winton.”<sup>64</sup> Anselm sent Edith-Matilda a terse letter at about the same time. In it, he stated: “After I left England I heard that you were dealing with the churches in your hands otherwise than is expedient for them or for your own soul...Therefore, I beseech you as my lady, advise you as my queen and admonish you as my daughter...that the churches of God which are in your power should know you as mother, as nurse, as kind lady and queen.”<sup>65</sup> Although it is unclear whether Anselm was referring specifically to Malmesbury Abbey, the chronicles and letters record no other instance of Edith-Matilda practicing lay investiture. Even if this letter was in response to a different episode, Anselm’s response to Malmesbury would undoubtedly have taken the same tone. In her promotion of Aedulf to the abbacy, though, Edith-Matilda found a

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<sup>64</sup>Edith-Matilda of England, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.326-7. Eng. trans. by Walter Frohlich, *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury Volume Three* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 139-40: *Vestrae igitur sanctitatis favore freta domno Aedulfo, Wintoniensi monacho olimque sacristae, vobis credo noto, abbatiam Malmesberiae in iis quae mei iuris erant commisi.*”

<sup>65</sup>*Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.284-5; trans. Frohlich, *The Letters of Anselm of Canterbury Volume Three*, 75-76: “Postquam exivi de Anglia, didici quia ecclesias, quae in manu vestra sunt, aliter tractatis quam illis expediat et animae vestrae ...Precor igitur ut dominam, consulo ut reginae, moneo ut filiam—quod etiam olim feci—ut ecclesiae dei, quae sunt in vestra potestate, vos cognoscant ut matrem, ut nutricem, ut benignam dominam et reginam.”

loophole that allowed her to fulfill her desire and placate Anselm. “To you is entirely reserved anew,” she wrote to the archbishop, “whatever pertains to the investiture and the decree, of course, so that the mandate of the staff as well as of the pastoral care shall be bestowed through the process of your own judgment.”<sup>66</sup> Edith-Matilda had already given Aedulf the temporalities of the office—the lands and revenues—but she had refrained from giving him the religious symbol of his office, the staff. That, along with instructions for the pastoral care of the abbey, she reserved for Anselm.

The episode of Malmesbury Abbey provides a further example of lay noblewomen’s potentially problematic influence on the reform movement. Shortly after he received the queen’s letter about Aedulf’s candidacy, Anselm wrote back with disappointing news. The archbishop approved of the queen’s clever compromise, telling her, “you have acted well and according to the will of God, in what you did there.” The candidate in question, however, “did something very foolish in this matter which he should not have done. For...he sent me a goblet.”<sup>67</sup> This gift of a goblet for the archbishop thrust Aedulf under the suspicion of simony, another of the key crimes which the reformers were trying to remove from the Church. In the letter, Anselm took care not to allow any mention of simony to touch his ally, the queen, directly; rather, the fault lay entirely with Aedulf. Despite this stain of simony, however, Edith-Matilda still prevailed with the abbacy. The question of the candidacy never comes up again in any of the extant letters, and the chroniclers, including William of Malmesbury, recorded nothing more

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<sup>66</sup>*Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.326-7; trans. Frolich, *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury Volume Three*, 139-40: “...vestrae quidem donationi et dispositioni quaecumque illius sunt ex integro reservatis, ut scilicet tam virgae quam curae pastoralis commissio vestrae discretionis contradatur arbitrio.”

<sup>67</sup>*Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.328; trans. Frolich, *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury Volume Three*, 141: “Vos enim, quantum ad vos spectat, bene et secundum deum fecistis quod inde fecistis; sed ipse in hoc fecit quiddam valde insipienter, quod facere non debuit. Nam per eosdem legatos, qui mihi litteras vestras et aliorum de suo negotio attulerunt, misit mihi scifum unum.”

about Aedulf's appointment.<sup>68</sup> Aedulf remained abbot until Edith-Matilda's death in 1118, when he was finally deposed from his office.<sup>69</sup> His appointment clearly shows how influential and powerful the queen could be. Despite Anselm's initial refusal and Aedulf's unpopularity (as witnessed by his immediate deposition following the queen's death), Aedulf still had the queen's support. Presumably her support was the only power that kept Aedulf in his office. Perhaps Anselm and the monks of Malmesbury realized that it would not be wise to offer offense to a queen who was otherwise their constant ally and supporter.

Despite aristocratic women's tendencies to act independently according to their own political or personal motivations, the reformers within the Church could not afford to ignore these women and their desire to become involved in the reform. Indeed, they often played key roles in the progression of the reform. Edith-Matilda proved essential in the English Investiture Conflict. The careful negotiation over the abbacy of Malmesbury which Edith-Matilda presented to Anselm in 1106 is all the more remarkable when taken in light of future events in the reform movement, both in England and in Europe as a whole. In the Concordat of London in 1107, when King Henry I and Anselm finally met after four years of conflict over investiture, the compromise they decided upon was the same one Edith-Matilda offered a year earlier to resolve the problem of the Malmesbury abbacy. In short, the secular ruler would grant a candidate all secular rights associated with an ecclesiastical office, while the archbishop would bestow the religious symbols

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<sup>68</sup>See Rodney Thomson, "William of Malmesbury and his Environment," *William of Malmesbury* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2003), 3-13.

<sup>69</sup>Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 66.



and powers of the office.<sup>70</sup> At the Concordat of Worms in 1122, this same compromise ended—in theory, at least—the decades-long struggle over investiture between the papacy and the emperor.<sup>71</sup> It is impossible to prove beyond doubt that Henry I and Anselm copied Edith-Matilda’s solution to the problem of lay investiture. However, the fact that the queen proposed this compromise in her dealings with Malmesbury Abbey at least a year before the Concordat of London suggests the degree of influence she had in shaping the effects of the papal reform movement in England.

