

***Marriage and Sanctity in
the Lives of Late Medieval Married Saints***

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degree of Master of Arts

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Abstract

Historians have generally assumed that for a medieval person to achieve sanctity he or she had to reject marriage and sexual roles and, by extension, social and familial expectations. Yet, the *vitae* of married saints, who were the minority of canonised saints in the Middle Ages, reveal that marriage and sanctity could coexist. Between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries the Medieval Church canonised several illustrious men and women who married, engaged in sexual relations, and maintained their religious devotion. Approaching the study of medieval marriage through modern hagiographical analysis, this thesis differs from many contemporary studies in that it thoroughly considers a few saints rather than cursorily address a large number.

Considering both male and female examples of married saints, this thesis reveals the commonalities and differences between the male and female experience of marriage. While this is not a thesis about saints *per se*, it approaches medieval marriage through saints' lives. Thus, portrayed here is less the lived reality of medieval marriage than the ideal marital life as described by chaste clerical writers. The subjects are, of course, all lay saints.

Appropriate behaviour, whether sexual, parental, or religious, is described at length in many medieval *vitae*. How did the saint come to marry? How are sexual relations portrayed in saints' lives? How did the saint live after the death of or separation from a spouse? Addressing these various questions among others, in this thesis I argue that married saints reveal a synthesis between the common life of the medieval laity and the religious life of the holy person. Marriage, and more importantly sexual relations, did not necessarily prevent medieval men and women from attaining holiness.

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Introduction: Sexuality, Marriage, and Consent

Few decisions in life should be more personal than the choice of a spouse or a lover. Yet, throughout history, this intimate experience has been subjected to painstaking social and religious regulation in the form of outright legislation or restraining social mores, indicating that more than physiological functions enter into personal bonding and family formation.¹

Thus, more than ten years ago, Asunción Lavrin opened a collection of essays concerned with sexuality and marriage. Lavrin examines colonial Latin America, yet these words could introduce any historical investigation of western marriage and sexuality. As in the Latin American experience, laws and traditions guided medieval marriage practices and by extension medieval marital sexuality. Choosing a partner affected the family of both bride and groom, concerned the Church authorities who guarded the spiritual welfare of all Christians, and could, in some cases, involve a temporal lord or prince on whose land or in whose service a bride or groom belonged. The relationship between the husband and the wife, however, was the core of the medieval family and is the focus of this thesis.

This study examines perceptions and representations of the ideal married life. I examine three aspects of married life in medieval Christian Europe, namely, the choice of spouse and formation of marriage, the sexual relations between husband and wife, and life after marital sexual relations. Although an examination of the lived reality of marital life would be desirable, no extant sources that I am aware of deals specifically with the daily life shared by a husband and a wife. While legal sources such as trial records

¹ *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Asunción Lavrin, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989) p.1.

indicate deviant or socially unacceptable sexual practices, herein I focus on the ideal of legitimate and loving marriage.² Hagiographical documents such as the *vitae* of married saints, supplemented by pastoral literature, namely sermons, penitentials, and guides for confessors, will be used to study married life and sexuality. Hagiographical sources, however, are problematic since they describe ideals rather than the actual experience of married life. Pastoral literature, on the other hand, though normative in nature, attempts to solve common problems in medieval life, and thus considers marriage in a practical context. This study, therefore, considers the ideals of marriage portrayed in saints' *vitae*, yet also examines pastoral literature as a comparative source.

The ideas of marriage presented were those of the clerical authors who had an understanding of medieval marriage based on canon law and theology, which the lay audience, in all likelihood, did not share. Approaches to medieval studies through various types of sources, hagiographical and pastoral in this case, allow for a more inclusive view of my theme. Legal sources, as noted above, indicate some of the deviant behavioural patterns in medieval society. These sources also reveal academic and theological, as well as legal theory, on marriage and sexuality in the medieval period. Since much of this literature influenced the authors of saints' *vitae* and pastoral literature, it is important to develop an understanding of the basic principles of these writings. Are the same ideals of married life presented in both saints' *vitae* and pastoral literature? What are some of the main issues discussed in pastoral literature – that is, what were the problems writers

² Jacques Rossiaud, *Medieval Prostitution*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988). For the medieval language of illicit sex see, Ruth Mazo Karras, "The Latin vocabulary of illicit sex in English ecclesiastical court records," in *Journal of Medieval Latin*, vol. 2, (1992) pp. 1-17; also see Karras' *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

attempted to solve via their texts? How do clerical authors, normally suspicious of sexuality, present the relations between husband and wife in the saint's *Vita*?

The well-known and well-studied saints Hedwig of Silesia (1174-1243), Elisabeth of Thuringia (1207-1231), and Birgitta of Sweden (c. 1307-1373) constitute the main group of female married saints studied in this thesis. All royal or noble examples of sainthood, these women received extensive support from Church and secular authorities as well as widespread popular veneration. The saints selected for this study all represent the northern and eastern regions of medieval Christian Europe. Moving to France and the Low Countries, Louis IX of France (1214-1270) and Yvette of Huy (1158-1227) add a geographical diversity to our study.³ Louis represents a less common, male example of the married saint. Since he is a king, the literature focuses on his administrative and crusading roles; however, his *vitae* reveal other aspects of his life. Yvette, the devout widow and mystic from the Low Countries, provides a non-royal, perhaps wealthy merchant, example of married sainthood.

Yvette of Huy's *Vita*, written by Hugh of Floreffe, has been published in an English translation, which is used throughout my thesis. The manuscripts of Yvette's *Vita* have suffered from the ravages of time. According to Jo Ann McNamara, the Bollandists based their 1642 edition, upon which McNamara bases her translation, on a now lost

³ While I am examining a few limited areas in medieval Europe, there are a great many studies on marriage and sexuality in the medieval period across diverse geographical regions. See for example, Jenny M. Jochens, "The church and sexuality in medieval Iceland," in *The Journal of Medieval History*, 6, (1980), pp. 377-392. John Klassen, "The development of the conjugal bond in late medieval Bohemia," in *The Journal of Medieval History*, 13, (1987) pp. 161-178; "Marriage and family in medieval Bohemia," in *East European Quarterly*, 19, no. 3, (1985) pp. 257-274. Eve Levin, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900-1700*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989); "Sexual vocabulary in medieval Russia," in *Sexuality and the Body in Russian Culture*, eds. J.T. Costlow, S. Sandler, & J. Vowles, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), pp. 41-52. L.R. Lewitter, "Women, sainthood, and marriage in Muscovy," in *Journal of Russian Studies*, vol. 37, (1979) pp. 3-11

manuscript. This later codex itself was based on the original, which is also now lost.⁴ For *The Life of Saint Birgitta* I also rely on an English translation.⁵ Birger Gregersson, Archbishop of Uppsala, wrote Birgitta's *Vita* in Latin, in conjunction with members of Birgitta's household, shortly after her death. Holloway suggests that Thomas Gascoigne may have produced the Middle English version found in *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*,⁶ on which she bases her translation.⁷ Furthermore, I have examined the Latin edition that appears in the *Acta Sanctorum* to confirm terms and phrases such as "the act of matrimony," referring to sexual intercourse, and note any significant differences.⁸

The earliest surviving manuscript of the *Vita Maior Beate Hedwigis* is a 1353 manuscript commissioned by Hedwig's great grandson, Ludwig I, Duke of Liegnitz and Brieg (1311-1398) and written by the Cistercian monk Simon of Trebnitz. The modern edition used herein, produced in 1972 by Wolfgang Braunfels, is contained in two volumes: the first features a facsimile of the 1353 manuscript and the second contains the Latin text as edited by Braunfels with accompanying German translation.⁹ I have relied solely on the Latin text. While there has yet to appear an English translation of Hedwig's

⁴ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara, (Toronto: Peregrina, 2000) p. 128, see note 1. I have also consulted the text as found in *Acta Sanctorum*, January II, pp. 865-887. McNamara's translation is faithful to the text. *Acta Sanctorum* will henceforth be cited as *AS*.

⁵ Birger Gregersson & Thomas Gascoigne, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, trans. Julia Bolton Holloway, (Toronto: Peregrina, 1991). See also *Saint Bride and Her Book: Birgitta of Sweden's Revelations*, trans. J.B. Holloway, (Newburyport, Mass.: Focus Texts, 1992) which contains Birgitta's revelations and an introduction to that text as well as a general discussion of Birgitta.

⁶ *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, ed. John Henry Blunt, Early English Text Society 19, (London: EETS, 1973).

⁷ See Holloway's introduction for a full survey of that manuscript history in *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 7-8. I have briefly consulted the Middle English version; I have only referenced Holloway's translation.

⁸ *Vita S. Birgittae Viduae* in *AS*, October IV, pp. 369-560.

⁹ *Der Hedwigis – Codex von 1353, Sammlung Ludwig*, ed. & trans. W. Braunfels, J. Krása, K. Kratzsch, & P. Moraw, (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1972). This edition includes the *Vita Maior*, *Vita Minor*, the Bull of Canonisation (1263), and a homily by Bernard of Clairvaux. While it seems likely that a version of Hedwig's *Vita* existed as early as the 1260s, around the time of her canonization, I have yet to discover a reference to such a manuscript.

Vita, there are a number of other German editions and translations. Catherine Emmerich notes the existence of at least nine medieval manuscripts.¹⁰

In 1233 the Pope Gregory IX ordered a commission into the wonders of Elisabeth of Thuringia; a year later she was canonised. Monika Renner's critical edition of Dietrich von Apolda's version of Elisabeth's *Vita*, written between 1236 and 1241, is used throughout. Renner utilises ten texts, the earliest a fourteenth-century manuscript found in the Royal Library in Brussels.¹¹ I have also consulted Elisabeth's short *Vita* as found in the *Golden Legend*. With "over 800 extant manuscripts containing all or part of the Latin *Legenda*," this text provides an example of medieval sanctity and sainthood as understood by the mass of medieval Christianity.¹² The inclusion of lay saints, including all the married saints considered in the *Golden Legend* indicates that the medieval Church attempted, at least in the later Middle Ages, to provide examples of piety for the mass of European population. These saints are all examples of lay piety.

As one would expect of a king, Louis' life and sanctity achieved a great deal of attention; at least four authors wrote versions of Louis' *Vita*. John of Joinville, Louis' friend and companion on crusade, is the author of perhaps the most widely read version.¹³ Joinville, however, does not deal with the life shared by Louis and his wife Marguerite, excepting anecdotal references, and thus, is not utilised herein. A second *vita*, written by

¹⁰ Augustine Knoblich, *Lebengeschichte der heiligen Hedwig, Herzogin und Landespatronin von Schlesien, 1174-1243*, trans. Catherine Emmerich, (Paris: H. Casterman, 1865), pp. II-III. The manuscript used by Knoblich is the same as the one that appears in *AS*, October, vol. 8, col. 198-270.

¹¹ Dietrich von Apolda, *Die Vita der heiligen Elisabeth des Dietrich von Apolda*, ed. Monika Renner, (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1993). For Renner's discussion of the manuscripts, see pp. 4-13.

¹² Sherry L. Reames, *The Legenda Aurea: a re-examination of its paradoxical history*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) p. 4. This 800 does not include manuscripts in the many vernacular languages of Europe. *The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine*, trans. Granger Ryan & Helmut Ripperger, (Salem: Ayer Co., 1989, originally published in 1941).

¹³ For a good modern English rendition of Louis' *Vita* by John of Joinville, see *The Life of St. Louis*, trans. R. Hague, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

Geoffrey of Beaulieu, was also composed shortly after Louis' death. Geoffrey's *Vita* used here, which was commissioned by and addressed to Gregory IX, is found in *Acta Sanctorum*.¹⁴ According to H.-François Delaborde, Geoffrey's name is found on the witness lists for Louis' canonisation.¹⁵ Thus, Geoffrey was closely associated with the trial and canonisation processes. While Geoffrey's version holds interest because of its origins, I rely mainly on a third version of Louis' *Vita* written by Queen Marguerite's confessor William of Saint-Pathus.¹⁶ Serving Marguerite between 1277 and 1295, William continued as her confessor long after Louis died. Writing several years after Louis' canonisation in 1297 (probably sometime between December 4th, 1302 and October 11th, 1303), William examined a copy of the canonisation proceedings prior to completing his version of Louis' *Vita*.¹⁷ The oldest manuscript of William's version is a 1741 French manuscript, which is the text found in *Acta Sanctorum*. While several manuscripts from the eighteenth century are extant, Delaborde suggests that the 1741 French manuscript is the best and he bases his translation upon that work.¹⁸ A fourth author, also not used herein, is William of Chartres, whose version of the *Vita* was written, according to David O'Connell, to supplement Geoffrey's of Beaulieu's version.¹⁹

¹⁴ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita S. Ludovici Regis*, in *AS*, August V, pp. 541-546. All the documents related to St. Louis are contained within this volume of *AS*, pp. 272-758. David O'Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis: a critical text*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1979) p. 20-22. O'Connell surveys the various biographers of Louis and their attitude towards the instructions to his son and daughter. O'Connell suggests that Geoffrey of Beaulieu was commissioned to write the *Vita* in 1272.

¹⁵ Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, *Vie De Saint Louis*, ed. H.-François Delaborde, (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1899), pp. xxiii-xxiv. O'Connell notes that Geoffrey was Louis' confessor for some twenty years; see *The Instructions of Saint Louis*, p. 20.

¹⁶ I have rendered Guillaume as William throughout.

¹⁷ William of Saint-Pathus, *Vie De Saint Louis*, pp. ix-x. O'Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis*, pp. 21-22. O'Connell suggests that William of Saint-Pathus had "the largest amount of source material at his disposal" when composing his *Vita*.

¹⁸ O'Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis*, pp. 21-22. Unlike Delaborde, who argues that William originally wrote in Latin, O'Connell argues that textual analysis reveals that William composed Louis' *Vita* in French.

¹⁹ O'Connell, *The Instructions of Saint Louis*, p. 21.

Along with saints' *vitae*, I briefly consider penitential and pastoral literature of medieval Europe. Penitentials and pastoral manuals were meant to aid the parish priest and the more specialised mendicant confessors of the later Middle Ages in serving the Christian laity of Europe.²⁰ Copies of Robert of Flamborough's *Liber Poenitentialis* (c. 1208-1215) appeared across Europe, from "Spain eastward to Czechoslovakia, from England southward to the Austrian Tyrol."²¹ The great variety of manuscripts, which date from both the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, indicate that this work was well read and received in medieval Europe. The text used herein is a critical edition published by J.J. Francis Firth in the early 1970s. Firth utilises "Robert of Flamborough's final, complete redaction" of the *Liber Poenitentialis*.²² Saint Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de matrimonio* deals, essentially, with the same subjects as contained in Flamborough's penitential. Peñafort's *Summa*, which codifies many of the decrees "into a coherently patterned fabric" in the thirteenth century, contains a greater organisational plan than Flamborough's *Liber*.²³ Edited by P. Honoratus Vincentius Laget in 1744, the *Sancti Raymundi Summa* contains the *Summa de matrimonio* and other works by Peñafort.²⁴

²⁰ Throughout I use the term pastoral to refer to literature that includes sermons, canon law, and penitentials. I occasionally use the term penitential to note specifically early medieval texts that aim to correct behaviour through confession and penance. My aim in using these sources is to show that the themes presented in saints' *vitae* also appear in other clerical writings.

²¹ Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, ed. J.J. Francis Firth, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1981) p. 18. Jacqueline Murray notes that at least 37 manuscripts of the *Liber Poenitentialis* survive, and another ten, now lost, are known to have existed. See *The Perceptions of Sexuality, Marriage, and Female in Early English Pastoral Manuals*, PhD Thesis, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1987) p. 119.

²² Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, pp. 51-52.

²³ James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) pp. 327-328.

²⁴ Raymond of Peñafort, *Sancti Raymundi Summa*, (Verona: Ex Typographia Seminarii, 1744). This is the only copy of Peñafort's works I have been able to access. James Brundage, however, notes that the *Summa de matrimonio* and other works have been recently edited by X.O. Sanz and A. Diez in the first volume of *Universa biblioteca iuris*. See *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 329, note 13.

In recent decades scholars have undertaken extensive hagiographical research by complementing *vitae* with canonisation proceedings. André Vauchez best explored canonisation documents in his study *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*. With this work and his more recent *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, Vauchez proposes new avenues of research in social history, including, though only briefly, the study of conjugal chastity.²⁵ While on the one hand Vauchez examines the typology of sainthood, on the other he explores the popular beliefs and practices of Christianity in medieval Europe. Yet, the study of hagiographical texts began long before Vauchez. In the seventeenth century a group of Jesuits known as the Bollandists began a project that David Knowles called a “great historical enterprise.”²⁶ Named after the scholar Jean Bolland, these Jesuits publish hagiographical documents, especially saints’ *vitae*, associated with Catholic Christian saints, in the series *Acta Sanctorum*. The work of the Bollandists, much of which appears in the journal *Analecta Bollandia*, provides a foundation for research on medieval saints and sainthood.

The Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye’s *The Legends of the Saints* is the first treatment of medieval hagiography in the twentieth century and is still essential reading for medieval historians.²⁷ Hagiography, argues Delehaye, contains a dangerous “degree of incredibility.” Historians of hagiography must use “the straight paths of scientific criticism,” and not place too much faith in the *vitae*. Hagiography does not primarily present historical fact; rather the “strictly hagiographical document must be of a religious

²⁵ André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, originally published 1981). Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, trans. M.J. Schneider (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1993, originally published 1987). This includes a brief chapter, merely six pages, on conjugal chastity.

²⁶ David Knowles, “The Bollandists,” in *Great Historical Enterprises*, (Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1963) pp. 1-32.

character and aim at edification.”²⁸ The teaching inherent in hagiography, the religious edification of the faithful by example, was a principal cultural motivation behind writing the *vitae* in the medieval period. Thomas Heffernan explores hagiographical conventions in his *Sacred Biography* through sociology and psychology, suggesting that the goal of the hagiographer was not historical instruction but theological edification. Upon hearing or reading Aelred of Reivaulx’s (1109-1167) death scene in the *Vita Sancti Aelredi*, for example, the audience might recall that Aelred’s last words are the same as Christ’s words on the cross. Thus, the hagiographer reveals the bond of “the human and the divine” in the saint through language familiar to the audience.²⁹ Many *vitae* display marked similarities to each other: for instance, the similarities between the lives of St. Anthony of Egypt (c. 251-356) and St. Guthlac (673-714) indicate borrowing from the earlier saint’s life in the latter.³⁰ Thus, medieval saints’ *vitae* are not, argue some scholars, viable historical documents. Nevertheless, Heffernan finds them useful insofar as they reveal medieval attitudes towards sanctity, the use of the supernatural, and clerical ideals.

Heffernan’s use of sociology and psychology in hagiographical research is not novel. Stephen Wilson’s collection of essays also utilises sociological methods to study the cults of Christian and Muslim saints in Europe and India.³¹ Including articles by such

²⁷ Hippolyte Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, trans. D. Attwater, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1962, originally published 1905). The translation used here was made from the 1955 edition.

²⁸ Delehaye, *The Legends of the Saints*, pp. 3, 72, 170.

²⁹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) pp. 74-79, 87, 122. Heffernan notes Aelred’s last words on p. 75 as: “In manus tuas commendo spiritum meum.” (“Into your hands I commend my spirit.”) See Luke 23:46.

³⁰ Thomas J. Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 12. Benjamin P. Kurtz, “From St. Antony to St. Guthlac: A study in biography,” in *University of California Publications in Modern Philology*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1926) 12:2, pp. 103-146. Anthony’s *Vita* was written c. 360, while Guthlac’s was written sometime between c. 720 – 749.

³¹ *Saints and their Cults: Studies in Religious Sociology, Folklore, and History*, ed. S. Wilson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

notable scholars as Patrick Geary, Pierre Deloos, and Michael Goodich, the collection examines works from the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Renewed interest in hagiography in the latter half of the twentieth century has resulted in a growth of studies in popular culture, perceptions, and social structure via hagiographical sources. Wilson's collection "gathers together a number of studies in each of these now overlapping genres;" his selection provides a comparative analysis in various fields of hagiographical research.³² *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, a more recent collection of essays, brings together essays from across Christian Europe showing the importance of "the political, spiritual, and social realities," in which *vitae* were composed.³³ These essays are united by the idea that "a plurality of responses to manifestations of Christian faith" characterises medieval sanctity and sainthood.³⁴ While the number of similarities in medieval *vitae* may suggest a single route to sanctity, recent studies reveal that the variety of contexts in which sainthood appears, for example the two contexts of virginal and marital sainthood, demonstrate that many ideals of sanctity persisted in the Middle Ages.

Several recent studies use aggregate data to create a typology of sainthood. A notable study by Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, for example, examines sainthood through seven hundred years and quantifies the life of the saint in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, as well as in terms of geography, class, and marital status. Suggesting that patterns of sainthood reveal that the religious interaction between clerical hierarchy and popular culture ran in both directions, Weinstein and Bell argue; "the holy

³² S. Wilson, "Introduction," in *Saints and their Cults*, p. 1.

³³ Brigitte Cazelles, "Introduction," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, eds. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski & Tímea Szell, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) p. 1. Also see the collection *Saints: Studies in Hagiography*, ed. Sandro Sticca, (New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1996).

life was being recreated by the imagination and the needs of the faithful.”³⁵ This recreation by the Christian community, a community that partook of the rewards of sanctity, resulted in diverse forms of sainthood. While hesitant to explain sainthood entirely by reference to social needs, Weinstein and Bell attempt to gauge perceptions about medieval society held by clerical writers. Hagiography, then, illustrates the social functions of medieval sainthood. While hagiography reveals clerical perceptions of medieval society, it also shows that the needs of medieval society shape the basic social context of hagiographical documents. Saints were at one and the same time both human and fallible and yet also granted the divinely conferred status of sainthood.

