

Lucy Menzies (1882 to 1954) and the Christian Ideal of Sanctity in Medieval Scotland

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I knew Lucy Menzies and Evelyn Underhill with a good degree of intimacy, and loved them both, and always feel myself deeply indebted to them. To see them together was to have a sight of a very dear friendship, full of heavenly values, and fun, and freedom to say anything, and a love which warmed and comforted their friends. Life was supremely with them an enduring search for the Will of God, sometimes in great darkness and suffering, sometimes in the light.¹

With these words, Margaret Cropper, the Lake District poet, dramatist, and biographer, described the deep friendship between her mutual friends Lucy Menzies and Evelyn Underhill. Cropper completed the first important biography of Underhill, which Lucy Menzies had laboured over until her own death in 1954. While Evelyn Underhill is rightly acknowledged as one of the twentieth century's most important writers and authorities on Christian mysticism and spirituality,² her friend Lucy Menzies is much less well known. Menzies was indeed a close friend, spiritual disciple and collaborator of Underhill and was an accomplished scholar and spiritual writer in her own right. Nonetheless, Menzies has fallen into relative obscurity, despite the fact that she was given an honorary doctorate in Divinity by the University of St Andrews in 1954 and is commemorated on 24 November in the calendar of the Scottish Episcopal Church. After first presenting an overview of Lucy's life and work, this article analyses her views on Christian sanctity in medieval Scotland as expressed in her biographies of saints Columba and Margaret.

¹ Margaret Cropper, *Evelyn Underhill* (London: Longmans, Green, 1958), p. ix.

² In addition to the biography by Margaret Cropper, see e.g., Ann Loades, *Evelyn Underhill* (London: Fount, 1997); Christopher John Richard Armstrong, *Evelyn Underhill, (1875–1941): An Introduction to Her Life and Writings* (London: Mowbray, 1975); Dana Greene, *Evelyn Underhill: Artist of the Infinite Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

*The Life and Writings of Lucy Menzies*³

Lucy Menzies was born in 1882 to the Reverend Allan Menzies and Mary Elizabeth Honey. As a young girl, she began what would be a long association with the town and university of St Andrews when her father became Professor of Biblical Criticism there.⁴ Lucy and her sister May were educated by their father at home, and later were sent to finishing school in Heidelberg where Lucy deepened the formidable language skills which would later serve her well in her scholarly work. In her childhood the family began a long tradition of holiday stays on the isle of Iona, and also made frequent visits to the continent. After both her parents died in 1916, Lucy continued to live in St Andrews and soon began to produce varied writings. The first was a translation from the French of *General Foch on the Rhine* (1918),⁵ and that same year she penned a personal memoir as a preface to her father's writing on Calvin and other subjects.⁶ Lucy would go on over the next decade to produce more translation volumes on a variety of interests: *Caucasian Folk-Tales selected and translated from the originals by Adolph Dirr* (1925)⁷ and *The First-Friend: an anthology of the friendships of man and dog compiled from the literature of all ages 1400 B.C. – 1921 A.D.* (1929).⁸

³ The following overview draws upon the two most extended published memoirs of Lucy Menzies: Lumsden Barkway, 'Lucy Menzies, A Memoir', in Cropper, *Evelyn Underhill*; and 'Lucy Menzies, Scholar and Mystic', abridged from a talk given at All Saints' Church, St Andrews by her godson John Hunter: <<http://www.umilta.net/menzies.html>> [accessed 21/08/2021]

⁴ For the significance of Allan Menzies work, see William Johnstone, 'Biblical Criticism in the Nineteenth Century', in *History of Scottish Theology*, ed. by David Ferguson and Mark Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2019), II, pp. 353–54.

⁵ Charles Le Goffic, *General Foch at the Marne: an account of the fighting in and near the marshes of Saint-Gond*, trans. by Lucy Menzies (London: J. M. Dent, 1918).

⁶ Allan Menzies, *A Study of Calvin and other papers; with a memoir of Allan Menzies by his daughter* (London: Macmillan, 1918).

