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Geertgen tot Sint Jans's Night Nativity: A Study in Female Spirituality Practices

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GEERTGEN TOT SINT JANS'S NIGHT NATIVITY:
A STUDY OF FEMALE SPIRITUALITY PRACTICES

by

KIMBERLY BROOKE MCGEE

Under the Direction of John Decker, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Night Nativity by Geertgen tot Sint Jans depicts the birth of Christ in a manner that emphasizes the role of the Virgin as mother and Christ as the enlightener of the world. In this paper, I will argue that the *Night Nativity* was directed primarily toward meeting the devotional needs and interests of the nuns of the Convent of Our Lady of the Visitation near Haarlem. This convent is of particular interest because it is associated with the Windesheim Congregation of the Modern Devotion, which was a religious movement that privileged certain forms of lay spirituality. In particular, the adherents of the Modern Devotion seemed to have preferred various forms of affective devotion often associated with “women’s spirituality.” Geertgen’s image, I believe, appealed to the women in the convent because it focuses on the role of the Virgin and, in doing so, activated well-known tropes of female spirituality.

INDEX WORDS: St. John, Spirituality, Lay Piety, Mary, The Virgin, Saint Birgitta, Devotion, Windesheim Congregation, Haarlem

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Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my husband Tyler. Thank you for all of the love, support and encouragement along the way. Thank you for allowing me to be me, for understanding how important my love for Art History is, for encouraging me to learn more, and for your eagerness to learn about what I love. I also dedicate this to my brother Chad. Your knowledge about so much has always impressed me. I look up to you in so many ways. You have helped shape my thoughts about life and have opened my mind to love everything about history and all things old.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Geertgen tot Sint Jans's *Night Nativity* (c. 1490) is one of the artist's more intriguing paintings, depicting the scene of Christ's birth through an abundance of light. The Christ child and the Virgin are both central figures in the scene and are accompanied by Joseph, angels, animals, and shepherds. In the foreground, rays of light emanating from the Christ child cast a sharp light on the faces of the surrounding angels, ox, and ass. The artist's use of light in the *Night Nativity* is remarkable for its intensity, which would have been even greater before much of the paint was abraded from the panel's surface.¹ Light was an important element in certain types of popular devotion in the fifteenth century and had a long history in Christian theology from the early church onward (e.g. the well-known light theology of the Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite). The "theology of light" made its way into both high and low practice through various avenues including theologians like Pseudo-Dionysius and Bonaventure, as well as through popular works of mystics and "lay theologians" like Birgitta of Sweden.² The prominence of light in the image, as well as its primary source— Christ raises the likelihood that the audience for Geertgen's panel valued the theological references and devotional routes it offered. This raises the question: who was the audience for this image, and how did it meet their religious/social needs?

In my thesis I will argue that this panel was used by the sisters living in the Convent of Our Lady of the Visitation, just outside the city of Haarlem.³ This view is a departure from what other scholars have suggested about the patronage of this panel.⁴ As is the case with so many works from Geertgen's oeuvre, there are no archival traces for who commissioned the work. Despite this uncertainty, I will argue that the painting was destined for a particular pious female audience, concerned with humility, spiritual motherhood, and service. In part, my belief that the

nuns of the convent were the *Night Nativity*'s patrons is based on Geertgen's biography in Karel Van Mander's *Het Schilderboek* (1604). This book is the only source that can tell us about the life of Geertgen tot Sint Jans (though it dates a century after the artist's death) and provides what little documentary evidence scholars have for the artist's patrons and *oeuvre*. In addition to Geertgen's main patrons, the Knights of St. John Hospitaller in Haarlem, van Mander also notes that there were works, in the Augustian priory in Haarlem, the Convent of Our Lady of the Visitation outside the St. John's Gate, and at residences of the Regular canons outside of Haarlem.⁵

There are several different names that scholars use when discussing the Convent of Our Lady of the Visitation, such as the Convent of the Visitation of Our Lady and the Convent Outside St. John's Gate. For the sake of convenience, I will use "the Convent Outside St. John's Gate" throughout my paper. This convent is of particular interest because it is associated with the Windesheim Congregation of the Modern Devotion, which was a religious movement that privileged certain forms of lay spirituality. In particular, the adherents of the Modern Devotion seemed to have preferred various forms of affective devotion often associated with "women's spirituality." The composition of Geertgen's panel appears to address just such interests. The Virgin occupies a large portion of the picture plane. Her size and prominence underscore her importance in the story of the Nativity. In addition to the newborn Christ child, the presence of child-like angels emphasizes her role as mother. Joseph, who is relegated to the background, takes on a secondary role to his wife. Though other scholars have indicated that Joseph's humble position may refer to his role as an ideal monk, I contend that his presence is secondary and also emphasizes the Virgin's importance as the mother of the incarnation of God.⁶ In addition, The Virgin's proximity to the brilliant light streaming from Christ's crib signals to the viewer that the

relationship between the Virgin and her son is the painting's primary focus; a theme that was a popular part of female piety. The size of the Virgin, the child-like angels, the secondary role of Joseph, and the overt use of light in the panel appear, then, to support female devotional practices popular in the fifteenth century.⁷

Though it is impossible to ascertain with any certainty which written sources, if any, inform the panel's content, the image strongly invokes themes found in popular religious works. Specifically, the *Night Nativity* seems to draw heavily on St. Birgitta's *Revelations* and on Jacopo de Voragine's *Golden Legend*. The artist may have acquired knowledge of the works of the Modern Devotion and de Voragine's *Golden Legend* through the library in the Haarlem Commandery where he worked.⁸ Even if he had no access to the books in that repository, which is likely, de Voragine's work, as well as Birgitta's *Revelations*, was widely disseminated in the fifteenth century and can be considered to have been part of popular knowledge and belief. This is important as the image has within it elements that may have triggered various devotional routes such as the birth of Christ as a metaphor for the rebirth of the soul, which offered the sisters a "spiritual roadmap" for elevating their spiritual lives. Further, the image provided the nuns with an opportunity to imitate the traits of the Virgin, such as being the humble and obedient servant to Christ, which would have mirrored their roles within the convent, as well as performing the spiritual role of mother and nurturer. Such routes, I argue, suited the spiritual needs of the sisters.⁹