The key to reconciling such active lay female involvement and reformist ideals lay in the creation of a newly emphasized female Christianity. This developing lay female religiosity described women’s actions within the Church in recognizable terms, casting reformers’ female allies in the traditional roles of mothers and wives. By focusing on such “traditional” roles but defining their powers and duties in new ways, the papal reformers were able to combat the deeply-rooted distrust of the feminine among both opponents and supporters of the ecclesiastical reform. In the past, noblewomen’s power and agency within these roles were usually limited by the extent to which their male kinfolk were willing to indulge them. In Anglo-Saxon England, for example, queens were never anointed; all of their influence depended on their ability to reach the king’s ear.<sup>72</sup> What “power” noblewomen had wielded had existed almost entirely in their private households. In contrast, the reformers’ secular spiritual daughters were obviously taking

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<sup>70</sup>Cantor, *Church, Kingship and Lay Investiture in England*, 253-73.

<sup>71</sup>Arnold, *Medieval Germany 500-1300*, 100-2.

<sup>72</sup>See Pauline Stafford, “Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages,” in *Medieval Women*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 79-100; see also Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 33-40.

on very important roles in the public arena as active lordly women, and the reformers were encouraging them to do so.

Reformers reconciled this contradiction by turning their attention to the function of marriage—any marriage, not just clerical—in society, including the reevaluation of lay marriage in many of their reforms.<sup>73</sup> Several leading reformers focused on the common issues of consanguinity and adultery in lay marriages. Gregory VII, following the example of Pope Leo IX, wrote several letters concerning dubious unions between cousins, including one to Matilda of Este, newly married to her third cousin, Marquis Azzo, forbidding her to have intercourse with her husband and commanding her to withdraw from society.<sup>74</sup> Bishop Ivo of Chartres sent a similar letter of condemnation to Adela of Blois, who had petitioned him on behalf of her cousin, who was having an adulterous affair with William of Breteuil; in it, Ivo informed Adela that she was risking her own salvation by trying to help her adulterous cousin.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, Ivo took a particular interest in this new emergence of the sanctity of marriage, which must have influenced the severe tone he used with Adela. When the French king Philip I wanted to divorce his lawful wife in favor of his mistress, Ivo objected so vociferously that Philip imprisoned him—although in the end, Ivo and the Church triumphed when the king officially repudiated his mistress in 1104.<sup>76</sup> By focusing on the increasingly religious aspects of

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<sup>73</sup>For medieval marriage see James Brundage, *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1993); David d'Avray, *Medieval Marriage: Symbolism and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: the Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France* (New York: Pantheon, 1983); Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

<sup>74</sup>Epistle II.36, *Register Gregoris VII*.

<sup>75</sup>Epistle 5, "D. Ivonis Epistolae," *Patrologia Latina* 162, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: 1865), col. 15.

marriage—which officially became a sacrament in the mid to late twelfth century—the Church not only increased its own power and influence in a major aspect of lay culture, it also increased the importance of the wife in her family by emphasizing her many roles as spouse, mother, educator, and nurturer.

One way in which papal reformers inserted their female correspondents into these new perceptions of marital roles was by involving them specifically in the issue of clerical marriage rather than in other pressing concerns, like simony and investiture. This was especially true for laywomen in the relatively lower strata of the nobility, who were not necessarily drawn into the Investiture Conflict by their rank, unlike the English or German queens or the Tuscan countesses. Peter Damian's letter to Adelaide of Turin, discussed earlier, is just one example among many. In a more telling instance, Pope Gregory VII wrote two letters on November 10, 1076, one to Count Robert I of Flanders and the other to his wife, Adela. Gregory warned Robert against priests "given over to fornication...not heeding what madness or what a crime it is at one and the same time to touch the body of a harlot and the body of Christ," and included a command to "gainsay simoniacs" who were "thieves and robbers."<sup>77</sup> In his letter to Adela, however, Gregory bid her to focus entirely on clerical marriage, making no mention of the simoniac priests. The different language of the letter illustrates the division in Gregory's approach. Rather than rely on vitriolic words like "harlot," Gregory used a more restrained tone when

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<sup>76</sup>For conflicts between the French monarchy and the church reformers see Elizabeth M. Hallam, *Capetian France 987-1328* (London: Longman, 1980), 129-41; Jean Dunbabin, *France in the Making: 843-1180* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154-62; Marcus Bull, "The Church," in *Short Oxford History of France: France in the Central Middle Ages*, ed. Marcus Bull (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 134-65.

<sup>77</sup>Epistle IV.11, *Register Gregoris VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *Register of Gregory VII*, 220; the full passage reads: "sacerdotes in fornicatione positi non erubescant cantando missam tractare corpus et sanguinem Christi non attendentes, que insania quodve scelus est uno eodemque tempore corpus meretricis et corpus attractare Christi...et symoniacis contradicere...fures sunt et latrones."

addressing Adela. “In no wise,” he wrote, “should ministers at the sacred altar who continue in fornication do duty, but they should also be driven outside the sanctuaries until they show fruits worthy of repentance.”<sup>78</sup>

Reformers even tied the image of the Church itself to their new ideals of marital sanctity, as well as perceptions of gender and sexuality. As Megan McLaughlin argues in *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform*, much of the reform rhetoric was couched in the imagery of the Church as the Bride of Christ, a polluted woman who had been sinned against by unfaithful husbands and sons—priests and laymen, respectively.<sup>79</sup> Reformers portrayed the Church as both wife and mother. Anselm of Canterbury, in one example, described laymen’s duties to the Church: “For princes, if they are Christians, should not consider that the spouse of God, their mother, was given to them as a hereditary dominion but rather entrusted to them by God so that they may merit to become her coheirs to honor and defend her.”<sup>80</sup> Their purpose in doing so is clear: as a wife, the Church demanded the fidelity of her clerics in terms of priestly celibacy; as a mother, the Church became the nurturer, educator, and caretaker of society. It is possible to suggest that this deliberate feminization of the Church directly aided the effort to reform marriage practices, as well as leading—whether intentional or not—to a new emphasis on the power and importance of specific gender roles in Christian society.