⁷ Adolph Dirr, *Caucasian Folk-Tales selected & translated from the originals*, trans. by Lucy Menzies (London; Toronto: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1925).

⁸ Lucy Menzies, *The First-Friend: an anthology of the friendships of man and dog compiled from the literature of all ages 1400 B.C.–1921 A.D.* (London, 1929).

Beginning in 1920 with her publication of the first version of *St Columba of Iona*,⁹ Lucy entered upon what Lumsden Barkway aptly called 'her own proper field' of spirituality.¹⁰ When Lucy became aware that the anonymous review of this book in *The Westminster Gazette* was by Evelyn Underhill, the two began a correspondence that soon led to a deep friendship. This study of Columba, which would see several revisions over the years, would be followed by an impressive series of books exploring issues related to Christian mysticism and spiritual biography. These included *A Book of Saints for the Young* (1923);¹¹ *The Saints of Italy* (1924);¹² *Saint Margaret of Scotland* (1925);¹³ and her most famous work, *Mirrors of the Holy: Ten Studies in Sanctity* (1928).¹⁴ Lucy and Evelyn's shared love of the French School of prayer and spiritual direction was reflected in two collaborative projects in which Lucy translated the works and Evelyn wrote the introductions: François Malaval's *A Simple Method of Raising the Soul to Contemplation: in the form of a dialogue* (1931)¹⁵ and *Letters of Direction: Thoughts on the Spiritual Life, from the letters of the Abbé de Tourville* (1939).¹⁶

Although she had been raised in the Church of Scotland, in 1924 Lucy was confirmed as an Anglican, which, according to Margaret Cropper, brought to her great peace of mind. Lucy always considered herself to be both Presbyterian and Episcopalian,¹⁷ while at the same time developing a deep appreciation of Roman Catholic spirituality, both in the Middle Ages, but also down to her own

⁹ Lucy Menzies, *Saint Columba of Iona: a Study of His Life, His times, & His Influence* (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1920).

¹⁰ Barkway, 'Lucy Menzies' in Cropper, *Evelyn Underhill*, p. xvii.

¹¹ Lucy Menzies, *A Book of Saints for the Young* (London; Boston: Medici Society, 1923).

¹² Lucy Menzies, *The Saints in Italy: A Book of Reference to the Saints in Italian Art and Dedication* (London: The Medici Society, 1924).

¹³ Lucy Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland* (London: Dent, 1925).

¹⁴ Lucy Menzies, *Mirrors of the Holy: Ten Studies in Sanctity* (London, A. R. Mowbray, 1928).

¹⁵ François Malaval, 1627–1719, *A Simple Method of Raising the Soul to Contemplation: in the Form of a Dialogue*, trans. by Lucy Menzies (London; Toronto: J. M. Dent, 1931).

¹⁶ Abbé de Tourville, *Letters of Direction: Thoughts on the Spiritual Life, from the letters of the Abbé de Tourville*, trans. by Lucy Menzies (Westminster (London): Dacre Press, 1939).

¹⁷ Hunter, 'Lucy Menzies, Scholar and Mystic', p. 5.

time. Her developing life as an Anglican led to a momentous step when, at the urging of Evelyn Underhill and others, Lucy took up the wardenship at the retreat house at Pleshey in Essex.¹⁸ Lucy held the wardenship at Pleshey for ten years, before retiring to St Andrews in 1938 for health reasons. Bishop Barkway, echoing the sentiments of so many retreatants at Pleshey over those years, reflected:

There she left a lasting heritage in the spiritual atmosphere and way of life which she established, and, more obviously in the lovely chapel which might almost be called her creation. She spent herself unsparingly on her retreat work [...] when you found her, you discovered something very rare — a heart at leisure with itself, which is the essence of the rarest of all virtues, that of Humility — not thinking badly of you, but not thinking of yourself at all. Everything was immediately referred to God [...] She seemed to be completely in rapport with you, and without explanation to see your point of view and to be completely at your service.¹⁹

Following the death of Evelyn Underhill in 1941, Lucy undertook the formidable task of acting as Evelyn's literary executor. In this capacity, she oversaw the publication of many of Evelyn's unpublished writings and addresses, including letters, retreat conferences, diary excerpts, and collected papers.²⁰ Despite her own declining health and eyesight, Lucy continued to

¹⁸ Hunter, 'Lucy Menzies, Scholar and Mystic', p. 5.