Michael Goodich’s *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century* turns away from the social functions of sainthood seen in Weinstein and Bell in order to study cultural ideals as presented in saints’ *vitae*.³⁶ Goodich argues that hagiography reveals the ideal cultural type, by means of three elements: the historical saint; the witnesses of the saint; and the hagiographical tradition. Goodich suggests that hagiography reveals the cultural ideals and conflicts dominant in the medieval world. My thesis, which follows this approach, examines the theme of marital life and sexuality present in medieval hagiography. While I do not focus on *vitae* of unmarried saints, I do attempt to account for negative representations of marriage in the *vitae* I have selected.

³⁴ Cazelles, “Introduction,” in *Images of Sainthood*, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society: The Two Worlds of Western Christendom, 1000-1700*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) p.13. Rudolph Bell has more recently explored the eating habits of Italian female saints using historical psychology. See *Holy Anorexia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

³⁶ Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*, (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1982). Also see Goodich, “Contours of female piety in later medieval hagiography,” in *Church History*, 50:1, (March, 1981) pp. 20-32; “A profile of thirteenth-century sainthood,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18:4, 1976, pp. 429-437; “The politics of canonization in the thirteenth century: lay and mendicant saints,” in *Saints and their Cults*, ed. S. Wilson, pp. 169-187.

Unlike Goodich, who examined slightly more than five hundred saints, I focus on five saints and deal with each in detail.

I noted above that André Vauchez' work has pointed to new areas of research, including conjugal chastity. But what exactly is conjugal chastity? Modern English usage does not clearly distinguish between chastity and continence. While both can mean complete abstention from sexual relations, chastity could also suggest periodic abstention from such relations. Herein marital or conjugal chastity refers to the proper observance of canon law and Church customs for sexual relations within legitimate marriage. Thus, a couple engaged in sexual activity following the proper customs and laws of prudence practise conjugal chastity. Dyan Elliott's work, *Spiritual Marriage*, posits the title phrase as the best description of non-sexual marriage. She suggests that the term "Spiritual Marriage" is understood best as complete abstention from sexual relations in marriage.³⁷ While Elliott notes the difficulties in identifying married saints who did not engage in sexual relations, I focus on a few of the better known saints that definitely did engage in sexual intercourse. These themes of sexuality and chastity are well studied in ancient and medieval historiography.

Perhaps the most important work for the history of early Christian sexuality is Peter Brown's *The Body and Society*. Brown's examination of early Christian sexual renunciation has become a classic study of early Christianity and sexuality.³⁸ *The Body and Society* reveals the great variety of attitudes towards marriage and sexuality in the

³⁷ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) pp. 4-5. Elliott's efforts to define Spiritual Marriage in her text reflect the difficulty of forming accurate definitions in modern English for medieval practices. Margaret McGlynn & Richard Moll posit "Chaste Marriage" as the best term for non-sexual marriage in the Middle Ages, see "Chaste marriage in the Middle Ages," in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, eds. V.L. Bullough & J.A. Brundage, (New York: Garland, 1996) pp. 103-104.

early Church, including those that were heretical and those that eventually became the orthodox traditions. Noting Augustine's attitudes to sexual renunciation and the three goods of marriage, Brown's work enlightens medieval perceptions of chastity, virginity, and sexual relations. Brown's earlier study of the cult of the saints, its rise in late antiquity, and its importance to medieval society, also provides a sound introduction to sainthood in early medieval society. He surveys, in a compilation of several lectures, the "joining of Heaven and Earth" in the cult and the role this had in Christian life.³⁹

Building on Brown's study of ancient Christian attitudes to sexuality, Angeliki Laiou has edited a collection of essays revealing diverse ideas of marriage and sexuality in ancient and medieval society. All the essays in Laiou's collection address the gap left by Brown in their focus on the role of sexual and marital consent or lack thereof.⁴⁰ For medieval writers, theologians and canonists alike, discussions of sexuality raise questions of sin, penance, and confession.

Taking the work of earlier scholars into the early and central Middle Ages, Pierre Payer suggests that penitentials, guides for penances between the sixth and twelfth centuries, reveal actual sexual behaviour and practice in Christian Europe. Payer stresses the importance of sexual regulations in the earliest penitentials, noting that later medieval manuals for confessors (*summae confessorum*) did not dwell so heavily on sexual

³⁸ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

³⁹ Brown, *Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981). Also see Brown's *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982) which examined a wide range of themes including approaches to history, holy men, relics, and iconoclasm.

⁴⁰ *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. A.E. Laiou, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1993).

deviancy.⁴¹ His later work, *The Bridling of Desire*, deals not with a particular type of source but a general theme present in medieval theological discourse.⁴² Considering the eventual consensus medieval theologians came to between the mid twelfth and early fourteenth century, Payer argues that “[n]ature, intercourse, marriage – these are the fundamental concepts out of which the medieval masters forged their views of sex ... The core of those views was applicable to Adam and Eve in Paradise as to their descendants after the Fall.” The only factor that changed after the Fall from paradise was lust, which was, of course, not present in Eden.⁴³ The theologians and canonists of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries formulated the Christian view of sexuality that had been stewing in medieval thought since Augustine.

At the outset of this introduction I noted that the documents available for the history of marriage and sexuality, in fact the majority of documents written in the Middle Ages, were produced by clerical or monastic writers. A study of medieval marital sexuality must begin in the fourth century with Saint Augustine of Hippo. Augustine (354-430) wrote a great many works propounding theological positions that would become central to Catholicism. Although early Church fathers from both east and west had written on marriage and sexuality, there is in the medieval west a continuous tradition of thought from Augustine to Hugh of Saint Victor (1096-1141) on marriage

⁴¹ Pierre Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984); “Early medieval regulations concerning marital sexual relations,” in *The Journal of Medieval History*, 6, (1980), pp. 353-376; “Foucault on penance and the shaping of sexuality,” in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 14:3, (1985) 313-320. For Jean Louis Flandrin, *Un Temps pour embrasser: aux origines de la morale sexuelle occidentale: VIe-Xie siècle*, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1983); “Repression and change in the sexual life of young people in medieval and early modern times” in *Family and Sexuality in French History*, eds. R. Wheaton & T.K. Hareven, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980); *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household, and Sexuality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

⁴² Pierre Payer, *The Bridling of Desire: Views of Sex in the Later Middle Ages*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

⁴³ Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, p. 183.

and sexuality. Early medieval theologians and canonists did little to alter his ideals and patterns of marriage and sexuality.⁴⁴ Hugh based his discussion of marriage in his work *On the Sacraments* on Augustine's writings.⁴⁵ Augustine's concept of marriage developed in a period when there was still no uniform Christian ideal or practice. As Peter Brown shows, the early Christian period is teeming with different attitudes and customs regarding marriage and sexuality.⁴⁶ Augustine himself spent years searching for a satisfactory philosophy or religion; during his time with the Manicheans, for example, Augustine probably practiced contraception which he would later denounce.⁴⁷ While Church authorities debated the various questions concerning the form of a proper Christian life, marriage and sexuality for example, an unofficial moral code developed and was passed down through the early Middle Ages. Augustine's theological writings, especially the idea of the threefold benefit of marriage presented in *On the Good of Marriage*, were absorbed early into that tradition. As Payer has noted, it was only with the twelfth- and thirteenth-century theologians that these early medieval ideas were formalised in writing.⁴⁸

Augustine's three goods of marriage, namely procreation, fidelity, and the sacramental bond, had an important impact on Hugh and other later medieval writers. The first good of marriage, progeny or the hope thereof, allowed for sexual relations as

⁴⁴ Philip Reynolds discusses the first millennium of marriage theory in the Christian west in *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage during the Patristic and Early Medieval Periods*, (New York: Brill, 1994); also see Pierre Payer, "Early medieval regulations concerning marital sexual relations."

⁴⁵ For Augustine's influence on Hugh see, David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, 2nd edn., eds. D.E. Luscombe & C.N.L. Brooke, (New York: Longman, 1988) pp. 29-45; *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor*, trans. & ed. Jerome Taylor, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961) pp. 29-32.

⁴⁶ See the introduction to *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, ed. Elizabeth Clark, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of American Press, 1996), pp. 1-4. See also Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, pp. 387-427.

⁴⁷ *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, pp. 4-6. As Clark notes, Augustine had only one child during his fifteen years with a concubine.

an excusable aspect of marriage. Procreation in marriage is supported by the word of God: in Genesis 1:28 we read, “And God pronounced his blessings on them, Increase and multiply and fill the earth.”⁴⁹ While theologians debated whether marital sex for progeny was absolutely sinless, Augustine felt that it was excusable.⁵⁰ “In marriage, intercourse for the purpose of generation has no fault attached to it, but for the purpose of satisfying concupiscence, provided with a spouse, because of the marriage fidelity, it is a venial sin; adultery or fornication, however, is a mortal sin.”⁵¹ Thus, marital sex for Augustine fell into two categories: the sinless sex of procreation and the venial sex of the conjugal debt. (The mortal sins of adultery and fornication fall outside marital sexuality.) One benefit of marital relations, as Hugh wrote following Paul, is “that nature might be supported and vice checked.”⁵² While Paul’s idea of marriage as a “remedy for incontinence” was well-known, Augustine’s view of the conjugal debt, argues Margaret Farley, essentially precluded any sexual intercourse not open to procreation.⁵³ Thus, if the remedy for incontinence includes contraception then a mortal sin has been committed. Furthermore sex for joy or simply pleasure appears in neither Augustine nor Hugh; the pleasure of

⁴⁸ Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁹ All English translations of the Bible come from *The Holy Bible: A Translation from the Latin Vulgate*, trans. R.A. Knox, (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1955). The Vulgate version consulted for this research is the *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, eds. A. Colunga & L. Turrado, 5th edn., (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1977).

⁵⁰ James Brundage notes that canonists followed the three goods as expressed by Augustine but were nonetheless concerned with lust. Lust, of course, could bring the taint of sin to marital relations. See “Carnal delight: canonistic theories of sexuality,” in *Sex, Law and Marriage in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Brundage (Aldershot: Variorum, 1993) I, p. 365. In the same collection, Brundage notes that “three subsidiary themes” about sex prevailed in the Middle Ages: that “sex equals impurity,” “sex equals reproduction,” and “sex equals affection.” See “‘Allas! That Evere Love was Synne’: Sex and medieval canon law,” II, p. 9.

⁵¹ *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, p. 48.

⁵² Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, trans. Roy J. Deferrari, (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1951) p. 325.

⁵³ Margaret Farley argues that only a few early Christian authors, and she does not include St. Augustine, held up the Pauline tradition of sex as a “remedy for incontinence.” See “Sexual Ethics,” in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, eds. J.B. Nelson & S.P. Longfellow, (Louisville:

marriage is found in the bond between husband and wife, the bond of fidelity in marriage.⁵⁴

Medieval scholars expounded the notions of mutual consent and conjugal debt advanced by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians, which states: “Let every man give his wife what is her due, and every woman do the same by her husband; he, not she, claims the right over her body, as she, not he, claims the right over his.”⁵⁵ Thus consent tended to present the value of equality in medieval marital life. In order for one spouse to leave the other for a monastic life, for example, the consent of the other is required. Note, however, that simple consent could not dissolve a marriage. In the same way each spouse was expected to render the conjugal debt – that is engage in sexual relations – at the request of the other. While Paul supported marital sexuality and the conjugal debt to ensure fidelity in marriage, Augustine, as Elizabeth Makowski notes, stressed the procreative aspect of marital sexuality.⁵⁶ The common position on the conjugal debt, notes James Brundage, is that the spouse who demands sexual relations during Lent, for example, sins. If the other spouse tries to convince the former of the dangers of sexual relations during holy seasons, yet yields to sexual relations because of the debt, he or she is “guiltless” of any impropriety.⁵⁷

While the Church emphasised the requirements of marriage in canon law, what exactly was the relationship between husband and wife? Was there an equivalent to

Westminster John Knox Press, 1994) pp. 60-61. For Paul’s treatment of marriage and sexuality see I Corinthians 7.

⁵⁴ Renée Mirkes argues that Hildegard of Bingen espoused a theology which accepted and promoted pleasure in sexual intercourse. See “Hildegard of Bingen, Nicole Oresme, and conjugal ethics,” in *New Blackfriars*, vol. 76, no. 896, (September 1995) pp. 386-387.

⁵⁵ I Corinthians 7: 3-5.

⁵⁶ Elizabeth M. Makowski, “The conjugal debt and medieval canon law,” in *Journal of Medieval History*, vol. 3, (1977) p. 100.

⁵⁷ James A Brundage, “Implied consent to intercourse,” in *Consent and Coercion*, ed. Laiou, p. 250.

modern notions of love in medieval marriage? Augustine praised continence in marriage, especially in old age when the “ardor of youth has cooled.” He felt, however that while the lust of youth is tamed by old age, “charity” or spiritual love between husband and wife remains.⁵⁸ John Noonan and Michael Sheehan argue that for Gratian, the twelfth-century canonist, marriage is made when marital affection exists between two people. Unfortunately, as Noonan notes, Gratian does not define marital affection.⁵⁹ Constance Rousseau, examining the letters of Innocent III, argues that the “fusion” of the sexual and non-sexual aspects of marriage could result in what is known as marital affection.⁶⁰ Both Augustine and Hugh, theologians rather than lawyers, divide the goods of marriage into three: progeny, faith, and sacramental bond. Hugh argues that “the substance of the sacrament itself is the mutual love of souls.”⁶¹ Progeny, fidelity, and the sacramental bond defined marriage for many medieval theologians and lawyers.

The word “sacrament,” or in the Latin “*sacramentum*,” as used by Augustine does not mean one of the seven sacraments of the Christian faith; rather it means a vow or sacred bond.⁶² Augustine argues that the sacrament of marriage, the third good of marriage, can be broken “in no way except by the death of one of the parties.”⁶³ While some writers posited that sterility was grounds for separation, Augustine and his

⁵⁸ *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, pp. 45-46.

⁵⁹ John T Noonan, “Marital affection in the canonists,” in eds. G. Forchielli & A.M. Stickler, *Studia Gratiana: post octava decreti saecularia*, vol. 12, (Bologna: Institutum Gratianum, 1967) pp. 489-490. Michael M. Sheehan, “*Maritalis Affectio* Revisited,” in ed. J.K. Farge, *Marriage, Family, and Law in Medieval Europe: Collected Studies of Michael Sheehan*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996) p. 268.

⁶⁰ Constance M. Rousseau, “The spousal relationship: marital society and sexuality in the letters of Pope Innocent III,” in *Mediaeval Studies*, vol. 56, (Toronto, 1994), p. 104.

⁶¹ Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments*, p. 326.

⁶² The list of sacraments, namely Baptism, Confirmation, the Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, and Matrimony, was established by Peter Lombard in the twelfth century and confirmed by the Councils of Florence (1459) and Trent (1545-63). See the *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F.L. Cross, 3rd edn. ed. E.A. Livingstone, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), entries under “sacrament” and “marriage.”

followers argued that no one can break that sacramental bond. The “essence of this sacrament,” writes Hugh, “is that those joined legitimately are not separated as long as they live.”⁶⁴ (Later medieval practice reveals that a separation, but not divorce, can occur if one spouse engages in adultery.) In Augustinian tradition marriage mirrored the relationship between Christ and his Church and thus took on a sacred aspect. While the three goods of marriage were followed faithfully by Augustine’s successors, the definition of marriage did develop in the centuries between Augustine and Hugh.

As the Middle Ages progressed medieval theologians and lawyers became more concerned with the details of medieval marriage. Hugh defined marriage as “a legitimate consent, that is, between legitimate persons and legitimately made on the part of the male and female, to observe an individual association in life.”⁶⁵ Hugh and other later medieval authors were concerned with the possibility of excessive copulation and unnatural practices. Marriage does not necessitate sexual relations, argued Hugh, but if sex “is not so excessive that it interferes with the time which is due to prayer and is not changed to that practice which is contrary to nature,” then it receives forgiveness.⁶⁶ Also, the concern for legitimacy, ensuring that none of the laws of consanguinity or affinity are broken, was a prevalent theme in medieval marital literature.⁶⁷ However, the application of these teachings caused considerable controversy throughout the Middle Ages. As we noted at the beginning of the chapter, the marriage of two people involved the interests of many

⁶³ *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments*, p. 340.

⁶⁵ Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments*, p. 330.

⁶⁶ Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments*, p. 342.

⁶⁷ Sara Butler notes that by the thirteenth century “incest was defined as entering into marriage with a person related to you within four degrees (i.e. third cousin), by blood (*consanguinity*), by marriage or by sexual union (*affinity*), or by sponsorship or spiritual relationship (e.g. a godparent).” See “‘For Better, or Worse’: Representations of spousal abuse in later medieval England,” unpublished essay presented at the *Dalhousie Faculty-Graduate Colloquia*, December 7th, 1997, p. 16.

groups, beyond those of the future spouses. The last thirty years has seen a proliferation of literature on the development of the idea of consent as the key element in forming a medieval marriage.

Examining the decretals of the mid-twelfth century pope Alexander III, James Brundage notes that the question of “sexual relations for determining whether a couple was married was a critical issue in twelfth-century marriage law.”⁶⁸ Two theories, the coital and the consensual, existed side-by-side through much of the period studied here.⁶⁹ In Gratian’s thought, which Rousseau views as characteristic of the Bologna law school, “sexual intercourse was necessary for the creation of the marital bond.”⁷⁰ The Parisian theologians, such as Peter Lombard, argued that present consent alone made marriage. Georges Duby, who studies these two different models, or as he later called them, “moralities,” notes that “the lay model of marriage, created to safeguard the social order, and the ecclesiastical model, created to safeguard the divine order” frequently came into conflict.⁷¹ Laura Betzig, however, notes that the “contest between church and state had less to do with mating – i.e., with access to women, than with marriage – i.e., with access to wives.”⁷² Betzig suggests that “higher status men” had sexual access to many women, yet men ensured that women within their household were monogamous.⁷³ Medieval families, specifically noble and royal families, ensured the survival of the patrimony

⁶⁸ James A Brundage, “Marriage and sexuality in the decretals of Alexander III,” in *Sex, Law and Marriage*, IX, p. 61.

⁶⁹ Brundage notes that a third view did exist that stated that marriage was made by the delivery of the bride to the groom and neither consent nor consummation was necessary. This view did not “find much favor in the law schools and soon faded from view.” See “Implied consent to intercourse,” p. 247.

⁷⁰ Rousseau, “The spousal relationship,” p. 91.

⁷¹ Georges Duby, *Medieval Marriage: Two Models from Twelfth-Century France*, trans. Elborg Forster (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) p. 3. See also *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

⁷² Laura Betzig, “Medieval monogamy,” in *The Journal of Family History*, 20:2, (1995) p. 183.

⁷³ Betzig, “Medieval monogamy,” pp. 191, 194.

through producing legitimate heirs with one wife. Problems of barrenness or the availability of a more suitable wife, whether because of wealth or beauty, occasionally prompted illicit divorces or separation (and illicit remarriage). Thus, noble and royal men may have taken concubines or second wives in order to ensure the survival of the patrimony. The Church strove throughout the Middle Ages to impose marriage laws that stopped the blatant dismissal of one wife for another. Yet the Church itself found reaching consensus difficult regarding the two different theories of marriage formation, the consent and coital. It is in light of these two schools of thought, the Bolognese and the Parisian that the discussion on consent will be framed.

The marriage of Mary and Joseph was used as an important paradigm for consent theorists. If sexual intercourse is needed to form marriage, then Mary and Joseph were not married and Jesus was illegitimate. Irvén Resnick notes that the issue was not simply consent versus consummation, but “for theologians and canonists of the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries the issue was: is consent both *a necessary and sufficient* condition for marriage?”⁷⁴ Hugh suggested that Mary was called the wife of Joseph even though she was only betrothed to him.⁷⁵ Therefore, those who are betrothed by consent are married. Hugh’s consideration of present and future consent was developed in light of the problem of promises of marriage: “He who promises does not yet do; but he who does, already does what he does.”⁷⁶ Thus, Hugh distinguishes between vows of future marriage and vows of present marriage. He notes that a vow of future marriage should not be broken – “there was no marriage, but there should have been” – though the sacramental

⁷⁴ Irvén M. Resnick, “Marriage in medieval culture: consent theory and the case of Joseph and Mary,” in *Church History*, 69:2 (June 2000) pp. 353-354.

⁷⁵ Matthew 1:17-20. Joseph is referred to as the husband of Mary by the author of the text. Further an angel says to Joseph, “do not be afraid to take thy wife Mary to thyself.”

bond, however, has not been made. With later scholars the argument of present and future consent was refined.

Peter Lombard (1100-1160), the Parisian theologian whose *Sententiae* were part of the standard curriculum for students in medieval universities for hundreds of years, refined the argument of the consent school of thought. For Lombard consent alone made a valid marriage. Consent in the present tense made marriage, sex was not needed at all, and future consent merely made betrothal.⁷⁷ Lombard states: “Bringing about therefore the cause of matrimony is consent, not just any kind, but through words expressed, not in the future but rather in the present.”⁷⁸ Pope Alexander III took this theory one step further and definitively stated: “But know this, that while marriage is initiated by betrothal, it is completed by sexual intercourse. Whence between one spouse and the other marriage is only initiated; through copulation marriage is completed.”⁷⁹ Consent was an essential aspect of marriage formation for Alexander III, yet consummation played a key role as well. While Mary and Joseph did not “complete” their marriage through consummation, their marriage was nonetheless complete in that procreation occurred. The three goods of marriage, the sacramental bond, fidelity, and procreation, were all realised.

