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# Ladder to Heaven: An Evaluation of Twelfth Century Latin Catholic Non-Dichotomous Spiritual Gender Identity

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Ladder to Heaven: An Evaluation of Twelfth Century Latin Catholic Non-Dichotomous  
Spiritual Gender Identity

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**Introduction**

The later medieval period has become infamous for the apparent rigidity of its society; hereditary class boundaries, religious distinctions, the Church's immense social and political influence, and dichotomous gender distinctions appear vastly immutable (with a few notable, anomalous exceptions to prove the rule). In the 1970s, historian Richard Southern argued that the period of reform in the twelfth century solidified a patriarchal state in the medieval period, and since his publication, historians have agreed that the "restructuring of the church and the extension of its influence were accompanied by increasingly rigid gender structures, with this conclusion that the reform movement was inimical to women."<sup>1</sup> As the academic discipline of gender history has grown, most analyses published on the period (focused mostly on women) have either explored the lack of agency given to women during the period, or focused on the "heroines" of medieval history, those "anomalous" women who appeared to live outside the prescribed gender norms of the period (primarily influenced and enforced by the Church).<sup>2</sup> These analyses reinforce the assumption that the Middle Ages represented a period of unified, dichotomous understanding of gender and nonconformity, in which men and women occupied wholly distinct spheres, and were believed to have innate behavioral and physiological differences. Authors focusing on periods throughout the Middle Ages, like Barbara L. Grant,

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<sup>1</sup> Fiona Griffiths, "'Men's Duty to Provide for Women's Needs': Abelard, Heloise, and Their Negotiation of the *Cura Monialium*," *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004): 3, accessed August 16, 2017, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2003.12.002>.

<sup>2</sup> Judith M. Bennett, "Forgetting the Past," *Gender & History* 20 (2008): 669-677. The discipline itself makes up a tiny fraction of the total publications in the academic study of gender studies. Judith M. Bennett in "Forgetting the Past" laments the reality that overwhelmingly the study of gender and women focuses on modern history (often so modern that the examples are "still a part of living memory"). In her research, she found that just four percent of peer-reviewed journal articles published from 2001-2007 focused on subject matter from pre-modern history, where eighty-six percent of published papers focused on subject matter dating from only two hundred years ago. Bennett writes that the antique and medieval world is an unattractive place for many gender theorists and historians because it boasts the facade of a deeply negative narrative surrounding the equality and agency of women and disrupts a prevalent tradition that modernity and capitalism impacted gender relationships negatively. Boiled down, scholars see these periods as "un-feminist," and studies analyzing these periods as likely to garner criticism, as being "antiquarian" or "potentially politically incorrect."

Ann Storey, and Rentha Warnicke (amongst others), in examining powerful, apparently anomalous (for behaving outside the bounds of rigid “femininity”) women shift the blame for prosecution of crimes onto the patriarchal society in which the women lived (Warnicke, on Anne Boleyn).<sup>3</sup> Anne Storey and Barbara L Grant, on Hildegard of Bingen (a twelfth century woman) additionally attempt to reconcile intellectual women’s success with their viewpoints on gender (which appears as rigid and conservative as the period in which they lived) by arguing that the “conservative” environment stifled their beliefs or creativity.<sup>4</sup> Grant refers to women who appeared to defy social standards by engaging in intellectual pursuits as “token” women, implying their singularity in medieval society. In doing so, Grant also diminishes her subject's autonomy and agency in genuinely representing their analyses (generally biblical exegeses) and re-affirming the influence and power of the understood patriarchy of medieval society, without having analyzed the works of the patriarchal influencers in order to derive their impact upon the women's works.<sup>5</sup> This type of apologist research focuses on periods throughout the Middle Ages,

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<sup>3</sup> G.W Bernard, “The Fall of Anne Boleyn,” *The English Historical Review* 106 (1991): 585-587, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/573258>.

<sup>4</sup> Ann Storey, “A Theophany of the Feminine: Hildegard of Bingen, Elizabeth of Schönau, and Herrad of Landsberg,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 19 (1998): 16-20, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1358649>.

<sup>5</sup> Barbara L. Grant and Hildegard von Bingen, “Five Liturgical Songs by Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179),” *Signs* 5 (1980): 557-567, accessed August 6, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173606>. Alcuin Blamires, editor of *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*, laments the lack of scholarly examination into the so-called “anti-feminist” literature which greatly influenced the theology, canon, and secular law of the Middle Ages, amongst those who purport to analyze medieval history through a gender analysis (Alcuin Blamires, “Introduction” in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), vii). Without studying the most influential theological and intellectual works of the period, scholars run the risk of painting, at best, a partial picture, and at worst, a flawed one, based on assumptions for which there is existing contradicting, yet unturned, evidence. The assumption stands that the medieval Latin Church represented a hardline perspective on gender and gender roles, one which was dualistic in nature and irreconcilable with the lives of those who lived outside of such a divide. Recent literature has focused on documenting the lives and persecutions of some individuals, those whose sexual and lifestyle inclinations deviated from the “traditional” narrative of rigidity, but which has not focused on how certain individuals who, by every outward appearance, seem to exist within this category, and yet receive praise and even ecclesiastical honor, rather than censure and persecution. (Robert Mills, *Seeing Sodomy in the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015). It is important to note that, historically, individuals did not see their sexual preferences in terms of an “orientation,” and thus it would be anachronistic to apply such modern terms to the actions and feelings of medieval individuals.

and is emblematic of the degree to which Southern's thesis has impacted the field of medieval history as a whole, and of why research focused on critically evaluating his thesis is genuinely important (and why such research must begin in the twelfth century-the origin of Southern's "patriarchal state").

Notable examples of such research include the works of Fiona Griffiths, a professor of medieval history at Stanford University, who has published numerous articles and books arguing against Southern's definitive thesis, arguing specifically that the twelfth century was a period of immense change, and its renaissance ought not to be remembered as a renaissance strictly for heteronormative educated men.<sup>6</sup> This research will build upon Fiona Griffiths's thesis, suggesting, based on an examination of the leading theologians' views on the soul and the process of salvation, and on some of the the most notable "token" women of the period, Herrad of Hohenbourg, Hildegard of Bingen, and Christina of Markyate, that the twelfth century represents a period of theological and intellectual change which created a space for certain non-dichotomous gender conforming individuals to exist within the current hierarchical system of power through the creation of an established principle of "spiritual dual-gendered-ness." Herrad, Christina, and Hildegard best represent the twelfth century renaissance state; they belong under the protection of the Church, the most important political structure of the period, were all immersed in the politics and practice of the reforms which Southern argues created the "patriarchal state," and have all been lauded centuries later for their widely accepted theological contributions to the medieval church while seemingly touting its gendered specifications. These women were contemporaries with each other, and with the greatest names in twelfth century theology; thus their acceptances by the Church authority represents the acceptance of the central

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<sup>6</sup> Fiona Griffiths, *Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 6.

reforming institution with which Southern is familiar. They existed in different regions, in different aspects of the Church, which provides this analysis with a degree of universality for the period and subject. This hidden space is responsible for the power and respect wielded by so-called “anomalous” individuals in medieval society, those who appear singular to the so-called “traditional,” dualistic understanding of gender, which takes its main influence from the readily observable (i.e. surface level) Catholic practice and the lay or secular way of life. Instead of being recognized as subversive, but given license to survive based on external factors, such as personal wealth, familial connections and status, or social pressure, men or women who met the standards of this “spiritual dual-gendered-ness” had the freedom to live in ways which ran counter to the prescribed gender roles.<sup>7</sup> This theological safe space appears to have its origins in the works of Augustine, was built on by the great male theologians of the twelfth century, accepted by their peers and referenced by the female religious of the period (three of whom are in focus here). While they, in biology, action, or intellect appear deviant from the traditional heteronormative medieval theory, they in fact, represent clear conformity to a multiplicitous theory, and as such, bolstered the systems of medieval authority, rather than being subversive but allowed to survive based on external factors (such as personal wealth, familial connections).<sup>8</sup>

### **The Apparent Rigidity of the Twelfth Century and its Flaws as a Categorization**

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<sup>7</sup> The lifestyles which existed counter to the established gender roles refers to women who were engaged in the “man’s” sphere--the public arena, and to men who existed outside the bounds of traditional masculinity, with its focus on war making, physical superiority, and sexual domination (this research will further define these arenas). However, this theological safe space was not a refuge for those whose sexual preferences (outside of celibacy) deviated from established hetero-normativity.

<sup>8</sup> It is necessary to point out the centrality of the Church during this period. Each individual’s life was greatly shaped by the influence of the Church, and the theological changes which occurred during their lifetime. The culture of guilt, where people felt compelled to confess their “sins,” as described to them by their priests flourished, and through this confessional process or education (for those who were wealthy or privileged her receive an education, which would focus extensively, if not entirely, on theology), the business of the Church and its positions on gender distinction, gender crime, and sexuality was intrinsically a party to lay society.

The traditional view on the rigidity of twelfth century medieval gender understanding is largely based on the period's renewed interest in the classical works and their influence in theology, surface level interpretations of theology, which do appear unequivocally dualistic, and analyses of lay culture regarding sexuality, and the separate roles in society of men and women.<sup>9</sup> Stemming from Aristotle's philosophical works on the ordination of life on earth, medieval views on the defining differences of men and women clearly place men above women. Aristotle writes on conception: "The male provides the 'form' and the 'principle of the movement,' the female provides the body, in other words, the material...it lacks one constituent...the principle of Soul."<sup>10</sup> Aristotle continues to write that women are "colder" and "weaker" in nature, where men are "hotter" and "stronger."<sup>11</sup> The medieval attitude, drawing from the ancient works was embodied in the understanding that, "It is the semen, when possessed of vitality, which makes us men, hot, well-braced in limbs, heavy, well-voiced, spirited, strong to think and act."<sup>12</sup> Physical virility, then, became a measurement of masculinity, and as such, superiority in power, thought, and action, where femininity became associated with the body, not the soul. The association of femininity with the body, in patristic and early medieval theology gave rise to the understanding that the female gender exhibited greater propensity for sin, whereas the male gender exhibited a

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<sup>9</sup> R.M Thompson, "Richard Souther and the Twelfth Century Intellectual World: Essay Review of R.W. Southern, *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe, Vol. I: Foundations, Vol. II: The Heroic Age*," *The Journal of Religious History* 26 (2002): 265, accessed September 7, 2017, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9809.t01-1-00156/epdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Aristotle, "De Generatione Animalium" in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, C.W. Marx* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 40.