2 THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Light, as Millard Meiss famously observed, was an integral part of early modern religious painting in the north.¹⁰ In Geertgen's panel, light plays a significant role— so significant that Erwin Panofsky lauded the *Night Nativity* (figure 2.1) as being unique among Netherlandish

paintings. According to Panofsky, the “*Night Nativity* was the first true night scene in Netherlandish art.”¹¹ Panofsky’s assertion, however, was incorrect as technical analysis carried out on the painting has shown that the dark hue of the image is the result of the oxidization of the ultra marine paint the artist used for the sky and the Virgin’s cloak.¹² The original state of the painting would have been more in keeping with the “daytime” Nativities common throughout Europe in this period. Oxidation aside, Panofsky was correct in identifying the intensity of the light in the image as being important. James Snyder suggests that these Nativity paintings are all very similar in the use of contrasting light, even though the backgrounds of the *Turin-Milan Book of Hours*, and Hugo van der Goes’s lost *Nativity* are more grey in color when compared to Geertgen’s panel, where the rich use of the ultra marine gives the painting a degree of naturalism while still focusing the viewer on the strong source of light coming from the Christ child.¹³ Snyder’s observations rightly point up the similarities of the genre but downplay too much the significant differences between Geertgen’s panel and other well known versions of the Nativity.

Robert Campin’s *Nativity* (figure 2.2) provides a useful point of comparison to Geertgen’s rendition as both invite the viewer to assemble devotional programs based on popular versions of the story. In particular, both evoke Birgitta’s *Revelations* and also draw parallels with de Voragine’s *Golden Legend* in which the faithful “[h]ave their eyes opened to the light.”¹⁴ Although both panels share the same overall narrative, each evidences variations on the theme— one refers to the legend of the midwives and the other does not— and the artists’ uses of light are obviously different. The Christ child in Geertgen’s painting appears to be the main source of illumination based on the abundance of light rays streaming from him and his manger. Snyder notes that the light radiating from the Christ child engulfs the Virgin who is in [the] awe of the miracle.¹⁵ In Campin’s panel, the Christ child radiates a weak nimbus; only Joseph’s shielding of

the candle he holds indicates that the child's light is greater. Intensity of light aside, both artists focus on the "pure" relationship between the Virgin and the Christ child at the moment of Christ's birth, which evokes the *Revelations* of St. Birgitta.¹⁶

Birgitta describes her mystical visions in her *Revelations*, which was translated into various vernaculars and was disseminated across Europe.¹⁷ In her description of her encounter with the Virgin, Birgitta writes, "Such incredible light and splendor went out from him that the sun could not be compared from it."¹⁸ In the *Revelations*, Birgitta expresses great reverence for the Virgin and appreciation for the experience of witnessing Christ's birth. The saint remembers her mystical experience:

When all these things were ready, the Virgin knelt down with great reverence and began to pray. She kept her back to the manger, but lifted up her head towards heaven, facing east. She remained there with her hands raised and her eyes intent upon heaven as through held in ecstatic contemplation, inebriated with divine delight. While she was praying I saw the infant move in her womb, at that very moment, in the flash of an eye, she gave birth to her son. Such indescribable light and splendor went out from him that the sun could not be compared to it. The candle that the old man had there was giving no light at all, for that divine luster completely outshone the material luster of the candle. The birth of the child was so instant and sudden that I was unable to see or discern how or even with what part of her body she gave birth. And yet I immediately saw that glorious infant lying on the ground, naked and shining. Verily though all of a sudden, I saw the glorious infant lying on the ground naked and shining, then I heard also the signing of angels, which was a miraculous sweetness and great beauty, when therefore the Virgin felt that she had already borne her Child, she immediately bowed her head, and joined her hands, and with great piety and reverence adorned the child saying to him: Welcome my God, my Lord and my son.¹⁹

Birgitta's spirituality was dominated by Marian Piety, which was an interest shared by fifteenth-century audiences.²⁰ The popularity of the *Revelations* appears to have been based on the lay reception of Birgitta's divine encounter with the Virgin, which was unlike any documented source at the time.²¹ Birgitta was the first saint to write about her numerous visitations from Mary and revealed to Christians a way of seeing the incarnate Christ through the eyes of the Virgin.²²

Further, Birgitta's experiences appear to have been the genesis point for the concept of conceiving Christ in an individual's soul as well as the possibility of a spiritual journey of motherhood with Christ.²³

The imagery of the Christ child as a source of light is not limited to Birgitta's writings however. Light imagery, for example, appears in the *Golden Legend*, where de Voragine, calls Christ the "enlightener ... whose advent will cure the spiritual blindness of humanity."²⁴ This is significant, as scholars have shown how the *Golden Legend* helped explain the link of the Nativity with the path to human salvation, but the light theology does not end there.²⁵ Thomas Aquinas, perhaps the most influential churchman of the late Middle Ages, preached about the importance of transforming the soul through the birth of Christ by becoming Children of the Light, which was a metaphor taken from biblical text.²⁶ The role of light in Aquinas's theology, both metaphorically and literally, played a role in his understanding of St. Augustine's three steps of spiritual sight: corporeal, spiritual, and intellectual, with intellectual sight the hardest for any Christian to attain. These levels of spiritual sight were parts of medieval devotional practice and helped form the "religious psychology" of the devout.²⁷ As a prompt for reaching intellectual sight, Christians used devotional images and objects. Votaries used devotional objects to help bring about a meditative state in which they could "work to transform their souls in a bid to earn, in part at least, eternal salvation."²⁸ Images like the *Night Nativity* enabled Christians to care for their innermost selves.²⁹ Each Christian was responsible for her personal wellbeing, more specifically for seeing to her eternal salvation, and devotional objects provided tools and instruments to perfect one's spiritual life.³⁰ Scholars such as Jeffery Hamburger, recognize the importance of devotional imagery during this period. Hamburger notes how late medieval devotion frequently called on readers to "see with the eyes of the heart," and to focus so fully

that “looking at a particular object becomes the means and the end of the devotional act.”³¹ Seeing with the eyes of the heart was an important aspect of lay piety as it asked Christians to search inwardly and seek God in their hearts, promoting a humble faith in their internal relationship with God.³² Through images, devout Christians could pursue religious contemplation as an opportunity to encounter the divine.³³