The conjugal debt, the formation of marriage, and sexual ethics all played an important part in the discourse of medieval marriage. Yet, as Marcia Colish notes, the debate about marriage and sexuality in the academic circles had an ephemeral quality.

⁷⁶ Hugh of Saint Victor, *On the Sacraments*, p. 330.

⁷⁷ Rousseau, “The spousal relationship,” pp. 91-92; Marcia Colish, *Peter Lombard*, vol. 2, (New York: Brill, 1994), pp. 653-654.

⁷⁸ Peter Lombard, *Sententiae in IV Libris Distinctae*, Tomus II, Liber III et IV, (Rome: Quaracchi Collegii, 1981), liber 4, dist. 27, cap 3:1, pp. 422. “Efficiens autem causa matrimonii est consensus, non quilibet, sed per verba expressus; nec de futuro, sed de praesenti.”

⁷⁹ Gratian, “Decretum,” in *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, Editio lipsiensis secunda, vol. 1, (Liepzig: Bernhardi Tauchnitz, 1879-1881) col. 1073; causa 27, Q. II, c. 34. “Sed sciendum est, quod coniugium desponsatione

Unlike the other sacraments (and here I mean the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church) “marriage existed as a social and legal institution and always had, regardless of what Christian thinkers might say about it.”⁸⁰ The clerics who wrote on marriage were in many cases, especially after the Gregorian Reform, unmarried, not sexually active, and essentially removed from the reality of life as experienced by the majority of medieval Christians. Throughout the Middle Ages the academic debate on marriage and sexuality raged and patterns of behaviour passed from parents to children.

In his work *The Bridling of Desire*, Pierre Payer notes that medieval writers did not produce treatises on sexuality. “In the strictest sense, there are no discussions of sex in the Middle Ages.”⁸¹ Sexuality, however, was a central aspect of medieval marriage and society. While the descriptions of virginity and celibacy suggests that medieval society placed a high value on sexual abstention and a lower value on sexuality, this is misleading. As the later Middle Ages progressed and fears of the coming Judgement, especially in the years after 1000 AD, subsided, the awareness of a need for more Christians, more labourers, more soldiers, and so on grew and so did the theological and legal discussions of sexuality. Julia Bolton Holloway notes, in the introduction to *Saint Bride and Her Book*, that Birgitta’s *Vita* is narrated in a virgin –wife –widow formula.⁸² This is, of course, the natural order of life for the average medieval woman. In the following pages I too have divided my text along these patterns – the coming of marriage, marriage, and life after marital relations (often widowhood). This interpretative framework should not be taken to suggest that each stage marked a definitive period in

iniatur, conmixtione perficitur. Unde inter sponsam et sponsam coniugium est, sed initiatum; inter copulatos est coniugium ratum.”

⁸⁰ Colish, *Peter Lombard*, p. 628.

⁸¹ Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, p. 14.

the saint's life. While marriage and the death of the spouse were important events, in some cases those two points were separated by only a few years; for many saints marriage was merely a transitional period from virginity to widowhood, from the hundred-fold fruit to the sixty-fold fruit. The *vitae* I examine do not spend pages upon pages discussing the nature of the saint's marriage, nor on how she or he came to that point. The saint's *vitae* focus on the miraculous, devotion to the poor, to the life of prayer, and miracles after death. For the supporters of the medieval saint, the exemplary life of sanctity is marked not by their good marriage but by their fantastic miracles and piety. However, by examining the scattered references to medieval marriage in *vitae* and in the pastoral literature, I hope to shed light on the medieval ideal of marriage and sexuality.

The first chapter, *The Parent's Will*, discusses the conflict between adolescents and their parents over the choice of vocation. This conflict concerns the choice between marriage and a religious life – the parents' will versus the will of the young man or woman. While several *vitae* indicate that young men and women struggled with their parents, most *vitae* reveal another situation. Most of young nobility and royalty accepted the married life, the life of procreation and sexuality, and followed the will of their parents. Why were some parents so adamant that their children married? How do considerations of wealth, land, and political alliance influence parental decisions? To what extent did the Church's increasing insistence on the spouses' consent to marriage influence the attitude of parents towards their children's future?

The second chapter explores the nature of marital chastity in the saints' *vitae*. The *vitae* of several saints reveal specific teachings about spousal relations and the nature of a

⁸² *Saint Bride and Her Book*, p. 3.

marriage between devout people. Church prohibitions for sexual relations during particular liturgical seasons presented in early medieval penitentials are also reflected in later medieval saints' *vitae*. Later medieval pastoral literature indicates continuities with early Church teaching of marital sexuality. The medieval Church attempted to circulate a moral code for lay audiences through both exemplary writing such as hagiographical literature and through early penitential literature. How was legitimate marital sexuality presented in the saints' *vitae* of the later Middle Ages? Why does the sexual code that appears in saint's *vitae* and early penitential literature not appear in later pastoral manuals? What is the relation between married saints and their children?

The third chapter addresses the saint's life after marital sexuality, which may or may not be widowhood. Medieval *vitae* contain more fully developed sections on the latter phase of the saint's life. Church writers, attempting to emphasize the holiness of the saint's life as well as how it differed from the ordinary common life, presented the saint's laudable post-marital chastity in great detail. How do the hagiographers portray the separation from or death of the spouse? Is this seen as a period of liberation from the secular world? Or did they portray any sense of loss on the part of the saint? While focusing on women/widows, this chapter also discusses some of the problems in examining widowers in the medieval period.

Chapter: 1 The Parent's Will

Modern clichés of difficult positions, up the creek without a paddle, between a rock and a hard place, are common in everyday parlance. Folk singer Jim White wonders whether he is stuck between “Jesus and the fiery furnace or the Devil and the deep blue sea;” two very precarious positions indeed!¹ Medieval hagiographers often presented their subjects in just such a predicament. Family tension arose during adolescence, chiefly as a result of the changes in marital and religious status. Until the transition from adolescence to adulthood, the child would be firmly under the authority of his or her parents; yet at this time an adolescent would begin asserting his or her own will.² Parents, and society at large, had expectations for young men and women in medieval Europe and these expectations could jar with the needs and desires of the adolescent. In the medieval period adolescence is not simply the age of marriage, but often a time of inner change, or conversion from one lifestyle to another. William James, the eminent psychologist of religion of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries, argues that conversion “is in its essence a normal adolescent phenomenon, incidental to the passage from the child’s small universe to the wider intellectual and spiritual life of maturity.”³ Young adults in the medieval period fell under the authority of their parents until the point of marriage or

¹ Jim White, “God was Drunk when He made me,” on the album *No Such Place*, (Mississauga: Luaka Bop/EMI Canada, 2001).

² While parental authority in medieval society generally meant the father’s authority, several examples used herein, including Christina of Markyate and St. Louis IX of France, present mothers as an authority over children.

³ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York: Mentor Books, 1958, originally published in 1902) p. 164. See also E.D. Starbuck’s *The Psychology of Religion*, (New York: Charles Scribners’ Sons, 1906) who argues that religious conversion tends to occur between the age of 10 and 25.

oblation in a monastery, and then women and young monks and nuns passed into the authority of another figure. While the child/adolescent is in the midst of a religious conversion, desiring to extend and develop further a religious vocation, he or she may find that parents are in the process of marrying them off to some unknown and/or unwanted spouse.⁴ This chapter examines how adolescent saints dealt with parents' wishes for marriage. I will argue that while there are instances of parent-child conflict when the time arises for a decision between marriage and entrance to a monastery, there is often no mention of such a conflict over marriage in these medieval *vitae*. Is there a common route to sainthood marked by either rejection of familial expectations or acceptance of them?

Michael Goodich notes that with the coming of adolescence in hagiographical sources "instances of overt parent-child conflict correspondingly occur."⁵ The revolt of St. Francis of Assisi against his father, Pietro di Bernardone, is perhaps the most well-known instance of child revolt. After publicly rejecting his father and worldly attachments, namely property and wealth, Francis fully embraced his ministry and established the Franciscans.⁶ But is this a common pattern? Thomas Heffernan suggests that the "*via media* for medieval sanctity illustrated in the lives of saintly women is narrow and strictly prescribed; its accomplishment requires a deliberate rejection of

We should note that both of these studies were concerned with contemporary evidence; yet the *vitae* examined reveal similarities in both age and reaction.

⁴ I use the term conversion to emphasise adolescence as a time of change, not necessarily religious conversion but possibly so. For studies in medieval conversion see *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages*, ed. James Muldoon, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997); Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992) and the companion volume, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992).

⁵ Goodich, *Vita Perfecta*, p. 100.

⁶ *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, trans. Raphael Brown, (Toronto: Image/Doubleday Books, 1958) pp. 3-4.

social and sexual mores rooted in the family.”⁷ While examples of child-parent conflict abound in medieval hagiography, suggesting that rejection of familial expectations is required or even central to achieving sanctity ignores much of the later medieval evidence. The saints’ *vitae* chosen for this thesis reflect only a small sample of medieval Christian *vitae*; however, the presentation of marriage in the *vitae* studied herein is not consistently positive. I will argue that while some saints explicitly refused to marry, in many *vitae* there is no record of such a refusal. The evidence indicates that in following their parents’ will as established by social and cultural norms, these saints were fulfilling their roles as defined by medieval society and this, furthermore, did not necessarily conflict with religious vocation or Christian sanctity.

As noted, the adolescent did not always accept the parents’ will; some women, for example, dedicated themselves and their virginity to Jesus Christ. Christina of Markyate (c. 1096-1166), who never actually became a saint, is just such an example. The daughter of well-to-do merchant family in Huntingdonshire, England, Christina made her vow to Christ at roughly fifteen.⁸ About this time Ralph Flambard, Bishop of Durham, “solicited her to commit a wicked deed,” yet Christina held fast and rejected his advance. Incensed, the bishop strove to break her vow of virginity and “gained the parents’ consent for her to be betrothed to Burthred.”⁹ Christina’s parents, Autti and Beatrix, supported the

⁷ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 188. Heffernan suggests that four types of female sanctity, namely “the redefinition of ideas of kinship; freedom from the Pauline notion of sexual ‘indebtedness’; the importance of prophetic visions; and the change from virgin, wife, or widow to *sponsa Christi*” are constant in female hagiography from early Christian times to the later Middle Ages, see p. 185.

⁸ *The Life of Christina of Markyate: A Twelfth Century Recluse*, ed. & trans. C.H. Talbot, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959, reprint 1998 Medieval Academy Reprint for Teaching, no. 39) pp. 14, 38-41. The editor has compiled a time line of Christina’s life presented in the introduction. I will give at least two page numbers for each reference to Christina’s *Vita* because the text features Latin and English on facing pages.

⁹ *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, pp. 42-45. The Latin, presented on the facing page, reads: “quam assensu(m) parentum ipso tradente.” Other English saints not considered herein who may reveal some attitudes towards marriage and sexuality include Margery Kempe and St. Margaret of Soctland.

betrothal, rejected Christina's vow, and attempted to force her to have sex with Burthred. Locking Christina in her room Autti, Beatrix, and Burthred (who seems more of a passive participant than Christina's parents) plotted how to take her virginity. Christina, however, maintained her vow through divine intervention; she fled her home shortly thereafter. Following her flight, Christina became an important religious figure at Markyate and St. Albans Abbey.

The rejection of parental authority was not an easy task. Christina suffered many physical and emotional hardships as a result. Burthred however, in a move that angered Christina's parents "because it had been done without their consent, [eventually] released Christina from her bond of marriage."¹⁰ Saint Margaret, or Pelagius, whom Jacobus de Voragine immortalised in the *Golden Legend*, also fled her home for fear of marriage.

Jacobus writes:

Finally she was bespoken in marriage by a noble youth, and both her parents gave their consent; whereupon the most lavish and delightful preparations were made for her nuptials. The wedding day came, and the youths and maidens, with all the nobility of the city, gathered before the bridal chamber and made joyous rout. But suddenly, God inspiring her, the virgin gave thought to the loss of her virginity, and to the sinful riotings with which it was celebrated; and prostrating herself upon the ground, and weighing in her heart the glory of virginity against the cares of wedlock, she deemed all the joys of this life as dung. Hence, that night she abstained from the society of her husband, and in the middle of the night she cut off her hair, garbed herself in the habit of a man, and recommending herself to God, secretly took flight.¹¹

Margaret's flight led her to enter a monastery under the male alias of Pelagius. By the end of this short *vita*, Jacobus presents Margaret as blameless, and she was in fact canonised for her devotion and piety. Surprisingly, no mention is made in her *Vita* of

¹⁰ *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, pp. 68-69, 108-109. Burthred in fact released Christina twice, the first time he was convinced to change his mind and later he released her forever.

¹¹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 613.

spousal consent for Margaret to enter a monastery. Even though she was married, Margaret fled and was able to attain the spiritual perfection of sainthood. Canon law states that in order for a husband or a wife to enter the religious life, the consent of the spouse is necessary.¹² While Margaret may have consented to marry through her parents' will, medieval society accepted that as legitimate consent. Yvette of Huy, like Christina and Margaret, also rejected the marriage bed; however, as Robert Sweetman notes, Yvette was unable to bear the weight of family pressure. "She bows before the cumulative weight of parental and social expectation and takes a husband at enormous personal cost."¹³

While Yvette struggled with her parents, she had motives unlike Christina and Francis, motives other than religious devotion. Confronting her parents, she pleads to remain single, but to no avail:

And she insisted upon this any way she could, now begging her mother and now her father that they might permit her to remain without a husband. But she came to understand that she could not do as she wished. Under pressure from her father and friends, with the whole town compelling her to take their advice and accept a husband, she could not hold out for too long against everyone's wishes and was betrothed to a young lad from the city although she was then uniquely a virgin.¹⁴

Reluctantly accepting the choice of her family, Yvette married the young man. Familial and social pressure demanded that a young woman, especially from a wealthy and important family, fulfil her role as a mother and wife. Hugh of Floreffe writes that the "whole town" urged her to marry.

¹² Gratian, "Decretum," col. 1068-1069; causa 27, Q. II, c. 20-21.

¹³ Robert Sweetman, "Christianity, women, and the medieval family," in *Religion, Feminism, and the Family*, eds. A.E. Carr & M.S. Van Leeuwen, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) p. 140.

¹⁴ Hugh of Floreffe, *Yvette of Huy*, pp. 40-41.

Yet, what exactly were Yvette's motives for avoiding marriage? Christina, as noted above, had vowed her virginity to God. Yvette, on the other hand, made no such vow. Hugh tells us Yvette feared birthing, raising children, and she had no desire to run a household.¹⁵ Yvette probably belonged to an important merchant family; we are told that she was born into the "best family in the city."¹⁶ Medieval merchant and noble families married their children to similarly ranked families, alliances that facilitated business expansion and helped increase family prestige. Thus, Yvette had no recourse against her parents' will. At the simplest form the struggle between parent and child is the desire of the child versus the expectation of the family. For the adolescent in medieval Europe, the period in the early teens tended to be characterised by significant change in one way or another. Marriageable children, as David Herlihy notes, tend to be between the ages of twelve and twenty.¹⁷ The formative years of adolescence signalled both the first assertions of independence and the change from child to spouse (or oblate in a monastery).

Herlihy, in his study of the development of the medieval household, notes that the age of marriage varied across Europe. Yvette's parents began to initiate marriage negotiations when she turned thirteen: "when it was apparent that she had left childhood for nubility, they began negotiations with her relatives and friends for the marriage of this daughter whom they particularly loved."¹⁸ Surveying a broad range of regions and times, Herlihy observes that, for first marriages, women tended to marry in the mid-teens while

¹⁵ Hugh of Floreffe, *Yvette of Huy*, p. 40.

¹⁶ Hugh of Floreffe, *Yvette of Huy*, p. 40.

¹⁷ David Herlihy discusses the various ages of Italian children at marriage in *Medieval Households*, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), pp. 103-111. While his examples tend to be somewhat older than those used here, they are still extremely young compared to modern sensibilities.

¹⁸ Hugh of Floreffe, *Yvette of Huy*, p. 40.

men married in the early to mid-twenties.¹⁹ In a recent work, Peter Biller emphasises that marriage patterns in medieval Europe follow geographical rather than temporal patterns.²⁰ While Yvette was a young thirteen, Christina, according to C.H. Talbot was an elderly eighteen or nineteen.²¹ The saints Birgitta, Hedwig, and Elisabeth married at twelve, thirteen, and fourteen respectively. The saints of northern Europe, excepting England, generally married rather young, but as Herlihy notes in his research, Italian women tended to marry at a somewhat older age: “For 30 Florentine women, whose birth dates and wedding dates between 1251 and 1475 are given in published family memoirs, the average age at first marriage is 17.2 years.”²²

Although I have found some examples of overt parent-child conflict over the important decision of marriage, the majority of the *vitae* examined here do not note such conflicts. The first part of Hedwig's *Vita* discusses “her manner of life, in the state of childhood, in the state of marriage, and her love of continence.”²³ Hedwig's marriage to Henry of Silesia led to a productive life; she bore three boys and three girls. Thus, Hedwig “performed her marital duty” and continued the family line.²⁴ Yet the woman who became the patron saint of Silesia and Poland as well as of married women was known for charity, humility, and other virtues that marked her as a saint. Why did she marry? According to her *Vita*:

¹⁹ David Herlihy, *Medieval Households*. My statements here are a general conclusion of Herlihy's section on age in marriage; he shows a great diversity across Europe and is quick to note that the sources for this kind of information are scattered and patchy at best, see pp. 103-111.

²⁰ Peter Biller, *The Measure of Multitude: Population in Medieval in Thought*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) pp. 11-12.

²¹ *The Life of Christina of Markyate*, Talbot's timeline places Christina's birth between 1096-98 and her marriage at 1114-15, p. 14.

²² Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, p. 104.

²³ *Vita Beate Maior Hedwigis*, in *Vita Hedwigis – Codex von 1353*. While Braudels et al. have translated the *Vita* into German; I have translated the Preface and first part from the Latin edition into English. See appendix, p. 97.

For in that contract of matrimony Hedwig is believed to have satisfied the will of her parents rather than her own. This would become very clear later, when she bound herself with the most notable chains of continence.

Simon of Trebnitz, who had the benefit of hindsight upon writing Hedwig's *Vita*, indicates that Hedwig's later vows show she did not desire marriage. Nonetheless Hedwig accepted her duty and "strove to defend honourable marriage, in accord with the doctrine of the Apostle, to preserve the pure marriage bed in all things, and to conserve the laws and rights of matrimony."²⁵

Unlike both Yvette and Christina's *vitae*, Hedwig's does not emphasise an overt parent-child conflict or struggle in her marriage. She willingly accepted her role as wife, duchess, and mother. Interestingly, Hedwig's *Vita* points out that she "satisfied the will" of her parents. Prior to that her hagiographer states that "Hedwig consented [*consensit*] to receive this noble man in fear of the Lord and without lust."²⁶ Thus, the author seems to regard Hedwig's parents' will and her own consent as the same. Hedwig's siblings, including four brothers and three sisters, were not all destined for the marriage chamber. One of her sisters became the abbess of a monastery in Kitzingen. One brother became the bishop of Bamberg. Most, however, were married and lived in the secular world. The well placed family had, in fact, one daughter married to Philip of France and another to Andrew of Hungary. Hedwig's sister, Queen of Hungary, is perhaps best known as Saint Elisabeth's mother.

Saint Elisabeth of Thuringia's marriage was a key political alliance. Like her aunt Hedwig, Elisabeth married without struggle. Her *Vita* reveals a great deal about marital

²⁴ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 102. Joseph Gottschalk argues that Hedwig and Henry had seven children, see *Die heilige Hedwig Herzogin von Schlesien*, (Cologne: Bohlau Verlag, 1964) p. 323.

²⁵ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 101.

²⁶ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 101.

life in medieval Europe. First of all her relationship with her husband seems to have been a good one, though short lived; five or six years after their marriage Louis IV of Thuringia died on crusade. Of the several versions of her *Vita*, the only easily accessible one is that found in the *Golden Legend*. Elisabeth's *Vita*, like all examined thus far, begins with a brief overview of her virtues in childhood. Jacobus de Voragine conveys something of her early life while still praising her virtue. Humble and devout in her youth, Elisabeth had a special devotion for the Virgin Mary and John the Evangelist. Yet, like Hedwig and Birgitta, Elisabeth entered into marriage at the behest of her father: "...she was compelled to enter the conjugal state, being constrained thereto by her father's command." Jacobus stressed that Elisabeth did not desire the union but "she consented to marital union, not for pleasure's sake but in obedience to the will of her father, and in order to raise up children to the service of God."²⁷ While Elisabeth did not want to marry she consented to her parents' will and directed her devotion to the Christian fruits of marriage, children. In this short *Vita* Elisabeth's husband, Louis IV Landgrave of Thuringia, is presented as a devout and humble man himself.²⁸

Dietrich von Apolda's longer *Vita* devotes several passages to Louis' good behaviour and devotion to Christianity. The relationship between Louis and Elisabeth develops from the outset of their marriage. Louis, upon being questioned about his intentions towards Elisabeth by a soldier accompanying her, says:

Truly, [even] if this mountain, which you see here, were gold all the way to the summit, I would more easily and powerfully disdain it all than reject marriage with Elisabeth. Let them know this and say that vainly: I love Elisabeth and put nothing ahead of marrying her.²⁹

²⁷ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 677.

²⁸ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 681.

²⁹ Dietrich von Apolda, *Die vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 31. "Vere, si hic, quem vides, mons a radice usque ad summum aureus esset, hunc ego facilius omnino et potius contempnerem, quam Elyzabeth

This, then, shows an emotional devotion on Louis' part toward Elisabeth. Dietrich dismissed those who spoke against marriage; the saint he wrote about shows that marriage can be a loving, devout, and good Christian life.