<sup>11</sup> Galen, *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body* in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 41-42. Aristotle's logic is echoed through history. Galen, the Greek third century philosopher and physician in Rome continued with Aristotle's claim, writing: "The semen generated in them [male testes]...becomes the efficient principle of the animals." Galen expands upon Aristotelian physics in his understanding that the "soul," the male contribution in conception, is the "efficient principle of animals." The efficient principle or cause, is the catalyst feature which propels all natural things and beings into reaching their intended purpose.

<sup>12</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, "Gendered Sexuality," *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* ed., Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 82.

greater ability to redress the ancient sins of humanity through its “dominance” in thought and action.

The classical Christian tradition, like the pagan work, found renewed interest in the twelfth century, and like the revival of the classical pagan works, is largely utilized in support of the Southern thesis. The contributions of Augustine, particularly found increasing popularity. Augustine’s conjectures continue to mirror the logic established by Aristotle: “In her mind and her rational intelligence, she [woman] has a nature equal of man’s, but in sex she is physically subject to him in the same way our natural impulses need to be subjected to the reasoning power of mind, in order that the actions to which they lead may be inspired by the principles of good conduct.”<sup>13</sup> Analysis on the nature of the afterlife, which he discusses in his treatise *City of God*, written in the fourth century Roman empire (in North Africa), also sheds light on the way in which he viewed the nature of gender, and the inherent questions associated with gender difference in the Catholic scripture. Through his corpus, Bernard of Clairvaux defines femininity as “soft,” “spiritually immature,” and as associated with the body, lust, and sin, and “weakness of the soul.”<sup>14</sup> St. Bernard extolled the ability of the masculine in reaching a level of connection with God, a task he deemed more difficult for women, due to their inherent connection to sin.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the ancient associations of gender with aspects of life and certain qualities governed the lives medieval individuals, and though their influences were varied based on the education and personal leanings of scholars, the individuals under focus here were familiar with (either through

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<sup>13</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, “De Genesi Ad Literam” and “De Civitate Dei,” in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 81.

<sup>14</sup> Shawn M. Kraemer, “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 304-327, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

<sup>15</sup> Joyce E. Salisbury, “Gendered Sexuality,” *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality* ed., Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 82.

direct or indirect study) of the ideas about gender espoused by these classical authors, as is apparent by the language they utilize.<sup>16</sup>

Interest in sexuality and gender conformity reached a high point during the twelfth century, from confessional questionings to lay manuals on love, the society very much appears to have closed ranks on the definitions of appropriate gendered and sexual activity, drawing on the classical ideas of male domination. Many of the “sinful” actions which individuals needed absolution for included sexual activity during prohibited days (fast days, advent), and inappropriate sexual activity (adultery, positions which placed the man in the “passive” place) because such “inappropriate” sexuality warned of the diminishment of a man’s ability to “think and act” strongly, and thus could endanger the structure of human society and violate the laws of

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<sup>16</sup> Clare Monagle, *Orthodoxy and Controversy in Twelfth-Century Religious Discourse: Peter Lombard’s “Sentences” and the Development of Theology* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 80-85. The importance of the twelfth century in creating and perpetuating new intellectual ideas, theological stances, and law cannot be understated. The twelfth century is an extremely important watershed in the intellectual history of the Middle Ages, and no study of law or theology of the period would be complete without first understanding its impact. The synthesis of classical philosophy and anatomy with catholic theology represents a turning point in medieval history, one which established a more cohesive and compressive power structure at the Rome with the proliferation of canon law and which enabled secular rulers to start structuring a legal system of their own (taking hints from the language, logic and procedure of canon law). An analysis of medieval law would be categorically incomplete without a thorough examination of the impact of this historical synthesis. Specifically, this project will focus on the implications of this synthesis in understanding the definitions of gender in society. The works of Aristotle, Augustine, Isidore of Seville, Galen, Peter Abelard, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Lombard, and Alan of Lille demonstrate and represent the logic in medieval notions of gender and the importance of gender difference in medieval society. Modern medieval scholars refer to the “long twelfth century” or the twelfth century renaissance as a revolution in the Medieval period. The late eleventh century to roughly 1215 (coinciding with the signing of the Magna Carta in England and the conclusion of the Fourth Lateran Council, an ecclesiastical watershed), is understood as a period of substantial change and intellectual and political growth. Educated (mostly ecclesiastical) members of the elite (mostly growing out of the Carolingian, then Capetian, Norman and Anglo-Norman political ascendancies) became extremely influential and powerful. These “*clerici*,” as Monagle terms them, re-discovered antique theories of medicine, cosmology, and law (largely coming from Aristotle) and, in synthesizing this material with Catholicism, created a flourishing theology, a standardized and written examination of natural law and ecclesiastical procedure, universities, and organizations of consolidated authority with the head at the Vatican. 1215 is arguably a capstone on this period of growth, as it represents the success of this period in integrating the twelfth century synthesis into the systems of power; the Magna Carta and the Fourth Lateran Council both represent the success of this new education in influencing secular and ecclesiastical power, which reigned until the Reformation.

nature,<sup>17</sup> (defined in canon law as that which is given by God and reasonable exegesis).<sup>18</sup> For the layperson, the strong connection between physical dominance and masculinity fostered the association between physical prowess and displays of “ideal” masculinity, as such warfare and sexual performance.<sup>19</sup> There is evidence of impotence as a legal matter, where husbands accused of such were granted the ability to exculpate themselves through demonstration (usually at a brothel) in order to prove their ability to meet the marriage debt and their active masculinity (which, if seen as diminished, could be used as evidence of habitual sexual misconduct, which depending on the crime, could be severely punishable, or as evidence of witchcraft), which is demonstratively extremely important. Andreas Capellanus, possibly a twelfth century retainer at the court of Champagne, wrote a manual *On Love*, a guide on the acceptable practices of courtly romance and the correct means of entering into a relationship.<sup>20</sup> He echoes theology and antique theory when he writes that “excessive indulgence in pleasure hinders love...such men as these wish to indulge...their love is like that of a shameless dog...for they are affected solely by that natural urge which puts men on a level with the rest of the animal kingdom.”<sup>21</sup> His second section “Between what persons love can exist,” states, “The main point to be noted about love is that it can exist only between persons of different sex...love blushes to embrace what nature

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<sup>17</sup> Clare Monagle, *Orthodoxy and Controversy in Twelfth-Century Religious Discourse: Peter Lombard's "Sentences" and the Development of Theology* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013) 84-85.

<sup>18</sup> Gratian, *The Treatise on Laws: Decretum DD. 1-20*, ed., Augustine Thompson, James Gordley, Katherine Christensen (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1993).

<sup>19</sup> Jacqueline Murray “Hiding Behind the Universal Man: Male Sexuality in the Middle Ages,” *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed., Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996) 123-152.

<sup>20</sup> P.G Walsh, Introduction to *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed., P.G Walsh (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed., P.G Walsh (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1982), 41.

[natural law] denies.”<sup>22</sup> Homosexuality became increasingly a punishable offense under the umbrella term sodomy (which encapsulated much more than homosexual sex, such as outlawed sexual positioning in heterosexual sex), with the twelfth century “crackdown,” voiced by theologian Peter Damian.<sup>23</sup> The theological complaint as well as the lay complaint with homosexual sex stemmed from the imagined assault to masculinity; placing one’s self in the passive role in sexual activity diminished the “natural” right of superiority given to mankind (literally *mankind*), which, for laypeople, demonstrated effeminacy, and for the Church, demonstrated subversion of the natural order and established hierarchy (of which its position at the top of humanity was growing ever more precarious as secular rulers centralized their authority). This information appears to validate the Southern thesis; the intention of displaying such evidence is not in discrediting this project's own thesis, but instead to demonstrate the basis on which its competition rests, and dispute the potency of such evidence in making the claim of rigidity.

The popular lay perspective and its understanding of the theological underpinnings on gender difference and crime supports those authors like Barbara L. Grant; there is overwhelming literary evidence from the twelfth century (some of the most compelling of which has been presented here) which suggest a dichotomous notion of gender. This veracity of such a notion would certainly validate the claims of Grant and her fellows regarding the singularity and “tokenism” of those few men and women who lived outside of these notions of gender difference and who were not persecuted on this basis (and who seemingly violate the medieval concepts of natural law and thus pose a threat to the structures of power in the medieval world). However, a

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<sup>22</sup> Andreas Capellanus, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, ed., P.G Walsh (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1982), 35.