¹⁹ Barkway, 'Lucy Menzies', p. xvii. For an excellent discussion of Pleshey and the work of Evelyn Underhill there while Lucy was Warden, see Robyn Wrigley-Carr, *The Spiritual Formation of Evelyn Underhill* (London: SPCK, 2020), pp. 113–37.

²⁰ *Collected Papers of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. by Lucy Menzies (London. New York; Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946); Evelyn Underhill (with a memoir by Lucy Menzies), *Light of Christ: Addresses Given at the House of Retreat, Pleshey, in May, 1932* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1944); Evelyn Underhill, *Shrines and Cities of France and Italy, from an early diary of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. by Lucy Menzies (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949); Evelyn Underhill, *An Anthology of the Love of God from the Writings of Evelyn Underhill*, ed. by Lumsden Barkway and Lucy Menzies (London: Mowbray, 1953). Concerning *The Letters of Evelyn Underhill, edited with an introduction by Charles Williams* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946),

produce new scholarship of her own. These included an edition of and introduction to the retreat addresses given at Pleshey by Father Edward Keble Talbot,²¹ and a memorial of the London Anglo-Catholic slum-priest Father Wainright.²² She also produced an abridged version of Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*.²³ Lucy's last completed book was published in 1953, an immense scholarly effort editing and translating the mystical text of the thirteenth century German Mechthild of Magdeburg entitled *The Revelations or The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, translated from the Manuscript in the Library of Einsiedeln.²⁴ This project proved to be very taxing, and with her health in continual decline, Lucy undertook the final task, left unfinished at her death, of writing a full biography of Evelyn Underhill.²⁵ Lucy was buried in the graveyard adjoining St Andrews Cathedral. A plaque in the Sacrament chapel in her beloved All Saints Church on North Castle Street, across the street from her home, marks the spot where she frequently prayed and meditated.²⁶

Bishop Barkway in his memoir asserts that although she was not credited as editor, Lucy did much of the work for this volume. As he remarks, p. xix, 'Similarly, her self-effacement had hidden her remarkable efficiency in the arts and in practical life. She got things done because she did not mind who got the credit for doing them.'

²¹ Edward Keble Talbot, *Retreat Addresses of Edward Keble Talbot*, ed. by Lucy Menzies (London, S.P.C.K., 1954).

²² Lucy Menzies, *Father Wainright: A Record* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1947).

²³ Charles Kingsley, *The Water Babies*, abridged with a memoir by Lucy Menzies (London: J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1946).

²⁴ Mechthild of Magdeburg, *The Revelations of Mechthild of Magdeburg (1210-1297): or The Flowing Light of the Godhead*, trans. from the manuscript in the library of the Monastery of Einsiedeln by Lucy Menzies (London; New York: Longmans, Green, 1953). Lucy's annotated copy of *Offenbarungen der Schwester Mechthild von Magdeburg, oder Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit*, ed. by P. Gall Morel (Regensburg: G.J. Mainz, 1869), which had previously been owned by Evelyn Underhill, can be found in the Special Collections of the library of the University of St Andrews.

²⁵ Lucy's notes and preliminary draft, utilized by Margaret Cropper in her biography of Evelyn Underhill, can be found in the Special Collections of the library of the University of St Andrews.

²⁶ Hunter, 'Lucy Menzies, Scholar and Mystic', p. 1.