Elisabeth's *Vita*, unlike Hedwig's and Yvette's, shows an interaction between Louis and Elisabeth prior to the wedding. Excluding a single reference, where the soldier escorts Elisabeth from her father to Louis, there is no mention of Elisabeth's parents and their involvement in arranging the marriage. Since both Louis and Elisabeth are saints, Dietrich von Apolda treats them both well:

In the year of the Lord's incarnation 1221, Louis renowned Landgrave of Thuringia, wedded the Lady Elisabeth, virtuous virgin, noble daughter of the King of Hungary. The faithful man was joined by God's knot with a faithful wife, *holy with holy, and innocent with innocent*. They loved each other in the charity of the Lord, not so much in a carnal as a spiritual marriage, more than could be believed.³⁰

Elisabeth's longer *Vita* does not present a parent-child conflict or the passive acceptance of parental authority present in Hedwig's *Vita*. And while Louis is active in the pre-marriage negotiations, the gifts may be an offer to Elisabeth's family; Elisabeth is not an active participant. The *Vita* does not tell us if Louis organised the marriage with Elisabeth's father, although it is implied in the narrative. The soldier takes Elisabeth from her father in Hungary to Louis in Thuringia. The soldier, therefore, acts as a surrogate authority figure, responsible

coniugium refutarem. Sentiant alii et loquantur, inaniter quod iudicant: Elyzabeth ego diligo eiusque matrimonio nil prepono."

³⁰ Dietrich von Apolda, *Die vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, pp. 32-33. "Anno igitur ab incarnatione domini MCCXXI Ludowicus, lantgravius Thuringie inclitus, dominam Elyzabeth, virginem castam, regis Ungarie filiam nobilem et eximiam duxit uxorem. Coniunctusque est dei nutu vir fidelis cum muliere fideli, *sanctus cum sancta, innocens cum innocente* [Psalms 17:26]. Et non tam carnale quam spirituale connubium sortiti invicem se in caritate domini, supra quam credi valeat, dilexerunt."

for Elisabeth in the transfer from father to husband, from the transition of virgin to bride.

In the case of Birgitta of Sweden, it was her suitor Ulf Gudmarson who dealt directly with her father. Birgitta was married in 1316 and canonised less than a century later in 1391. Bridget Morris suggests that “Birgitta must have known from earliest years that marriage was an inevitability for her.” As one of two surviving daughters in an important family, Birgitta’s marriage “would have ensured protection of Birger Persson’s wealth and interests.”³¹ Johannes Jørgensen, in a two volume biography of Birgitta, suggests that Birgitta received this advice from her aunt: “Matrimony was a holy sacrament, one of the seven means of grace of the Church; marriage was a good state and well-pleasing to God.”³² Young women, especially devout young women, who are faced with an unwanted marriage may have been reassured by family members on the goodness of marriage. According to Birgitta’s *Vita*:

... she intended most fervently to live all her life as a virgin, yet both by God’s providence and the counsel of her father, she was married when she was twelve years old to a noble young knight called Ulf, prince of Nericia – otherwise called Ulf Gudmarson – who was eighteen years old and also a virgin.³³

The *Vita* does not suggest any overt conflict with her father over choice of lifestyle.

When Ulf and Magnus, the sons of Gudmar, asked for Birger’s daughters for matrimony, “Sir Birger gave his consent.”³⁴ The nobleman Birger thus solidified a family alliance and ensured that his family would continue to be of importance in Swedish affairs.

³¹ Bridget Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, in the series *Studies in Medieval Mysticism*, vol. 1, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1999) p. 41.

³² Johannes Jørgensen, *St Bridget of Sweden*, vol. 1, (London, Longmans and Green Co., 1954) p. 46.

³³ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 15-16.

³⁴ Jørgensen, *St Bridget of Sweden*, vol. 1, p. 48.

Bridget Morris, relying on the witness testimonies, notes that Birgitta's daughter testified that Birgitta was "compelled, coerced and forced" into marriage. This is not, however, corroborated by other sources.³⁵ Furthermore it seems that if Birgitta had suffered and not willingly accepted marriage, her hagiographer would have noted this; the suffering of saints is a popular theme in medieval hagiography. Traditionally Christian sainthood evolved out of the early years of Christianity, when martyrs and later confessors were perceived as being extraordinarily holy. The suffering of martyrs and confessors, including such well-known hermits as St. Antony of Egypt, continued in medieval sainthood.³⁶ When a hagiographer could easily show the sanctity and patience of a married saint in the face of the actions of an evil spouse, the hagiographer would do so.

Thus far my examples both of overt parental-child conflict and willing obedience have been taken from female saints' *vitae*. Yet, young men also fell under the authority of their parents. One of the most well-known medieval saints, Louis IX, King of France, is an excellent example of a married saint. Unfortunately none of Louis' four *Vitae* discuss the negotiations by which he and Marguerite of Provence were married. Régine Pernoud, however, cites the *Great Chronicles of France* as a source for the marriage of Marguerite and Louis:

The King bade the Count of Provence send him his daughter [Marguerite], for he meant to take her for his wedded wife. These tidings the Count received most joyfully and did much feast and reward the messengers thereof. He gave into their hands his daughter, who had been well taught and tutored from her earliest years. The messengers took the maid in charge, bade the Count farewell, and did ride till they came to the King

³⁵ Morris, *St. Birgitta of Sweden*, p. 41.

³⁶ For a note on the influence of the Life of Saint Antony, see the introduction to Athanasius', *The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus*, trans. & ed. Robert C. Gregg, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1980) pp. 13-17.

again and delivered him the maid. The King received her with much joy and caused her to be crowned Queen of France by the hand of the Archbishop of Sens.³⁷

The chronicler records this royal marriage as an important historical moment for the state of France. While the passage indicates that Louis himself sent the messengers, it seems more likely that Queen Blanche, the regent during Louis' minority, had established the contact with Count Berenger, but that the embassy was officially sent by the King.³⁸ Considering the importance of the royal marriage, we can be fairly certain that the regent and her advisors were quite careful in deciding upon Louis' future spouse.

Marriage was experienced differently by Louis IX and Louis IV of Thuringia. While I am relying on Elisabeth's *Vita* for her husband's experience, it seems that he had some freedom in the courtship of Elisabeth. Would the young King Louis have had similar freedom? Likely not; Louis relied on ambassadors and advisors in choosing a wife and preparing for marriage. Differences between the two Louis aside, both came into marriage from a different vantage than our female examples. Foremost, the young male did not move from the authority of parents to the authority of a spouse. Notwithstanding Paul's injunction that the body of the husband belongs to his wife and the wife's body belongs to her husband,³⁹ husbands were viewed as the authority figure within the medieval household. Actual experience in the average medieval household is extremely difficult to gauge. Nonetheless, the saints studied herein more often than not

³⁷ As quoted in Régine Pernoud, *Blanche of Castile*, trans. Henry Noel, (London: Collins, 1975, originally published 1972) pp. 64-65.

³⁸ Genevieve Ribordy discusses marriage preliminaries, the form and function of the embassies, and the nature of noble marriage in a recent essay. See "The two paths to marriage: the preliminaries of noble marriage in late medieval France," in *Journal of Family History*, 26:3, (July 2001), pp. 323-336. Margaret Wade Labarge, a modern biographer of Louis, provides a brief, but unenlightening, discussion of Louis and Marguerite's marriage. See *Saint Louis: The Life of Louis IX of France*, (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1968) pp. 54-57.

³⁹ I Corinthians 7:4.

willingly accept the authority and decision of parents in marriage. While there are some *vitae* that speak of conflict, most notably in Christina of Markyate and Yvette of Huy, the conflict is often minor; Yvette was eventually swayed to marry. Only Christina continued to resist, and fled her home. Is this pattern reflected in pastoral literature?

Turning to early medieval penitential literature on marriage, we do not find any discussion of this tension between parental or adolescent desires regarding marriage and religious vocation. The Penitential of Theodore, perhaps a collection of answers given by Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury (668-690) to certain theological questions, notes that children of a certain age may in fact have authority over themselves.⁴⁰ While a penitential typically contains penances for sins, note here that this penitential is not prescribing any penances as such. Rather it states the guidelines for the age of maturity, the age at which a child becomes an adult with rights over his or her own body. In a section "On matters relating to marriage" we find the following two entries:

36. But a girl of seventeen years has the power of her own body.
 37. Until he is fifteen years old a boy shall be in the power of his father, then he can make himself a monk; but a girl of sixteen or seventeen years who was before the power of her parents (can become a nun). After that age a father may not bestow his daughter in marriage against her will.⁴¹

Several manuscripts state that women from the age of thirteen through sixteen have "power" over themselves. Later pastoral literature, specifically *summae confessorum* (guides for confessors), deal more specifically with a coherent set of canons. The later pastoral manuals tend to focus less on collecting various statements on a wide variety of

⁴⁰ *Medieval Handbook of Penance: A Translation of the principal libri poenitentiales and selection from related documents*, eds. John T. McNeill & Helena M. Gamer, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938). McNeill and Gamer provide and introduction to Theodore's Penitential and discuss the various questions of authorship and dates of completion. See pp. 179-182.

⁴¹ *Medieval Handbook of Penance*, p. 211.

issues, than focusing on specific issues of interest to priests and confessors in medieval Europe.

The second book of Robert of Flamborough's *Liber Poenitentialis* focuses on questions of marriage. Medieval theologians and canonists supported consent as a factor in the making of medieval marriage. Authors stressed that consent plus sexual intercourse was required, and that consent was often enough to make a valid marriage. Turning to Flamborough's work we find three aspects of marriage.

Three things are required for matrimony: consent of souls, consent of bodies, that is consent to sexual intercourse, and the capacity to enter into a contract. Whence even the blessed Virgin consented to sexual intercourse; while conditionally pledging her virginity.⁴²

Thus, the Virgin Mary was married and expecting to engage in sexual relations; however, she and Joseph never did engage in relations due to circumstance. The impediments to marriage listed by Flamborough include vows, ordination, relation, and forced marriage. Under the title, "De coactione" Flamborough briefly discusses how coercion is an impediment to marriage:

Unqualified and violent coercion, namely that which can fall upon a steadfast man, including threats of death, flogging, or bodily restraint, impedes a transaction and nullifies a contract [of marriage]. And though she may speak these words and does not wish to consent to them, namely "I take you as mine," she does not consent nor does she wish to consent. But, if anyone was coerced, if afterwards she made a bond with the man and when she could, she did not turn away, it seems that she consented.⁴³

⁴² Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, p. 64. "Tria exiguntur ad matrimonium: consensus animorum, consensus corporum, id est consensus in carnalem copulam, et personarum regularitas ad contrahendum. Unde et beata Virgo in carnalem consensit copulam; conditionaliter enim vovit virginitatem." "...et personarum regularitas ad contrahendum" refers to the ability for a person to enter a contract. That is they are not constrained by a previous vow or other limiting factors; literally "regularity of the persons to be contracted."

⁴³ Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, p. 92. "Coactio absoluta et violenta, quae scilicet cadit in virum constantem, et impedit contrahendum et dirimit contractum, ut minae mortis, verbera, captio corporalis; et licet proferat haec verba et nolit consentire, scilicet 'Accipio te in meam,' non tamen consentit nec vult consentire. Sed, quantumcumque aliqua coacta fuerit, si postea moram fecerit cum viro et cum potuit non recessit, videtur consensisse."

Thus, consent is central to the formation of marriage and a legitimate marriage cannot be based on forced consent. Flamborough goes on to discuss rape, meaning here not physical forced sexual intercourse but seizure of person which may or may not include forced sexual relations. Flamborough does not, however, make a clear distinction between parental and individual consent.

Saint Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de matrimonio*, deals with the formation of marriage, the impediments to marriage, and questions about children's dowry, inheritance, and legitimacy. Raymond's writings suggest that the Church recognised parental rights, or at least the fact that parents do make the arrangement for marriage. Trying to stem the power of parents somewhat, he placed age limits on betrothal and marriage: "If however, their parents conclude betrothal before the boy reaches seven, they make nothing."⁴⁴ Concerned about the age at marriage, Raymond goes on to note: "Moreover the age appropriate to contract marriage in a girl is twelve years, in a boy fourteen. And if they are joined before, it is not marriage."⁴⁵ The Church was concerned that the authority of the parents did not contravene canon law. Furthermore, while it seems that the Church decrees emphasised consent of the betrothed, the clergy were aware that parents were marrying children at a young age.

All the examples explored in this chapter suggest that parents arranged their children's marriage or at least approved of it. Nowhere do we find the child/betrothed say "I consent to marry this person" or the more medieval "I take you as mine." Whose

⁴⁴ Raymond of Peñafort, *Sancti Raymundi Summa*, Q. II, col. 462. "Si vero ante septennium pueri, vel parentes eorum nomine contrahunt sponsalia, nihil agunt."

⁴⁵ Raymond of Peñafort, *Sancti Raymundi Summa*, Q. II, col. 464. "Ceterum aetas ad contrahendum matrimonium apta est in puella duodecim annorum, in puero quattordecim. Et si ante conjugantur, non est matrimonium."

consent is required for a legitimate marriage? David Herlihy suggests that the Church's consensual definition of marriage completely undermined parental authority. "The father, for example, could neither force a son or daughter into an unwanted marriage, nor prevent him or her from marrying."⁴⁶ Was there, however, a real change in children's rights, if we may use this modern term, in determining whether they marry or not in medieval society after the introduction of the consensual marriage? Hedwig, Elisabeth, and Birgitta, destined for marriage as royal or noble daughters, do not protest their betrothals; all three developed their religious vocation later in their lives. Louis, the young king, had to continue the family line. Young Yvette, bullied into marriage by her father, and apparently the local community, married under duress. The *vitae* studied herein indicate that Church authorities were aware that young men and women were forced into marriage by their parents. By portraying the young saint as willing to marry only in obedience to parental authority, clerical writers balance their narratives between supporting marriage as a good Christian life and sanctity as a reserve of the virginal and chaste. Could a young man or woman who wanted marriage be a saint?

As I noted at the outset of this chapter, Thomas Heffernan suggests that in rejecting their parents' wishes for marriage, female saints were following a common paradigm.⁴⁷ Yet several saints examined herein, who present a form of life familiar to the vast majority of medieval people, do not reject parental authority. While the common farmer or labourer could not associate with the lifestyle of royal and noble saints, the presentation of the married saint would appeal to the masses. Furthermore, the Church's attempt to appeal to wider audiences in the Later Middle Ages naturally led to an

⁴⁶ Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, p. 81.

⁴⁷ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, p. 188.

emphasis on married people, who represented the bulk of the Christian population.

Hedwig, Elisabeth, and Birgitta seemingly accepted marriage without confrontation with their parents. While Louis' *Vitae* do not address the issue of his marriage, it is doubtful that he, as a king, expected to remain unmarried.

Chapter 2: The Marriage Bed

Appropriate behaviour in medieval society, including sexual behaviour, was strictly defined by Church writers. The spiritual welfare of Christians required that Church authorities address all facets of moral life. And as a central aspect of human society, sexuality and reproduction garnered a good deal of attention. The recent works of James Brundage and Pierre Payer discuss some of this attention to sexual ethics. As the Church sought to develop a sexual morality in the early Middle Ages, a code of sexual behaviour described by Payer,¹ certain acceptable patterns and practices emerged. Brundage notes that two criteria affected acceptable times for sexual relations in these early medieval penitentials: a woman's physiological cycles and the Christian liturgical seasons.² Following all, or even a majority, of the proscriptions in the penitentials would result, suggests Brundage, in severely limited sexual relations between husband and wife. The sexual code of conduct established by the Church in the early medieval period was still endorsed in the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.

While accounts of medieval sanctity, commonly exemplified by virginal men and women in monasteries, rarely portray the married life, those *vitae* that do describe the married life and marital sexuality do not neglect the devotion and piety of their subjects. Marriage, including the worldly activities of sexual relations and child rearing, was often presented in medieval *vitae* as an interlude, a time between the virginal innocence of

¹ Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, p. 183. See my introduction above, pp. 13-14.

² Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 155. Brundage explores the presentation of marital sexuality in early medieval penitentials, see pp. 154-164. Besides women's physiological cycle and Church holy seasons, miscellaneous requirements, such as positions, attire, and time of day, also affected sexual

youth and the devout chastity of old age or widowhood. The saintly men and women studied in this thesis, however, often practice their spiritual vocation during marriage. The conjugal bed rarely limits the saints' ability to fulfil their religious devotion and ascetic practices. Following the guidelines for proper sexual behaviour, the saint could fulfil all the roles of medieval marriage: spouse, parent, and dutiful Christian.

Silesia, a small region centred on the Oder River in western Poland, was home to one of medieval Eastern Europe's most important saints. Hedwig, little known beyond Germany and Poland today, was related to much of the Eastern and Central European aristocracy. Widely venerated in Poland and Silesia, Hedwig attracted the support of both the lay and ecclesiastical hierarchies as well as support from the populace of the region. As duchess of Silesia she was a strong supporter of mendicant friars, Cistercian houses, and other religious foundations. So too was her husband, Henry. In the years following her death in 1243 support grew for her canonisation; in 1263 she joined the ranks of saints. As noted in chapter one, in 1186 Hedwig had been given in marriage, at the will of her parents, to Duke Henry. Unlike many *vitae*, Hedwig's addresses her conjugal life with Henry in detail. André Vauchez argues that she is the only real example of conjugal chastity among saints in the Middle Ages and devotes a chapter to her in his *The Laity in the Middle Ages*.³ Yet what exactly do we see in Hedwig's *Vita* that makes her such a singular example? After introducing her family and quickly discussing her childhood, Simon of Trebnitz discusses her marriage. Simon shows her sanctity even in the marriage bed:

While bound by the conjugal chain, [Hedwig] strove to defend honourable

practices.

³ Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, pp. 185-190. While Vauchez notes Saints Omobono, Elisabeth, Louis, and Hedwig, most of his discussion focuses on the last.

marriage in accord with the doctrine of the Apostle,⁴ to preserve perfectly the pure marriage bed in all things, and to observe the laws and rights of matrimony. Hoping to attain salvation through the procreation of children, she wished to please God in her love of chastity. As far as she could at the appropriate time, and with the consent of her husband, she bound herself by the law of the chaste. So as soon as she felt she had conceived, she would then respectfully abstain from her husband's bed and from sexual relations [*ab eius copula*] up until the completion of her confinement. She began to observe that solemn law and virtuous custom after she conceived her first child, when she was thirteen years and thirteen weeks. She would not cease to observe these customs throughout her childbearing years.⁵

As we noted in the previous chapter, women married young and, in at least Hedwig's case, engaged in sexual relations upon or soon after marriage. Hedwig was probably married at twelve, the youngest possible age for marriage in the thirteenth century, and became pregnant soon after.

The tone of the passage suggests that Hedwig took special reverence in the practice of her marriage. We find, for example, a vague reference to her observing the "solemn law and virtuous custom." As noted at the outset of this chapter, the early medieval penitentials define appropriate sexual behaviour. This behaviour is presented in Hedwig's *Vita*:

After Hedwig conceived her children, she desired not only to live continently for the rest of her life, but by her wholesome counsel and exhortations, also persuaded her noble husband to willingly observe continence with her. They abstained from conjugal relations every year for Advent, Lent, Ember days, saints' vigils and solemnities, on Fridays, and on the Lord's Day. She did not think that veneration shown to the saints was pleasing to nor fasting accepted by God if they were practised in carnal delights. For that reason she often abstained from sexual relations [*a carnali copula*] with her consort for a month, sometimes for six or eight weeks, although at that time they were united in one bed.⁶

Hedwig, not surprisingly, urged Henry to engage in sexual abstinence, or marital chastity,

⁴ "...in accord with the doctrine of the Apostle," refers to the Apostle Paul's letter I Corinthians 7: 1-11. See introduction, pp. 14-15.

with her. She showed respect for Christian holy days and saints' feasts by leading her husband to sexual continence at the appropriate times. Simon points out that Hedwig and Henry "were united in one bed;" conjugal chastity did not require separation from a spouse, simply restraint. While they abstained from sexual relations they still lived as husband and wife. After twenty-three years of marriage, Henry and Hedwig took a vow of chastity in 1209; Henry died nearly thirty years later in 1238.

Hedwig educated others to the ways of conjugal chastity. She instructed "her daughter-in-law, the lady Anna ... to observe this custom of [marital] continence."⁷ Saint Elisabeth, Hedwig's niece, also followed the example of her aunt as a devout wife and exemplar of female sanctity. Unlike Hedwig's marriage though, Elisabeth's was short-lived as Louis died within six years of their marriage.⁸ Elisabeth was better known for her virtues after marriage, yet it is those brief years of her marriage with which we are concerned here. Elisabeth's short *Vita* found in Jacobus of Voragine's *Golden Legend*, which reached a far larger audience than the longer *Vita*, offers a glimpse at Louis and Elisabeth's physical relationship.⁹ Elisabeth, we are told:

... consented to conjugal intercourse, not out of libidinous desire but out of respect for her father's command, and in order to procreate and raise children for the service of God. Thus, while bound by the law of the conjugal bed, she was not bound to enjoyment. This is obvious from the fact that she made a vow in Master Conrad's hands, that if she survived her husband she would practice continence for the rest of her life.¹⁰

⁵ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, pp. 101-102.

⁶ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, pp. 102-103.

⁷ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 102.

⁸ Vauchez, *The Laity in the Middle Ages*, p. 185.