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<sup>78</sup>Epistle IV.10, *Register Gregoris VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *The Register of Gregory VII*, 219-20: “nullo modo ministros sacri altaris in fornicatione manentes misse debere celebrare officium, quin etiam extra choros esse pellendos, quousque penitentiae dignos fructus exhibeant.”

<sup>79</sup>McLaughlin, *Sex, Gender, and Episcopal Authority in an Age of Reform*, 51-187. See also chapter two in Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 150-73.

<sup>80</sup>*Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 4.159-60; trans. Walter Frohlich, *The Letters of Saint Anselm of Canterbury*, 2.233-235: “Non enim debent principes sponsam dei, matrem suam, si Christiani sunt, aestimare sibi datam in haereditariam dominationem, sed a deo sibi commendatam, ut eius cohaeredes mereantur esse ad reverentiam et defensionem.”

The fact that the emergence of the Bride of Christ image occurred contemporaneously with the growth of the cult of the Virgin Mary during this period is highly significant for the Church's evolving perception of gender roles. Indeed, clerics directly compared the Church to the Mother of God. In his early-twelfth century treatise *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, Honorius Augustodunensis argued that Mary represented the role of the Church in the Christian religion. As a mother, the Church, like Mary, gave birth to offspring through baptism. Honorius even portrayed the Church as a virgin for serving the true faith and not being polluted by heresies, as Mary was never corrupted by sexual acts.<sup>81</sup> The twelfth century witnessed the greatest increase in devotion to the Virgin Mary, both in liturgy and literature.<sup>82</sup> Anselm of Canterbury, for example, wrote three prayers to Mary in which he venerated her as the Queen of Heaven and, more importantly, as the Mother of God, focusing especially on her compassion.<sup>83</sup>

Ecclesiastical reformers strongly encouraged their female correspondents to venerate Mary, using the saint as the archetype of the perfect Christian woman. True, Mary was a virgin, but when writing to lay noblewomen, the reformers chose to emphasize instead her role as the Mother of God, as an intercessor for mankind, and as an active agent in the faith. Gregory VII assured Matilda of Tuscany that the Virgin Mother was "higher and better and more holy than every mother...You will find her, I confidently promise, more responsive than a natural mother and more mild in her love for

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<sup>81</sup>Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae*, trans. and ed. Amelia Carr (Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1991), 53.

<sup>82</sup>E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 158.

<sup>83</sup>For a discussion of Anselm's prayers, see Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Allen Lane, 2009), 134. For a translation of the prayers, see Anselm of Canterbury, *The Prayers and Meditations*, trans. and ed. Sister Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin Books, 1973).

you.”<sup>84</sup> Matilda, following Gregory’s advice, requested that Anselm of Canterbury—whom she had met during his second exile in 1104—send her copies of his Marian prayers.<sup>85</sup> Ida of Boulogne won praise for founding the monasteries of Our Lady of the Chapel in Calais and the abbey of Cappelle in honor of the Virgin Mary.<sup>86</sup> Queens like Edith-Matilda, Margaret of Scotland, and Adelaide of Hungary were directly compared to Mary in her form as Queen of Heaven. Indeed, Ivo of Chartres made a clever play on Edith-Matilda’s title, calling her the “Queen of the Angles” who would one day “reign in heaven with the Queen of the Angels.”<sup>87</sup> The reformers’ promotion of the cult of the Virgin contained a challenge for lay noblewomen: to emulate Mary as much as they possibly could by serving as mothers, daughters, and wives of the Christian Church.

Marian imagery also carried over into other forms and examples of female religiosity. The correspondence preserved in ecclesiastical registers offers a useful insight into the interactions between the reformers and high status secular women, but in addition to these letters, the *Vitae* of three of the lay noblewomen discussed here have survived. These *Vitae* provide clear and detailed portraits of the Church’s new perception of lay female religiosity, including the same virtues attributed to the Virgin Mary, the Church’s perfect woman. Of the three women portrayed in the *Vitae*, Ida of Boulogne and Margaret of Scotland best conformed to Marian ideals of motherhood, generosity, and nurture, which might have contributed to each woman’s later canonization. The third woman,

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<sup>84</sup>Epistle I.47, *Register Gregoris VII*; trans. Cowdrey, *Register of Gregory VII*, 53: “quanto altior et melior ac sanctior est omni matre...Invenies illam, indubitanter promitto, promptiorem carnali matre ac mitiorem in tui dilectione.”

<sup>85</sup>Matilda of Tuscany, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, 5.256-57.

<sup>86</sup>“Vita Idae,” in *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis* vol. 2, 139-147.

<sup>87</sup>Epistle 142, “D. Ivonis Epistolae,” PL 162, col. 148-9.

Matilda of Tuscany, was never a mother, but the picture that emerges from her *Vita* is that of a triumphant female lord, reminiscent of the Queen of Heaven. Naturally, the authors of these works could not portray their subjects as perfect copies of Mary, but they used the three secular women, just as the Church used Mary, as models for an ideal female religiosity.