Geertgen’s *Night Nativity* offers the viewer just such a chance by presenting her with a private glimpse inside the manger. A space is left for the votary in front of the manger between the angelic host and the Virgin. This position is more privileged than that afforded to Joseph, who waits in the shadows, and notionally demarcates the viewer as a direct eyewitness to the miracle. This view offers a special glimpse into the mysterious event of Christ’s birth and may be seen, perhaps, as simulating a mystical or visionary experience.³⁴ Many religious Orders believed that “mystical visions called for active purgation of each soul for the building of God’s kingdom.”³⁵ Receiving visions from God, and experiencing mystical union with him, was one of the ultimate goals of mystical piety, most commonly practiced by nuns and monks.³⁶ Reverently praying and imitating Christ inwardly and outwardly would often ignite spiritual insight without “waiting for a mystical union with God in spirit.”³⁷ Through religious contemplation, the faithful attempted to understand the nature of God, and would try to reach him through mystical insight. Often, depictions of or references to the Eucharist engendered a spiritual euphoria in the votary, which Hamburger suggests sparked an “experience of mystical ecstasy.”³⁸ To be sure, not all nuns were mystics. Images like Geertgen’s *Night Nativity*, however, provided members of convents, as well as other pious Christians, exemplars of piety on which to focus in their devotional practices.³⁹

Caroline Bynum asserts that “women mystics were primarily responsible for instigating the most distinctive aspects of medieval piety: devotion to the infant Christ, the Eucharist, and focusing on the wounds, blood, body, and heart of Jesus.”⁴⁰ This form of mysticism was popular throughout the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries and was often associated with female religious groups. In fact, many religious women, and well-known mystics such as Mary of Oignes (who I will discuss more later in the paper), saw visions of the Christ child, imagined themselves as midwife to the Virgin, and often envisioned themselves holding the Christ child.⁴¹ Interaction with the Virgin and Christ went beyond imagining being a midwife or an attendant to Christ. In devotional practices like those advocated in the *Speculum virginum*, written by a Benedictine monk from the Rhineland and widely circulated within monastic orders, nuns were encouraged to go so far as to “experience union with Christ in the form of pregnancy.”⁴² Spiritual exercises like those in the *Speculum Virginum* as well as the visions of Mary of Oignes and Birgitta were all part of a “mystical undercurrent that manifested particularly with the Windesheim Chapter.”

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The importance of motherhood, birth, and the reformation of the soul are evident in the *Night Nativity* through the child-like portrayal of the angels surrounding the Christ child and the Virgin. The nuns Outside St. John’s Gate may have understood the focus on children and childhood through the biblical enjoinder to become “like unto children” in order to approach God the Father.⁴⁴ To be “Christ like” in her soul, the votary must act in the humility of a child, seeking obedience and mercy in the eyes of God.⁴⁵ Spiritual childhood was not the only avenue available to the faithful in Geertgen’s panel. The Virgin’s role as mother and as intercessor provided the nuns with yet another avenue to God through maternal care. This act of contemplation was achieved when the nuns imagined themselves as being present at, and

participating in, scenes of the life of Christ, such as the Nativity. Bonaventure and Bernard of Clairvaux, for example, encouraged the faithful to participate in the Nativity by taking part in caring for the Christ child and acting as a helper for the Virgin as a new mother.⁴⁶ For the nuns Outside St. John' Gate, the *Night Nativity* may not only have revealed deep theological truths rooted in the Incarnation and the role of the Virgin, but also may have activated well-worn tropes of female spirituality, a topic I will explore in my next section.



Figure 2.1 Geertgen tot Sint Jans. 1490. Night Nativity. 34x 25.3 cm. Oil on Oak. National Gallery of London.



Figure 2.2 Robert Campin. 1420. Nativity. 87x70 cm. Oil on Wood. Musée des Beaux-arts, Dijon.

3 FEMALE PIETY

The late middle ages and early modern period saw the rise of the so-called “lay-piety movement,” which is a term of necessity describing the interest among Christians in developing their own personal relationship with Christ by transforming their souls through obedience and humility. Religion influenced the daily lives of early modern Christians, and the rise of lay piety made all avenues of spiritual enlightenment with Christ easily attainable. At a time when religious institutions were unstable as a result of the social, political, and spiritual upheavals caused by the Black Death, the Great Schism, seemingly unending peasant revolts, and the eighty years war, various spiritual movements among the laity placed the responsibility for one’s soul on her or his shoulders.⁴⁷ One of the more interesting consequences of these events was that many women decided to live in communities that governed themselves, without a connection to a religious order. The women who belonged to these groups called themselves Beguines and their communities Beguinages. These communities originated in Flanders during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and spread through the north to the Rhineland and Germany.⁴⁸ Women living in Beguinages gave up their formal social positions, renounced marriage, eschewed all worldly possessions, embraced voluntary poverty, lead a spiritually motivated existence, and chose life of chastity.⁴⁹ Turning away from material things helped them fulfill their calling to serve the poor and sick and provide acts of charity to their community, which displayed their humility, their acceptance of Christ’s dictates in the Gospels, and their dedication to the maternal traits of the Virgin.