⁹ Reames, *The Legenda Aurea*, pp. 3-4. See my discussion on the *Golden Legend* in the introduction, pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 304. "Master Conrad was a very poor man but was known for his knowledge and piety," see p. 305. Master Conrad was Elisabeth's confessor; descriptions in the *Golden Legend* suggest he was a rather brutal man, see especially p. 679.

Jacobus discusses further Elisabeth's virtues and dedication to prayer. When he returns to her married life he notes that Elisabeth often avoided Louis' bed, indicating that she, like Hedwig, followed a regime of sexual abstinence. Dietrich von Apolda's longer *Vita* also addresses the sexual relations between Elisabeth and Louis, stressing that an "honourable marriage and pure bed was between them, [established] not in lust but in holy marital chastity."¹¹ Elisabeth's longer *Vita* also notes her propensity for late night vigils. While she was concerned about the loss of her bodily integrity (her virginity), as a wife and mother, she did urge Louis to embrace conjugal chastity. Louis was not ignorant of his wife's dedication to her faith and is portrayed as a pious and understanding husband: "Frequently when she rose at night, [although] with his [full] approval, he pitied her frailty and begged her not to afflict herself unwisely."¹² While embracing a regime of prayer and asceticism, Louis did not match his wife's devotion. Nonetheless, his piety and support of Elisabeth is apparent.

Referring to Elisabeth's devotions and ascetic practices, Jacobus notes that the "landgrave was tolerant of all this and said that he would gladly do the same himself if he were not afraid of upsetting the whole household."¹³ After another long discussion of Elisabeth's piety, Jacobus returns to Louis, noting that he happily allowed her freedom to follow her devotion at will. Dietrich discusses Louis' piety and virtues over several sections of Elisabeth's *Vita*.¹⁴ Concerning their marriage, much of what appears about

¹¹ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 34. "Erat inter eos honorabile connubium et thorus immaculatus, non in ardore libidinis sed in coniugalis sanctimonia castatis."

¹² Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 34. "Multotiens autem cum ipso surgeret annuente eius teneritudini compatiens petiit ab ea, ne se affligeret indiscrete."

¹³ Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 306.

¹⁴ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, pp. 48-54. Three sections are dedicated to Louis, including one on his purity, one on his morals, and one on his pious works, in the third book of Elisabeth's *Vita*.

Louis is the same in both the short and long versions. In both accounts, for example, Elisabeth is roused from sleep late at night to pray by one of her maids. The maid, who woke Elisabeth nightly for her prayers, unexpectedly awakened Louis one particular evening:

It happened once by accident that the venerable Ysentrud untied the chains of the sleeping man. Though he was awakened, he bore this patiently, knowing his wife's great devotion. And thus awakened, Elisabeth rose and got out of bed for her tireless vigils, and, as often happened, she fell asleep while praying on the carpet before his bed.¹⁵

In the *Golden Legend* account, while Louis was awakened by Ysentrud, he feigned sleep and did not disturb his wife's devotions.¹⁶ Dietrich's portrayal of Louis reveals that husbands, worldly attachments, and temptations to sexual sin, need not be obstacles to pious devotion and sanctity.

There is little to suggest that during their marriage Elisabeth's devotions were hampered. Elisabeth fulfilled the role of wife, mother, and great lady and Louis is repeatedly portrayed as understanding and supportive.¹⁷ Elisabeth certainly did take advantage of Louis' absence to embrace her devotion wholeheartedly. When, for example, Louis accompanied the emperor for two years abroad, Elisabeth began to give more alms: "Then the merciful Elisabeth, moved by compassion for the poor, gave the paupers the alms collected from her granges throughout the year."¹⁸ Nonetheless, Elisabeth's and Louis' relationship is presented as a loving one. On Louis' return from a

¹⁵ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 35. "Accidit ergo per errorem, ut venerabilis Ysentrudis pedicam viri traheret dormientis. Qui evigilans coniugisque devocionem cognoscens sustulit pacienter. Itaque excitata surgens cum indefessis excubaret vigiliis, evenit frequenter, ut ante lectum viri super tapete orando prolixius obdormiret."

¹⁶ Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 678.

¹⁷ Jacobus of Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, pp. 679-680. Dietrich, *Die Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 35.

¹⁸ Dietrich, *Die Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, pp. 55-56. "Tunc misericors Elyzabeth miserorum compassione permota omnem annonam de suis grangiis collectam in pauperum elemosinas erogavit."

visit to the emperor's court we read:

When, moreover, the Landgrave returned from the emperor after many months of wandering, all the earth rejoiced, welcoming its prince with immeasurable joy. The prince's mother and brothers rejoiced greatly, but the Lady Elisabeth rejoiced more than all others.¹⁹

As Atkinson notes, Elisabeth had lived with Louis' family from the age of four until their marriage some ten years later.²⁰ Did Louis and Elisabeth know each other prior to their marriage? Did the bond between them, even in the short five years of their marriage, grow into love? The sacrament of marriage and the love each feels for the other is blessed in the marriage bed.

Knowing, moreover, that the pious prince, for whom her soul longed, was returning, she became accustomed to dressing properly and regally. She said: 'I apply these trappings to my body, not for carnal lust or ecstasy of mind, but purely for Christ's love. Thus, I remove the occasion of sin, so that he may love only me with marital and licit affection in the Lord, so that we may thus also hope to be united in the bond of eternal life to the one who blessed the sacrament of marriage.'²¹

Within this marriage a positive role is ascribed to both husband and wife, and their relationship includes a strong bond of love and faith. Does this appear in other married saints' *vitae*? In the case of Duke Henry, mentioned above, there is little discussion of his devotion. Simon of Trebnitz describes Henry as the "magnificent prince," however, Henry himself is not presented as an extremely devout person. He did consent, according to Hedwig's *Vita*, to abstain from sex during the appropriate times and eventually took a

¹⁹ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 58. "Cum autem post multos menses ab imperatore lantgravius redisset, *exultavit tota terra*, principem suum cum inestimabili gaudio suscipiens letabunda. Gaudebant precipue mater et fratres, sed iocundabatur domina Elyzabeth super omnes."

²⁰ Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) p. 165.

²¹ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 39. "Cognoscens autem, quod rediret, *quem desiderabat anima eius*, princeps pius, ornare decenter et regaliter se consuevit. Dicebat enim: 'Non pro carnis libidine et mentis elacione, sed pure pro Christi caritate hec corpori meo ornamenta adhibeo, quatenus displicencie peccatique occasionem tollam, ut me solam in domino affectu maritali diligit et licito sicque ad eo, qui sacramentum sanctificavit coniugii, eterne vite consortium pariter expectemus.'

vow of marital continence.²² Nonetheless, Hedwig's hagiographer does not put aside his subject, as does Elisabeth's, to describe Duke Henry's virtues.

Birgitta's religious devotion and ascetic practices were not suppressed during her marriage and Ulf appears as a respectable husband and companion. We read that Birgitta, during "her husband's life ... made confession every Friday and after his death she made it every day."²³ When an apparition of Ulf appears to Birgitta after his death, he reveals that he too confessed every Friday during their marriage. This, in fact, was one of the six virtues that ensured Ulf's salvation.²⁴ Together, Ulf and Birgitta had a good marriage and, rather than abandoning each other immediately after their children were born, they travelled on pilgrimage together before entering into separate monasteries.²⁵ While the last few years of their marriage were spent apart, Birgitta's *Vita* indicates that their life together was filled with religious practice. Her *Vita* does not, however, reveal a systematic pattern of sexual behaviour.

Some typically medieval ideals, however, are presented in this text. After their wedding, for example, Ulf and Birgitta did not engage in sexual relations immediately: "For two years after their marriage they lived together virginally."²⁶ James Brundage notes that newlyweds in medieval Europe were expected to abstain for several days; Birgitta and Ulf more than fulfilled that requirement.²⁷ Even when Birgitta and Ulf decided to have children, "they made devout prayers to almighty God that he would keep

²² *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 102.

²³ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 23.

²⁴ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 27.

²⁵ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 20.

²⁶ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 16.

²⁷ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 162. See figure 4.1.

them without sin in the act of matrimony.”²⁸ While the detail of days of abstinence noted in Hedwig’s *Vita* above do not appear in Birgitta’s *Vita*, the caution and solemnity that Birgitta and Ulf display when approaching sexual relations is noteworthy. Specific days for sexual abstinence are not presented to the audience, yet the ideal of passionless and functional sex is apparent. Although sexual relations in Birgitta’s and Ulf’s marriage are presented as passionless, their marriage, with the attendant religious duties of confession and pilgrimage, appears as a positive aspect of Birgitta’s life.

Saint Louis, as a king and the subject of four different *vitae*, is an interesting example of medieval marriage ideals. John of Joinville virtually ignores Louis’ married life. None of the *vitae*, as noted in the first chapter, deal with the making of Louis’ and Marguerite’s marriage. Turning to their sexual relations, however, we do find some patterns similar to those in Hedwig’s and Birgitta’s *vitae*.²⁹ Geoffrey of Beaulieu indicates that Louis practised those same days of abstention as Hedwig, as noted above:

With the consent of his wife the Queen, throughout Advent and Lent, they mutually abstained from sexual relations: and likewise certain days every week, similarly during vigils and greater feast days. Moreover he abstained on solemnities, when he was to receive communion, as well as several days prior to communion, and several after, out of reverence for the sacred Mystery.³⁰

Interestingly, Geoffrey also notes the attitude towards sexual activity and the Eucharist.

As Payer indicates, early medieval penitentials occasionally cite the time before and after

²⁸ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 15-16. The Middle English version of the passage “the act of matrimony” reads the exact same as Holloway’s translation with variances in spelling only. See “A Life of St Bridget, supposed to be written by the author of the mirror,” in *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, p. xlviij.

²⁹ Labarge, *Saint Louis*, pp. 54-57, 210-211. Labarge discusses something of Louis and Marguerite’s relationship, however, sexuality is not addressed directly.

³⁰ Geoffrey of Beaulieu, *Vita S. Ludovici Regis*, p. 545. “De consensus uxoris suae reginae, per totum Adventum, et per totam Quadragesimam, ad opere carnali mutuo continebant: et nihilominus certis aliquot diebus qualibet septimana, similiter in vigiliis et diebus magnorum festorum. Insuper in solemnitatibus, in quibus communicare debebat, pluribus diebus ante communionem, et pluribus post, ob reverentiam sacri

communion as appropriate for sexual abstinence. Sexual activity could disrupt the ritual purity required for participation in the Eucharist and other holy rites.³¹

William of Saint-Pathus' version of Louis' *Vita* also lists days on which Louis abstained from sexual relations with Marguerite. Advent, Lent, several days prior to and after communion and other feast days are listed.³² While John of Joinville says nothing about these days of abstention, or about the relationship between Louis and Marguerite, it is interesting that both William and Geoffrey present these standard days of sexual abstinence. William portrays Louis as so reserved that he is wary of time spent with female companions other than his wife. It is again emphasised that Louis avoided sexual relations with Marguerite on Lent, as well as Fridays and Saturdays.³³ As the King of France, Louis garnered a lot of attention for his political life and his crusading life. Interestingly, William notes that Louis avoids physical relations with his wife during Lent and several days a week; nonetheless, there is no mention of their time together on these occasions. Perhaps this holidays were dedicated to family which could signify Louis' awareness of the need for a stable family life and environment for his children. Presumably well-aware of the Church's expectations for family life, Louis attempted to foster the union with his wife and strengthen his role as father and patriarch of the family.

Mysterii continebat.”

³¹ Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials*, pp. 25, 62. Brundage discusses the issue of sex as a pollutant. Ritual purity required, for example, that married couples abstain from sex on Sundays. See *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 157-158.

³² William of Saint-Pathus, *Vie de Saint Louis*, p. 129. “Et encores li benoiez sainz Loys se contenoit par tout l’Avent et par toute la Quarantaine, et avecques ce en certain jours chascune semaine, et ausi es vegiles et es jours des granz festes, et par desus ce, es jours des festes es queles il avoit acoustumé a recevoir le vrai cors Nostre Seigneur, par plusieurs jours devant la communion et plusieurs jours après.”

³³ William of Saint-Pathus, *Vie de Saint Louis*, p. 130. “Toute netee fu eu saint roy, ne onques el tens que il crut, nee u tens de sa jouvente, ne en nul tens cil qui avecques lui furent es tens desus diz et qui longuement converserent avecques lui, ne porent veoir ne apercevoir que li benoiez rois eust nule familiarité ne soupeonneuse conversacion avecques nule femme autre que le seue, ne onques il n’oïrent dire ne detrere aucune parole de s’incontinence. Et en toute le tens de Quaresme et en touz les jours de vendredi et de

Louis' virtuous behaviour, however, went beyond the marriage bed, revealing that sanctity is not limited by the institution of marriage. Louis, for example, humbled himself by washing the feet of the poor: "For he was accustomed to washing the feet of the poor (on his knees) in a secret place every Saturday; and after washing [their feet], he would then kiss them."³⁴ In this Louis emulated Jesus in the classic scene from the Gospel of John: "And now, rising from supper, [Jesus] laid his garments aside, took a towel, and put it about him; and then he poured water into the basin, and began to wash the feet of his disciples, wiping them with the towel that girded him."³⁵ Saint Louis goes to "a secret place," quietly practising humility, one of the highest virtues. Louis' religious practices are not limited by his marriage, and acts of humility and charity abounds in his *Vita*.

Yvette's *Vita*, unlike all those discussed thus far, presents a bleak picture of married life. As Yvette had predicted, her dislike of marriage grew into a festering hatred: "And she learned from experience what she had guessed to be true from the beginning. She began to abhor the customs of marriage and to detest all copulation with her husband."³⁶ Yvette's lot only became worse as time went on. She tried to maintain "the integrity of her pure heart," but was weakened by "the world and the ways of the conjugal order."³⁷ Unlike our previous examples who either mutually abstain from sexual intercourse for the early part of their marriage, as in the case of Birgitta and Ulf, or abstain for holy days, as in the case of Hedwig and Henry, Yvette seems to have had no

samedi li benoiez rois se tenoit de la compaignie de la royne."

³⁴ William of Saint-Pathus, *Vie De Saint Louis*, p. 104. "Car il avoit acoustumé chascun samedi a laver les piez as povres a genoz en lieu secrés, et après laver, essuier les et besier humblement." Delaborde notes that this scene is represented in the Sainte Chapelle and in the convent of the Cordeliers in Lorraine; see note 1 in Delaborde's introduction.

³⁵ John 13: 4-6.

³⁶ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yevtte of Huy*, p. 41.

³⁷ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 41.

respite from the conjugal debt. Hugh of Floreffe describes the emotional response triggered in Yvette as a result of sexual relations: “She began to hate the payment of the conjugal debt so much that she longed to be freed of her husband.”³⁸ In a state of desperation, Yvette began to pray for the death of her husband.

Her struggle against the expectations of family and the marital duty of sexual relations resulted in a completely negative presentation of marriage in her *Vita*. Shortly before the death of her husband, which occurred five years after their marriage, she underwent a conversion. She turned her life away from thoughts of her husband’s death and “she resolved to rekindle the fires of charity within herself.”³⁹ Unlike the other saints discussed, Yvette’s married life did not include extraordinary religious or ascetic devotions. The only theme discussed by her biographer, Hugh of Floreffe, during her married life is the pain and suffering of the conjugal bed. Yvette’s stand against remarriage, in which she emphasised her devotion to God, is the first explicit appearance of her piety.⁴⁰

The relationship between spouses was central to the medieval family. For Louis and Hedwig specific holy days are listed as times of abstinence from sexual relations between spouses. While Birgitta’s and Elisabeth’s marriages are both reserved and solemn when the conjugal duty is fulfilled, we do not see in their lives the same detail as appears in Louis and Hedwig’s *vitae*. Yvette’s *Vita*, on the other hand, presents the conjugal duty as a frightening and taxing role. While her husband does not fully enter the

³⁸ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 42.

³⁹ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 42-43.

⁴⁰ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 45-46. Yvette does convert before the death of her husband, desiring to “rekindle the fires of charity within herself.” This is, however, only the beginning of her conversion, thus she did not fully embrace religious devotion until after the death of her husband when the threat of remarriage presented itself.

story, (we do not even have his name) he and the conjugal life for which he stands are presented as debased. As noted at the outset the early medieval penitentials address the issue of sexual behaviour. Brundage notes that “[s]exual offenses constituted the largest single category of behavior that the penitentials treated.”⁴¹ Gratian, the twelfth-century canonist, indicates that the payment of the conjugal debt is more important than the periodic abstentions.⁴² As the saint’s *vitae* reveal the continued concern for the days of continence, this raises questions about the later medieval pastoral and penitential literature. Do Robert of Flamborough and Raymond of Peñafort deal with the days of continence? Do they suggest times and forms of appropriate behaviour?

Pastoral manuals, suggests Jacqueline Murray, aid priests and confessors in the *cura animarum*, or the cure of souls. “Thus, they present a mixture of the theoretical and the practical, in a manner which allows insights into attitudes and values of both the leaders of the medieval church and the faithful to whom they ministered.”⁴³ When discussing marriage itself, Robert does not address topics relating to sexual relations. Rather he focuses on the impediments to marriage. When one turns, however, to the section “De Fornicatione” the parallels with earlier penitentials are obvious. A brief section, for example, is devoted to the penance for sexual relations during Lent:

He who knows his wife during Lent and refuses to abstain from her shall do penance for one year, or make payment, namely a sum of twenty-five solidi, to the Church or to be divided among the paupers. If it is done through drunkenness and is not habit, penance shall be done for forty

⁴¹ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 153. For his discussion on penitential literature see pp. 152-169.

⁴² Gratian, *Decretum*, col. 1250, causa 33, Q. IV, C. 11. “Hec autem seruanda sunt, si uxor consensum adhibere voluerit; ceterum sine eius consensus nec causo orationis continentia seruari debet.” Several passages leading up to this Gratian notes the times of abstinence in sexual relations. See also Brundage, *Sex, Law, and Christian Society*, p. 242.

⁴³ Murray, “The Perceptions of Sexuality,” p. 2.

days.⁴⁴

While some leniency is applied for the sin committed under the influence of alcohol, it is, nonetheless, a hefty penance. While sexual relations in forbidden times may have constituted fornication for Robert of Flamborough, this pattern does not appear in Raymond of Peñafort's *Summa de matrimonio*.⁴⁵ The common feature of sexual rules in the early medieval penitentials does not continue in the two later medieval *summae confessorum* studied herein.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, this material was known to clerical writers, specifically hagiographers, of the later Middle Ages. Thus, the idea of certain periods for sexual abstinence was still present in the *vitae* of twelfth through fourteenth centuries.

During the early Middle Ages the ideals of and requirements for sexual relations in Christian society were being developed and by the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth century these requirements were well established. The marriage bed provided the opportunity for husband and wife to propagate not only the medieval family but also medieval Christendom. Within legitimate marriage and following appropriate sexual behaviour, sexual relations could be a healthy part of the medieval family and marriage. The ideal marriage, as portrayed in saints' *vitae*, also reveals that religious devotion did not necessarily suffer within the conjugal union. While the next chapter will explore the

⁴⁴ Robert of Flamborough, *Liber Poenitentialis*, p. 243. "Qui in quadragesima cognoverit uxorem suam et noluerit abstinere ab ea unum annum poeniteat, aut pretium, videlicet viginti quinque solidorum, ad ecclesiam tribuat aut pauperibus dividat. Si per ebrietatem et sine consuetudine acciderit, quadraginta dies poeniteat."

⁴⁵ None of the texts contained in the *Sancti Raymundi Summa*, including *Summa de matrimonio*, *poenitentia*, and *canonico*, refers to times of sexual abstinence. As well, I have consulted the decretals of Gregory IX, compiled by Raymond, which also does not refer to times of sexual abstinence in marriage. Payer suggests that Raymond's discussion of marital sexuality revolves around "four reasons" for sexual relations: for the sake of children, for the sake of the conjugal debt, to stem incontinence/fornication, and in order to satisfy lust. See *Bridling Desire*, pp. 85-86.

⁴⁶ For the early penitential literature see Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials* and Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 152-175.

asceticism of life after sexual relations, it has been shown here that religious devotion was not necessarily curtailed by marriage. Yvette's *Vita* and troubled marriage aside, the conjugal life was not shunned in medieval society, even by the chaste clerical writers who addressed the issue; for the laity of medieval Europe the stories of saints could enlighten and encourage them in their life.

Chapter 3: After the Marriage Bed

The study of widows has allowed historians to fill many of the lacunae in the history of medieval women. Noticeably invisible in most medieval sources, widows do appear in wills, court records, and some other sources. The contemporary study of medieval widowhood, however, has generally focused on women alone. Men too lost spouses and became widowers. The theme of widowhood neatly captures the time after the death of a spouse; it does not, however, address where married life continues but sexual relations have ceased. Medieval widowhood was typically a time when a woman undertook religious devotion either in a monastery or in a Beguinage (predominantly in the Low Countries), or, in some cases, widows remained within the community. Men typically remarried. The problem of examining medieval widowers, namely their invisibility in the sources, will be addressed below. While the *vitae* studied herein portray life after marriage as the time of ascetic practice and devotion, those holy indicators, as noted in the previous chapter, are not absent during the married life of the saint. With the exception of Yvette, the saints' *vitae* studied herein reveal that holy men and women were able to balance their religious life of devotion and piety with their married life of sexuality and marital love.

While a balance was often achieved in married life, as the previous chapter has shown, medieval hagiographers presented their subjects as moving beyond a balance of devotion and worldly duty to a state of spiritual perfection. The saint achieved perfection in his or her religious works, such as charities, and in his or her devotions and prayers.