These three biographies are remarkable for several reasons. Looking ahead to the future, subsequent centuries saw a marked increase in renowned holy women, especially female mystics or visionaries like Hildegard of Bingen and Julian of Norwich. These later women were almost exclusively professed religious, living most of their lives in monastic institutions.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, the three women from the period of the papal reform whose biographies have survived spent the majority of their lives in the secular world: Matilda of Tuscany and Margaret of Scotland both died while still active rulers (though, according to their biographers and confessors, each had professed at some point to a desire to take the veil), and Ida of Boulogne did not retire to a monastic house until near the end of her life.<sup>89</sup> Secondly, while these three *Vitae* share certain common hagiographical topoi with earlier works, the authors chose to emphasize their subjects' agency—they were, in no way, passive observers attempting to live out a chaste life in retirement.<sup>90</sup> Finally, these three works were written for a very specific purpose: not only

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<sup>88</sup>For further information on thirteenth and fourteenth century holy women, see Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden, eds., *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-c. 1500*. Turnhout (Belgium: Brepols, 2010).

<sup>89</sup>Ferdinand Holbock argued in 2002 that Ida most likely became a “secular oblate” rather than a professed religious. See *Married Saints and Blesseds* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 148.

<sup>90</sup>For a selection of scholarship on hagiography, see Pamela Gehrke, *Saints and Scribes: Medieval Hagiography in its Manuscript Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

to record the deeds of their pious subjects, but also to serve as a kind of handbook for other powerful secular nobility. The *Vita Idae*, written by an anonymous monk of St. Vaast shortly after Ida's death in 1113, mentions frequently, in true hagiographical form, how much readers or listeners could learn from the merits of Ida's life. Donizo of Sutri, Matilda of Tuscany's biographer, ended his work with a specific exhortation for Emperor Henry V and his empress to bless Matilda's name and copy her devotion to Christ.<sup>91</sup> Turgot of Durham framed his hagiography of St. Margaret of Scotland in such a way to create the portrayal of a perfect Christian queen, one which he meant for her daughter, Edith-Matilda of England, to live by.

The three *Vitae* differed greatly in style and tone. Donizo's *Vita Mathildis* read more like a *res gestae*, or a record of Matilda's military deeds, while the *Vita Idae* focused on the miracles that Ida performed during her lifetime which would later earn her canonization. The *Vita Sanctae Margaretae*, on the other hand, omitted the miracles attributed to the Scottish queen and instead highlighted the more worldly good she did in her position as queen. Despite these major differences, however, the *Vitae* shared a common goal to create a Christian woman who led a successful and praiseworthy life in the secular world. Of the three authors, Donizo of Sutri struggled the most with reconciling holy deeds in a secular figure. Still clinging to the traditional image of a virginal saint, Donizo neglected to mention either of Matilda's two marriages, clearly preferring to imply that she was entirely chaste without a hint that suggested otherwise.<sup>92</sup> His Matilda appeared as a powerful political and military figure, suiting her more

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<sup>91</sup>Latin edition from *Donizone: Vita Di Matilde di Canossa*, ed. Paolo Golinelli (Milano: Jaca Book, 2009).

<sup>92</sup>Joan M. Ferrante, "Women's Role in Latin Letters from the Fourth to the Early Twelfth Century," in *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women*, ed. June McCash Hall (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1996), 93-94



“masculine” deeds in real life. In one telling scene, Donizo portrayed Henry IV kneeling before Matilda, calling her his “powerful cousin” and begging for her blessing and her aid in dealing with the papacy.<sup>93</sup> In her epitaph, Donizo proclaimed, “You have conquered kings.”<sup>94</sup> Her true success lay not in defeating Henry IV in battle however; instead, it lay in her victories as a protector and patron of the Church, in the actions she carried out with the blessings of the pope.

Ida of Boulogne and Margaret of Scotland, on the other hand, were portrayed in more overtly feminine roles. Ida’s biographer, for example, showed her as the perfect Christian mother, so concerned with her sons’ physical and spiritual wellbeing that she breastfed them herself rather than using a wet nurse, lest her sons be contaminated by the wet nurse’s possible depravity.<sup>95</sup> The author attributed her sons’ later successes on the First Crusade to the example which Ida set for them. He also portrayed her as the perfect Christian mother to her entire community, repeatedly connecting her with the poor, the sick, the old and the young, widows and orphans, and the entire “household of faith.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, the majority of the miracles Ida worked during her lifetime involved either women or children. The author took care to note that even after her retirement from the public world, Ida played an active role in ecclesiastical affairs, especially those concerning the less fortunate in society.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup>*Donizone: Vita Di Matilde di Canossa*, II line 97 : “consobrina valens.”

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid*, line 1426: “Vicisiti reges.”

<sup>95</sup>“Vita Idea,” *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis II*, 142: “non sinebat alienis sed propriis laedari uberibus, timens ut pravis contaminarentur moribus.”

<sup>96</sup>“Vita Idea,” *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis II*, 142: “Agebat solícite pauperum curam, retributionem expectans futuram; viduas et orphanos circumquaque et infirmos, maxime domesticos fidei...”

<sup>97</sup>“Vita Idae,” *Acta Sanctorum Aprilis II*, 145-6.