<sup>23</sup> Warren Johansson and William A. Percy, “Homosexuality,” in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed., Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brundage (London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1996), 167.

more in depth analysis of the powerful twelfth century theologians, and their understanding on the nature of the soul and atonement, and its impact in the canon law (which subsequently governed Europe either directly or through osmosis as secular rulers embraced the procedure and content in the decades and centuries after its initial codification in 1215 at the Fourth Lateran Council) reveals buried definitions of ideal gender performance, and the non-binary composition of such an identity. Firstly, these authors, while none save Peter Abelard dispute the total male supremacy in closeness to God and on earth, they do all concede to the existence and occurrence of “exceptional” women, on the model of Mary, who through their chastity (and usually, virginity) enjoy special privilege of Godly communion.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the works focusing on the afterlife and the nature of the soul reveal a highly enmeshed understanding of non-binary gender distinction, and a process I’ve termed “spiritual dual-gendered-ness” or spiritual gender transformation, whereby church fathers and mid-medieval contemporary jurists and theologians alike argue that individuals (both men and women) can (and ideally should) exist in a gendered liminal space exhibiting both female and male characteristics in order to ultimately commune with God in heaven. This theory then provides a space for individuals who do not appear to conform to the traditional medieval lay society’s understanding of gender to exist, one which confers great respect and authority upon that person as an example of enlightened spirituality and theological theory incarnate. Within the institutional and intellectual context of the medieval Church, there existed a place for “special” women;<sup>25</sup> while twelfth century theologians draw

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<sup>24</sup> This theory of exceptionalism is not equal to Grant’s “tokenism” by any means. In her definition, women who gain respect or simply escape persecution for living outside of the “woman’s place” as a daughter or wife, or who exhibits masculine traits such as dress, occupation, education, or everyday behavior are exceptions in the sense that they remained subversive but through extenuating circumstances such as wealth, rank or personal connection, they managed to remain at liberty.

<sup>25</sup> St. Augustine, *De Fide et operibus*, in Peter Abelard, *Sic et Non*, in Dylan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 131.

heavily from St. Augustine's work, they each have a unique position on the state of men and women on the ladder to God, connected by the accepted assumption of exceptional women. This concept comes from a discussion on the fall of man, and the means by which humanity may atone for the sins of Adam and Eve and achieve heaven with God in the afterlife, and while these people all had different visions of gender—the content of overlap suggests a level of implicit consensus in the mid medieval period.

### **Twelfth Century Expansion on the Theological Safe Space**

Theologians and intellectuals for centuries posed and answered questions on the conditions of atonement, the qualities which one must possess in order to achieve communion with God, and the nature of the human soul (of what it is formed of, how it is connected to God, the differences between the Soul and the Body, and how the relationship between the Soul and the Body play into the afterlife), but this question became increasingly discussed in the twelfth century discourse. Augustine's main contribution to later medieval (and especially twelfth-century) intellectual debates was his *City of God* and his commentary on the *Song of Songs*, the interpretation of which spawned many theological discourses and colored many treatises on the nature of the soul itself, namely through the works of said Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, Peter Abelard, and Gilbert of Hoyland. The main metaphor of the *Song of Songs* is of particular interest; the work describes the marriage of a "bride" to her husband in demonstrating the communion of a soul with God. The particular descriptions of this phenomenon and the necessary conditions for its success (the requisite state of the soul, how one may achieve said state, in what form the soul takes and how it communes with God) are of particular interest, because they imply a highest (closest to God) gender identity, which is neither wholly male, nor female, but combines aspects of the medieval notions of both gender identities.

Bernard of Clairvaux and Aelred of Rievaulx, contemporary twelfth-century Cistercian theologians, bury within their multitude of treatises and letters an understanding of “idyllic masculinity,” a concept with origins in Augustine’s *City of God*. In *City of God*, Augustine’s message, in analyzing Paul in Ephesians 4.13, interprets his understanding of the afterlife in a way which opens the door for these later theologians to build on and understand gender as non-dichotomous by creating a definition of what this paper will call “idyllic masculinity.” Paul writes, “we shall attain perfect manhood” in heaven, after having attained salvation.<sup>26</sup> In his interpretation of Paul, Augustine writes, “For my part, I feel that...there is no doubt that there will be both sexes in the resurrection. For in that life there will be no sexual lust, which is the cause of shame.”<sup>27</sup> Augustine’s interpretations hint at two major points. Augustine’s message regarding the afterlife implies that the singular difference between men and women (in their hierarchy towards God), is, the feminine connection to the body and subsequent propensity for sin. Translating and arguing that in the afterlife, all become “men,” while remaining in the bodies of both men and women, Augustine claims that the ultimate distinction is spiritual and not just anatomically or bodily. While he argues that women’s bodies and their close association with the body as a whole is connected to lust, shame, and sin, woman would be spiritually equal to man, even in a woman’s body, if she were able to sever herself, spiritually (mentally, in behavior) from the typical pitfalls which generally arise with the body itself. To be clear, Augustine is not

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<sup>26</sup> Gillian Clark, “Adam’s Engendering: Augustine on Gender and Creation” *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 and 1997 Winter Meeting at the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed., R.N Swanson (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 17.

<sup>27</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, “De Genesi Ad Literam” and “De Civitate Dei,” in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 81. He echoes Aristotle and Galen in asserting that woman’s inferiority comes from the innate connection to the body. When he writes that though a woman is a man’s equal intellectually, but must be “subject” to a man nevertheless, in order to correct “natural impulses,” the implication is that the woman’s connection to the “body” (and therefore an increased propensity or connection to sin), necessarily means that she must remain under the control of a man or men in order to prevent the spread of such sin.

necessarily contradicting Paul, instead, he is conditioning Paul's statement; all might achieve "perfect manhood" in gaining salvation, but that manhood does not hinge on biological masculinity, but rather a spiritual "masculinity," or "idyllic masculinity" (a state which both biological men and women could achieve, since no patristic father or respected theologian denies the possibility of women gaining salvation, but instead lament on the difficulty of the task).<sup>28</sup> Bernard and Aelred's interpretations and usages of Augustine's concept reveals much more than the twelfth century's reliance on Augustine, the classical physics of Aristotle and Plato, and preoccupation with atonement, guilt, the afterlife, and the apocalypse. These theologians enjoyed popularity, respect, and relationships with the highest echelons of medieval society; their works and major themes greatly influenced the Fourth Lateran Council, one of the most major milestones of the Middle Ages, as it codified theology, and canon law positions which exist to this day, and which subsequently influenced the procedure and content of lay legal systems, particularly those in France and England.<sup>29</sup> These descriptions regarding the soul and afterlife reveal an unspoken, unwritten, implicit consensus on the ideal nature of gender and its implications for their society as a whole. Their concepts of the term provide a space for women outside of the traditional bounds of femininity. Additionally, it exists for men who would not have fit into the traditional lay perspective of masculinity (which was tied together with sexual

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<sup>28</sup> Dylan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 11-12. Elliot discusses the patristic understanding of "becoming male" in biblical exegesis, writing about its origins in the Gnostic dualism of the centuries before the Council of Nicaea in 425. This view can be seen as having become internalized by Christian women (or perpetuated by Christian men, depending on the actual authorship) in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, where an imprisoned Roman Christian woman dreams she becomes a man in order to fight the metaphorical devil of Roman disbelief and persecution. Elliot writes that the concept of the "virile woman" continued to survive in theological consciousness through the centuries. However, Augustine's work altered the original philosophy behind the "virile woman," or the idea of promised relief from gendered society, where all would live together as one gender, without sex or lust.

<sup>29</sup> Clare Monagle, *Orthodoxy and Controversy in Twelfth-Century Religious Discourse: Peter Lombard's "Sentences" and the Development of Theology* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2013), 83-84.

dominance, war-making, and other displays of physical prowess including displays of massive food and wine consumption). The inclusion of these groups means, at least theoretically, that there existed a place of acceptance in medieval society for a specific group of lay gender role nonconforming individuals (both biological men and women).

Bernard's corpus, particularly *In Praise of the New Knighthood* and his commentary on the *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, adapts Augustine's idea of "idyllic masculinity" for the twelfth-century context. In *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, part of the centralization efforts of Church authority, he attempts to persuade lay elites to embark on the Second Crusade, making the point that only service in the name of the Church leads to heaven.<sup>30</sup> In contrast to his view of femininity as "spiritually immature" "soft," and connected to the body, he discusses masculinity in terms of *forte* or a mental strength, and a moral and intellectual virility.<sup>31</sup> Bernard's interest in masculinity is particularly intriguing because of the way he takes traditional lay ideals of masculinity, derived from conquest, strength in battle, and physical virility, and creates mental and metaphorical equivalents as the spiritual ideals of masculine behavior. Bernard also qualifies ideal spiritual masculinity as martial, and he describes the need of men to "take up arms" against both a metaphorical devil and the weakness of humanity and against a physical enemy, the infidel, in both his *Sermons on the Song of Songs* and in *In Praise of the New Knighthood*.<sup>32</sup> In *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, Bernard's harsh words on laymen engaged in secular warfare, in his section "On Worldly Knighthood" are particularly intriguing. He writes (ostensibly to Hugh of Payns, but generally to the lay elite), "O Knights...in all this pomp...you charge to your death.