This chapter, therefore, studies the life of the saint after sexual relations have ended, whether through widowhood or consensual continence. Life after sexual relations provides a landmark in the life of the saint, for it was sexual relations that were considered the principal threat to the spiritual purity of married people. Abandoning the “act of matrimony,” whether as a result of widowhood or during marriage, allows the saint to enhance his or her spiritual practices. That rejection is accompanied by renewed relationships between saint and spouse as well as between saint and children. Does the saint necessarily reject spouse and children in striving for spiritual perfection? Can a more intense state of spiritual devotion co-exist with a family life? While some saints ceased sexual relations within marriage, two of the examples studied herein, Elisabeth of Thuringia and Yvette of Huy, were widowed before spiritual marriage could begin.¹

We learn in the opening of Yvette’s *Vita* that her conversion, her religious life, “began after the death of her husband.”² Yvette’s father, however, wanted her to remarry in order “to extend his posterity.” Yvette would not consider remarriage and so her father enlisted the aid of Bishop Radulph of Liège. When Yvette was brought before the bishop he quietly spoke with her, “as though to comfort her,” and argued the case for her remarriage. Yvette, only eighteen, refuted his arguments and expressed her desire to remain a widow. Bishop Radulph was eventually swayed by her arguments (and “the favour of divine clemency [which] shone down from above”) and accepted her vow of chaste widowhood. Furthermore, he “became her helper and protector against the

¹ Spiritual marriage refers here to non-sexually active marriage. Following Dyan Elliott’s category (see *Spiritual Marriage*, see pp. 4-5) two saints studied herein lived the married life without sexual relations; two were widowed before they engaged in non-sexual marriage; Saint Louis does not appear to have engaged in spiritual marriage and he himself died prior to Marguerite.

² Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 36.

persuasions and advice of her adversaries.”³ For a young widow of an important family, remarriage was a common practice. Yvette had two surviving children, and was thus assuredly fertile, and was the daughter of a well-to-do father, an important administrator for the bishop of Liège. Yvette was a good prospect for remarriage.

Nonetheless, she withstood her father’s attempt to remarry her and looked forward to the life of a devout widow. Yvette lived as a widow for several years; however, she was unsatisfied with her charity:

... she remained as a widow in the town for about five years after her husband’s death, taking care of the house and her sons, whom she educated in the fear of the Lord as carefully as she could. For though fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, charity which casts out fear was not yet perfect in her.⁴

She then gave away as much as she could, but still found it difficult to “live among the worldly and not be worldly.” In order to remove herself completely from the world, Yvette moved to a leprosarium on the river Meuse outside the walls of Huy. She remained there for eleven years.⁵ Yvette embraced the leprous willingly: “she wished to humiliate herself with the bedridden, humbly serving their needs so that this daily service might always make her even more humble within as represented without by the ministry to the vile.”⁶ But this life still failed to satisfy Yvette’s spiritual needs.

Leaving the leprosarium, Yvette set about becoming an anchoress. “Abandoning the service of Martha, she determined to choose only the higher part, the service of Mary.” After serving the lepers (as Martha served Jesus), Yvette set about to focus more

³ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 44-46.

⁴ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 53.

⁵ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 60-61.

⁶ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 61.

on the contemplative side of her vocation.⁷ A heavy guilt, however, hung over Yvette after she became an anchoress. She had never confessed her sin committed during her marriage, namely wishing the death of her husband. Yvette's guilt was assuaged by a vision, the vision of her judgement, which ended with the Virgin Mary pleading for Yvette. Jesus accepted his mother's plea, saying: "And you must keep her and protect and rule her as your own."⁸ While Yvette's sin was a great one, her ascetic practices, charity, and prayers, helped to ensure her salvation. The vision shows that she moved beyond that sin: "she had proceeded no small way toward perfecting her virtues and later was made more careful in her deeds [and thoughts]."⁹ Yvette spent the major part of her life as a devout widow serving her fellow Christians and living in contemplation as an anchoress.

Upon the death of her husband Yvette dedicated herself not only to good works but also to her children. The elder son went on to "study letters" while the younger stayed with her. A recent study of the life of Yvette focuses, rightly, on her role as a mother and her religious vocation after marriage.¹⁰ Yvette's temporary hope for her husband's death, argues Carpenter, "points to considerable emotional disturbance."¹¹ Yvette's marriage was treated by her hagiographer and, in all likelihood, by Yvette herself, as a brief interruption in her life. Both of Yvette's two surviving children (a third died sometime during her marriage) became monks of the Cistercian order, as did her father. Yvette and her father reconciled any lingering tensions from the forced marriage. Her father entered the religious life himself, became a pilgrim, and ended his days in the monastery of

⁷ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 67. The story of Martha and Mary prompted many medieval writers to view physical service as good but contemplation as better; see Luke 10: 38-42.

⁸ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 70-71.

⁹ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, p. 71.

¹⁰ Jennifer Carpenter, "Yvette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228): Children and Mothering in the Sainly Life," in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. J. Carpenter & Sally-Beth MacLean, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995) pp. 57-93.

Villers.¹² The elder son went to the monastery of Orval leaving Yvette to worry about the younger, who lived a rather depraved life. The younger son appears briefly to be admonished by his mother. He returned, however, to his sinful ways: "Rumours spread and the news flew to the mother about the perdition of her son."¹³ He eventually reformed his life after speaking with his mother and receiving a vision of hell. His years were spent in the Cistercian monastery at Trois-Fontaines where he died as a humble and devout priest.¹⁴

Yvette succeeded in her role as mother even though her marriage was not a positive part of her life. Life during marriage, the life these saints experienced as engaged within the world, included the experience of children. As one of the three goods of marriage, progeny were another outlet by which a person could become sanctified. The portrayal of Yvette's widowhood, however, focused on her role as religious figure. As Carpenter notes, Yvette tried to escape the worldly attachments of her family. At the leper colony, however, Yvette continued in her maternal role by becoming a spiritual mother to those lepers in her care.¹⁵ Yvette's sons ended their days in the religious life and, thus, Yvette succeeded in her role as mother. She spread the Christian faith by rearing two sons who became monks. She guided her father in his transition from the worldly to the religious life. Her own life, full of suffering as a wife and a mother, achieved sanctification in her later life and allowed her to join the host of saints in heaven.¹⁶

¹¹ Carpenter, "Julette of Huy," p. 64.

¹² Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette*, p. 66.

¹³ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette*, pp. 77-78.

¹⁴ Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette*, pp. 79-82.

¹⁵ Carpenter, "Julette of Huy," p. 75. See Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, pp. 60-62.

¹⁶ See Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation* for a discussion of the later medieval development of physical motherhood as a holy vocation; pp. 144-193.

Birgitta and Ulf, who, as noted in the previous chapter, had a beneficial marriage, prayed to God that He “keep them without sin in the act of matrimony;” they prayed that their sexual relations be without the lust and sinfulness so feared by clerical writers. Together Ulf and Birgitta had eight children.¹⁷ Two, Benedict and Ingeborg, did not survive their youth. Two sons became knights and, interestingly, travelled with Birgitta on pilgrimage. One of Birgitta’s daughters, Catherine, “lived with her husband in complete virginity,” while another, Cecilia, is not discussed after her birth.¹⁸ Catherine was also regarded as a holy woman and performed several miracles while in Rome.¹⁹ Birgitta and Ulf instilled a religious devotion in their children; even the two boys who remained in the world as knights accompanied Birgitta on pilgrimage as their father had done. One daughter took a vow of chastity with her husband and together they remained virginal in their marriage.

Saint Birgitta’s married life ended in 1344 upon Ulf’s death after twenty-five years of marriage. Birgitta lived during her widowhood as a pilgrim; however, prior to undertaking this way of life she settled her worldly affairs:

After her husband’s death, Saint Birgitta turned all her will to God’s and proposed to forsake all worldly pleasure for the love of God. With the assistance and grace of our Lord, she decided to live in chaste widowhood all her life and she continually made her prayer to almighty God that she know by what way she might best please him. Subsequently she gave all her lands and goods to her children and to poor men so that she might follow the Lord in poverty. She reserved for herself only what which would simply and humbly serve her for meat, and drink so that thereby she might live in a simple condition.²⁰

¹⁷ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, p. 16.

¹⁸ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 16-20. Catherine reappears several times with Birgitta as a travelling companion. The births and lives of Gudmar and Martha are noticeably absent.

¹⁹ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 18-19.

²⁰ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 20-21.

After discussing Birgitta's marriage to Ulf and the relations with her children, her biographer, Birger Gregersson, goes on to discuss Birgitta's virtues and asceticism, as well as her miracles. In 1346 Birgitta set out for Rome as a pilgrim, accompanied by two "spiritual fathers." She remained in Rome, apart from the time she made other pilgrimages, for the rest of her life, living as a pauper and increasing the austerity of her vigils, fasts, and abstentions.²¹

Birgitta's widowhood was marked by an austere lifestyle, visions, and good works. The ascetic practices she had followed during her married life were exceeded in her widowhood. For Birgitta the life of widowhood was less about being free of her husband and more about the extra time she could devote to her religious vocation. I would argue that the short life span for men in medieval times due either to violence (war) or poor health (diet, disease) has led historians to view widowhood as a period of freedom for the medieval woman. For the medieval man or woman the life after marriage or after the cessation of conjugal relations was less about being free from the spouse than about being free for the devotions to God which may have been neglected (excusably so) during their married life.

Like Birgitta and Ulf, Hedwig and Henry began living apart in later life, perhaps at Hedwig's urging: "Comforted by the Spirit of God for thirty years, they began to live apart in celibacy adorned marvellously by the beauty of chastity."²² They had fulfilled the role of progenitors of Christians and dedicated their life after marital sexuality to religious devotion. Hedwig's relationship with Henry after they ceased physical relations suggests that their relationship had not developed into a loving bond to the same extent as

²¹ Gregersson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 21-22.

²² *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 103.

that between Birgitta and Ulf. Wary of rumour about their devotion and chastity, Hedwig avoided her husband's company unless it was absolutely necessary: "She would not visit him, nor would she, in any respect, speak to him except to promote pious works to him, or to discuss matters of religious or needy persons."²³ And even when she did visit with Henry she always ensured that there were chaperons present. Was Hedwig's caution in visiting Henry meant to protect their reputations or did it reflect a desire to sever worldly relationships?

After her separation from Henry, Hedwig's life became more centred on the monastery of Trebnitz and the women for whom she became a spiritual mother.²⁴ As noted in the previous chapter, Hedwig took care not only of her own children but of those young women who were brought to her. Hedwig's *Vita* describes her actions within the framework of the classic medieval categories of sanctity. The virtues of humility, charity, and patience, for example, are dealt with in more detail than her family life:

Hedwig also strove diligently to preserve patience, that most necessary virtue for everyone, the escort and friend of humility, so that these virtues may possess her soul in accordance with the word of God. She did not get angry with anyone, or speak harsh words, but gently spoke consoling words to all, and was always pleasant to everyone, as was fitting given her religious maturity.²⁵

Hedwig's sanctity does not stem from her married life, but rather from the virtues she exhibits. Patience and humility guide her actions and her behaviour, and it is they, not

²³ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 104.

²⁴ The *Vita* does not indicate if Hedwig became a nun at the monastery at Trebnitz, though it seems likely that Hedwig's hagiographer would say that if she did. See *Vita Hedwigis*, p. 77. "Dum autem beata Hedwigis moraretur in claustris Trebnicansi, sororum quidem illarum induit habitum, sed ordini se non obligavit per votum, ne ligata per professionis obedienciam a pietatis operibus et a consolandis pauperibus oporteret eam de cetero existere elogatam."

²⁵ *Vita Hedwigis*, p. 80. "Pacienciam quoque, humilitatis comitem et amicam, summe necessariam omnibus, ut in ea suam possideant animam secundum verbum Domini studuit diligentissime conservare nulli umquam irascens aut dure respondens, sed omnes benigne alloquens verbis

marriage and sexuality, which are treated as her chief route to sanctity. These family matters, which may have received attention in the *Vita* for the benefit of the patron who requested the text, reveal some of the ideals of marriage and marital sanctity in medieval Europe. Nonetheless, while Hedwig's *Vita* reveals ideals of family and married life, its focus is the virtues of Christian faith.

Hedwig, like Yvette, acted as a mother to many more than her biological children. According to her *Vita*, Hedwig "took into her care many girls bereft of their parents and lacking in means." Her guidance of these young women emphasised two ways of life in medieval society: "Of them she enclosed some in the monastery as virgins, others she married off to preserve conjugal chastity. Thus serving Christ faithfully, they might hope for the hundred-fold fruit or the thirty-fold fruit from God."²⁶ She guided those women in the way of life that she herself engaged in, that of marital chastity, as well as the life of physical virginity. Hedwig also gathered widows "who prayed and fasted day and night" together. Thus, Hedwig engaged in spiritual and physical motherhood: "she shone even more with the splendour of her exemplary nature."²⁷ Nonetheless, in Hedwig's *Vita*, there is a surprising emphasis on both her extended and immediate family.

Hedwig and Henry had six children between their marriage in 1186 and 1209, when they took a vow of marital continence.²⁸ The eldest son, named Henry after his father, naturally "succeeded his father in rule" and died two years before his mother

consolatoriis se cunctis exhibebat affabilem semper, ut bene decebat, religosa maturitate adiuncta."

²⁶ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, pp. 105.

²⁷ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, pp. 106.

²⁸ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 102. Gottschalk argues that Hedwig and Henry had seven children even though only six are listed in her *Vita*, see *Die heilige Hedwig*, p. 323. Alban Butler also notes seven children, see *Butler's Lives of the Saints*, eds. H.J. Thurston & D. Attwater, Vol. IV, (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1981) pp. 124-125.

while defending Poland from invading Tartars.²⁹ Simon of Trebnitz also mentions a daughter, Gertrud, who became a nun of the Cistercian order: she followed “the pattern of her pious parents not in conjugal, but rather, in virginal purity.”³⁰ While Hedwig’s *Vita* does not discuss the lives of her children in detail, Simon does discuss the importance of lineage in family piety: “From such a holy root came great holy branches as well; *for every good tree bears good fruit.*”³¹ For Hedwig’s hagiography, family history and lineage were quite important.³² As Joseph Gottschalk notes, between “1150 and 1500 no less than twenty one saints arose in the Andechs family.”³³ The Andechs family rose to power under Frederick Barbarossa and established important connections throughout Europe. Hedwig’s immediate family included the Patriarch of Aquilea and two brothers who became lay rulers in Silesia. One sister became an abbess and another three married secular lords; one of the latter was the mother of Saint Elisabeth of Thuringia.³⁴ Another brother, Eckbert, became the Bishop of Bamberg.

Eckbert took his niece, Saint Elisabeth, into his home after her husband Louis’ death to marry her off to another appropriate suitor. Elisabeth had urged Louis, “a feal, devout, and blameless prince,” to go on crusade and pilgrimage in the Holy Land. Upon his death en route, Elisabeth “piously embraced the state of widowhood.”³⁵ Like Yvette, Elisabeth was pressed to remarry even though she desired chaste widowhood: “...by the

²⁹ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 103.

³⁰ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 103.

³¹ *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix, p. 103. See Matthew 7: 16-18.

³² See *Der Hedwigis – Codex von 1353, Sammlung Ludwig* for a family tree that accompanied her canonisation processes.

³³ Gottshalk, *St. Hedwig*, p. 322.

³⁴ For Hedwig’s immediate family, see *Vita Hedwigis*, appendix I, p. 101.

³⁵ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 681.

bishop's command, she was brought to a certain castle, there to await her marriage."³⁶

Dietrich shows that Elisabeth was aware of her uncle's desire to have her remarried:

Moreover, the venerable man [Bishop Eckbert], knowing that the apostle said, "I wish young widows to marry and bear children," considered uniting [Elisabeth] in marriage to some prince. And he did not conceal this from her.³⁷

Elisabeth overcame the campaign for her remarriage, as did Yvette. Elisabeth's life was filled with charity and humility. She abandoned the title of lady and laboured at the most menial of tasks and spent her widowhood in the labour of religious devotion and ascetic simplicity.

As noted in the previous chapter, Elisabeth was able to engage in religious devotions while married; nevertheless, her widowhood was marked by an escalation of charities and devotions:

Elisabeth, the servant of God, applied herself constantly to prayer; she cultivated works of charity and mercy. And those who were most oppressed by poverty, weakness or illness commanded her greatest devotion; taking them into her own hospice, she personally ministered to them most humbly.³⁸

Elisabeth's commitment to the poor and infirm was fostered in her widowhood and yet was possible during her marriage. Elisabeth's hagiographer does not suggest that Louis himself hindered her devotions but rather that all worldly attachments limit one's ability

³⁶ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 682. Note that in both Yvette's and Elisabeth's case a bishop intervened to aid the family in forcing the obstinate widow to remarry.

³⁷ Dietrich, *Die Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 75 "Sciens autem venerabilis vir, quia dicit apostolus 'adolescentiores viduas volo nubere et filios procreare,' cogitabat eam alicuius principis matrimonio copulare. Quod et ipsam non latuit." The biblical passage used by Dietrich here are taken from Saint Paul's letter I Tim. 5.

³⁸ Dietrich, *Die Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, pp. 90. "Incumbebat autem dei famula Elyzabeth oracioni assidue, exercebat opera caritatis et misericordie; et quos paupertas, debilitas vel infirmitas plus aliis opprimerat quosque devocio plus commendabat, in suo hospicio colligens ipsis in propria persona humillime ministrabat."

to focus on holy practices. Without the impediment of worldly attachments Elisabeth easily achieved sanctity and joined the hosts in heaven.

The mother of three children, Elisabeth of Thuringia was a model of devotion and charity for her children. For both Elisabeth and Yvette abandoning family ties, the corrupting influence of worldly concerns, was central to their later devotion. Elisabeth wanted to remove all worldly attachments from her life:

Then she said to her women: 'The Lord has heard my voice, and henceforth I count all timely goods as dung, I have no more concern for my children than for others, and I make no account of contempt and insults; for I wish it to be seen that I love none save only God!'³⁹

Her prayers and ascetic practices would have had quite an impact on children. Yet Elisabeth's widowhood did not involve her children. This prompts the question: how does Dietrich's longer version of Elisabeth's *Vita* portray the relationship between Elisabeth and her children?

Elisabeth's longer *Vita* offers a more positive view of the product of marriage. While Elisabeth married and thus remained in the world, her love for her husband both spiritually endangered the soul by leading the heart to lust, and also purified the sacrament of marriage. One of the three goods of marriage, procreation allows the married saint to show good faith by raising their children with the guidance of the Church; pious parenthood shows both the goodness of the parent and helps to further extend the goodness of the Church. The sacrament of marriage, that holy bond sustained by God (and, thus, unbreakable), is solidified by the procreation of children in the Christian faith and by the loving bond of a couple:

She did not lack in the principal good of marriage, which is the blessings of children. For God endowed her with a good gift, impregnating her

³⁹ Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 683.

womb with most noble offspring, so that she might avoid the stigma of sterility and enjoy the solace of children. For she gave birth to a son named Herman, who succeeded his father as Landgrave of Thuringia; and a daughter, who was given in marriage to the Duke of Brabant; and another daughter, who remained in the virginal state in the monastery of Aldenburch where she became a nun and today is the mother superior.⁴⁰

Dietrich emphasises that a good marriage is tied to procreation and pious parenthood.

Elisabeth's short lived marriage was sanctified by her children and her love for Louis.

Devout parenthood and marriage allowed Elisabeth to remain pure (though not a virgin) in married life. Her later asceticism was based on the separation from the worldly ties of family life.

Saint Louis' relationship with his children, as most of Louis' family life, is scarcely addressed in the various versions of his *Vita*. Louis did, however, write a book of "teachings" for his son Philip and "instructions" for his daughter Isabelle.⁴¹ These sources provide a rare opportunity to directly consider a saint's writings to his children. Isabelle, who died less than a year after Louis in 1271, watched her husband of sixteen years die along with her father and younger brother in his last Crusade.⁴² The *Instructions* to Isabelle, comprising a brief twenty-two paragraphs, reveal that religious devotion and pious behaviour was Louis' main concern for his children. After the initial greetings,

⁴⁰ Dietrich von Apolda, *Der Vita der heiligen Elisabeth*, p. 39. "Nec defuit ei bonum illud principale matrimonii, quo benedictionem in liberis consecuta est. Dotavit enim deus eam dote bona fecundans uterum eius sobole nobilissima, ut et sterilitatis careret obprobrio et liberorum frueretur solacio. Peperit enim filium Hermannum nomine, qui successor patris lantgravius fuit Thuringie, filiam quoque, quam duxit coniugem dux Brabantie, itemque aliam filiam, que in virginitate permanens in Aldenburch cenobio famulatur domino existens magistra monialium usque hodie."

⁴¹ David O'Connell, *The Teachings of Saint Louis: a critical text*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972); *The Instructions of Saint Louis: a critical text*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979). Both texts comprise the bulk of William of Saint-Pathus' discussion of Louis' relationship with his children; see *Vie de Saint Louis*, pp. 59-71. William's version of Louis' *Vita* is the only one that provides both the "teachings" and the "instructions."

⁴² O'Connell, *The Instructions*, p.56. Isabelle apparently had no children with her husband, Thibaut V of Champagne (d. 1270). Her brother Jehan-Tristan died in the month of August 1270 along with her father.

Louis commends Isabelle to love God with all her heart and all her power.⁴³ The *Instructions*, written for Isabelle after she had been married for several years, urge frequent confession and meditation on the holy life. Louis encourages Isabelle to find a confessor with a sufficient education to instruct Isabelle properly.⁴⁴ Louis implicitly reveals his belief that the holy and devout life was possible in marriage. As a wife and Christian, Isabelle should strive for humility and obedience. Respect in these things shown to her parents and husband are commendable attributes.⁴⁵ Interestingly many of the *Instructions* appear in the *Teachings* given to Philip III, Louis' eldest son.