In her literary output, Lucy Menzies was much more than a populariser, although she did successfully reach large audiences with some of her works. She was in fact a fine critical scholar who succeeded in making many important areas of the Christian spiritual tradition accessible to an English-speaking audience for the first time. Moreover, she accomplished this from an informed and sympathetic point of view that went beyond mere hagiography and combined an enviable analytic depth with a transparent love for her subject and the implications of it for contemporary spiritual life. As Professor Baxter put it in his address marking her honorary doctorate in Divinity from St Andrews,

Possessing deep historical scholarship and linguistic equipment both wide and accurate, Miss Menzies brought to the understanding of St Columba and Queen Margaret the rarer gifts of intuition and insight, and as the list of her writings lengthened, so this unusual insight deepened into an unusual spiritual charm.²⁷

In writing about the two great saints of medieval Scotland, Lucy applied the highest standards of scholarship with a keen spiritual sympathy for the foundations of the Church in her own native country.

Sanctity in Medieval Scotland

As noted earlier, Lucy Menzies had an intimate acquaintance with the isle of Iona from an early age, and her love for the place never left her. Her first scholarly biography, dedicated to St Columba, the sixth century Irish monk and missionary founder of the monastery at Iona, afforded her ample scope to present the history of Iona in the context of reflections that combined a high degree of Celtic Romanticism with an intense appreciation of the historical realities of medieval monastic life. Likewise, her biography of St Margaret, which was based upon close reading of primary sources, gave her the opportunity to reflect upon the place of asceticism and monastic prayer in the pursuit of Christian holiness by the laity. Menzies is also noteworthy in that, almost alone among early twentieth century Protestant writers, she did not attempt on the one hand to portray Columba as an anti-Roman champion of a 'Celtic Church', or on the other to condemn Margaret for supposedly contributing to the demise of an independent 'Celtic Church' by sweeping away older forms in favour of

²⁷ Cited in Hunter, 'Lucy Menzies, Scholar and Mystic', pp. 9–10.

new Roman ones. In this sense, her writings on both these saints are important landmarks in both historical and ecumenical studies.²⁸

In a foreword to a later revision of her life of St Columba, Lucy reflected upon how the original book brought her into contact with Evelyn Underhill. Here she articulated what she saw as the most important aspect of this biography, namely Columba's gradual spiritual transformation:

That was an anonymous review but I learned later that it was written by Evelyn Underhill, more interested in St Columba's gradual transformation into sanctity than in his historical background. It is a characteristic of the saints that they tend to be transformed by that which they seek. In spite of Columba's tempestuous nature it is eventually the man of prayer who wins through. A background of prayer and a continual tendency towards God shine through his life. And in the end he achieved selflessness and humility. The story of his struggles with others, his conquest of himself and finally his evening of serenity at Iona, forms one of the most moving pages of history. The intimate domestic life of Columba at Iona is shown us in a vivid way. We see him just as he was, his quick temper, his impetuous ways, his petulance about troublesome guests — and yet his never failing hospitality — his love for his fellows and for every living thing, even for his trees, his devotion to those under his rule, his absolute belief in prayer, above all his love for God.²⁹

Throughout her discussion of Columba's life and activities, based mostly on Adamnan's seventh century hagiography of the saint, Lucy balanced critical scholarly skills with an approach equally close to her heart, a certain Romantic view of what could be called the Celtic temperament and spiritual landscape. This tendency is found throughout the book, in passages where Lucy reflected upon the numerous miracles attributed to Columba. She noted how the miracle stories found in Adamnan's *vita* were an expected part of the story for

²⁸ On these points see the cogent comments of Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1999), pp. 174–77.

²⁹ All subsequent references to this work are taken from the revised version of the 1920 original: Lucy Menzies, *St. Columba of Iona*, 6th edn (Glasgow: The Iona Community, [1949]1974), pp. viii-ix.