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<sup>30</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, trans., M. Conrad Greenia (Trappist: Cistercian Publications, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Shawn M. Kraemer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 316, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

Are these the trappings [silk coverings and plumed armor] of a warrior or are they not rather the trinkets of a woman?"<sup>33</sup> His ire continues as he writes that lay knights certainly fight with "irrational anger, hunger for empty glory...hankering after earthly possessions," all reasons why a knight ought to fear his death on the battlefield, since surely it would send him to hellfire.<sup>34</sup> For Bernard, idyllic masculinity (rises above and inverts the causal "masculinity" defined for and praised by the lay masses) is defined by appropriating the language of sexual and physical dominance and applying it to an intellectual state, which Shawn M. Kramer calls "metaphorical virility."<sup>35</sup>

Bernard's idyllic masculinity is divorced of its connection to male anatomy, and is instead attached to the classical Aristotelian understanding that mental exertion, intellectual pursuits, and successful rhetorical "penetration" has an intrinsic link to masculinity.<sup>36</sup> Bernard's work, Krahmer writes, demonstrates that a soul can be "polished" or worked into its perfect state of communion with God through contemplation and appropriate action. This idea has considerable similarities to Aristotle's theories regarding physics, alluded to in the works of Galen: Aristotle contends that all beings move towards their perfect "state," compelled by the efficient cause. Galen argued that the efficient cause of humanity was semen; however, in Bernard's recalculation of the theory, the perfect state is communion with God, and the efficient cause is arguably a metaphorical virility (the mental and active discourse regarding morality,

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<sup>33</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Praise of the New Knighthood*, trans., M. Conrad Greenia (Trappist: Cistercian Publications, 2000), 37.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>35</sup> Shawn M. Krahmer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 315, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

<sup>36</sup> Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* in "Aristotle (384-322 BC)," in *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 39-40. Of course Aristotle also believed, centrally, that male anatomy and biology was singularly important in gender difference, and Bernard certainly learned much of his Aristotle through his diffusion in other texts.

intellect, and self-control in adverse circumstances, as defined by Bernard in the *Sermon on the Song of Songs*), which for Bernard, exceptional women can aspire to achieve.<sup>37</sup> Here, a woman who might achieve “spiritual masculinization,” in theory, is not upsetting the natural order or the hierarchy which the Church relied on for its supremacy on earth. A woman in this position gained spiritual authority by taking on the role of the “man,” meaning that she did not presume to take power “as a woman,” which would assume that she could take power from a man, while existing in a lower rung of divine authority, and thus open the whole of society to the fall of order. Though she is a woman, she is spiritually a man, and thus, has arrived, naturally, at a post of superior power.

Aelred’s works reference the theological controversies of the day: those between Bernard, Abelard and Peter Lombard, the subtext of which focuses on the ideal gender of the soul.<sup>38</sup> Aelred, in his *De Anima*, equates the soul to God; as God is largely ineffable, so is the human soul. As the soul manipulates the person’s body, so God controls the universe, and as the soul is “in every part and not less in the part than in the whole, it shows that God is also is not divided, but is one simple, indivisible being.”<sup>39</sup> The soul, then, exists as an image of the divine.

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<sup>37</sup> Shawn M. Kraemer, “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 304-327, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

<sup>38</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Ailred of Rievaulx: De Anima* ed., C.H Talbot (London: Warburg Institute at University of London, 1952) 9, 14. C.H Talbot writes that his works demonstrate a connection with the Laon theological School, known for its interest in the soul and original sin, and its disinterest in pursuing lines of questioning related to the Trinity or the virgin birth. Aelred’s work, Talbot continues, reflects a “reliance” on St. Augustine and rejection of dialectical reasoning the usage of which was the hallmark of other theologians, such as Peter Abelard). He had a hatred of the pagan classical authors, asserting that they have burned for their sins, and therefore their works have no place in the house of God (a monastery). This dislike includes the works of Aristotle, Socrates, and Plato (probably his dislike of Abelard and dialectics stem from this rejection). Though he may have detested these authors and the means of their logic, the intellectual movement of his time did not wholesale reject them as Aelred did, and their influence, obviously, was huge for his contemporaries and in the codification of the canon law, which largely rested on the intellectual debates of the twelfth century (and of which Aelred was an uncontested part).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 29

If Adam had not rent apart the communion between the memory, intellect, and will, he would have remained wholly aware of his soul and therefore of its resemblance-to God. The ascetic life, he contended, was the means of once again uniting the three aspects of humanity, and by focusing on and living (metaphorically) in combining the trinity of memory, intellect and will, one may be able to once again live in communion with God and the soul.<sup>40</sup> In “Jesus at the Age of Twelve, II, The Allegorical Sense,” Aelred writes, “Thus his [Jesus’s] bodily progress is our spiritual progress, and what we are told he did at each stage of his life is reproduced in us spiritually...as is experienced by those of us who advance in virtue.” He refers here to Jesus’s progressive critique of the Jewish religion in which he grew up; in other words, Aelred refers to Jesus’s intellectual growth, writing that men can mirror this growth in their souls through the practice of Jesus’s ascetic contemplation.<sup>41</sup> Here, Bernard and Aelred are synchronized: they both argue that the ideal process of atonement and access to God is through vigorous intellectual, ascetic activity, and that this state is the ideal state for a man. Returning to *De Anima*, Aelred

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid. For his rejection of the classical, it is interesting that, probably through the medieval osmosis of idea, Aristotelian and neoplatonic physics imbues his discussion on the nature of the soul and life. He writes that the Soul is “essentially rational life,” and that life, then, is a “kinetic power.” Aristotelian physics posit that “natural” beings are so because they have an end-point, and a means of advancing themselves to that point through the “efficient cause” of the being, a concept which mirrors Aelred’s notion of life as “kinetic energy.” Through vigorous intellectual activity, meditation and asceticism, an individual can “perfect” the soul, and in doing so, bring it into communion with God.

<sup>41</sup> Kim M. Phillips, “Maidenhood as the Perfect Age of Woman’s Life,” *Young Medieval Women*, ed., Katherine J. Lewis, Noël James Menuge, Kim. M. Phillips (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999). 6-7. He specifically uses the masculine when describing this process. While it is technically possible he refers to mankind through the universal masculine, context would suggest otherwise. As he discusses those who may emulate Jesus’s journey through an intellectual (spiritual) kinetic transformation, the medieval attitude was to use Jesus as a model of male sanctity and male life, where women (as a group) were compared to the Virgin Mary or Mary Magdalene in making a similar, albeit less significant spiritual step. This is further exemplified in the way in which the time of Jesus’s death become fetishized in medieval male culture; the age between thirty and thirty five (when Jesus was thought to have died) was understood as the ideal male age (and the age of perfect beauty, as well), because the man had the ability to emulate Jesus. In contrast, women were considered most beautiful and most divinely-associated much younger, and without reference to Jesus. Thus, Aelred is a part of a culture which connects perfection and masculinity to Jesus, and in referencing that aspect of medieval life with his latin masculine, his implication is that the emulation of what he defines as the key aspect of Jesus’s life, is the ideal state for a man to exist in.

argues that man's ability to re-commune with God, to re-connect through this intellectual/spiritual activity, reverses the damage done to that "man's" soul in from the Fall of man (used universally). This activity thus atones for and reverses the sins of both Adam and Eve, using humanity's greatest tool and defining characteristic, reason.<sup>42</sup> Implicit in the argument is the idea that the "man" is taking over the woman's role in the fall as well as the man's, ultimately demonstrating two things to Aelred's audience. One, that men can become better "women" than women could be, through a specifically male gendered, rigorous process of apology to God and two, that in order to reach this level of communion or marriage with God, a man necessarily must assume or recognize a level of "femininity" inside himself. Like Bernard, Aelred makes a crucial distinction in his "idyllic masculinity," the intellectual process of spiritual re-communion with God: it is unattached to male biology, and instead relies on the typical medieval conflation of maleness and rationality/reason (where *typical* femininity disrupts the male process of superior logic by sexual distraction and preoccupation with "the body," and "the earth" instead of "the soul," and "the divine").

Based on the definitions these influential twelfth century theologians provided on "idyllic masculinity," (building on the Augustinian legacy, using classical logic), there *theoretically* existed a space in medieval society for non-traditional gender conforming individuals. St. Bernard of Clairvaux's and Gilbert of Hoyland's, another of his Cistercian contemporaries, works on the *Sermon on the Song of Songs* reveal a consensus on the *reality* of achieving "idyllic masculinity," which, in this project will be termed "spiritual masculinization." The two theologians' analysis of the conceit of a bride, the soul, marrying her fiancé, or God, reveals almost more about twelfth-century transition views on gender than on the intended

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<sup>42</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Aelred of Rievaulx: de Anima* ed., C.H Talbot (London: Warburg Institute at University of London, 1952), 30.

contemplations on Christian devotion. Gilbert of Hoyland, in his *Sermons on the Song of Songs*, writes of “the bride,”

so at his [God’s] retreat, she retreats to her little bed of infirmity...at night she meditates on him, seeking the one her soul loves. Not indolent is her action in this bed on which she has fallen. She is not wanton nor does she dally on a bed of concupiscence; but she struggles the more, mindful of her only Beloved, vanquished not by infirmity but by charity.<sup>43</sup>

He continues, writing of this moment, that her meditation on her “love” is a “devout task,” where the setting is especially right:

What better place than one’s little bed, what time more fitting than by night, for the exercise of love? Better than the day then, is this night, since night conceals a man from the disturbance to which day exposes him. In Genesis, as soon as our first parents opened their eyes to this daylight, they blushed in confusion. How much happier were they previously when they kept their eyes closed, and when under cover of a better night, they knew not sin’s concupiscence!”<sup>44</sup>

Gilbert then qualifies the bride’s activity: “But into a spirit restful and pure, on her own wisdom is wont to hasten and enter gratuitously. How will an eye irritated by anger or anxiety gaze upon the unapproachable light which is penetrated only by a clear mind?”<sup>45</sup> Gilbert’s analysis of Augustine’s most influential work includes several riveting points of analysis. Gilbert writes that the bride’s site of repose is fitting and vastly important in the understanding of the metaphor; the night and the bride’s “little bed,” are necessary to the integrity of the metaphor. The bride, marrying God, sits on a bed at night, the setting of matrimonial (and all canonical licit sexual activity) consummation; however, her activities, though connected to “love,” are intellectual (meditative), and Gilbert takes special care to enunciate the differences by declaring that she is “not wanton,” “nor does she dally on a bed of concupiscence.” Her ascetic intellectual pursuit

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<sup>43</sup> Gilbert of Hoyland, *The Works of Gilbert of Hoyland: Sermons on the Song of Songs*, trans., Lawrence C. Braceland (Kalamazoo, Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1978) 44. Regarding the terms “love” and “charity,” these translated terms derive from the Latin “caritas,” which, in twelfth century theological context is generally taken to mean “love of God and humanity.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 45.