David O'Connell, the editor of both the *Instructions* and the *Teachings*, suggests that the two works were nearly contemporaneous. He argues that "Louis probably had one text at his left elbow, or at least clearly in mind," as he composed the other.⁴⁶ The lessons Louis wished to impart to both his children were, essentially, of a religious nature. Philip also received, for example, the injunction to frequent and regular confession.⁴⁷ The *Teachings*, however, include an extra ten paragraphs, much of which focuses on the duties of a sovereign. Louis' letter to Philip also includes consideration for the work of a prince and exhortations to protect the kingdom. Louis stressed that Philip must ease the wars and conflicts within his kingdom and should follow the example of

⁴³ O'Connell, *The Instructions*, p. 78. "Chiere fille, je vous enseigne que vous amés Nostre Signeur de toute vostre cuer et de tout vostre pooir, car sans chou nus ne puet riens valoir."

⁴⁴ O'Connell, *The Instructions*, p. 79. "Chiere fille, acoustumés vous a souvent confesser et eslisiés tous jours confessours qui soient de sainte vie et de souffissant lettreüre par qui vous soiés ensigne des choses que vous devés eschiever et des choses ke vous devés faire."

⁴⁵ O'Connell, *The Instructions*, p. 80. "Chiere fille, obeïssiés humelement a vostre marit et a vostre pere et a vostre mere es choses qui sunt selonc Dieu. Vous devés chou volentiers faire pour l'amour que vous avés a aus et assés plue pour l'amour Nostre Signour qui ensi l'a ordené a cascun selonc chou qu'il affiert; contre Dieu vous ne devés a nului obeïr."

⁴⁶ O'Connell, *The Instructions*, p. 60. For example, the passage from the *Instructions* noted in footnote 43 above appears in the third paragraph of the *Teachings*: "Chiers filz, je t'enseigne premierement que tu aimmes Dieu de tout ton cuer et de tout ton pouoir, car sanz ce nulz ne puet riens valoir," p. 55.

⁴⁷ O'Connell, *The Teachings*, p. 56. For this passage in the *Instructions*, see footnote 44.

Saint Martin who relieved the tensions between clerics in his archbishopric.⁴⁸ Louis' letters to his eldest son and daughter suggest, not surprisingly, that Philip should focus on the affairs of state, while Isabelle on developing the good virtues and morals, though Philip should also be a virtuous king.

The interesting case of Louis and his elder children reveals the desire a father had to instruct them in the way of religious devotion and lay governance. Throughout this chapter I have also been considering the life a married saint lived after the death of a spouse or after the cessation of sexual relations in the marriage. Saint Louis, however, died prior to his wife Marguerite, and was thus never a widower. This leaves the daunting task of determining the nature of male post-marital experience without a male example. Turning to other texts in search of the male experience of widowhood, one notices a similar dearth of evidence on the male experience of widowhood and life after marital sexuality. Throughout this chapter I have already noted that two female saints continued their married lives with a spouse after sexual relations ceased. In several instances there is evidence in a female saint's life for the male experience. In one case the two spouses entered separate monasteries to end their days. In another the wife withdrew from her husband and dedicated her life to religion; her meetings with her husband occur only with a chaperon. For Louis, who spent much of his time on Crusade, family life was secondary to the role of king. Nonetheless, he strove, as noted previously, to provide a stable household for his family and instruction for his children. What life did a male widower

⁴⁸ O'Connell, *The Teachings*, p. 59. "Chiers filz, je t'enseigne que les guerres et les contenz qui seront en ta terre ou entre tes hommes, que tu mettez pene de les apaisier a ton pouoir; car c'est une chose qui moult plect a Nostre Seigneur; et mes sires saint Martin nous a donné moult grant exemple, car ik ala pour mettre pais entre les clers qui estoient en son arcesveschié, au temps qu'il savoit par Nostre Seigneur qu'il devoit mourir, et lui sembla qu'il metoit bone fin en sa vie en ce faire." Louis discusses further the role of protecting the kingdom in paragraph sixteen, p. 57.

experience in medieval Europe? Was the widower's life similar to or distinct from the life a widow?

In the transition from married husband to widower, a man retained legal, economic, and political rights. The woman, on the other hand, became an anomaly within medieval society. Her position entitled her to recognition; this recognition has allowed historians to access women's experience in medieval society. Margaret Pelling's remarks about the study of widowers and their relevance to gender history are telling:

Given that the imbalance of attention to the sexes is still far from redressed, it may seem perverse to give much attention to finding widowers. Some determination is required, since, as will become clear, widowers are remarkably difficult to find. However ... there are many ways in which the paradoxical invisibility of the widower throws light on the situation of the widow.⁴⁹

The experience of the widowers, whose status was, Pelling stresses, "shortlived, or hardly existent at all," is used, in this instance, to reinforce the study of widows. Most widowers, according to Pelling, remarried very soon after the death of their spouse. The scholarly literature on the male experience of widowhood (as well as on my category of life after marital relations) is scant and completely unstudied for the twelfth through fourteenth centuries.⁵⁰ The one point that is reinforced by several authors is that men who have lost

⁴⁹ Margaret Pelling, "Finding widowers," in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, ed. Lyndan Warner & Sandra Cavello, (New York: Longman, 1999) p. 37.

⁵⁰ Cavello and Warner's collection, from which the Pelling essay is taken, studies widowhood as experienced by both men and women in the medieval and early modern period. The medieval contributions, however, do not address the period studied herein. See *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*. Recent studies on masculinity and male experience are beginning to provide insight into the varying male experiences in medieval Europe. None of the texts considered for this study, however, address the experience of widowhood. See *Masculinity in Medieval Europe*, ed. Dawn Hadley, (New York: Longman: 1999) and *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994). *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen & Bonnie Wheeler, (New York: Garland Pub., 1997). *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. Jacqueline Murray, Garland Medieval Casebooks, vol. 25, (New York, Garland, 1999).

a spouse tended to remarry more quickly than women and possibly more often than women.⁵¹

Life after marital sex, which may or may not mean widowhood, was not a category that medieval people or modern scholars have utilised. It has been used here to further develop the discussion of the ideal marriage. The medieval view of marriage stressed the limited use of sexual relations, and therefore a life of continence was promoted by both preachers and theologians like St. Augustine as an ideal for married couples later in life as well as for widows or widowers.⁵² The *vitae* studied herein suggest that the route to sanctity, which is always to be imitated, may include marriage. This route can also include a life with a spouse after marital relations have ceased. Ulf and Birgitta journeyed on pilgrimage together after they ended their physical relationship. Yet it seems more common for a husband and wife to cease living together completely after taking a vow of absolute sexual continence. In the case of Henry and Hedwig, the *vita* indicates little interaction between them after sexual relations had ceased. In the Middle Ages the early age of death for men, due to wars, disease, and work related jobs meant that many women became widows. While remarriage was common, the image of the chaste widow was dominant in medieval culture.

Though widowed, many of the saints had responsibilities for their children. Louis, Hedwig, Birgitta, and Yvette were involved with raising their children in, at least, the early years of their children's lives. Elisabeth and Yvette abandoned their families,

⁵¹ Pelling, "Finding widowers," p. 37. Julia Crick notes that in pre-Conquest England there was a high rate of remarriage for both men and women in the ranks of the nobility; see "Men, women and widows: widowhood in pre-Conquest England," in *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, pp. 25-26. Herlihy, *Medieval Households*, p. 107. Ida Blom, "The History of Widowhood: A Bibliographic Overview," in *The Journal of Family History*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 192-193.

⁵² For sermons on widows see *The Faces of Women in the Sermons of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, (Toronto: Peregrina, 1999) pp. 51, 57, 98. *St. Augustine on Marriage and Sexuality*, pp. 81-82.

including their children, upon the death of their husbands and followed their religious vocations. Hedwig and Yvette fostered a relationship with the ill, the poor, and others who became their spiritual children. Thus, their motherhood extended beyond blood relations.⁵³ Modern scholars have begun to expand the research on medieval childhood and parenthood since the appearance of Philippe Ariès' *Centuries of Childhood* in 1960.⁵⁴ Ariès argued, based on iconographic evidence, that childhood was a relatively recent historical construct. The medieval "family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life, property and names; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility."⁵⁵ In recent years this theory has been revisited and refuted by a number of scholars.⁵⁶ As the evidence examined herein reveals, the Christian Church portrayed many of the married saints as good parents, attentive and pious. While several saints left their families to embrace their religious calling, in most cases provisions were in place for children. And, furthermore, leaving a family for the religious life was not necessarily absolute; Yvette counselled both her father and son while an anchoress in her later life. While some married saints thus attempted to break the ties of family, compassion in guiding family members in faith was portrayed as a desirable quality.

⁵³ See Jennifer Carpenter, "Jette of Huy," for a discussion of Yvette as a spiritual mother.

⁵⁴ Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, trans. Robert Baldick, (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962, originally published 1960).

⁵⁵ Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood*, p. 411.

⁵⁶ See, for example, David Herlihy, "Medieval children," in *The Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures: Essays on Medieval Civilization*, ed. Bede Karl Lackner & Kenneth Roy Philp, (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1978) pp. 110 -112. Shumlamith Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*, trans. Chaya Galai, (London: Methuen, 1983) pp. 235-236. John Boswell, *The Kindness of Strangers: The Abandonment of Children in Western Europe from Late Antiquity to the Renaissance*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998, original edition 1988) pp. 35-37.

Conclusion

Thomas Heffernan argues, based on the *vitae* of Sts. Perpetua and Felicitas, and scattered references in the later *vitae* of Catherine of Siena and Margery Kempe, that the route to sanctity for women rests on the “rejection of social and sexual mores rooted in the family.”¹ Yet the *vitae* surveyed herein reveal that sanctity, while not centred in the family, is not precluded by that social structure. In the regions of Silesia and Thuringia a late medieval audience would likely hear stories of Elisabeth and Hedwig rather than the early Christian Perpetua and Felicitas. That audience would know that Elisabeth and Hedwig married, had children (thus, engaged in sexual intercourse), and dedicated their later lives to chastity, charity, and humility. Did the people of France focus their spiritual meditations on the austere life of St. Antony of Egypt or on their pious king Louis IX? Medieval society was pluralistic; in the common culture of medieval Christianity men and women across Europe and the Mediterranean engaged in a variety of religious devotions. Likewise, the routes to sanctity as well as formal sainthood were many and varied.

While many medieval saints attract attention and historical inquiry for the extraordinary nature of their lives, saints whose lives share some common traits with those of ordinary lay people provide more information for the historian. Marriage and sexuality were an integral part of medieval life as it is to most, if not all, of human societies. As Pierre Payer notes, marital sexuality in the Middle Ages was “naturally oriented to procreation (that is what sex is for), and ... was permissible only within a

¹ Heffernan, *Sacred Biography*, pp. 186-188.

legitimate marriage.”² Payer presents the statement about sexual intercourse at the Synod of Angers (c. 1217) as the traditional medieval view of marital sexuality:

In regard to the sacrament of marriage it must be said that every voluntary emission of semen is a mortal sin in both male and female unless excused by legitimate marriage. But faith teaches that sexual intercourse between male and female is excused by a legitimate marriage as long as the union is in the proper manner.³

As the *vitae* examined in the previous chapters show, the concern with sexuality and the ideal of marriage were addressed with care by hagiographers. In their desire to present ideals for imitation and examples for teaching, hagiographers, who were by and large celibate churchmen, were wary of the married saint. Yet, it is the married saints of Europe who provided important examples for the average Christian.

Ulf Gudmarson, the husband of Saint Birgitta of Sweden, is an excellent example of married sanctity. While Ulf himself was not a saint, his relationship with Birgitta, as presented in her *vita*, indicates that he was a devout man who remained in the world most of his life. When Ulf returns to Birgitta after his death in a vision he lists six things that ensured his salvation after a time in purgatory.

The first is the confession I made every Friday when I still had the time and the intention to amend my sins. The second is that when I sat in judgement, I judged not for the love of money nor of favour, but I diligently examined all my judgments and was ready to correct them when I had done something I ought not to have done. The third is that I obeyed my spiritual father when he counseled [sic] me not to perform the act of matrimony after I knew a child was conceived. The fourth is that when I was lodged in any place, I was as careful as possible that neither I nor my servants were unkind to poor men. I was not untrustworthy to them and though I went into debt, I paid the wages due to them. The fifth is the abstinence I observed while on pilgrimage to Saint James. I did not drink

² Pierre Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, p. 4.

³ *Les statuts synodaux français du XIIIe siècle precedes de l'histoire du synode diocésain depuis ses origines* 1 *Les statuts de Paris et le Synodal de l'ouest (XIIIe siècle)*, ed. O. Pontal, (Collection de documents inédits sur l'histoire de France. Section de philologie et d'histoire jusqu'à 1610. Serie 8, vol. 9, Paris 1971) pp. 232-4. As quoted from Payer, *The Bridling of Desire*, p. 4.

between meals and because of that abstinence, I am pardoned for having sat long at table and for my loquacity and excess. And now I am sure of salvation though I do not know the hour. The sixth is that I assigned my chattels to those whom I considered righteous and who would fulfil my obligations.⁴

This account reveals that confession, obedience, abstinence, and charity lead to salvation. Ulf's kind and just practices as a lay lord ensured that he would eventually be saved. The excess of food and drink in which he typically indulged is balanced by the good works of pilgrimage and abstinence. While Ulf was far from a perfect husband, the practice of a few virtues and an honest life ensured that this average Christian would be saved.

The *vitae* studied herein reveal two distinct patterns of life for the medieval married woman. According to the first, as the examples of Yvette and Elisabeth show, the young woman is forced into a marriage, fulfils the role of wife and mother for several years, and becomes a holy widow after the death of the spouse. Hedwig and Birgitta's *vitae* show, on the other hand, a young woman who is forced into marriage, fulfils the role of wife and mother for several years, and leads a married life of chastity and piety in which the husband willingly participates with the saintly wife. Our fifth example, Saint Louis, fits neither of these patterns. The male saint is all the more difficult to study in the context of marriage and family for these themes are of no interest to the hagiographer. The female saint as parent, as a guide for her husband in religious devotion, and, in Yvette's case, as martyr who does not willingly enter the marriage, provides wonderful material for the hagiographer. The male saint, such as Saint Louis, attracts attention for heroics and virtuous violence (the Crusades) and piety in kingship. The family of Saint Louis attracted little attention, yet was central to his life.

⁴ Gregerson, *The Life of Saint Birgitta*, pp. 27-28.

While the saintly life was not necessarily limited by marriage, sexual relations, and family attachments, the life of the married saints studied herein reveals that sanctity was greatly enhanced by the more intense asceticism and religious devotions of life after sexual relations. Moving beyond the worldly life of the family, saintly men and women could embrace their vocation without the ties of a spouse or children. The saintly women noted herein tend to embrace their spiritual motherhood by caring for the ill, infirm, or poor. Their own children are not abandoned, but are no longer the centre of the saints' lives. Arising out of this thesis, however, are several questions and avenues for further research. The geographical region studied here, northern Europe, may not represent patterns found elsewhere in medieval Christendom. Byzantine married saints, such as Sts. Mary the Younger and Thomaïs of Lesbos for example, may not follow the same patterns exhibited by Sts. Birgitta, Hedwig, and Elisabeth.⁵ This consideration could also be extended temporally: what were marriage ideals prior to and after the twelfth through fourteenth centuries?

Returning to Asunción Lavrin, with whom I opened this thesis, note should be taken that the difference between the ideal and the reality is a gap which historians must attempt to cross. Coming out of a discussion of the Council of Trent, Lavrin notes:

To educate the faithful in the revised canons of the church and to foster spiritual conformity, theologians developed catechisms and confessionals, which laid out orthodoxy from the cradle to the grave. Such broad agenda, however, did not meet all its goals. There was always a gap between religious canons [or the ideal] and the actual behaviour of the people. Adaptation, confrontations, enforcements, and elusion in matters of personal behaviour, especially in its sexual aspects, became important elements in the daily lives of many people, and this is an important if

⁵ See *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints' Lives in English Translation*, ed. Alice-Mary Talbot, (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1996) for the *vitae* of St. Mary, pp. 239-290, and St. Thomaïs, pp. 291-322.

neglected chapter in the social history of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁶

How were the ideals of medieval Europe perceived by the Christian laity? Did the men and women practice abstinence on all the holy days of the Christian calendar? It seems unlikely that men and women across Europe knew or followed all the proscriptions. As James Brundage notes: “a couple might have managed to have sexual relations ... slightly more than once a week, on average, over a three year period” if they followed the Church proscriptions. According to his research, and modern assessments of sexual relations between couples, that is a very infrequent indeed.⁷

Ideals are, nonetheless, just ideals. Did the men and women need to follow all the days of abstinence? Was a common feature of medieval confession the sin of sexual relations at inappropriate times? The Church authorities and hagiographers of the late twelfth through fourteenth centuries recognised that sanctity could develop within a healthy and productive marriage. Parenthood, familial devotion, and love between spouses could limit the spiritual achievements of a saint slightly – religious activity after sexual relations shows a marked increase in most saints. Yet, men and women in medieval Europe who married, engaged in sex, and raised their children well could feel secure in knowing that their lives would not necessarily end in damnation.

⁶ Lavrin, “Sexuality in Colonial Mexico: A Church Dilemma,” in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, p. 48.

⁷ Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, pp. 159-160.

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Appendix
Vita Maior Beate Hedwigis

The following excerpt, comprising the preface and first part of Hedwig's *Vita Maior*, was translated from the Latin edition found in: *Der Hedwigs – Codex von 1353, Sammlung Ludwig* (Berlin: Gebr. Mann Verlag, 1972). Edited and translated into German by W. Braunfels, J. Krása, K. Kratzsch, and P. Moraw, I have translated the following directly from the Latin edition. Braunfels, et al., base their edition and translation on a 1353 manuscript commissioned by Hedwig's great grandson, Ludwig I, Duke of Liegnitz and Brieg (1311-1398). Simon of Trebnitz, a Cistercian monk, is the author.

Incipit Praefaciuncula de vita beate Hedwigis, quondam ducisse Slesie.

1. Splendoris eterni genitor *lumenque indeficiens, Dominus Deus omnipotens*, que *novissime diebus istis in eodem Filio suo illuxit* mundo, viciorum tenebris obnubilatum iam seculum novo quodam lucis sue radio clarius illustravit, dum beatam Hedwigim veluti *ardentem faculam* illi exhibuit et ut preclaram *lucernam super candelabrum posuit* ad lucendum pulcherrimis virtutum meritis et sancte conversacionis exemplis omnibus in sancte matris ecclesie domo existentibus.

Ipse enim *Pater misericordiarum*, sicut eam in vita mirabiliter sanctitatis privilegio extulit, sic ipsam quoque in morte inestimabili decore et miraculorum prodigiis exaltavit, prout infra plenius innotescet.

2. Nam ad Dei gloriam et ad edificacionem audiencium devocionemque fidelium excitandam, ad laudem quoque ipsius sancte in subsequentibus exprimuntur serius opera eius meritoria et exercicia virtuosa atque miracula, que propter eius merita operari dignatus est Altissimus, secundum quod ea diligenter examinantes diligentissime conscripserunt et conscripta fideliter summo representaverunt pontifici hii, qui fuerunt examinatores predictorum a sede apostolica deputati.

3. Que scripta in trebnicensi cenobio reservata dum studiosius relegissem, cum illis sepius contuli, qui dicta factaque noverant istius negocii et sic certa materia habita probate veritatis seriem stilo simplici prosequens quanta potui diligencia simul iungere studui ea, que de eodem virtutis sive miraculi genere erant ibidem diffusius consignata.

Here begins the preface to the Life of Saint Hedwig, Duchess of Silesia.

1. Father of eternal splendour and *unfailing light, Almighty Lord God*, who in *these recent times illuminated* the world with his *Son*¹, the world obscured by the shadow of sin, and has brightened a new age with his even brighter ray of light, as He showed them Saint Hedwig like a *burning torch* and placed her like *bright light on the candelabra* to burn with the very beautiful merits of virtue and example of holy life for all those dwelling in the house of the Holy Mother Church.²

The *merciful Father* Himself miraculously raised her up in life by the privilege of sanctity and he raised her up in death with inestimable beauty and the wonders of miracles as will be shown below.³

2. For to the glory of God and the edification of the hearers and in order to rouse the devotion of the faithful and for the praise of that saint, in the following shall be expressed earnestly her meritorious works and virtuous actions and miracles, which God deigned to performing on account of her merits. These matters were carefully examined and diligently written down, and faithfully presented to the Pope by those he appointed to this task.

3. While I was studiously rereading these writings, stored in the monastery of Trebnitz, I often met with those who knew the words and deeds of this matter. And thus having proven the veracity of material, I tried to gather together as diligently as I could in a simple ordered style those things which were recorded there in such a diffuse manner about the nature of her virtues and miracles.

Preterea frater Engelbertus ordinis Cystersiensis domus Lubensis in sua compilacione de hac sancta posuit quedam notabilia, que ut in suis videbitur (locis) addidi supradictis et rubricis appositis per certos titulos et capitula distinxi singula, de quibus post tractabitur, ut quod quis de qualibet hic posita materia videre voluerit, facilius valeat invenire.

4. Agitur autem primo de conversacione eius in etate puerili et tempore matrimonii et amore continencie; secundo de humilitate ipsius; tercio de eius paciencia; quarto de austeritate vite eius; quinto de oracione eius et devocione ad Deum; sexto de operibus misericordie et pietate eius ad proximum; septimo de miraculis, que perpetravit in vita sua; octavo de spiritu, quem habuit, prophecie; nono de transitu eius et miraculis factis tempore mortis ipsius; decimode miraculis, que contigerunt post mortem eius; undecimo de canonizacione eius; duodecimo de translacione eius et de hiis (miraculis), que facta sunt tempore translacionis, et sollempniis aliis.