The Virgin Mary was the most influential saint within female religious communities. For the women who were members of convents and Beguinages, many of whom came to their calling later in life, the Virgin was an exemplar who addressed their own desires to be chaste, virginal,

and at the same time motherly.⁵⁰ Not only was the Virgin looked to as the perfect role model, but Rosemary Hale also suggests that “identification with Mary as a paradoxical image of spiritual fecundity achieved the pure virgin soul, given her obedience, intercession and love.”⁵¹ The Virgin was depicted as the mother of Christ in visual imagery such as *Annunciation*, *Incarnation*, and *Nativity* scenes, which were fairly popular because of the spiritual narrative that could be used as a devotional subjects. Millard Meiss notes that in such imagery, the “Virgin was regarded as a window in which the spirit of God passes through Earth, by symbolizing both stages of the miracle of conception and birth.”⁵² Further, Meiss acknowledges that spiritual contemplation of the Virgin could lead the pious to the spirit of God. As the best example of a pious woman, imitating and venerating the Virgin would not have been uncommon for women both inside and outside religious and quasi-religious houses. In particular, nuns, Beguines, or pious laywomen could look to the Virgin as a role model for humility and service. In fact, depictions of Christ or popular saints were used as points of reference that reinforced the truth of God’s word and the authenticity of his plan as revealed in scripture.⁵³

Spiritual movements such as the *Modern Devotion*— also known as the Common Life or the *Devotio Moderna*— valued the virtues of obedience and humility.⁵⁴ The *Modern Devotion*, was a late medieval religious movement founded by Jan van Ruusbroec and others that was popular in the northern Netherlands. The importance of the Christian virtues of obedience and humility are discussed in the foundational texts of the organization.⁵⁵ The Modern Devotion provided an opportunity to women who wished to adopt an apostolic lifestyle and accept an existence of humility, chastity, poverty. Adherents removed themselves from society and left behind all their material possessions. The teachings of the Geert Grote, one of the most influential founders of the group, were made famous by Thomas à Kempis in his book *Imitatio*

Christi and were widely disseminated among various lay pious organizations, especially within the Order of the Windesheim Congregation.⁵⁶ We know that Thomas à Kempis resided at the Windesheim congregation, which often held gatherings for the Brotherhood and Sisterhood of the Common Life. Although he often wrote in Latin, Groote's work for the Modern Devotion, in which he addressed the importance of "remaking the soul" through spiritual rebirth, more specifically by way of the Nativity, was translated into local vernaculars throughout the Low Countries.⁵⁷ Groote used the metaphor of birth to discuss how Christians could transform their souls through the Incarnation of Christ.⁵⁸ This theology would have been familiar to the sisters at the Convent Outside St. John's Gate, who identified with teaching of the *Modern Devotion*. Even without this direct connection, the nuns in the convent likely would have been familiar with the concept of rebirth through the Incarnation of Christ as it was fairly widely recognized among the pious in the period. This is made abundantly clear by the various avenues that nuns, beguines, and laywomen used as aids in their spiritual growth. Spiritual rebirth could take many forms including, but not limited to, serving the needs of their communities, devotional practices designed to rejuvenate the soul through mystical experiences, and the experience of spiritual birth/motherhood.

Through the rise of female spirituality, laywomen were able to have an independent relationship with Christ, rather than depending on guidance from their male counterparts. For women, entry into a (quasi)religious order brought a certain level of spiritual liberty.⁵⁹ Women could experience mystical devotion with Christ anywhere they chose; any place could serve as a location of prayer or devotion, whether it was in small groups, the cloister, or individual solitude. The devotional objects used for meditation, such as small prayer beads, prayer books, devotional images, and so forth, tend to be mobile, making them easily accessible.⁶⁰ In other words, women

in convents, Beguinages, or houses dedicated to the Modern Devotion had the ability explore their spiritual lives further by interacting with objects that facilitated the contemplation of the lives of Christ and the Virgin and exploring those narratives in highly personal ways. A panel like Geertgen's *Night Nativity* would have provided opportunities to follow these, and other, avenues mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

Through the process of devotion, pious women (inside the cloister and outside it) honored the cardinal Christian virtues of faith, hope, and charity. These themes were commonly associated with Marian devotion, the *Modern Devotion*, and Augustinian teachings.⁶¹ Many Christian theologians such as Bonaventure, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Augustine encouraged the faithful to imitate Christ by seeking out Mary as the allegorical mother of all Christians. In one of Augustine's Christmas sermons, he says, "Conceive Christ by faith, give birth to Him through your works, so that your heart may be doing in the law of Christ what the womb of Mary did in the flesh of Christ."⁶² Just as Augustine realized the spiritual wealth that can enrich the souls of Christians when devoting prayers and meditations to the Virgin, Bonaventure acknowledges the notion of spiritual motherhood in his work titled, *On the Five Feasts of the Child of Jesus*. In it, he explains that the soul becomes a "spiritual Mary by conceiving and giving birth to Christ through Zealous devotion."⁶³ Bonaventure, a follower of St. Francis of Assisi, established a guideline for Christians who were concerned with their spiritual well being. Through his meditations, the concept of spiritual motherhood was developed in the hearts of Christians, where they "fashioned their spiritual lives on the model of Mary, Mother of the Lord and image of the Church, and [to] developed the maternal element in our nature."⁶⁴ In addition, Bonaventure professes that there is a "maternal relationship with Christ in our spiritual lives, a most intimate

union between Christ and the soul, represented symbolically as the relationship between a mother and the baby conceived in her womb.”⁶⁵

Several theologians pioneered the concept of transforming the soul through the processes of spiritual rebirth and Marian piety. Of interest for this paper is the work of Johannes Brinckerink, who was an adherent of Marian devotion, devoted his entire life to the pastoral care of women, and was a founding member of the Modern Devotion. Brinckerink stated “[w]hen women apply themselves devoutly they often receive more grace and stand in favor with God than men do.”⁶⁶ According to Brinckerink’s teachings, divine blessings occurred more to women than to men. He encouraged the sisters of the Common Life to keep account of their spiritual journeys in “sister-books,” some of which still survive today. The entries in these books acknowledge the importance these pious women put on the virtue of humility.⁶⁷ Brinckerink’s suggestions carried a great deal of weight as the Sisterhood of the Common Life took shape with his help. The sisters began by living in communities very similar to the Beguines. Like Beguines, members of the Modern Devotion did not take traditional monastic vows and lived outside the official orders sanctioned by the Church. Such extra-conventual life did not last long, however, and by 1387 the new Windesheim Convent was consecrated, following the rule of St. Augustine.⁶⁸ After Brinckerink’s death in 1419, the pastoral care of the Sisters was assumed by the Brothers of the Order. In time, both male and female lines of the Modern Devotion achieved great popularity and became important spiritual communities within northern Dutch cities like Haarlem, Amsterdam and Utrecht.⁶⁹ By the end of the fifteenth-century, the Windesheim Chapter spread across northern Europe reaching nearly a hundred member monasteries, mostly situated in the Netherlands.⁷⁰