(for she has eschewed the comforts of lay society) bring her into a connubial embrace with God, an embrace born out of chastity, but which is nevertheless described in terms of the passions of a wedding night, and which symbolizes the reversal of the fall of man, born out of sexual sin (as confirmed by Gilbert's reference to Genesis). Theoretically, Bernard, Aelred, and Gilbert's theological understanding of the ideal masculine state provides a sacred space of acceptance and praise for those who do not generally meet the lay gender standard— particularly, but not exclusively, men. Medieval lay masculinity rested on physical and sexual dominance (measured by success in warfare, courtly love, hunting, and eating), and left little room for the acceptance of those men who fell short in these areas (remembering the early and mid-medieval *criminal* legal cases employed against those husbands accused of impotence).<sup>46</sup> In theory, anyone could achieve “metaphorical virility,” a dominance of the mental and spiritual faculties, acting as a kind of Aristotelian kinetic force (Aelred's understanding) or as a neoplatonic *entelechy* (Bernard's) which polishes the soul into the state at which it can connect to God, as defined by both these extremely socially and politically potent theological thinkers, and therefore a standard of protected and revered “masculinity,” one which could transcend the bounds of biological gender and apply to women, castrated, physically or sexually impotent men, as long as they met rigid and lofty expectations of such a definition.

Shawn M. Kramer, in “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux,” analyzes the twelfth-century Cistercian commentary on Augustine's work, focusing on Bernard of Clairvaux. Gilbert of Hoyland's “bride” exemplifies the “idyllic masculinity” defined by Aelred in *De Anima* and Bernard in *In Praise of the New Knighthood*: the bride is reflective and intellectually “penetrates” the logic and “word” of God and his apostles, and “her” conduit to God is

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<sup>46</sup> The criminal nature of these lawsuits is important; they were carried out not by an ecclesiastical court in order to determine the validity of marriage where adequate consumption was possible, but by a criminal panel.

meditation through “love,” in a process which, on a personal and spiritual level reverses the fall of man, opening the possibility of a woman spiritually “transforming” into the “idyllic man” in order to commune with God. Kramer’s analysis provides context on the scholarly consensus regarding the gender of “the bride” and its implication in understanding these commentaries. Kramer calls Bernard’s bride a “virile” woman, because she exemplifies the traits of his ideal man, as defined in *In Praise of the New Knighthood*,<sup>47</sup> and although many scholars argue that the “bride” should be considered a male model of behavior, because “anima” the Latin word for “soul” is a feminine noun and thusly, the “bride” is only female in grammar, not in intention, Kramer writes that this theory cannot hold water.<sup>48</sup> Kramer argues that Augustine, in his original *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, utilized a masculine for “anima,” and thus, if Bernard (or for that matter anyone else writing a commentary on the work, such as Gilbert) were really interested in demonstrating that this path existed strictly for biological men, he could have done so.<sup>49</sup> Even if Kramer’s theory holds false, as Dylan Elliott posits, the metaphor still highlights the idea of “spiritual masculinization” and “dual-genderedness.”<sup>50</sup> Both authors intended their works to be studied by their fellow monks as material for contemplation. As Aelred had, Bernard and Gilbert then ask their fellows to take upon themselves a certain level of femininity (and become better “women” than a typical woman) in order to truly atone for the fall of man and reconnect their souls with God (it is important to note that in this case, the men do not take on a passive role, save for their relationship with God, meaning that the men do not “degrade” themselves or the

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<sup>47</sup> Shawn M. Kraemer, “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 304-327, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

<sup>48</sup> Shawn M. Kraemer, “The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Church History* 69 (June 2000): 304-327, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3169582>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Dylan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012), 172.

natural hierarchy of their sex, a move which would have been antithetical to twelfth-century canon theology, and that this certain feminine aspect is the ability of humble passivity).

However, as the means of “spiritual masculinization,” carry no explicit gender restrictions, there is no evidence suggesting that a woman could not pursue the path and achieve the same level of spiritual communion with God (her soul having become masculinized, but retaining the ideal feminine aspect of “humble passivity”).

Gilbert, Aelred, and Bernard were mainstream theologians, and the prominence of the Cistercian order gave their works a level of acceptance and instant fame, resulting in their codification at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). While the argument could be made that their perspective is singular to the Cistercian faction, outside of which their ideas faded out of practice, analyses from the Cistercians’s bitter intellectual enemy, Peter Abelard, and the works and hagiographies of several “token” women from the twelfth century show a level of consensus regarding the process of “spiritual masculinization,” which logically, appears to negate the possibility of anomaly or factional singularity. The influence of the Cistercian dominance in the twelfth century cannot be understated; clerics and religious women of the period would have been affected by the rise in Cistercian asceticism, and Bernard's treatise on the Second Crusade would have been immensely well known to those educated, or connected to Church propaganda. Those who disagreed publicly with Bernard of Clairvaux also had to contend with his prominence and Papal connections, and such disagreements were well publicized and known.

### **Abelard and the Anti-Cistercian Perspective**

Peter Abelard (d. 1142) was St. Bernard of Clairvaux’s most prominent intellectual and theological enemy - in fact, Bernard was responsible for several unsuccessful attempts at condemning Abelard for heresy - but he is perhaps most infamous for his relationship with his

former student and one-time wife Heloise. Abelard's relationship with Heloise is not simply tangentially related to his theological works; indeed, his work largely demonstrates his relationship with Heloise acted as a singular influence upon his ideas. Though he and the Cistercians had a tense relationship, to say the least, and despite Abelard's significant departure on the issue of gender hierarchy, he (based on his letters between himself and Heloise and on his dialectical work *Sic et Non*), Bernard, Aelred, and Gilbert all provide a path for women of "spiritual masculinization" in gaining communion with God, and a commended space on earth as a particularly holy individual.<sup>51</sup> In his last letter to Heloise, *De Auctoritate Vel Dignitate Ordinis Sanctimonialium*, Abelard writes:

Just because the sex of women is weaker, their virtue is more more pleasing to God and more perfect, according to the testimony of the Lord Himself. When encouraging the Apostle to struggle despite his weakness for the crown of victory, He says, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for power is made perfect in infirmity.' But where can we say that this was ever so thoroughly realized, through the dispensation of divine grace, as in that weakness of women's sex, which both sin and nature had made contemptible? Also the Lord restored Eve, the origin of all evil, in Mary before he renewed Adam in Christ. And just as sin began from a woman, so grace began from a woman.<sup>52</sup>

Abelard echoes the claims from his predecessors here: women, weak with a propensity for sin connected to their bodies, share with Mary the ability to repudiate their sinfulness by rejecting the body and assuming a 'masculine' spiritual level higher than that associated with femininity. However, as Alcuin Blamires argues, Abelard, taking the traditional theological, anti-feminist

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<sup>51</sup> While most popular and scholarly readers of Abelard and Heloise's letters tend to ignore Abelard's final correspondence with Heloise, his pastoral advice letter, this project maintains that this letter, more so than the others, reveals his feelings about his relationship to Heloise (even as it presents itself as a dry monastic rule), and his positions about the state of gender in the Christian world. Fiona Griffiths, a medieval historian at Stanford University has referenced the lack of scholarly interest in Abelard's last letter as a disappointment, and Dylan Elliott equally argues for its importance out of obscurity. Add references to specific works by Griffiths and Elliott

<sup>52</sup> Peter Abelard, "De Auctoritate Vel Dignitate Ordinis Sanctimonialium," in "Abelard (1079-1142)," *Woman Defamed, Woman Defended*, ed., Alcuin Blamires, Karen Pratt, and C.W. Marx (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992) 235.

foundations of gender, arrives at a proto-feminist conclusion.<sup>53</sup> Where Augustine found that certain exceptional women were able to repudiate their inherent weakness and association of lust and sin, Abelard argues that these actions are not singular or exceptional, but represent the manifestations of woman's (as in all women) spiritual supremacy as a function of God's grace on her "weakness," prompting the completion of the "last becomes first" scriptural prophesy which reveals Abelard's position regarding "spiritual dual-gendered-ness."<sup>54</sup>

Abelard's favorite example, Blamires notes, is the story of the Samaritan woman offering Jesus a drink, the story of which he relates to Heloise in their final correspondence. In this scene, Blamires writes, Abelard, "goes on to offer a lyrical pro-feminist theory about the meaning of Jesus's 'thirst' at the well. He interprets the thirst as a special yearning for all women's salvation."<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, in Augustine's approach to this same episode, he genders the Samaritan woman with a "masculine essence," thus demonstrating the innate superiority of men, but re-affirming the addendum that women could in theory ascend "in essence" to a level of spiritual masculinity by rejecting and reversing the weakness and inherent female sinfulness. Abelard does not give up on the association of female to body and male to soul (seen in Aristotle as well as later Christian writers)—he doesn't just say a "few exceptions by special grace," instead he bases a strength of the entire gender on the basis of their inherent weakness and propensity for sin, and this position further colors his analysis of the Samaritan woman. She, just like the female bride or "soul" which Bernard and Gilbert write about, joins God through a sort

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<sup>53</sup>Alcuin Blamires, "Caput a Femina, membra a viris: Gender Polemic in Abelard's Letter 'On the Authority and Dignity of the Nun's Profession,'" in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in the Twelfth Century Latin*, ed., David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 62

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>55</sup> Alcuin Blamires, "Caput a Femina, membra a viris: Gender Polemic In Abelard's Letter 'On the Authority and Dignity of the Nun's Profession'" in *The Tongue of the Fathers: Gender and Ideology in the Twelfth-Century Latin*, ed. David Townsend and Andrew Taylor (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 63.

of metaphorical and spiritual sexuality. The woman “quenches his thirst” through her piety, and in a chaste reversal of Eve’s original sin, arrives in communion with God (spiritually) and her soul resides in Heaven.<sup>56</sup> So while Abelard and the Cistercians remained embittered enemies, polar sides of the twelfth- century intellectual debate, their works betray an underlying consensus upon which layers of difference and antipathy rest. Abelard and the Cistercians firstly agree on the source of atonement: the soul, and an apology for the fall of man through a spiritual process of sexual reversal. Abelard and the Cistercians (as well as Augustine) therefore represent mirror images of themselves: Abelard contends that this process is designed for women, that women have the most possibility of atonement, but that men, through “spiritual virginity” and intellectual process can achieve the same by taking on a feminine role, becoming gender non-dichotomous in the process.