Christians of that time and were seen as an important way for Columba to imitate Christ.³⁰ Thus, his miracle stories, whatever may be the case of their portrayal as supernatural, were intended to reflect aspects of Columba's sanctity which Lucy considers to be genuine. Just as she felt the later poems attributed to him retained something of the force and effect of his sentiments and personality,³¹ the miracle tales genuinely reflected that Columba had 'gifts of insight and discernment which give rise to many a story of his supernatural powers'.³² The stories of his hospitality to birds and beasts, however romantically they are presented, were a manifestation of his sanctity and a deep kinship with all of creation:

Compassionate love for animals was characteristic of many of the saints. Selfless lives possess a strange power over the lesser creation; the barrier between man and beasts seem to be swept away; instead there is mutual recognition that all creatures share the universal life given by God.³³

Lucy specifically asserted that this is something that Columba shared with St Francis of Assisi.³⁴ Likewise, Columba's solicitude for the poor and those suffering from various kinds of illness was at the heart of stories that reflected his genuine gift of healing, something she feels was confirmed by our own personal experience:

His own gift of healing is easily understood; there must have been a sense of spiritual power about him which surrounded and emanated from him and which exerted an immediate and direct influence on a people ready to believe in the supernatural. Many of us have experienced something of this sort in our own lives.³⁵

Lucy's views on the relationship of the miraculous to sanctity, at times, were linked with her appreciation of what she viewed as characteristics of the 'Celtic character'. For example, the numerous episodes of prophecy attributed

³⁰ Menzies, *St Columba*, pp. 8–9.

³¹ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 13

³² Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 53

³³ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 54

³⁴ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 38.

³⁵ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 55.

to Columba by Adamnan were part of what she sees as the gift of ‘second sight’, and in alluding to this Lucy attaches this faculty with sanctity more generally and specifically a posture of humble receptivity to God’s word:

The strange gift of the second sight, which Adamnan calls ‘the divine gift of prophecy’, was possessed by Columba in high degree. He knew of things happening at a distance — ‘Heaven has granted to some’, he said, ‘to see on occasion in their minds clearly and surely the whole of the earth and sea and sky’. It has been suggested that the Celtic peoples may be less separated from the universal consciousness than the rest of mankind, that perhaps they live closer to the Eternal. That, of course, is true of the saints, of all who train themselves by lives of waiting on God to be able to receive his messages. The Columba of the later, and still more of the latter years, was a very different being from the impetuous hot-head of his youth. He had more to overcome in himself than many, but towards the end we see all the marks of selflessness and humility, the true hall-marks of sanctity.³⁶

There are also other ways in which Lucy portrays Columba, particularly in the first four decades of his life, as the very image of the Romantic Celt. He is described as possessing an eager temperament and love of fighting, but also as a poet and bard akin to Ossian, a lover of all things beautiful marked by a holy cheerfulness, and a scholar and servant of God with a passion for travel and spreading the Gospel.³⁷ If monastic discipline and prayer were the keys to Columba’s evolution from tempestuous youth to an elder marked by humility and sanctity, Iona was the arena where this spiritual transformation took place by providing Columba with an environment of beauty and solitude.³⁸

Based upon her own extensive time there and her vivid imagination, Lucy seamlessly combines reflection upon Columba’s life with that of those who experience Iona as modern pilgrims.³⁹ She employed lovely and evocative

³⁶ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 58.

³⁷ Menzies, *St Columba*, pp. 10–16.

³⁸ Menzies, *St Columba*, pp. 58–59.

³⁹ E.g., she recounts the story of how Columba sent out his spirit to refresh the monks returning from work, and how the same happens to modern pilgrims, who find themselves ‘no longer sensible of trouble or fatigue’. Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 79.

words to describe how it felt to sail around the Western Isles, and described in detail the landscape of Iona stressing how from earliest times the island had ‘an aura of sanctity’,⁴⁰ citing Fiona MacLeod on how Iona was a ‘thin place’.⁴¹ For Lucy, Iona literally had an infinite appeal to the artist and painter, uniquely blending aesthetics with holiness.⁴²