The nuns Outside St. John's Gate were associated with the Windesheim Congregation and were aware of the female-centered piety of the Modern Devotion. As such, the sisters in the convent would likely have been aware of the spiritual benefits of imitating the Virgin, of being humble and obedient, and of giving birth to Christ in one's soul as a means of renewing it— themes I have linked to the *Night Nativity*. The image's focus on the role of the Virgin invites female viewers in particular to take part in the spiritual birth and spiritual motherhood described in contemporary devotional tracts. In the following section, I continue my discussion of female spirituality in terms of the concept of "spiritual motherhood" and the devotional practices accompanying it. These concepts are important to our understanding of Geertgen's panel as they provide insight into how the sisters may have constructed a personal relationship with Christ by imitating the traits of the Virgin as mother, acting as a humble servant to Christ, and providing care and charity to others. More specifically these devotional practices can be linked to [the] aspects of female spirituality and traits that were commonly attributed to nuns.

4 SPIRITUAL BIRTH

Through images like the *Night Nativity*, viewers were encouraged to remember the humility, love, joy and sorrow of the Virgin and the Christ child.⁷¹ Votaries did so through devotional practices that were common among female religious houses during the fifteenth century.⁷² The idea of spiritual motherhood assumed a new role during the late middle ages and early modern period. Theologians encouraged Christians to transform their souls by identifying with the emotions and spiritual well being of Christ and the Virgin through effective prayer and piety. Though this idea was not limited just to women, we can acknowledge specifically female influences on the development of this brand of piety through its emphasis on the Christ child.⁷³ Unlike their male counterparts, female mystics could more easily take on a maternal role during

their devotions in which they envisioned themselves suckling the Christ child, thereby identifying somatically with the Virgin's maternal relationship with Christ.⁷⁴ The Virgin offered women the "archetypal image of pious labor and prayer."⁷⁵ Emulating the Virgin's maternal relationship to the Christ child was a way for women to show their love for Christ and a "vehicle" for achieving mystical union with the Divine.⁷⁶ Jeffrey Hamburger's research into the development of *Nonnenarbeiten* (the artwork created by cloistered nuns) suggests that the Virgin was more important to women, especially nuns, than to men.⁷⁷ Hamburger explains how *Nonnenarbeiten*, which was devotional art produced by nuns in the Rhinelands, depicted the emotional connection between the Virgin, Christ child and women. Popular themes illustrated in *Nonnenarbeiten* were images of the Christ child, Christ as bridegroom, and the Virgin as spiritual mother, all of which were commonly displayed in devotional art in convents.⁷⁸ Linking the attributes of female spirituality with devotional images such as *The Night Nativity*, reveals how Geertgen's image invited viewers to enact the birth of Christ mentally by placing themselves in the role of the Virgin as spiritual mother, and in doing so awakening their souls.

The role of images in this process is made abundantly clear in Henry Suso's devotional tract titled "*The Exemplar*." Suso, a fourteenth-century Dominican monk who provided pastoral care to local nuns, encouraged his readers to follow a spiritual journey towards God, by way of visual imagery.⁷⁹ The *Exemplar* had illustrations mapping out a spiritual process, teaching the reader how to obtain mystical visions of God. Throughout this mystical journey, the faithful are asked to imitate Mary as the ideal model for loving God. Hamburger discusses this type of spirituality and suggests that visual devotion could be interchangeable so that devotional objects and prayer would stand in for the process of prayer itself.⁸⁰ Focusing on devotional images, in theory, would open a visual dialogue between the viewer and the saint depicted and invite the votary to

pursue the visionary experiences most described in female monastic literature. Hamburger further explains how “devotional images offered independence and individual expression to women, something the church did not always offer.”⁸¹ Avenues of devotional practice most commonly associated with female spirituality shed light on how the nuns Outside St. John’s Gate may have understood and used an image like the *Night Nativity*. The panel encourages the viewer to venerate the Virgin and Christ child in ways that would have been important for religious contemplation by drawing attention to Mary as mother of Christ and humble and obedient servant of God. The Virgin was a perfect model, a metaphor for being a good mother and caretaker to those that were sick and poor within their communities.

Rosemary Hale refers to the process of becoming a spiritual mother as “Imitatio Mariae.”⁸² She argues that not only were late-medieval Christians imitating the Marian virtues preparing themselves for the “advent of spiritual motherhood but they were also imitating the postures, attitudes, and behaviors of Mary as an act of piety honoring Mary herself as well as Christ.”⁸³ Carolyn Walker-Bynum suggests that early modern women received spiritual motherhood by traditional and culturally determined images of women, meaning that there were specific devotional images that were more suited for the needs of women and images that were specific to men.⁸⁴ Bynum further notes that the notion of the female as flesh became an argument for women’s *Imitatio Christi*, through physicality, and acknowledging that it is the female body where the incarnation occurred, suggesting the importance of displaying the role of spiritual motherhood within the souls of women.⁸⁵ This concept offered another devotional channel for nuns and the faithful to understand the process of spiritual rebirth, through the role of the Incarnation.