Dylan Elliot argues that Abelard constructed this way of thinking as a means of assuring himself that Heloise would not burn in Hell for the relationship they had shared; that his many works reflect his struggle to create a unified system of understanding around the nature of sin in order to exonerate Heloise and himself, and indeed his work betrays his interest in assuring their salvation. In doing so, Abelard creates a system of Christian responsibility, which re-writes the idea of salvation with gendered nuances. Abelard writes that, “nothing pollutes the soul except what is of the soul,” meaning that intentionality (the deepest, darkest reasons a person had for acting the way in which they do), rather than action defines the state of the human soul.<sup>57</sup> In this case, Heloise, though she had externally appeared to have committed many sins (adultery, spurning the habit), her intentionality was pure because of her character: fierce devotion to love

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Dylan Elliot, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 131.

and intellect, as well as “tenacity and courage in abundance” (based on her brash claims of preferring death and hellfire to breaking her vows to Abelard, claims which demonstrate her qualities as a ideal *univira*--the Latin term for a woman who stayed with one husband for her life). The idea of *univira* is exemplified in Augustine and Abelard’s favorite Roman exempla, Lucretia, the Roman wife, who having been raped by the king-to-be, killed herself rather than “pollute” her marriage.<sup>58</sup> She became the reasoning behind Abelard’s assertion that intentionality in sex was important, that either person could resist internally and therefore be free of the sin of the action), explicitly comparing her to Lucretia.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, Abelard was able to conclude that Heloise, if she had never met and married Abelard, would still be sinless in character and intentionality. As Heloise would die for Abelard, so this alternate Heloise would die for Christ (in the same way, Abelard contends that Abraham, not needed to populate the world, would have remained as virginal as John the Baptist, due to his intentionality and character, and thus, ought to be treated as similarly “untainted”).<sup>60</sup> Elliot argues that Abelard’s last letter, providing Heloise with examples of the great women religious, and the power of the dedicated religious woman to succeed to communion with God, was his way of atoning for changing Heloise’s life, and turning the possibility of the “alternate Heloise” into the corporeal Heloise. Thus, Abelard, through wedding his own wife to God by virtue of his own intellectual cajoling, is in fact completing the steps of “metaphorical virility,” as Bernard of Clairvaux defines the term, but as the passive

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. Lucretia was a favorite topic of St. Augustine and Abelard. In the Roman story, Lucretia was raped by a usurping foreign king, and in dedication to her marriage and the classical Roman feminine virtue of loyalty, killed herself rather than shame her marriage, though in the eyes of law and society she was an innocent party. She was seen as an example of purity and true Roman virtue overcoming the vices and corruptions of society in Roman history, and by Abelard. He used her as an example of the action and intention dichotomy and the connection of intention with matters of the soul or character of a person. Her importance as a symbol of the peon of Roman femininity cannot be overstated.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 134.

player, since he is not polishing his soul so as to wed God, but is instead doing so to marry another to God.<sup>61</sup> This is once again a mirror image of Bernard, Aelred, and Gilbert's position; in their view, their soul's "wedding" to God would allow them to intercede on behalf of worthy individuals (namely the scores of women who lived piously but not *saintly* and came to male clerics or priests for confession, atonement, and the sacrament), but in this case, the woman would intercede on behalf of the *worthy man* who had guided her to God, by virtue of her position as wife of God.<sup>62</sup> Abelard's intentionality of following Heloise to Heaven this way is made clear in this final exhortation regarding his burial: "Wherever my body may lie, buried or unburied, I beg you to have it brought to your burial-ground...and thereby be encouraged to pour out prayers on my behalf...Nor do I believe that there is any more fitting place...[than] amongst women dedicated to Christ."<sup>63</sup> Abelard commends his body to Heloise, in the hope that her prayers may lead him to Heaven. He also maintains that there is no better burial place for a man intending to reach heaven than with women religious, the implication being that their status gives them an advantage in communing with God. In Abelard's understanding of sin, the soul, and "marriage" to God (created out of his guilt and continuing obsessive love for Heloise), the man

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<sup>61</sup> It should be noted that Abelard was castrated by Heloise's uncle and guardian, which precipitated their exit into religious life. He may be compensating for his literal "emasculatation" in arguing that men hoping to receive heaven as their just dessert take the passive role in this divine marriage, and spiritually "emasculate" themselves.

<sup>62</sup> Fiona Griffiths, "'Men's Duty to Provide for Women's Needs': Abelard, Heloise, and Their Negotiation of the *Cura Monialium*," *Journal of Medieval History* 30: 2004, 1-24, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1016/j.jmedhist.2003.12.002>. Griffiths has argued that this specific concept from Abelard rehabilitated the contemporary idea of the *cura monialium*, or priest's duties to perform sacraments and manage the welfare and continued existence for women's religious communities (since women could not perform certain religious rites), from the concept of a burdensome chore, to a vastly important spiritual duty, the practice of which was intimately connected with the salvation of both parties (as described above). Abelard's contribution to the debate was naturally well known during and after his lifetime, and those who studied theology or the workings of the Church were certain to be aware of his positions, including the female examples this project will analyze.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Abelard in *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* by Dylan Elliot, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 135.

takes the place of the good Christian woman but maintains the male prerogative of “intellectual penetration” in the process of gaining the kingdom of Heaven, a mirrored “dual-gendered-ness” to the views of the Cistercians.<sup>64</sup> While Abelard’s views may seem wholly different from those of the Cistercians, their overlap, even in such measurably different approaches, demonstrates a level of twelfth-century intellectual consensus regarding the acceptability of “non-dichotomous” gender identity as a spiritual facet of atonement and communion with God.<sup>65</sup>

### **Theology in Practice: The Examples of Herrad, Christian, and Hildegard**

Looking at the works of and male commentary on a few of the most notable examples of female “tokens” of the twelfth century, Herrad of Hohenbourg, Hildegard of Bingen, and Christina of Markyate, the evidence indicates that these women were not perceived as exceptions to the established rules by virtue of external effects, but as “transformed males” in an Abelardian conception of the journey towards divine communion. Instead of representing conservative ideas about women in the public and gender inferiority, as the majority of scholars have contended, these women actually advocated for a radical reform of the priest’s relationship to the female religious (mirroring Abelard’s ideas surrounding the *Cura Monialium*), and the ability of women to become the *active* participant in the process of atonement and thereby become “spiritually male” a concept which provides a space for individuals to seize agency *within the established*

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<sup>64</sup> It must be pointed out that in this Abelardian theory, the man is not the only character who has a gender transformation; the woman too, gains an aspect of “masculinity,” that same capacity for intellectual process the utilization of which in meditation on God, the Trinity, and the soul (prompted and curated by the passive “male” figure) brings one into the spiritual marriage with God, and which has been regularly defined as a “masculinizing” process since the theological works of Augustine.

<sup>65</sup> It should be noted that while Abelard was repeatedly tried for heresy, and while his ideas clearly break from canon tradition regarding the chain of being, he was always cleared, and his works were heavily influential during the period, in the Benedictine monastic circle, and in the intellectual reform movement of the Fourth Lateran Council, where his ideas regarding intentionality were central.

*hierarchy* and empower other individuals to find agency, authority, and salvation through an accepted inversion of traditional gender roles.

Christina of Markyate (d. 1160) is best remembered from *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, a hagiographical account of her life.<sup>66</sup> The descriptions of her life and religious practice in this work demonstrate the religious establishment's perspective on Christina's life, having been written by an anonymous monks at St. Albans (Hertfordshire, England), in order to bolster the reputation of the monastery. The authorship of the hagiography points to the likelihood that the descriptions therein reveal more about society's expectations for a female saint than perhaps Christina's actual life represented. C. Stephen Jaeger in "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," delineates the departures which Christina's hagiography represents to the genre: namely, that the narrative focuses on a series of passionate relationships, which, as Jaeger writes, "remains chaste by the skin of its teeth."<sup>67</sup> The narration of several relationships which Jaeger calls "love stories" very deliberately, is unusual for a hagiography about a woman; the contradiction between the explicitly feminine response to relationships and the male descriptions of her character is puzzling, and is perhaps best resolved by evaluating Christina's hagiography through the lens of non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity.

Christina's hagiographer makes references throughout the text to very "masculine" aspects of her character, in contrast to the feminine responses she has to the emotional and

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<sup>66</sup> Christina came from a prominent family in England, after the Norman invasion, and during the period of cultural change and mixing. She was married by her parents, but refused to accept her husband or consummate the marriage, until she ran away from home, and began a religious life. Through the course of her life, she entered into several relationships, with Roger (a cleric with whom she lives for several years until his death), an unnamed cleric, who she shares companionship with after Roger's death, and Geoffrey of St. Albans (though this relationship is not colored as the other two are, with the implication of love).