Likewise, Turgot's Margaret of Scotland was also an exemplary mother, overseeing her children's education herself, pouring "out care to her children not less than to herself, seeing that they were nurtured with all diligence and that they were introduced to honest matters as much as possible."<sup>98</sup> Also like Matilda and Ida, Margaret was an effective public figure, playing a crucial role in her society. Turgot portrayed the Scottish queen as an influential leader, a role model, and, above all, a teacher. Margaret's attendants, rather than scorning her, "both esteemed her with fear and feared her with esteem" to the point that "not only would no one dare to do an execrable deed in her presence, no one even dared to offer a disgraceful word."<sup>99</sup> King Malcolm, in contrast, appeared as a borderline barbarian, illiterate, uncivilized, and impious, but Malcolm "learned from [Margaret's] urging and example to pray to God....He dreaded to displease that queen...in any manner but rather he used to rush to comply with her wishes and prudent plans in all things."<sup>100</sup> Turgot created the image of the queen as a public symbol of royal power and authority, down to the very clothes and utensils she used: Margaret "went about with costly, refined clothing as befitted a queen," and decorated the royal hall so that "the whole house glittered with the reflections off gold and silver" because these were "things which royal dignity demanded from her."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup>*Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. Hinde, 240; trans. Huneycutt, 166: "Nec minorem quam sibimet, filiis curam impendebat; ut, videlicet, cum omni diligentia nutrentur, et quam maxime honesties moribus instituerentur."

<sup>99</sup>*Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. Hinde, 239; trans. Huneycutt, 166: "illam et timendo diligenter, et diligendo timerent. Quare in presentia ejus non solum nihil execrandum facere, sed ne turpe quidem verbum quisquam ausus fuerat proferre."

<sup>100</sup>*Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. Hinde, 241; trans. Huneycutt, 167; the full passage reads: "Didicit ille ab ea etiam vigiliis noctis frequenter orando producere; didicit, ejus hortatu et exemplo, cum gemitu cordis et lacrymarum profusione Deum orare...Ipsam tam venerabilis vitae reginam, quoniam in ejus corde Christum veraciter habitare perspexerat, ille quoquomodo offendere formidabat; sed potius votis ejus et prudentibus consiliis celerius per omnia obedire properabat."

By focusing on Margaret's role in and impact on society, her biographer made it clear that his intention was not to paint a portrait of a saint who happened to be a queen, but of a queen who became a saint through her actions in the world. Turgot carefully chose the actions and events which drove his narrative forward. In an enlightening passage, he wrote, "Let others admire in others tokens of miracles, in Margaret I admire to a much greater extent works of compassion. For signs are common to both good and evil people, but works of true piety and charity are exclusive to the good...Let us, I say, more worthily admire in Margaret the deeds which effected her sanctity rather than portents (if she had caused any) which showed her very great sanctity to people."<sup>102</sup> Almost every recorded episode of Margaret's actions in the text served as an example of the queen's compassion, piety, and charity. These attributes formed not only the basis for Margaret's characterization but also the heart of Turgot's vision of ideal Christian female lordship: Margaret was a devoted wife, a nurturing mother, an exemplar of piety, and, most importantly, an active and influential agent working for the betterment of Christian society.

The letters and the three *Vitae* discussed here often portray very different—sometimes even conflicting—perceptions of lay female religiosity. Female involvement in ecclesiastical affairs was a complicated matter for both the reformers and their

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<sup>101</sup>*Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. Hinde, 242; trans. Huneycutt, 168: "Regalis quoque aulae ornamenta multiplicavit, ut non tantum diverso palliorum decore niteret, sed etiam auro argentoque domus totat resplenderet...et haec quidem illa fecerat, non quia mundi honore delectabatur, sed, quod regia dignitas ab ea exigebat."

<sup>102</sup>*Symeonis Dunelmensis Opera et Collectanea*, ed. Hinde, 250; trans. Huneycutt, 174-5; the full passage reads: "Mirentur alii in aliis signa miraculorum, ego in Margarita multo magis admirer opera misericordiarum: nam signa bonis et malis sunt communia; opera autem verae pietatis et caritatis bonorum propria. Illa sanctitatem interdum ostendunt, ista etiam faciunt. Dignius, inquam, miremur in Margarita facta, quae illam Sanctam faciebant, quam signa, si aliqua fecisset, quae hominibus sanctam tantum ostenderent."

opponents, as well as for the women themselves. Yet a pattern does emerge. Over the five decades that witnessed the height of the reform movement, the Church's female allies in the secular world evolved from figures like Matilda of Tuscany, who blurred the traditional boundaries between public masculinity and private femininity, to a clear-cut depiction of a Christian mother, wife, and lord who wielded a great deal of influence in her local powerbase and acted as a public role model. The role of this ideal laywoman—this “handmaiden of God,” to use Anselm of Canterbury's favorite phrase—continued to expand even as the reform itself expanded its reach and effect, so that, towards the end of this period, a lay noblewoman was expected to look out for the salvation not only of her family, but to oversee the pastoral care of her community as a whole. It is to this particular facet that the discussion now turns.

#### *Handmaidens of God: Ensuring Pastoral Care*

“See your brothers, your fellow servants, the people of your God,” Edith-Matilda wrote to Anselm in 1104, “already enduring shipwreck, already slipping down into death. But you do not help, nor do you extend your right hand, nor do you interpose yourself between us and the danger....Therefore, good lord, pious father, blunt this severity and—pardon what I say—soften the steeliness of your heart!”<sup>103</sup> Prior to this letter, Anselm and Edith-Matilda's other male correspondents invariably assured the English queen that mediating with the king was the most useful action she could take in order to support the Church's cause. With this letter, however, Edith-Matilda eschewed the traditional

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<sup>103</sup>*Opera Omnia* 5.244-6; trans. Frolich, *The Letters of St. Anselm of Canterbury*, 3.22-23: “Vides, ecce vides fratres tuos, conservos tuos, populum domini tui iam naufragia sustinentem, iam labantem in ultimis, nec succurris, nec porrigis dexteram, nec obiectas te discrimini.... Flecte itaque, bone domine, pie pater, severitatem hanc, et ferreum—pace tua dixerim—pectus emolli.”