St. Birgitta placed a great deal of emphasis on spiritual motherhood, as I noted earlier, but was not the only writer to discuss the concept. Prior to Birgitta's revelations the Beguine Mary of Oignes spoke of similar Nativity-themed visions where the Virgin also visited her.⁸⁶ The life of Mary of Oignes was memorialized and recorded by James Vitry several years after her death in his *Vita Marie Oignacensis*. Vitry, an ecclesiastical administrator, popularized the teachings of Oignes in his book, which coincided with the period in which Birgitta received her visions. Vitry claimed that Mary of Oignes was a "model for a new variety of lay piety."⁸⁷ She was known for subjecting herself to harsh physical mortification designed to enhance her chances of receiving mystical visions, which she claimed to have often.⁸⁸ In addition to the examples offered by Mary of Oignes and Saint Birgitta, the faithful could also turn to Nativity-based meditations during the season of Advent. The emphasis on the Christ child, as well as the opportunity to imagine one's self as a spiritual mother, had an expanded reach thanks to "quasi-liturgical" performances carried out near churches and, in some cases, at various locations around town.⁸⁹

The Nativity was often associated with the Corpus Christi. Theologically, both refer to the Incarnation and Eucharist through the birth and body of Christ. The Eucharist meanings were solidified in the Nativity by the knowledge that Bethlehem is commonly interpreted as the "house of bread" (*domus panis*), linking the birth of Christ with the bread of life.⁹⁰ The link between bread and body has biblical roots but was made popular through the concept of Real Presence advocated by Pope Gregory the Great, an earlier follower of the Pseudo-Dionysius's teachings, who established the connection of the bread of the Eucharist to the body of Christ through his sermon on the Nativity. Gregory states, "And He was born in Bethlehem for good reason, since Bethlehem means House of Bread. For He it is who said 'I am the living bread which came down from heaven. Therefore that place where the Lord is born was called

beforehand the House of Bread.”⁹¹ By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Nativity sermons such as St. Gregory’s formed the foundation for the visual tradition of representing Christ in the form of the Eucharistic wafer or as an apparition of the Man of Sorrows to make specific links between Incarnation and salvation. For early modern Christians, witnessing the consecration of the host was like witnessing the miracle of Incarnation in the flesh, beneficial to the faithful and mystics who could stimulate their religious experience through contemplation.⁹²

The popularity of the Eucharist was a common aspect of religious piety throughout the fifteenth century especially among women. Scholars have argued that women focused on the Eucharist partially because of its association with food. Female devotees of the Eucharist frequently took communion, refused other non-sacramental food in order to boost their religious contemplation, and subjected themselves to rigorous mortifications of the flesh to reenact the sufferings that Christ once endured.⁹³ Christian women seemed to associate more with Eucharist piety, than men did. Bynum suggests that “the centering of Christian devotional life on the Eucharist was clearly inspired by women at whose insistence the feast of the Corpus Christi was instituted.”⁹⁴ She further argues that female spirituality was primarily “Christocentric,” focusing on the infancy of Christ, specifically through the Incarnation and Nativity.⁹⁵ One way to focus on the body of Christ, and to understand his humanity in fleshly form, was through the Eucharist. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century nuns were particularly drawn to visual imagery of the Christ child as the host, a common vision experienced by female mystics.⁹⁶ In fact Bynum argues that there are psychological and spiritual reasons [for] why female mystics engaged so heavily with imagery of the Christ child, noting that religious women believed that “[i]f Christ was incarnated in the hands of the celebrating priest as in the Virgin’s womb, might he not also be incarnated within the communicating nun or beguine, and might not each of these types of spiritual

maternity bear fruit in spiritual birth?”⁹⁷ Bynum acknowledges the importance of this kind of devotion among female monastic houses, and how this concept flourished by replacing the need for clerical authority and placed individual responsibility for developing a personal relationship with Christ.

For the faithful, the links between Christ as the Incarnation of God, his Mother, and pious souls yearning for heaven were not purely theological. They were, instead, enacted in public spaces through multiple devotional performances carried out during the Advent season. A good example of this are the N-Town plays. By the fourteenth-century, the N-Town plays, Mystery plays, and the York Town plays, which we know stemmed from the Feast of Corpus Christi, elaborated the life of Christ and the Virgin for the spiritual edification of audiences. More specifically, the N-Town Marian plays became extremely popular because of their emphasis on the life of the Virgin in the miraculous event of the Nativity.⁹⁸ The N-Town plays repeatedly referenced the Virgin’s humility by portraying her kneeling in wondrous contemplation of the mysterious event of Christ’s Birth. St. Birgitta’s *Revelations* may have also influenced the N-Town plays with the iconographical portrayal of the kneeling Virgin and discussion of the “great light ” in the performance.⁹⁹

In addition to the plays, the devout could spiritually prepare themselves for the “coming of Christ’s birth,” by engaging with dolls representing the Christ child around the time of Advent.¹⁰⁰ This form of devotion was very popular in the Low Countries and found its most common form in so-called Crib veneration. The yearly observance celebrated the birth of Christ in highly personal terms, which I will discuss below. Crib veneration appears to have its origin in a sermon preached by St. Francis of Assisi in 1223 in which he recreated the Nativity in a field at Greccio.¹⁰¹ During his performance of the Mass, Francis showed veneration to a doll of the

Christ Child that he placed in a crib atop the altar.¹⁰² This form of affective veneration quickly spread throughout Europe, and became part of the religious culture of Haarlem by the fifteenth century.¹⁰³ In the north, Crib veneration became an important part of the celebration of Christmas Mass with the laity acting out Christ's birth. During the ceremony, the priest, recreating Francis's actions at Greccio, placed a doll in a crib situated on the altar. Parishioners brought their own dolls and cribs and sang to them and cared for them as the priest said the Mass.¹⁰⁴ Such public performances brought to life the scene of the Nativity and made the theology of the Incarnation more immediate and relatable for the faithful. The Nativity, however, was not the only avenue the faithful could follow to stimulate visions of Christ or to understand the role of the Virgin as mother, servant, and care giver.

The public performances carried out during Corpus Christi, the N-Town plays, and Crib Veneration likely informed the ways that viewers received and understood complex concepts such as the Incarnation in devotional images such as the *Night Nativity*. It not difficult to see how Geertgen's panel would have been particularly appealing to practitioners of "female spirituality." The nuns Outside St. John's Gate may well have developed a deep appreciation for the subject of the Nativity as a starting point for personal devotion through extra-liturgical avenues such as those mentioned earlier. Such religious images and texts associated with the Advent would have encourage the nuns to experience the emotions of the Virgin at Christ's birth by placing importance on personal piety through spiritual motherhood. Certainly, pious males also could have been moved by Nativity and Eucharistic performances. We find recorded, however, more examples of women placing importance on scenes from the Incarnation and on images of the Christ Child. Both routes made possible the construction of a maternal persona and encouraged

becoming a “spiritual mother” by focusing on the embodiment of Christ through the Virgin’s womb.