<sup>67</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 101.

passionate relationships she has with the succession of male mentors. He emphasizes Christina's superior intellectual capabilities and her role in the "spiritual guid[ance] and education" of the Abbot Geoffrey of St. Albans.<sup>68</sup> Her biographer writes that in refusing to parents's desires and protestations that she marry and consummate her marriage (a position she had refused for years, claiming the prerogatives of virginity instead), "her parents, whose 'wiles her outwitted at all points and served but to emphasize her invincible prudence'" continued to lose their position of authority in marrying their daughter.<sup>69</sup> Samuel Fanous, the current head of publishing at the Bodleian Library, focuses on the author's continuous discussion of Christina's superior intelligence, arguing in "Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown," that the author's preoccupation with certain elements of her character, including her intelligence and dedication to virginity, display demonstrable parallels with female and male martyred saints, and the language similarities certainly appear to imply a consensus on Christina's identity existing outside of the traditional feminine, and demonstrating, for that matter, decisively idyllic masculine traits.<sup>70</sup> In her *vita* Christina is said to have sat her one time husband down and pleaded her case for their perpetual virginity, by comparing herself to the martyrs of the Roman empire fighting in the wild beasts in a death sentence to win eternal glory in Heaven.<sup>71</sup> The connection between Christina

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<sup>68</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, "The Loves of Christina of Markyate," *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser 99-115 (Routledge: Oxford, 2005) 101.

<sup>69</sup> Samuel Fanous, "Christina of Markyate and the Double Crown," *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser 53-78 (Routledge: Oxford, 2005) 56.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>71</sup> Dylan Elliot points out in *The Bride of Christ goes to Hell* that these early martyrdom stories concerning women purposefully masculinize the women. Rachel Moriarty in "'Playing the Man'- The Courage of Christian Martyrs, Translated and Transposed" also argues that early female martyrs did enjoy a masculine status. Both authors use the case of the martyrdom of Perpetua as their best example, where a young Roman woman sentenced to die for her Christian adherence dreams herself into the body of a man in order to beat the execution sentence in the fighting arena and ascend to heaven. The use of a metaphorical battle in religious dialogue is ubiquitous in medieval writing, and provides a level of comparative masculinity to the lay community. The fact that Christina is paired off with such examples of battle worn martyrs specifically applies masculine traits to her person.

and the masculinity of battle-won martyrdom and superior intellectual capabilities solidifies Fanous's argument that Christina's biographer specifically attempted to shade her with a masculine edge as the key to her success in escaping her family and marriage, and joining in a life of contemplation on God, and in bringing her peers into communion with Him. Her biographer appears to quite deliberately imbue his subject with the "idyllic" masculine qualities, demonstrating her "metaphorical virility," with her intellectual superiority and ability to metaphorically "penetrate" the minds and spirits of others in helping them reach God.

The Cistercian theory of non-dichotomous gender identity is echoed in one of the most famous scenes in *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, one which in itself reflects the masculine and feminine contradictory elements of Christina's spiritual character. While living with an unnamed cleric, in isolated spiritual contemplation, they developed feelings for each other, and Christina went into the wilderness to find solace from her unwanted passions. The author writes that during her time in the wilderness, Christina came upon Jesus: "So the maiden...pressed him to her bosom. And with immeasurable delight she held him at one moment to her virginal breast, at another she felt his presence within her...From that moment on the fire of lust was...extinguished."<sup>72</sup> Christina's trip into the wilderness directly plays on Jesus's sojourn into the wilderness in resisting temptation by the devil, as well as the masculine ascetic ritual of spending time in the wilderness in order to inflict enough pain upon the body to dispel sexual desire from the soul.<sup>73</sup> Thus, by association, the author connects Christina to a very spiritually *male* practice,

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Rachel Moriarty, "'Playing the Man' - the courage of Christian Martyrs, Translated and Transposed," *Gender and Christian Religion: Papers Read at the 1996 and 1997 Winter Meeting at the Ecclesiastical History Society*, ed., R.N Swanson (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>72</sup> Anonymous, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser 53-78 (Routledge: Oxford, 2005) 107.

<sup>73</sup> Katherine Allen Smith, "Saints in Shining Armor: Martial Asceticism and Masculine Models of Sanctity, ca. 1050-1250," *Speculum* 83 (July 2008): 592-593, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20466282>.

and connects her actions to male and female models such as Jesus and Mary. Spiritually, the implication is that Christina exhibits significant idyllic masculine elements. This scene shows Christina essentially experiencing a conjugal visit from Jesus, which in turn expels from her sexual desire for the unnamed cleric. The author's descriptions are reminiscent of Gilbert of Hoyland's commentary on the *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, and mirror Bernard of Clairvaux and Gilbert's implicit understanding that idyllic masculinity incorporates a level of perfect "humble passivity," as the soul must bend to God. This scene depicts a literal representation of the metaphor of the wedding of the soul and God; Christina's soul, "polished" by her intellectual pursuits and metaphorical battle hardiness, submits to the dominance of God in the reunion of human soul and the Trinity, overturning the Fall, and freeing Christina from the burden of original sin.

This same scene also provides evidence for an Abelardian understanding of Christina's spiritual gender identity. Under the leadership of and in the syneisaktistic relationships with Roger and the unnamed cleric, Christina sought out Jesus rather than engage in a sexual relationship with these men. However, the descriptions of their feelings for each other reveal much more than just Christina's ability to "overcome" a feminine propensity for sexual sin; these descriptions demonstrate an idealistic Abelardian relationship, which places both her male mentors and herself into non-binary spiritual gender roles. On Christina's meeting with Roger, the hagiographer writes: "The Virgin of God lay prostrate in the old man's chapel...the man of God stepped over her with his face averted in order not to see her. But as he passed by he looked over his shoulder...She, at the same instant glanced upwards...And so they saw each other, not by

design, and yet not by chance.”<sup>74</sup> The glance, for both, “cast its sparks into their hearts by...grace.”<sup>75</sup> In the case of her relationship to the unnamed cleric, both parties were “struggling with...wretched passion,” and were “so inwardly inflamed,” as to nearly violate Christina’s vow of virginity. In both cases, the relationships are described in such a way as parallel the language of twelfth century romance (a new literary genre in the twelfth century), which was associated with morality tales regarding the correct places of men and women in society.<sup>76</sup> In Christina’s relationships with Roger and the unnamed cleric, she is ostensibly the mentee of knowledgeable clerics; Roger especially is credited with guiding Christina into religious life. However, though she is always under their “direction,” demonstrating her ideal feminine humble passivity, she is the one who, through her intimate relationship with God, prevents the violation of their collective vows of chastity. She married God in order to escape from the earthly desire for a flesh and blood man. Essentially, Christina’s life, and in particular the sequence of events which lead her to the wilderness scene, play out as Abelard believes his relationship with Heloise could have done in his virtual reality. Since Christina is a woman, she has the innate closeness with God, in Abelard’s view, to marry Him, whereas the man (Roger and the unnamed cleric) is the consultant, the agent, and the conduit through which Christina is pushed, and taught towards seeking such a union with God. Though these men may have been her teachers and her would-be lovers, it is through her active role that they are all saved (and the men made passive, occupying the role of facilitator to the salvation of a woman, who in turn, intercedes for their souls as well, displaying the role of the *cura monialium* in an ideal state). As the clerics who bound, wrote, and

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<sup>74</sup> Anonymous Monk at St. Albans, *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, in C. Stephen Jaeger, “The Loves of Christina of Markyate,” *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 102.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> C. Stephen Jaeger, “The Loves of Christina of Markyate,” *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser, (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 104.

illuminate Christina's hagiographers would undoubtedly have been familiar with the controversy between Abelard and Bernard, the parallelism which her story has to Abelard's ideal virtual reality is striking. Hints of the existence of such a non-dichotomous gender identity space existing in the mindset of the institutional hierarchy of the Church in actual practice is groundbreaking, turning the allusion to twelfth century Romance on its head.

Herrad of Hohenbourg, an Augustinian Abess in Hohenburg (Alsace), is famous for commissioning the *Hortus Deliciarum* (Garden of Delights), a twelfth century theological compendium, as well as her careful dominion over her charges. The *Hortus Deliciarum* reveals her understanding of her own gender identity, as well as the role she perceived her identity to play in the process of salvation for her and the nuns under her control.<sup>77</sup> In her analysis on Herrad, Fiona Griffiths notes how Herrad describes her *Hortus* and her own role in creating such a lofty theological work. Herrad writes that she was, "a bee inspired by God," and her works were "the various flowers of sacred Scriptural and philosophical writings," and implores that the book "be useful and delightful to you [the reader]...May you never cease to study it in your thoughts and memory."<sup>78</sup> Griffiths does not touch on the question of Herrad's gender identity or the role of gender identity in the spiritual universe of the leading theologians, but the above quotation of Herrad's speaks to this topic. The imagery in her statement is extremely striking. The metaphor which she uses may seem innocuous, but it reveals the way she feels about her role as an intellectual and a woman, as well as her understanding of her soul. The imagery of a bee

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<sup>77</sup> Fiona Griffiths argues that Herrad represents a female movement within the Gregorian reform, in order to demonstrate that the twelfth century was not the total patriarchal wasteland so many medieval and gender historians believe it to be (and thusly avoid the period in their analyses, for fear that it can render nothing of note or worse, paint the researcher as archaic).