As important as solitude could be to Columba’s growth in holiness, Lucy also stressed that his spiritual development was fundamentally worked out within the social world of the monastic community, where Columba was shown to be both a brother and a father to his family of monks. Thus, while Columba could at times be stern, Lucy stressed how he also often went out walking or riding to encourage his brethren in their work, and how they were constantly in his thoughts. His prayers and affections were with them, comforting them and strengthening them.⁴³ Finally, in her description of Columba’s servant Diarmid, Lucy articulated yet another aspect of holiness — the life of hidden yet indispensable service which perhaps gave voice to her own path:

Diarmid was Columba’s personal attendant, one of those devoted disciples who knows no fame but is always in the background, supporting and strengthening the master he serves and worships, enabling him to fulfil his destiny unhindered by care for everyday details.⁴⁴

Turning to Menzies’s 1925 study of the eleventh century queen, St Margaret, in the preface she notes how this work naturally follows her earlier work on Columba.⁴⁵ Yet from the outset Lucy made it clear that a key to understanding Margaret’s life was to place her in the category of mystic. Thus, she began by quoting Evelyn Underhill on how each mystic possesses ‘the power of stinging to activity the dormant spark in the souls of those whom they meet’.⁴⁶ Throughout the book Lucy referred to the scholarly work of Evelyn Underhill and William James, and to mystical writers such as Catherine of Siena, Ruysbroek and John of the Cross, to explain aspects of Margaret’s inner life. She

⁴⁰ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 20.

⁴¹ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 24

⁴² Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 24.

⁴³ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 35

⁴⁴ Menzies, *St Columba*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. viii.

⁴⁶ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, frontispiece.

justified this practice in her 'Acknowledgements': 'Mystic experience being of the same nature in whatever land or age, we come to passages which explain Margaret's thoughts and ideals in many contemplatives of later date, and I have quoted freely from them.'⁴⁷

However, this does not mean that Lucy portrays Margaret as a sort of ahistorical mystical figure who could have lived nearly an identical life in any period. While drawing upon important secondary scholarship and above all on the early twelfth century life of Margaret by the saint's friend Turgot of Durham, monk and subsequently bishop of St Andrews,⁴⁸ Lucy took great pains to place Margaret's life and work in the context of eleventh century Scotland. Furthermore, building upon insights of Turgot and other sources, as well as her own knowledge of the history of Christian spirituality, Lucy announced in her preface how Margaret embodied and adapted a specifically monastic and Benedictine spirituality in her own life:

[...] but it is surely just because Reality is the sole quest and joy of the mystic that we find Margaret's life transfigured by it. The Light at which she aimed 'enwrapped and penetrated her as the air is penetrated by the light of the sun' and shone through everything she did. But, much as she did for Scotland, she was greater than her best work. Thinking of her, living with her, it is not her achievements which strike us so much as the selfless spirit in which she achieved them. 'The height and perfection of blessedness', said Cassian, in

⁴⁷ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 198.

⁴⁸ Lucy drew extensively upon the English translation, including its learned notes: Turgot, Bishop of St Andrews, *The Life of St Margaret, Queen of Scotland*, ed. by William Forbes-Leith (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1896). For an overview of Turgot's life and work, see Robert Bartlett, 'Turgot (c. 1050–1115)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, published online 23 September 2004:

<<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27831>>

For the influence of Turgot on Margaret's ideas of reform, see Bridget Nichols, 'Women and Liturgical Reform: The Case of Margaret of Scotland', in *Priscilla Papers*, 22 (2008), 23–27.

words which were probably known to Margaret, 'does not consist in the performance of wonderful works, but in the purity of Love'.⁴⁹

This theme of Margaret as pursuing an essentially lay Benedictine, what today might be called a Benedictine oblate, path of holiness is developed in detail throughout the book and constitutes an important and highly original insight. Lucy described how the young princess' early days at the English court were marked by her education at the hands of Benedictines, where she learned to read and pray with the Scriptures, studied the lives of saints, and the works of two key monastic authors, John Cassian and Pope Gregory the Great.⁵⁰ Likewise, Margaret's friendship with Archbishop Lanfranc, himself a Benedictine reformer, was seen by Lucy as crucial to Margaret's own efforts while queen in the reform and re-vitalization of the Scottish church.⁵¹