The nuns Outside St. John’s Gate were not the only sisters spiritually influenced by images of the Virgin and the Christ child. Research has shown that many female religious houses valued the importance of “Nativity devotion.” The *Crib of the Infant Jesus* (Figure 4.1) from the Grand Beguinage in Louvain provides an elegant example of how seriously pious women could take devotion to the Christ Child and the adoption of a persona as a “spiritual mother.” The elaborate crib displays scenes from the Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, and the family tree of Christ. The nun who owned this object took on a maternal role by rocking the crib and, presumably, singing to a doll of the Christ child in it. This form of veneration took advantage of a common practice among nuns and or female mystics who referred to themselves as the mother of Christ by taking on the role of the Virgin mentally while participating in their devotions.¹⁰⁵ Such religious images and texts surrounding Advent would have encourage the nuns to experience the emotions of the Virgin at Christ’s birth by and placed importance on personal piety through spiritual motherhood.

These types of practices may have been especially important to those who commissioned the *Night Nativity* and or used it. Such an image would help stimulate a nun’s memory of liturgical performances and of Mass by associating the body in the crib with that represented by the Host. Not only would this image mentally place the nuns at the scene of Christ’s birth, but also the emotions of the spirit would be awakened when venerating the Christ child and the Virgin. Through further contemplation of the Incarnation displayed in the panel, the nuns would have had access to the concept of rebirth by enacting the role of spiritual motherhood and by mimetically following the Virgin’s example of obedience and humility. The *Night Nativity*

provided a “spiritual road map” for the ways in which the nuns could become spiritual mothers through such religious practices.



Figure 4.1 The Crib of Infant Jesus. 15th century. 13 15/16 x 11 3/8 x 7 1/4 in. Wood, Polychromy, Silver-gilt. Made in Brabant, South Netherlands. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

5 CONCLUSION

In my thesis I have attempted to describe and discuss the spiritual practices and communal needs that are the foundations for the commission of the *Night Nativity*. It is impossible to know for certain whether or not this image was indeed destined for the Convent Outside St. John's Gate mentioned in van Mander's *het Schilderboek*. As I have tried to demonstrate, however, the presence of elements strongly associated with "female spirituality" in the panel— the importance of the role of the Virgin, the soul's rebirth through spiritual motherhood, etc.— seem to point toward the nuns (or toward another female house at the very least). The emphasis on the Virgin and Christ in Geertgen's panel offered votaries a spiritual road map to further their relationship with Christ through multiple avenues of affective devotion.

The *Night Nativity* seems to draw on various religious texts that were familiar not only to all Christians but also to those that were often used to further female spirituality. That said, however, the image is no mere illustration of any one written source. The Virgin's size, location, and importance in the panel conforms with multiple types of devotion centered on the Virgin and her role in Christian's lives. Female viewers of Geertgen's panel— whether nuns in the Convent Outside St. John's Gate or members of another house— may have used the devotional routes the image provided to experience their own form of spiritual motherhood in imitation of the Virgin. The example set by Mary provided these viewers with a pattern for adopting the key virtues of humility and obedience in serving Christ— critical behaviors for women living in a spiritual community. Whether or not the image was made for the nuns in the Convent Outside St. John's Gate, the central purpose of the *Night Nativity* was to help the viewer remake her soul and in doing do move closer to salvation.¹⁰⁶

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ENDNOTES

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- ¹ Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Paintings: Its Origins and Character*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 326.
- ² John Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 105.
- ³ Albert Châtelet, *Early Dutch Painting: Painting in the Northern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century*, trans. Christopher Brown and Anthony Turner, (New York: Rizzolo International Publications, 1981), 93.
- ⁴ John Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 106. James Snyder, “*Geertgen Tot Sint Jans and the Haarlem School of Painting*,” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1958), 245. Henry Luttikhuisen, *Late Medieval Piety and Geertgen Tot Sint Jans’s Altarpiece for the Haarlem Jansheren* (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1997), 156. Decker, Snyder, Luttikhuisen all discuss that the Knights of Saint John were the main patrons for Geertgen’s work, however Luttikhuisen acknowledges possibly patronage for the convents of the Windesheim congregation outside Saint John’s gate.
- ⁵ Lisa Murphy, Gwen Tauber, and Arie Wallert, *The Holy Kinship: A Medieval Masterpiece* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum/Waanders Publishing, 2001), 23; Albert Châtelet, *Early Dutch Painting: Painting in the Northern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century*, trans. Christopher Brown and Anthony Turner, (New York: Rizzolo International Publications, 1981), 93.
- ⁶ John Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 112.
- ⁷ James Snyder discusses the size of the Virgin in the *Night Nativity*, James Snyder, “*Geertgen Tot Sint Jans and the Haarlem School of Painting*,” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 1958), 177. Hamburger also explains the role of the Virgin in devotional imagery in his book, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 70,129, 144. This type of religious experience is more common with women than men and explained in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1982),172.
- ⁸ The library of the Knights of Saint John contained works by de Voragine and *The Modern Devotion*, As cited in Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*; Noord Hollands Archief, Klosterarchief, Kast 7, loket 7, bundle 4, nr. 4. Also cited in Sahlin’s, *Birgitta of Sweden and Birgitta’s Revelations*, (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), 19; were widely popular and circulated through Latin and vernacular languages from the end of the 14th-17th century. Full editions were translated into Swedish, English, German, and Dutch during the Middle Ages, used not only by religious orders, theologians, members of the royal nobility, but also the laity and merchant class were familiar with St. Birgitta’s *Revelations* throughout the 15th century.
- ⁹ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 65.
- ¹⁰ Millard Meiss, “Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings,” *The Art Bulletin* 27, no.3, (1945):177.
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- ¹² Lorne Campbell, National Gallery Catalogues (new series): *The Fifteenth Century Netherlandish Paintings*, (London: National Gallery Publications, 1998), 238.
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- ¹⁸ Bridget Morris, *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden*, Trans. Dennis Searby, Vol. 3, Liber Caelesto, VI-VIII, (New York: Oxford University Press: NY, 2012), 251.
- ¹⁹ Saint Birgitta, *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta of Sweden*, Trans. Dennis Searby, ed. Bridget Morris, Vol. 3, Liber Caelesto, VI-VIII, (Oxford University Press: NY, 2012), 251.
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- ²⁴ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, trans. William Granger Ryan, Vol. 1, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 41.
- ²⁵ John, Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 106.
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- ²⁹ John, Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 20.
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- ³¹ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 129.
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- ³³ Henry Luttikhuisen, *Late Medieval Piety and Geertgen Tot Sint Jans's Altarpiece for the Haarlem Jansheren* (PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 1997), 152.
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⁴⁴ Citation taken from Matthew 18:3, “And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