boundaries of a wife—however royal she might be—to promote her own agency over her entire community—in this case, the English people. The queen depicted herself in this and in subsequent letters as the protector of her kingdom’s salvation, unafraid to chastise even the highest authorities in the Church if she believed they were neglecting her people’s spiritual needs. This concern for the common welfare developed alongside with and because of the other papal and monastic reforms, especially after 1100. Indeed, a comparison of the two generations of lay noblewomen involved in the reform demonstrates the emergence of this attention to pastoral care: from the Tuscan countesses as political and militant protectors of the papacy to the more nurturing figures of Ida of Boulogne, Edith-Matilda, and her mother Margaret, as depicted in her twelfth-century hagiography.

This period witnessed the important development of new practices of lay piety, including especially a new attention to pastoral care, both in terms of spiritual wellbeing and bodily health. One physical manifestation of this new attention came in the forms of hospitals and leprosariums. The early twelfth century witnessed the most active phase of hospital foundations during the Middle Ages, and roughly one-fifth of these hospitals began as leprosariums.<sup>104</sup> Lay noblewomen were often at the heart of this new concern for the Christian community, and many founded these hospitals with the expectation that their relationship with the foundations would continue throughout their lives.<sup>105</sup> Queen

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<sup>104</sup>Carole Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006), 106-7. See also R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950-1250* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 42-56.

<sup>105</sup>Sheila Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: Gift-giving and the Spiritual Economy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004).

Edith-Matilda, for example, provided an annual income for her foundation, the Hospital of St. Giles in London.<sup>106</sup>

The preoccupation with lepers followed the same line of thought. Leprosy, which medieval physicians believed was caused by “divine will, hostile planetary forces, poor diet, corrupt air, dirt, sexual misconduct, [and] prolonged contact with the leprous,” among other factors, had for centuries been associated with sin.<sup>107</sup> As a result, most societies shunned lepers, assuming that their affliction represented a form of divine punishment. In the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, however, leprosy began to take on a new connotation. Christians began to focus more on Christ’s Passion, especially in terms of his suffering and humility. Many even venerated the *Christus quasi leprosus*, Christ as a leper during the Passion. Parallel to this development was the new interest in penitential religious figures, such as Mary Magdalene, whose story offered hope for the reformed sinner.<sup>108</sup> The two notions combined to create a budding desire among the lay pious to care for the lepers in their societies. Indeed, lepers, victims of a “living death,” became the symbols of worldly grief and suffering.<sup>109</sup> By caring for such afflicted individuals, Christians hoped to imitate Christ and his saints. Indeed, as the twelfth century progressed, *imitatio Christi* became a popular lay motif.

Again, Edith-Matilda of England offers a prime example of this new lay religious devotion. Her younger brother David, staying in the English court during Easter 1105, could only stare in wonder as his sister cleaned a group of lepers in her own chambers:

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<sup>106</sup>Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 105-6.

<sup>107</sup>Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 4. See also Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 120-140.

<sup>108</sup>Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 102-3.

<sup>109</sup>Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 137.

I found the house filled with lepers and the queen standing in their midst. When she had taken off her cloak and bound herself with a linen towel, she put water in a basin and began to wash their feet and wipe them dry. When they were dry, she took them in both her hands and kissed them with devotion. I asked her, “What are you doing, my lady? If the king knew of this he would certainly never deign with his lips to kiss your mouth, polluted as it is with the disease of these leprous feet.” Smiling, she said, “Who does not know that the feet of the eternal king should be preferred to the lips of a king who will die? Indeed I called you for this, my dearest brother, so that you would learn by my example to do the same.”<sup>110</sup>

At the same time as members of the lay aristocracy like Edith-Matilda evoked the *Christus quasi leprosus*, they also practiced a deeply emotional form of penance by debasing themselves in order to act as servants and risking their own health to care for the lowest of the low. This can be seen in the way David looked back at his refusal to help his sister with the lepers: “I was terror stricken and replied that there was no way I could do that. I did not yet know the Lord, nor had his spirit been revealed to me...I went back to my friends, stubbornly holding on to my guilt.”<sup>111</sup> During Edith-Matilda’s lifetime, the veneration of the *Christus quasi leprosus* was so new to England that David could only react with a visceral sense of disgust and horror to his sister’s form of lay devotion, rather than recognizing the penitential act for what it was.

The importance of pastoral care to these later women can be seen most clearly in their acts of patronage towards the budding Augustinian Order. The history of the Augustinians is, unfortunately, hazy in this period; the Church made no attempt to

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<sup>110</sup>Aelred of Rievaulx, “Geneologia regum anglorum,” *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 195, col. 736. Eng. trans. by Jane Patricia Freeland in *Aelred of Rievaulx: The Historical Works* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2005), 120: “Et ecce domus plena leprosis et regina in medio stans, depositoque pallio cum se linteo praecinxisset, posita in pelvi aqua coepit lavare pedes eorum et extergere, extersosque utrisque constringere manibus et devotissime osculari. Cui ego: «Quid agis, inquam, o domina mea? Certe si rex sciret ista, nunquam es tuum leprosum pedum tabe pollutum suis dignaretur labiis osculari.» Tunc ipsa subridens: «Pedes, ait, Regis aeterni quis nesciat labiis regis morituri esse praeferendos? Ego certe idcirco vocavi te, frater charissime, ut meo exemplo talia discas operari.»”