This emphasis on the Benedictine spirituality of Margaret is developed further in chapter 8. Drawing upon the recently published Dom Cuthbert Butler's *Benedictine Monachism*,⁵² Lucy discussed in some detail the nature of Benedictine life, seeing it as a balance of manual labour, self-discipline and prayer. The moderation of the Benedictine Rule was stressed, as well as its roots in the earlier writings of Basil, Augustine and John Cassian. The Benedictine ideal lay, 'not in the annihilation of the natural appetites, but in their sanctification'.⁵³ It was primarily concerned with the monks seeing Christ in everyone they encountered, and following Christ in obedience, patience, and self-denial. Lucy considered its humane spirituality a prime means for the development of sanctity: 'It is enlightening to consider the standard aimed at by St Benedict, a broad, human standard, inspired equally by idealism and common-sense, the latter quality being highly recommended to us by the saints.'⁵⁴

Lucy further expounds these ideas by stressing that Margaret learned from the Benedictine ideal to practise purification of self, and to put into place in her own life values such as ongoing conversion of life (*conversio morum*), commitment to place (*stabilitas*), and obedience. On the issue of poverty, Lucy

⁴⁹ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. xi.

⁵⁰ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, pp. 20–21.

⁵¹ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 25.

⁵² Cuthbert Butler, *Benedictine Monachism: Studies in Benedictine Life and Rule*, 2nd edn (London, New York & Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1924).

⁵³ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 69.

understood this in the Benedictine context as being essentially an exhortation to simplicity and frugality, linked to the obligation for a person to practise stewardship of the things entrusted to them, a sense fully applicable to the life of Margaret.⁵⁵ Above all, Lucy saw Margaret as epitomizing the Benedictine ideal of humility.⁵⁶

In describing Margaret's dedication to Benedictine ideals of balance, moderation and prayer, Lucy did voice concern about how Margaret fasted to the point of infirmity. As she put it, 'Margaret is not a good example of the balanced life as regards to fasting.'⁵⁷ Lucy went on to say that while we must not approve of this excessive fasting, still we are obliged to try to understand it as a way to enter in some small way into the sufferings of Christ. If such fasting was done for the right reason, Lucy argued, such as pain borne for a friend, it could be, apparently, liberating and give an almost heavenly joy. Lucy speculated that Margaret's excessive fasting was offered to God for the bellicose Malcolm in expiation for his violence and warfare. In saying this, Lucy assumed the role of trying to explain to her audience what can seem to be questionable medieval practice, while also providing a plausible theological rationale for ascetical practices that she would analyse in her later works. In walking the thin line between her own developing thought and the sensibilities of her audience, Lucy, in the traditional manner, linked fasting with Margaret's equally strenuous efforts at almsgiving:

If Margaret's ardour in fasting was mistaken — and of that we are not in a position to judge — it was a discipline she did not allow to interfere with her work for others. She spent long hours of prayer in the morning, and she did not break her fast till with the king she had served the poor who waited for them in the great hall. This daily observance is really an allegory of her life-service of God and of her fellow-men, before service of self.'⁵⁸

While Lucy maintained that Margaret was clearly shaped by Benedictine ideals, it was in the sphere of domestic life and court where the queen lived out these values. Lucy described at length Margaret's devotion to her husband Malcolm and their children. Acknowledging that Malcolm refused to curb his

⁵⁵ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 76.

⁵⁶ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 153

⁵⁷ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 154

⁵⁸ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 157.

warlike behaviour, Lucy did however follow her medieval source, Turgot, in describing how Malcolm was devoted to his wife, respected her piety and learning, and most importantly of all, supported her plans for reform of both Church and state. In other words, as Lucy explained it, Malcolm responded well in the presence of a sanctity that he himself could not fully understand. Likewise, Malcolm entrusted to his wife the moral education of their sons; one of her greatest accomplishments for the future of Scotland was inculcating her sons with her own love of religion, education, and responsibility.