<sup>78</sup> Herrad of Hohenbourg, *Hortus Deliciarum*, in Fiona Griffiths, Introduction to *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 2.

pollinating the “plants” of great theological works through her exegesis, and imploring that her work be utilized by others to aid in their edification and intellectual progress is intrinsically masculine.<sup>79</sup> Not only is the act of “pollination” actually phallic, but the notion that through mental, intellectual, or rhetorical “pollination,” an individual is also asserting masculinity, and for Bernard, Aelred, Gilbert, and Abelard, this asserting of masculinity represents a higher, more idyllic sort of spiritual masculinity. Her self-representation here matches the theoretical framework for non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity of the Cistercians, but it could also match Abelard’s vision as well. Looking at Herrad’s work as a whole, she advocates for the women of her audience to monitor the clergy, on whom they depended for the deliverance of the sacraments,<sup>80</sup> search for evidence of offenses such as “failure to renounce private property, love of fine food, drink, and luxurious clothing; and the sale of sermons or other pastoral services- in short, avarice.”<sup>81</sup> Here, Herrad is establishing that the services provided to the women religious by the clerics are important for their spiritual health and desire to commune with God, and as such, they must be leading their lives without sin in order to counsel women such as herself into communion with God (in short, the clerics must participate in Abelard’s understanding of the *Cura Monialium*, as conduits for the women to gain the “spiritual masculine” methodology of intellectual practice in reaching God while maintaining a level of feminine passivity in accepting the help from the clerics, and gain a level of “femininity” and take a passive role, in submitting

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<sup>79</sup> The process which is described above is defined by Bernard says, is the means of “polishing” the soul for communion with God, and though they do not use the same words, Abelard, Aelred, and Gilbert agree on this point.

<sup>80</sup> Nowhere does she ever advocate for female empowerment of these duties, or argue for the progression of female authority in the Church, a move which historians have noted and pronounced inconsistent with her ability to “transcend” the rigid power structure of the twelfth century, and which highlights the powerful conservative, patriarchal influence over her.

<sup>81</sup> Herrad of Hohenbourg, *Hortus Deliciarum* in Fiona Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 210. Herrad is participating in the crackdown of the greatest system of Church reform until the Reformation by counseling her peers to hold priests to the values established in the Gregorian reform.

to God and his wife for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven). Looking at Herrad's work as a whole, there exist no major contradictions regarding her understanding of her own gender identity and the role of women in medieval society. She presents a unified theory of an Abelardian non-dichotomous gendered process of spiritual salvation.

Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) rose to prominence by virtue of visions she claimed to receive from God and of her major theological work *Scivias*, the text of which, along with her male contemporaries' commentary on it and her, reveal as in the case of Herrad, her acknowledgement of non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity, as well as the acceptance of such by male peers.<sup>82</sup> Historians have had a difficult time understanding Hildegard's position; they cite her female personifications of important theological ideas, such as *Caritas*, as creating a feminine aspect to the Trinity by painting *Caritas* as the Holy Spirit,<sup>83</sup> while simultaneously having "professed loyalty to the patriarchal hierarchy of the day as it functioned in that great political machine-the medieval church," as Barbara L. Grant writes, attempting to demonstrate the apparent disunity in Hildegard's position.<sup>84</sup> In *Scivias*, Hildegard describes her vision as follows:

And I saw a serene Man coming forth from this radiant dawn, Who poured out His brightness into the darkness; and it drove Him back with great force, so that He poured out the redness of blood and the whiteness of pallor into it, and struck the darkness such a strong blow that the person who was lying in it was touched by Him, took on a shining appearance and walked out of it upright. And I heard the voice saying to me from the aforementioned living fire: "O you who are wretched earth and, as a woman, untaught in all learning of earthly teaches and unable to read literature with philosophical

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<sup>82</sup> Guibert of Gembloux in Barbara Newman, "Hildegard of Bingen: Visions and Validation," *Church History* 54 (June 1995): 163-175, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3167233>. 1. Guibert of Gembloux, a prominent cleric and contemporary of Hildegard's, wrote that Hildegard "has transcended the female subjection by a lofty height and is equal in eminence of not just any men, but of the very highest."

<sup>83</sup> Ann Storey, "A Theophany of the Feminine: Hildegard of Bingen, Elizabeth of Schönau, and Herrad of Landsberg," *Woman's Art Journal* 19 (1998): 17, accessed August 9, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1358649>.

<sup>84</sup> Barbara L. Grant and Hildegard von Bingen, "Five Liturgical Songs by Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)," *Signs* 5 (1980): 557-567, accessed August 6, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173606>.

understanding, you are nonetheless touched by My light, which kindles in you an inner fire like a burning sun...So do not be timid, but say these things you understand in the Spirit as I speak them through you...Therefore, O diffident mind, who are taught inwardly by mystical inspiration, though because of Eve's transgression you are trodden on by the masculine sex, speak of that fiery work this sure vision has shown you."<sup>85</sup>

The “Man,” most probably Jesus, is representative of human men on earth--they are capable of trusting “Hildegard,” or spiritual women, and in giving “her” the wisdom and knowledge of the scripture and other works, give her the power to touch God. Through their combined intercession, they can bring the possibility of salvation to humanity. In her vision, the “man” has metaphorically “penetrated” her with the intellectual skills she previously did not have, in order for her to commune with God; essentially, the man demonstrated his metaphorical virility in order to provide the woman with the ability to spiritually “transform” as she then proceeds to “penetrate” the minds of humanity with the help of God; in effect, she has been given almost a special dispensation or gift of masculinity from an explicitly masculine figure of God. She writes that she herself is “highest fiery power, who has enkindled every spark that lives...I shine...I arouse all things to life.” In *De operatione Dei*, and in *Scivias* she writes that “*This blazing fire that you see symbolizes the Omnipotent and Living God;*” the conflation of herself and God within this “blazing fire” demonstrates the merging of God and herself, the reunion of the human soul with the Trinity, which Aelred discusses. Thus, through her communion, or marriage to God, she gains the masculine power of “metaphorical virility” and “idyllic masculinity” through the work of the shadowy “man,” who gives up his “active” agency by submitting himself to the promotion of “Hildegard,” who writes that she spreads her message to promote salvation, just as

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<sup>85</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, on Columbia University Archives, accessed August 9, 2017, Book II, Vision II, accessed August 16, 2017, [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f2003/client\\_edit/documents/scivias.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f2003/client_edit/documents/scivias.html).

Herrad did (an active masculine example of metaphorical virility).<sup>86</sup> This scene recalls Abelard's vision of the *cura monialium* and the divine power associated with non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity. This analysis of Hildegard's works unify her discussion of female agency with her insistence in the power of the clerical hierarchy and male protection of the female religious. The way she was perceived by her male contemporaries strengthens her own depiction of her gender identity through visual metaphor; through masculine "curation" of the female religious, they can become something above "the female subjection" and inspire the salvation of countless others through her penetration of visions into their conscious intellectual deliberations. This holds true even if her praising male contemporaries believed in the less radical Cistercian understanding of gender transformation as a means of salvation for the exceptional few, and not in the idea of the the possible pathway for all women by virtue of their femininity as Abelard argued (and as Hildegard hints at with her blatant feminization of such crucial aspects of the Church, such as the Trinity).<sup>87</sup>

### Conclusions

Contrary to Southern's claims, and the continuing scholarly consensus, an overwhelming amount of evidence from the twelfth century reveals medieval understandings of gender that do not conform to the rigid structure generally attributed to the Gregorian Reform. For decades

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<sup>86</sup> Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias*, on Columbia University Archives, accessed August 9, 2017, [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f2003/client\\_edit/documents/scivias.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/english/f2003/client_edit/documents/scivias.html). She gives herself the power of intellectual generation, Bernard's prime association with the "idyllic masculinity," largely reminiscent of classical and twelfth century lay ideas of masculinity attached to the ability to impregnate.

<sup>87</sup> It is remarkable, in this context that Hildegard of Bingen took the initiative in instructing the women of her convent to wear wedding clothes during their monastic vows, embracing the symbolism of the "bride of christ." Thomas Head, "The Marriages of Christina of Markyate," in *Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Holy Woman*, ed., Samuel Fanous and Henrietta Leyser (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 117. In doing so, Hildegard co-opted the term specifically as a profession of women (taking with the term, the implicit associations with idyllic masculinity), and aligning herself with an Abelardian understanding of female "calling" to serve as the wife of God, through the intercession of male religious on earth (since the rites of the ceremony and the dispensation of the Eucharist was necessarily performed by such a man).

historians have cherry picked examples of legal and socially accepted definitions of proper of masculinity and femininity, as well as surface level interpretations of the leading theological works of the twelfth century, as hard proof that the long century's renaissance solidified a harsh wall between the meanings of "man," and "woman." These historians who focus on female "tokens" in a man's world deny agency to the subjects they claim to empower, by claiming their departures from "progressive" view-points, their persecutions, and their successes were the product of their patriarchal society. A theological analysis of twelfth-century logic on the question of the soul reveals a theoretical understanding of a spiritual gender identity which exists as neither fully masculine nor fully feminine, but rather as a conflation of the "perfect" aspect of both gender identities. This theoretical understanding of a non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity is common amongst several medieval Latin monastic traditions, and reveals itself as a practical measurement of piety throughout religious communities in Christendom. Women like Hildegard, Herrad, Heloise, and Christina were not celebrated because they had powerful families, money to contribute to the Church, or because of cult followings the Church feared to overrule; they were accepted because their lives outside the traditional bounds of femininity existed within rationalized system of gender theory which does not conform to the traditional lay boundaries of masculinity and femininity.

This research undercuts decades of historical assumptions, and gives agency back to medieval religious men and women who lived within this non-dichotomous gender schema. Additionally, it provides the context necessary to fully unify the theological teachings of many twelfth century scholars, including the women discussed here. This research also provides a launching dock for legal examinations into medieval gender theory and practice. While this research has focused on the theological, twelfth century theological developments quickly

became codified in canon and lay law after the Fourth Lateran Council, and as the theorists discussed presently constitute an overwhelming fraction of those represented at the Fourth Lateran Council, their ideas were largely codified into canon process and subsequently into lay law. A study of non-dichotomous spiritual gender identity in law would provide historians with a much more nuanced vision of the way in which gender crime was defined and prosecuted throughout the Middle Ages.

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