<sup>111</sup>Aelred of Rievaulx, “Geneologia regum anglorum,” PL 195, 736; trans. Freeland, *The Historical Works*, 120: “Ad hanc vocem vehementer expavi, et nullo modo id me posse respondi. Necdum enim sciebam Dominum, nec revelatus fuerat mihi spiritus ejus...ego mea culpa ridens ad socios remeavi.”

regulate the order until the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, after which point the sources for the Augustinians are abundant.<sup>112</sup> However, the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries witnessed the birth and spread of the Augustinians as part of a larger move towards the reform movement's ideal of the *Vita Apostolica*—a life emulating the Apostles.<sup>113</sup> The Augustinians were regular canons, priests who lived according to a quasi-monastic rule known as the Rule of St. Augustine.<sup>114</sup> Their most notable tenets consisted of an insistence on communal rather than personal property, usually smaller establishments than those run by traditional monastic houses, and a clear interest in pastoral care. This last feature ensured that the Augustinians were much more closely involved in their neighboring societies than their monastic cousins.<sup>115</sup> The Augustinians took on numerous roles, serving in cathedral churches and priories, running hospitals, acting as parish priests for smaller localities, or “otherwise exercis[ing] the care of souls in some way.”<sup>116</sup> The order was, in a way, the formalization and institutionalization of the ideology behind pastoral care. The form of religious life originated in southern France and Italy in the mid-eleventh century as a result of efforts to revive Carolingian

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<sup>112</sup>Southern, *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*, 241-49.

<sup>113</sup>For the history and scholarship of the Augustinian Order of Regular Canons, see J.C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England* (London: S.P.C.K., 1950); F. Donald Logan, *A History of the Church in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137-8; Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism* 160-4; Frances Andrews, *The Other Friars: The Carmelite, Augustinian, Sack and Pied Friars in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006).

<sup>114</sup>Lawrence, *Medieval monasticism*, 160-66. For the Rule of St. Augustine, see George Lawless, *Augustine of Hippo and his Monastic Rule* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

<sup>115</sup>Hallam, *Capetian France*, 148.

<sup>116</sup>Logan, *History of the Church in the Middle Ages*, 137.



precedents, and it spread rapidly, reaching northern France, Germany, and even England by the first decades of the twelfth century.<sup>117</sup>

Two aristocratic laywomen in particular promoted the spread of the Augustinians, perhaps as a desire to take a more formal approach in their interest in pastoral care: Adela of Blois and Edith-Matilda of England. In 1101/2, Ivo of Chartres requested Adela's aid for a collegiate church which Kimberly LoPrete has identified as St-Jean-en-Vallée, to the north of Chartres.<sup>118</sup> Ivo had recently instituted the Augustinian Rule there, and one of the new canons had become embroiled in an argument over property with his former monastery. "I ask therefore," Ivo pleaded, "for the salvation of your soul that you love the church of St. John the Baptist, where with God's help we have introduced a regular life, and that you defend the things pertaining to that church against attackers and usurpers as much as you can."<sup>119</sup> Adela not only agreed to support the canon's claim, but she also later donated land to St-Jean.<sup>120</sup>

Adela's sister-in-law, Edith-Matilda, greatly favored the Augustinian order. Indeed, she and her husband Henry I founded some of the earliest Augustinian houses in England, where they became so popular so quickly that by the end of the twelfth century they were the most widespread forms of religious institution in the kingdom, with almost 300 houses.<sup>121</sup> Edith-Matilda founded the priory of Holy Trinity Aldgate in London c.

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<sup>117</sup>Allison D. Fizzard, *Plympton Priory: A House of Augustinian Canons in South-Western England in the Late Middle Ages* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 2.

<sup>118</sup>LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 249.

<sup>119</sup>Epistle 91, "D. Ivonis Epistolae," *PL* 162, col. 112: "Rogo autem pro remedio animas vestrae ut ecclesiam beati Joannis Baptistae, in qua regularem vitam Deo donante ordinavimus, diligatis, et res ad ipsam ecclesiam pertinentes contra insidiantes et incursantes pro posse vestro defendatis."

<sup>120</sup>LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 249.

1108 and specifically requested that canons from the first Augustinian house established in England, St. Botolph's, come to London to instruct the new priory in the Augustinian Rule. She also donated generously to Merton Priory in Surrey, founded by one of Henry I's sheriffs. Edith-Matilda's popularity and prestige at court ensured that other Anglo-Norman nobles copied her actions, so that Holy Trinity Aldgate and Merton Priors soon became so popular that by 1150 they headed almost a dozen daughter houses.<sup>122</sup> Henry I granted another Augustinian house, Waltham Abbey, to Edith-Matilda, most likely around the time of their marriage in 1100. Eight charters concerning the queen's interactions with Waltham have survived, in which she showed her continuous generosity, freeing the canons from a tithe they had previously paid for the building of Durham Cathedral and granting them the rights to hold a fair on the feasts of the Holy Cross, among other matters.<sup>123</sup>

Adela's and Edith-Matilda's interest in the Augustinians (and reformers' encouragement of such interest) is easy to understand in light of the order's reputation as pastoral caretakers. Although some Augustinian houses mimicked monastic observances much more closely by living in seclusion, most were well known for their public acts of service and charity, especially concerning the sick and the poor. Both Adela and Edith-Matilda—along with several of the other women discussed above—shared this interest in attending to the needs of all members of their communities. Certainly not all of their pastoral actions were motivated by altruism—charitable works carried a “high premium”

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<sup>121</sup>Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 164.

<sup>122</sup>J.C. Dickinson, *The Origins of the Austin Canons and their Introduction into England*, 111-26. See Also Huneycutt, *Matilda of Scotland*, 108-9.