Ultimately, for Lucy, Margaret's sanctity lies in the fact that she, following the example of her teacher Lanfranc and ultimately Pope Gregory the Great, admirably combined the contemplative and active life. Margaret quotes Turgot referring to how Margaret was like another Mary, sitting at Christ's feet meditating on his teaching day and night.⁵⁹ But she also was like Martha, founding and restoring abbeys and schools, establishing the high art of embroidery, encouraging pilgrimage, helping captives and refugees, extending hospitality to all classes of people, including the poor. As Lucy sums it up, this ideal of sanctity, the combination of the active and contemplative, was of the highest importance to subsequent Scottish history:

In any case, such profound personal experience as hers was not dependent on books. The path of the mystic is in all cases much the same — the awakening to the Divine, the purifying of self, the eager course of self-denial to purge away everything out of harmony with the enlightened vision. Then, all the powers transformed, the enlightened spirit must inevitably spend itself on others [...]. And it was because of her deep spiritual anchorage that she was able to deny herself the cloistered life and throw herself actively into the affairs of her adopted country. She was the instrument through which the spiritual life of Scotland was to be revived.⁶⁰

Conclusions

It has been noted⁶¹ as a mark of the Anglican tradition that the boundaries between important works of theology and spirituality can often blur. The same

⁵⁹ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, p. 41.

⁶⁰ Menzies, *Saint Margaret Queen of Scotland*, pp. 148–49.

⁶¹ *Love's Redeeming Work: The Anglican Quest for Holiness*, ed. by Geoffrey Rowell, Kenneth Stevenson, and Rowan Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. xxxiii.

could be said for works of biography and history; if subjects are treated in a particular way, they can cross over boundaries of literary genre, and we see this at work in Lucy Menzies's two spiritual biographies of medieval Scottish saints. While both biographies are meant to reach a non-specialist audience and are written in a charming and accessible style to achieve this, they also represent an original synthesis of up-to-date scholarship. This commitment to make scholarship accessible and relevant to a lay audience is in itself a significant accomplishment and indeed vocation and was one that Lucy Menzies also extended in her writings about saints for children and travellers, as well as her essays on women mystics. While it does position her as joining in the work of Evelyn Underhill in this regard, it also places her among other important Anglican female writers, such as Margaret Cropper with her three volumes of biographies of Anglican spiritual writers,⁶² and the medievalist Eleanor Shipley Duckett in her studies on saints and scholars in the early English and Carolingian churches.⁶³

The multiple editions of her spiritual biography of Columba served as an influential introduction to the saint and Iona for countless pilgrims. Lucy's books on Columba and Margaret also fulfilled an important ecumenical role, as they removed the consideration of both saints from the polemical interdenominational squabbling that had marked so many discussions of Celtic Christianity, revealing them to be extremely significant ecumenical figures belonging to the whole Church. Along with this, Lucy handled, with nuance, sensitivity and knowledge aspects of medieval spirituality that could seem alien to many in her audience, including mysticism and monastic asceticism. This final point fits in with a vocation dedicated to these goals, and presents Lucy Menzies, along with her friend Evelyn Underhill, as a living embodiment of the ideals of sanctity she so persuasively and disarmingly articulated for a wide audience. As Julia Bolton Holloway wrote about Evelyn and Lucy, 'It is a chorus of voices across time, culminating in Evelyn Underhill and Lucy Menzies, both

⁶² See the following by Margaret Cropper: *Flame Touches Flame* (London: The Religious Book Club, 1950); *Sparks Among the Stubble* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1955); and *Shining Lights: Six Anglican saints of the 19th century* (London: Dartman, Longman & Todd, 1963).

⁶³ See Susan Mosher Stuard, 'Eleanor Shipley Duckett (1880–1976)', in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. by Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 213–26.

women who explored the past for spiritual greatness in order to give it to the present and the future.’⁶⁴

⁶⁴ A preface to her publication of John Hunter’s memoir on Julia’s website dedicated to Julian of Norwich and other mystics:
<<http://www.umilta.net/menzies.html>> [accessed 21/08/2021].