⁴⁵ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 108.

⁴⁶ John of Calabria describes to the reader how one most act to envisions the scenes of Christ’s birth in the text, Pseudo-Bonaventure, *Mediations of the Life of Christ*, Trans. Ragusa and R. Green. Second Edn. (Princeton: Princeton University, 1997),38-41.

⁴⁷ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 43.

⁴⁸ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 255.

⁴⁹ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 42.

⁵⁰ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 76.

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⁵² Millard Meiss, “*Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings*,” *The Art Bulletin* 27, no.3, (1945):177.

⁵³ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 75.

⁵⁴ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 109. Scholars, such as Henry Luttikhuizen, tend to associate much of Northern art to the *Modern Devotion*, because of the association of naturalism and broad appeal in the popularity of this book made by the different translations in the vernacular. He states that, “Dutch art may have been used to help the laity and illiterate understand the message of God.” However, there is some disagreement as to how popular the *Modern Devotion* was during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and whether Northern art really responded to it in the way Luttikhuizen suggests. Consequently, the Northern countries would have been familiar with the teachings of Grote and Ruusbroek, along with other theological texts that were a part of a broader intellectual context through which pious viewers could engage with such imagery..

⁵⁵ John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life, The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Later Middle Ages*, (Philidelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 183.

⁵⁶ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 230.

⁵⁷ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 107.

⁵⁸ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),107.

⁵⁹ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 44.

⁶⁰ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 47.

⁶¹ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 130.

⁶² Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), 85.

⁶³ Bonaventure, “*On the Five Feasts of the Christ Jesus*,” In *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. José de Vinck, (St. Anthony Guild Press: Patterson, 1966), 199-214.

⁶⁴ St Bonaventure, “*Bringing Forth Christ: Five Feast of the Child Jesus*,” trans. Eric Doyle (SLG Press: Oxford, 1984), 21.

⁶⁵ St Bonaventure, “*Bringing Forth Christ: Five Feast of the Child Jesus*,” trans. Eric Doyle (SLG Press: Oxford, 1984), 98.

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- ⁶⁶ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 1.
- ⁶⁷ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 6.
- ⁶⁸ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 9.
- ⁶⁹ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 9.
- ⁷⁰ Wybren Scheepsam, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, The Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings*, Trans. David F. Johnson. (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2004), 10.
- ⁷¹ Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), 86.
- ⁷² Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 172.
- ⁷³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkley, 1982), 18.
- ⁷⁴ Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), 86.
- ⁷⁵ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 186.
- ⁷⁶ Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*, (The Boydell Press: Woodbridge, 2001), 103.
- ⁷⁷ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 181.
- ⁷⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkley, 1982), 141.
- ⁷⁹ Henry Luttikhuisen and Dorothy Verkerk, *Snyder's Medieval Art*, (Pearson Practice Hall, Upper Saddle River), 461.
- ⁸⁰ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 75.
- ⁸¹ Jeffery Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997), 181.
- ⁸² Rosemary Hale, "Imitatio Mariae:" Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs, *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no.4, (1990) :199.
- ⁸³ Rosemary Hale, "Imitatio Mariae:" Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs, *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no.4, (1990) :199.
- ⁸⁴ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Food and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (University of California Press, Berkley: 1987), 252.
- ⁸⁵ Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Food and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (University of California Press, Berkley: 1987), 252.
- ⁸⁶ Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture: With Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene*, (Rutgers University Press: New York, 1954), 318.
- ⁸⁷ Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no.2 (1989): 325.
- ⁸⁸ Carol Neel, "The Origins of the Beguines," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, no.2 (1989): 325.
- ⁸⁹ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 173.
- ⁹⁰ Theresa Coletti, "Devotional Iconography in the N-Town Marian Plays, *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 11, (1997), 32.
- ⁹¹ Leah Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Medieval Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays, *Speculum*, Vol. 48, No.3, (July 1974): 494.
- ⁹² Leah Sinanoglou, "The Christ Child as Medieval Sacrifice: A Medieval Tradition and the Corpus Christi Plays, *Speculum*, Vol. 48, No.3, (July 1974): 499.

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- ⁹³ Muri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, University of Cambridge: Cambridge, 1991, pp.318.
- ⁹⁴ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkley, 1982),18.
- ⁹⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Crown and Veil*, pp.179.
- ⁹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkley, 1982),256.
- ⁹⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (University of California Press: Berkley, 1982), 257.
- ⁹⁸ Theresa Coletti, “*Devotional Iconography in the N-Town Marian Plays*, *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 11, (1997),22-44. Pp. 22.
- ⁹⁹ Theresa Coletti, “*Devotional Iconography in the N-Town Marian Plays*, *Comparative Drama*, Vol. 11, (1997), 31.
- ¹⁰⁰ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 173.
- ¹⁰¹ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),102.
- ¹⁰² John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),102.
- ¹⁰³ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),102.
- ¹⁰⁴ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),102
- ¹⁰⁵ Jeffery F. Hamburger, Susan Marti, *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to Fifteenth Centuries*, trans. Dietlinde Hamburger, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 57.
- ¹⁰⁶ John Decker, *Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen Tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington, Ashgate: 2009),149.