<sup>123</sup>See Rosalind Ransford, *The Early Charters of the Augustinian Canons of Waltham Abbey, Essex 1062-1230* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), Charters 3, 5, and 15.

for salvation, after all—but their actions did demonstrate a new focus for lay piety.<sup>124</sup> Ida of Boulogne earned her title of “Blessed” through her miraculous healings of women and children, the weakest members of medieval society. Edith-Matilda stunned and sickened her brother David by cleansing the sores of lepers in her personal chambers without regard to her own wellbeing. And Adela of Blois showed such a keen interest in medicine and hospitals that in his poem addressed to her, Baudri of Bourgueil included a character who discusses the medicinal art along with the more traditional liberal arts.<sup>125</sup>

The ecclesiastical reform movement’s emphasis on a return to the apostolic life led directly to the upsurge in grassroots efforts towards pastoral care, manifested by orders of regular canons like the Augustinians and foundations of hospitals, pilgrimage sites, and leprosariums.<sup>126</sup> Pastoral care gained momentum throughout the twelfth century, yet it is important to note that Adela, Edith-Matilda, and the other lay noblewomen were serving in the frontlines of an ideal that had only begun to emerge, but one that also played directly into the new perceptions of lay female religiosity that appeared at this time. Their actions and the approval that they won from their friends and allies in the Church showed that lay noblewomen had the duty to oversee not only the spiritual and physical health of their immediate families, but of their entire Christian communities. Edith-Matilda once sent a gift of candelabra to the bishop of Le Mans, ostensibly as a reminder of herself and her requests for his prayers; Hildebert responded by saying it was clearly also a reminder of his own pastoral duty to her and her people, to

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<sup>124</sup>Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, 58.

<sup>125</sup>LoPrete, *Adela of Blois*, 74.

<sup>126</sup>See Lawrence, *Medieval Monasticism*, 160-2; Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England*, 19-67.

“give light to all who are in the house.” The bishop gratefully accepted the gift, writing, “I embrace your exhortation, daughter of Christ, which even if it were not your intention, if you simply gave, yet as I accept the service of the gift, I shall not scorn its lesson.”<sup>127</sup>

This, too, was the role in which the reformers’ secular female allies placed themselves: public figures who provided an example for their communities to aspire to and who promoted the Church’s teachings and causes to the greatest extent that they could within the constraints imposed by their gender and lay status.

### *Conclusion*

The late eleventh and early twelfth centuries saw an unusual amount of deliberate cooperation between lay aristocratic women and papal reformers within the Church, but it appears to have been a short-lived phenomenon, albeit an historically meaningful one. The reformers clearly depended heavily upon these two generations of women, for their positions as mediators, as eyes and ears in their local courts, and, eventually, as exemplars of the new forms of faith that emerged as a result of the reform. By the Concordat of Worms in 1122, however, women seem to have once again faded to the margins of the Church’s attention. It is possible that the reformers found themselves in a strong enough position that they no longer had the desperate need to recruit powerful political allies, male and female alike. The twelfth century also became a time of political crisis for medieval Europe, as every major kingdom suffered from wars—often civil wars that changed the makeup of a kingdom’s rulership. The Church itself faced papal schisms

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<sup>127</sup>Epistle 9, “Ven. Hildeberti Epistolae,” *Patrologia Latina* 171, ed. J.P. Migne (Paris: 1865), col. 160-62: “...ut luceat omnibus qui in domo sunt. Amplector tuam, filia Christi, exhortationem, quae si tuae defuit intentioni, si dedisti simpliciter, sic tamen muneris accipio famulatum, ne contemnam documentum.”

and renewed conflicts with the Empire.<sup>128</sup> Although religious concerns continued to color the events of every regional scene, ecclesiastical reform in the terms that eleventh-century reformers would have understood no longer took central stage. Additionally, the institutions of the reform were in already in place.

Despite the shifting tides in the mid- to late-twelfth century, the effect of lay female involvement in the eleventh-century ecclesiastical reform should not be underestimated. The women discussed in this thesis left indelible marks on the Church itself, perhaps not as the ruling “senate” which anti-reformers scorned, but as powerful allies and leaders of the reform. Indeed, the involvement of lay noblewomen in ecclesiastical affairs during the height of the papal reform can be seen as an anticipation of the future development of lay female religious orders in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the form of the Beguines and Poor Clares.<sup>129</sup> Clearly secular women were eager to find new ways to observe their faith.

The lay noblewomen who supported the reform had an important impact on both the spread and success of the reform movement as well as on the perception of gender roles that developed during this period. The actions of this network of religious-minded lay noblewomen forced the reformers in the Church to nuance their own ideal of complete separation of secular influence over ecclesiastical affairs in order to make room for these women, their support, and their new forms of lay piety. The portrait of female religiosity that emerged was not one of a retiring virgin shunning the pollution of the secular world. Rather, a woman’s duty to the Church was, as Peter Damian commanded

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<sup>128</sup>Thomas N. Bisson, *The Crisis of the Twelfth Century: Power, Lordship, and the Origins of European Government* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>129</sup>For these later lay female orders, see Lawrence, “Sisters or Handmaids,” in *Medieval Monasticism*, 217-37.

Adelaide of Turin in 1064, to “act therefore to be a virago of the Lord.”<sup>130</sup> This, then, was the role of a pious lay noblewoman: a teacher, an exemplar, a caretaker of the “wretched” and “oppressed”, but above all an influential public figure promoting the idea of a Christian society.

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<sup>130</sup>Epistle 114, *MGH, Die Briefe der Deutschen Kaiserzeit, IV, Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. Kurt Reindel, 295-306: “Age ergo, esto virago Domini.”

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