Explicit prologus.

Incipit vita beate Hedwigis et primo de conversacione eius in etate puerili et tempore matrimonii et amore castitatis et continencie

1. Hedwigis iam in celis beata in terris de stirpe generosa progrediens nobilis quidem erat secundum corporee propagacionis originem, morum autem elegancia fulgens et pollens honestatis decore longe fuit nobilior animo ac in anima multo laudabiliore erat generositate preclara.

Nimirum pulchritudo graciaram et donorum sibi superinfusa divinitus magnificabat in ipsa altitudinem generis et natalium ipsius magnificencia graciosiorem reddebat in ea sublimatam virtutibus nobilitatem atque pulchritudinem mentis.

Moreover Brother Engelbert of the Cistercian house of Luben set down in his compilation about this saint certain notable things, which appear to have been added to the aforesaid in these places. By adding rubrics I distinguished the various titles and chapters so that whoever wants to see this material could find it more easily.

4. The first part will treat of her manner of life, in the state of childhood, in the state of marriage, and her love of continence. The second part deals with her humility, the third with her patience, and the fourth with the austerity of her life. The fifth part considers her prayers and devotion to God while the sixth her works of mercy and love of neighbour. The seventh part deals with the miracles she performed during her life, the eighth with her gift of prophecy, and the ninth deals with her death and the miracles performed at the time of death. The tenth deals with the miracles that occurred after her death. The eleventh treats of her canonisation. The twelfth records her translation and the miracles done at the time of her translation, and other solemn matters.

Here ends the prologue.

Here begins the life of Saint Hedwig, dealing first with her manner of life as a child, her time as a wife, and her love of chastity and continence.

1. Hedwig, now a saint in heaven, came from a noble family in her earthly life and was thus noble according to her physical origin. Nobler still was the shining elegance of her character and the beauty of her honour; in her bright soul she was ever more praiseworthy for her generosity.

The extraordinary beauty of grace, and of the gifts of the divine, increased in her the height of her family, and the magnificence of her birth rendered even more gracious in the sublime nobility by virtues and the beauty of mind.

2. Hec utique magnifici principis Bertoldi, marchionis Badensis comitis Tyrolensis atque ducis Meranie filia, matrem habebat nomine Agnetem non minus secundum dignitatem seculi nobilem, utpote de marchionum orientalium prosapia prodeuntem, filiam scilicet marchionis orientalis et comitis de Rochlechz Dedonis, filii Conradi marchionis Misnensis et Lusacie et de Landesberch.

Unde ipsa filia tamquam nobilissime arboris fructus egregius et electus bonitatis sue vigorem vigorosumque dulcedinis sua saporem non perdidit diuturnitate temporis, immo divinis adauctum benedictionibus posteris in Cristo degustandum per consolacionis gratiam conservavit.

3. A sua namque puericia cor gerens senile satagebat levitates vitando bonos assuescere mores et insolencias fugere iuveniles.

Fovendo quoque innocentis vite mundiciam honestati semper et discipline dabat operam diligentem.

In omnibus hiis et aliis operibus suis preter homines, quos sibi deputatos a progenitoribus suis ad bonorum informacionem morum rectores habebat, eruditorem habuit Spiritum Sanctum, qui ab infancia ipsam timere Deum docuit et abstinere ab omni concupiscencia.

Unde numquam cum ludentibus reprehensibiliter se miscuit neque cum hiis, qui levitatibus ambulabant, participem se prebebat.

Nam in etate puerili in claustro Kicingo sacras litteras didicit, quarum studio et tempus in iuventute expendit utiliter ac in earum intellectu postmodum consolacionis interne et devocionis hausit gratiam affluenter.

2. She was the daughter of the magnificent prince Bertold, Margrave of Baden, Count of Tirol and Duke of Merania. She had a mother named Agnes of no less dignity in her earthly nobility, in as much as she came from the family of the Margraves of the East. For Agnes was the daughter of Dedo, Margrave of the East and Count of Rochlitz, and he was the son of Conrad, Margrave of Meissen, Lausitz, and Landsberg.

Just as the choice and outstanding fruit of the most noble tree does not lose its excellent vigour or its vivid sweet taste over a long time, so she kept this thing to be eaten in Christ by the grace of consolation and grew in divine blessings.

3. For since her childhood, conducting herself maturely, she endeavoured to cultivate good manners while avoiding youthful insolence and levity.

Also fostering the purity of innocent life, she always gave herself over to discipline and honest diligence.

In all these and her other works, in addition to the men appointed by her parents as guides, who were to form her morals, she also had an even wiser teacher in the Holy Spirit, who taught her from infancy to fear God and to abstain from all concupiscence.

Thus at no time did she allow herself to mingle reprehensibly with the children at play, nor would she participate with those who walked in levity.

As a child in the monastery of Kitzingen she learned the Sacred Letters, in the study of which she spent time usefully in her youth. And later, from her grasp of their meaning, she drew abundantly of the grace of internal consolations and devotion.

4. Quatuor germanos, tres vero sorores germanas habebat, quarum una Philippo regi Francie nupsit, altera Andree regi Ungarie in coniugio extitit copulata, de qua nata est illa laudabilis et nunc iam gloriosa in celis beata Elyzabeth, lantgravia Thuringie, cuius in Martburch corpus sanctissimum requiescit.

Tercia vero fuit abbatissa sanctimonialium ordinis sancti Benedicti in Kicingo, Franconie monasterio antedicto.

Unus fratrum eius Bertoldus Aquiligensis patriarcha extitit, alter scilicet Ekebertus Babenbergensis episcopus fuit, reliqui duo, Otto videlicet et Henricus, seculari milicie dediti patri successerunt in dominio.

Ipsa autem famula domini, Hedwigis, habens etatis annos duodecim magnifico principi Henrico, duci Slesie et Polonie, matrimonialiter iungebatur.

Hunc utique nobilem virum ut altera Sara in timore Domini non cum libidine consensit suscipere.

Nam in contrahendo matrimonium illud suorum potius progenitorum quam propriam voluntatem creditur inplevisse, ut ex post facto constare sufficientissime potuit, dum tam notabili se continencie loro strinxit.

Coniugali enim vinculo alligata studebat secundum doctrinam apostoli honorabile connubium et thorum immaculatum in omnibus custodire, leges ac iura matrimonii peroptime conservare.

Per filiorum quippe generacionem eternam salutem consequi sperans, Deo nichilominus castitatis amore placere desiderans, quantum pro tempore licuit, de mariti consensu se lege continencium (vinciebat).

4. She had four brothers and three sisters, of the latter, one married Philip King of France. Another was joined to Andre the King of Hungary in conjugal union, from which was born that praiseworthy and now glorious saint in heaven Elizabeth, landgrave of Thuringia, whose saintly body rests at Marburg.

A third sister became the abbess of the nuns of the order of St Benedict in the aforesaid monastery Kitzingen in Franconia.

One of her brothers, Bertold, was made the patriarch of Aquileia, and another, Eckbert, was Bishop of Bamberg. The other two, Otto and Henry, enlisted in the secular military and later succeeded their father in his dominion.

The servant of the lord, Hedwig herself, was joined in matrimony to the magnificent prince Henry, Duke of Silesia and Poland at the age of twelve.

Like another Sara, Hedwig consented to receive this noble man in fear of the Lord and without lust.

For in that contract of matrimony Hedwig is believed to have satisfied the will of her parents rather than her own. This would become very clear later, when she bound herself with the most notable chains of continence.

While bound by the conjugal chain, she strove to defend honourable marriage, in accord with the doctrine of the Apostle, to preserve perfectly the pure marriage bed in all things, and to observe the laws and rights of matrimony.⁴

Hoping to attain salvation through the procreation of children, still she wished to please God in the love of chastity. As far as she could at the appropriate time, and with the consent of the husband, she bound herself by the law of the chaste.

Mox enim ut se concepisse sensisset, reverenter a viri thoro deinceps abstinuit et ab eius copula usque post conplecionem puerperii separata permansit.

5. Istius sancte legis et honeste consuetudinis observanciam inchoavit a prime prolis sue conceptu qua gravida fuit cum esset annorum tredecim et tredecim ebdomadarum, nec eam destitit observare usque ad tempus illud, quo desiit parere.

Trium namque filiorum, Bolezlay scilicet, Conradi et Henrici ac trium filiarum, Agnetis, Sophie et Gerdrudis mater effecta ad plenarie statim se castitatis contulit celibatum.

Hunc quoque modum in matrimonio continendi sanccitum a sancta matre ecclesia, quoscumque poterat, instruebat.

Precipue dominam Annam, nurum suam, (hanc legem) docuit observare ex speciali affectu et se ipsam, dum de hoc eam instrueret, ei se posuit in exemplum.

O quam felices sunt matrone matrimonialibus adhuc vinculis subiugate, si huius beate femine imitari conantur exemplum!

6. Que non solum, ut predicatur, concepta sobole continenter de cetero vivere studuit, verum eciam salutaribus consiliis et exhortacionibus suum ad hoc generosum maritum inflexit, ut una secum voluntarie continenciam observaret singulis annis per totum adventum et per quadragesimam, omnibus diebus quatuor temporum et sextis feriis, in sanctorum vigiliis ac sollempnitatibus eorumdem et in diebus dominicis.

Non enim reputabat gratam esse veneracionem sanctis exhibitam nec Deo acceptum fore ieiunium, quod cum oblectamentis carnalibus celebratur.

So as soon as she felt she had conceived, she would then respectfully abstain from her husband's bed and from sexual relations up until the completion of her confinement.

5. She began to observe that solemn law and virtuous custom after she conceived her first child, when she was thirteen years and thirteen weeks. She would not cease to observe these customs throughout her childbearing years.

Having become the mother of three boys, namely, Boleslaw, Conrad, and Henry and three girls Agnes, Sophie, and Gerdrud, Hedwig immediately embarked upon complete continence.

She taught this way of matrimonial continence, as sanctioned by Holy Mother Church, to whomsoever she could.

First of all, Hedwig taught her daughter-in-law, the lady Anna, out of a special affection to observe this custom of continence. While she instructed her in this, Hedwig gave herself as an example.

O how happy are those ladies, still attached with chains in marriage, if they endeavour to imitate the example of this good woman!

6. After Hedwig conceived her children, she desired not only to live continently for the rest of her life, but by her wholesome counsel and exhortations she also persuaded her noble husband to willingly observe continence with her. They abstained from conjugal relations every year for Advent, Lent, Ember days, saints' vigils and solemnities, on Fridays, and on the Lord's Day.

She did not think that veneration shown to the saints was pleasing to nor fasting accepted by God, if they were practised in carnal delights.

Propterea ipsa cum consorte suo sepe per mensem et quandoque per sex aliquando vero per octo ebdomadas, quamvis tempore (suo) uno simul iungerentur in lecto, a carnali copula penitus abstinebat.

7. De tam sancta ergo radice et sancti sunt rami progressi, de *bona* quoque *arbore* *bonus* factus est *fructus*.

Soboles quippe, quam isti beati genuere parentes, Deum colere studuit et cultum divinum pro viribus ampliavit.

Nam filius eorum, dux Henricus, patri succedens in dominio vir utique Deo devotus et donorum patrator operum extitit.

Qui ut fidelis ac strenuus miles Christi Tartaris pro populo Dei constanter se opposuit fusoque sanguine suo anno Domini MCCXLI quinto Ydus Aprilis mortem eius suscepit.

Filia vero, domina Gerdrudis, piorum parentum imitata vestigia non quidem in coniugali, sed potius in virginali puritate intra ordinem Cysterciensium Domino serviebat.

8. Et quia felices hii coniuges devota mente taliter virtuoso castimonie exercicio Deo docente instabant continue et sanctificabant per vite mundiciam corpora sua, ad maiora tandem pervenire meruerunt divine gracie incrementa, ita ut uno animo parique consensu cum episcopali benedictione sollempni ad continenciam se perpetuam obligarent.

Spiritu namque Domini confortati circiter triginta annos a thoro tantem divisi duxerunt celibem vitam et castitatis pulchritudine mirabiliter exornatam.

For that reason she often abstained from sexual relations with her consort for a month, sometimes for six or eight weeks; although at that time they were united in one bed.

7. From such a holy root came holy branches as well; *for every good tree bears good fruit.*⁵

The family, whom these holy parents begot, likewise sought to worship and multiply prayers to God.

For their son, Duke Henry, succeeded his father in rule, and was also devoted to God and performed good works.

Henry, like a faithful and energetic soldier of Christ firmly fought against the Tartars and poured forth his own blood for the people of God. He succumbed to death on the fifth Ides of April, in the year of our Lord 1241.

Their daughter, Lady Gerdrud, following the pattern of her pious parents not in conjugal, but rather, in virginal purity serving the Lord in the Cistercian Order.

8. And because this happy couple, with devout minds and taught by God, continually followed in the virtuous exercise of chastity and all their lives sanctified the purity of their bodies, they merited to achieve such great growth in divine grace that of one mind and equal will they bound themselves to perpetual continence with a solemn episcopal benediction.

Comforted by the Spirit of God for thirty years, they began to live apart in celibacy adorned marvellously by the beauty of chastity.

In omni autem illo tempore ipsa Christi ancilla summo precavebat conamine, ne ipsius, qui tunc iam pluribus innotuerat et frequentius declarabatur multis per satis evidenciam signa, decorem pudicitie aequaliter obfuscarum contingeret opinione sinistra in cordibus infirmorum, qui de facili quandoque sibi assumunt materiam scandalum et veluti spinarum aculei lingua detraccionis lacerant boni operis rosas sibi vicinias pululantes.

Mariti qua-propter sic ipsa devitabat consorcium atque colloquia, ut eum non adiret nec sibi ullatenus loqueretur, nisi dum vellet promovere apud ipsum opera pietatis aut negocia religiosorum sive personarum miserabilium expedire.

Nec tamen hoc faciebat alibi quam in publico loco vel in ecclesia pluribusque vel ad minus duabus honestis personis presentibus et sepe audientibus verba sua.

Insuper ipsum in egritudine positum non visitabat nisi cum domina Anna, nuru sua, et cum aliis dominabus.

Ipsa quoque dum esset in Trebnitz frequenter in dormitorio cum sororibus quietis sue commodum habuit, tum propter devocionis sedulum studium propter honestatis exemplar mundis confovendum, et quam diligenter in se coluit, in aliis quoque bonam famam studiosius conservavit.

Nam religiosis ad se venientibus frequenter de quieto et honesto providebat hospicio, ubi extra tumultum secularium commorantes ora loquencium iniqua poterant facilius declinare.

9. Studebat amica Christi semper in vita sua sicut coram Deo sanctissime sic etiam coram hominibus honestissime conversari.

Throughout that time, however, the handmaiden of Christ took great precautions lest the beauty of her modesty, which then was known to many and had been frequently declared by evident signs, be clouded with evil ideas in the hearts of the feeble. They themselves easily believe scandalous lies and like spiny barbs, they mangle the roses of good works growing nearby with their venomous tongue.

Thus, she avoided her own husband's companionship and conversation. She would not visit him, nor would she, in any respect, speak to him except to promote pious works to him, or to discuss the concerns of religious or of needy persons.

Therefore she never did this anywhere other than in a public place or church or with two other honest persons present who could hear their words.

She would not even visit him in sickness unless accompanied by the Lady Anna, her daughter-in-law and with other women.

And when she was in Trebnitz, in the dormitory with her sisters, she often had the convenience of rest. Then for the sake of diligent devotions and for fostering honest example she strengthened the pure. And that which she diligently cultivated in herself she also keenly preserved in others, namely a good reputation.

For she frequently provided a decent and quiet refuge for the religious who came to her, where they would be able more easily to avoid the pernicious mouths of the chatterboxes.

9. The friend of Christ desired always in her life both before God and before men to speak most devoutly and honestly.

Honestam enim semper nitebatur habere familiam in tota curia sua et precipue suo speciali mancipatas obsequio feminas, camerarios aliosque officiales habuit disciplina et bonis moribus decoratos.

Detractores Deo odibiles familiares habere nolebat, sermones quoque ipsorum derogatorios duas pariter interficientes animas, loquentis videlicet et audientis, veluti venenum ac morsum serpencium et ut instrumentum dyabolicum abhorrebat.

10. In carne preter carne vivere, quia magni credebat esse meriti, et vitam angelicam ideo ad amandam conservandamque castitatem, quam ipsa semper dilexerat a sua iuventute et diligebat tenerrime, quodquot et quos poterat invitabat.

Constructo denique Trebnicensi monasterio procuravit in eo multas locari feminas et virgines sacras ad serviendum Domino pro corona ineffabilis glorie in cordis et corporis castitate.

Inter quas suam quoque obtulit Deo filiam, Gerdrudim predictam, ibidem postmodum abbatissam.

11. Plures quoque puellas nobiles genere et quasdam de genealogia simplici prodeuntes orbatas parentibus ac opibus destitutas assumpsit in curam.

Ex quibus alias inclusit in monasterio ad virginalem, alias iunxit matrimonio ad conservandam pudiciciam coniugalem, ut sic Cristo fideliter servientes, ille centesimum, iste vero tricesimum fructum a Domino expectarent

Aliquas insuper secum habebat viduas ieiuniis et oracionibus die noctuque vacantes pro fructu sexagesimo congregando.

For she strove always to have an honest family or staff in her entire household, especially to have female servants, chamberlains, and other officials adorned with discipline and goods morals.

She did not want hateful detractors of God in her household, and abhorred their derogatory words that equally killed both the souls of the speakers and the souls of the hearers, like the venom and bite of snakes and like the instruments of the devil.

10. She encouraged as much as she could and whomever she could to live an angelic life in the flesh but outside the flesh; she believed it was of great merit to love and preserve chastity, which she herself had loved since her youth and tenderly cherished.⁶

Finally having constructed the monastery at Trebnitz, she placed many women and sacred virgins in that place to the service of the Lord, for the crown of ineffable glory in purity of heart and chastity of body.

Among them she offered to God the aforesaid daughter Gerdrud, who later became the abbess.

11. She took into her care many girls bereft of their parents and lacking in means, from both noble and simple families.

Of them she enclosed some in the monastery as virgins, others she married off to preserve conjugal chastity. Thus serving Christ faithfully, they might hope for hundred-fold fruit or thirty-fold fruit from God.

Moreover she had some widows with her who prayed and fasted day and night gathering sixty-fold fruit.⁷

12. Sic autem Christi vernula non solum semetipsam, verum etiam consortem suum divino mancipavit obsequio, sic pia mater prolem, quam genuit, ad laudem Domini dulciter educavit, sic benigna domina familie sue ministerium Deo devotum cupiebat esse et gratum, sic famula Dei morum pulchritudine et honeste conversacionis exemplis omnes homines, quantum per eam effici potuit ad melioris vite studium provocavit.

Christi namque caritate repleta ipsius ad amorem famulatumque cunctos pertingere affectabat.

Et quoniam intus puritate consciencie floruit et exterius exemplaritatis splendore clarius radiavit, fama nominis eius crescebat cottidie et odore bono de sanctitatis ipsius opinione procedente omnes vicinie replebantur.

Unde non solum pro dignitate seculi, qua pollebat, sed amplius pro virtutis merito, quo fulgebat, habebatur venerabilis et apud religiosos et apud homines seculares, qui eius aut videntes aut intelligentes opera bona glorificabant omnium Creatorem, qui talem et tam preclaram sanctitate famulam sibi elegit mundoque in solacium et iuvamen ipsam exhibuit.

Thus the slave of Christ dedicated not only herself but also her spouse to serve God. So the pious mother taught the children she brought forth to sweetly praise the Lord. The kind-hearted Lady desired to be, with her family, devoted and pleasing to the ministry of God. The maid of God stirred all to live better lives by the beauty of her morals and the example of her honest life.

For filled with Christ's love itself she desired all to reach his love and service.

And since internally she flourished with purity of conscience and, on the outside, she shone even more with the splendour of her exemplary nature, report of her name arose daily and as her good name was made known, all near her were filled by the sweet odour of her sanctity.

Whence, not only through earthly dignity, in which she was powerful, but also for the merit of her virtue, in which she shone, she was held to be venerable, both among religious and lay men, who seeing or knowing her good works glorified the Creator of all, who had chosen for himself such a servant and exhibited her to the world as a comfort and encouragement.

¹ Hebrews 1:2; Psalms 117:24

² Matthew 5:15.

³ 2 Corinthians 1:3

⁴ For the Apostle Paul on marriage see, I Corinthians 7: 1-11. I have consulted the Vulgate, the Knox translation of the Vulgate, as well as the King James Version for this study.

⁵ Matthew 7:16-18.

⁶ *In carne preter carne vivere ...*, the editor of the German text, gives both Romans 8: 12-13 and 2 Corinthians 10: 3 as points for reference of this passage. Neither passage is exact nor do they aid with the translation of this passage.

⁷ The Parable of the Sower, see Matthew 13: 8-9, recounts the thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and hundred-fold harvest. In his *Letter to Eustochium*, Jerome mentions the hundred-fold harvest as the reward for virgins and the sixty-fold harvest for chaste widows. He notes further that “married women glory too, since they come second to virgins.” It is accepted that married women received thirty-fold rewards. See *The Letters of St. Jerome*, trans. C.C. Mierow, Vol. 1, Letters 1-22, in *Ancient Christian Writers*, No. 33, (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1963) pp. 134-179.