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Noble Freedom: The Importance of Freedom in the Theology of Beatrice of Nazareth and Hadewijch

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

NOBLE FREEDOM:
THE IMPORTANCE OF FREEDOM IN THE THEOLOGY OF
BEATRICE OF NAZARETH AND HADEWIJCH

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY
SETH J. A. ALEXANDER
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
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First and foremost I must thank my parents, who have encouraged and believed in me throughout my life, but particularly during the long composition of this present work. My father did not live to see the completion of this work, so I dedicate it to him and his unshakeable, loving support. His love of history spurred on the inception of this work. I am sorry we will be unable to discuss the results of this finished work.

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For my father

... and transformed by divine emotion, she could sense and savor nothing but God.

The Life of Juliana of Mont-Cornillon

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CHAPTER ONE:

ON NOBLE FREEDOM: THE SPIRITUAL THEOLOGY OF HADEWIJCH AND BEATRICE

On April 14, 2013, Marcella Pattyn died in Courtrai, Belgium. She was 92 years old, blind, and she died quietly in the same Belgian city where she had lived and worked for her entire life. Pattyn had not done great things, from a global perspective: she was not glamorous or powerful, yet at her death a bronze statue of this humble woman was erected in home city. Marcella Pattyn, or *Juffrouw* Marcella, was a beguine. The last living beguine, whose death drew to a close an 800-year-old, vibrant way of life begun by charismatic women in the Middle Ages that survived for centuries despite repression by both Catholic and Protestant leadership in Northern Europe. Like *Juffrouw* Marcella, most beguines lived quiet lives, but deep within their silence lies a tradition of profound mystical theology and a commitment to service of those in need in an imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. This theology, focused upon the point at which God meets the human person in human lives, owes much of its development to women. A short re-print of Marcella's obituary appeared in *The Economist*, raising her for a brief moment, in death, to the eyes of the world. As the world, now, recognizes the loss of this "piece of world heritage"¹, it seems appropriate to look back at the theology that shaped and was shaped by the lived traditions of innumerable beguines' lives since the Middle Ages. For this task, I will focus on the writings of Hadewijch

¹ The words of the mayor of Courtrai upon his visit to Marcella Pattyn. Obituary, "Marcella Pattyn," *The Economist*, 27 April 2013, accessed November 2, 2015, <http://www.economist.com/news/obituary/21576632-marcella-pattyn-worlds-last-beguine-died-april-14th-aged-92-marcella-pattyn>.

of Brabant, a beguine, and Beatrice of Nazareth, educated by one of the earliest beguine communities, to attempt to better understand these medieval women's beliefs on freedom and union with God.

Mulieres religiosae refers to a diverse group of women in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries who lived a variety of lifestyles. Two such *mulieres* are Hadewijch, a beguine, and Beatrice of Nazareth, a Cistercian nun -- both outstanding thirteenth-century authors who wrote the mystical theology that came to be associated with this dynamic group of women. Both women are striking by the fact that they composed their own theological work at all, in a time when such endeavors were largely closed to women.²

After long being overlooked and their works being virtually lost, over the past sixty years scholarship on Hadewijch and Beatrice has flourished. Especially in the past two decades scholars have continue to honor the theological work of these two women, and to approach their authorship from a multitude of different angles. Hadewijch's dense corpus has come under considerable examination by scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum, Bernard McGinn, Paul Mommaers, and Barbara Newman. A full English translation of her entire body of work was made available through the work of Columba Hart, OSB, which has opened up the availability of her readership to a wider audience. A similar dynamic has been underway with Beatrice. Roger de Ganck's magisterial works and translation of the translation of her autobiography have promoted continued scholarship on this mystical author. All of this work has contributed to recognizing Hadewijch and Beatrice as serious

² Most *mulieres religiosae* that are known to us had their lives and teachings written down by a male confessor or enthusiast. In some cases the male author did not know the woman he was memorializing in his work.

theologians. These women contribute to a fuller picture of medieval theology. As Mommaers and Dutton say of Hadewijch, “This woman *says* something new in a new way.”³

In general the *mulieres religiosae* relied upon the patronage and spiritual guidance of men. In northern Europe, the Cistercian monks tended to fill these roles of male support, and, thus, Cistercian spirituality seems to have been quite influential upon the religious women of the thirteenth century. Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry were by no means the founders of the Cistercian reform movement, but these men were two of its brightest lights. As such, I will be comparing their understandings of freedom and union with God to those of Hadewijch and Beatrice. It is my position that Hadewijch and Beatrice were influenced by the thought of Bernard and William and expanded upon their ideas, forging ahead in their own theological development. This is a particularly important nuance of Hadewijch and Beatrice’s work due to the gradual shift in theology from the monastery to the university. Hadewijch and Beatrice “do” theology in the style of the monks like Bernard and William – at its base is an internalized experience of the proclaimed Word of God, life and prayer in community, and the work of charity. Prayer and work were the hinges upon which turned Benedict of Nursia’s *Rule* for monks, and the Cistercian movement sought to recapture authentic observance of that lifestyle. As theology moved into the realm of the university – a venue closed to women – the writings of women like Hadewijch and Beatrice began to be looked at as spiritual writing rather than as serious theological contributions.

³ Paul Mommaers and Elisabeth Dutton. *Hadewijch: Writer – Beguine – Love Mystic*. Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2004, 58.

The task of this study is to explore the writings of these two medieval women theologians to examine how they interpreted their experiences of union with God. To do this, I will investigate the ways in which these two particular women of the thirteenth-century Low Countries construct a theological understanding of the human relationship to the divine. This theological anthropology, for both women, is built upon their own dynamic experiences of God in their lives. These experiences – some bodily and very sensory, some profoundly interior – served as the framework onto which Hadewijch and Beatrice were able to construct a theology of divine encounter and transmit it to their communities. In different ways, Hadewijch's and Beatrice's understanding of the relationship between God and humanity is characterized by a concern for freedom – freedom to transform into their true selves with God. Examining Hadewijch and Beatrice's writing with attention to how they handle the topic of freedom and, more broadly, using freedom as a lens through which to approach their work opens up a deeper understanding of theology by these women of the thirteenth century.

I will explore this theology of freedom and divine encounter via specific ways in which Hadewijch and Beatrice treat it in their writings. To demonstrate the centrality of freedom to Hadewijch's and Beatrice's work I will focus on elucidating how freedom functions in two ways: freedom to love God, and freedom to grow in likeness with God, away from anything that inhibits the human soul's capacity for God. The first aspect of freedom draws from the twelfth-century Cistercian theological traditions mentioned above. It is my belief that both Hadewijch and Beatrice are indebted to Cistercian writers like Bernard and William of St. Thierry for their radical understanding of human freedom for God. Following

this tradition, God is the initiator of a relationship between Godself and the human soul. This “noble freedom” is a gift of God that allows human beings to move closer and more deeply into their true selves. These true selves are what God created human beings to be, namely creatures in God’s own image, invited to live the divine life with God. This grounding in freedom allows the human being to respond to the call of love, but it is no simple matter. Hadewijch and Beatrice, in their work, both delve deeply into describing the different ways in which the soul must strive to give affirmative consent to the loving call of God. This understanding of being created free in the image of God is something that Hadewijch and Beatrice share quite closely with their Cistercian brethren. This common starting point will cast greater light upon the ways that Hadewijch and Beatrice move beyond the thought of the Cistercian authors into their own unique understandings of freedom in God.

This second aspect of freedom that is much attended to by Hadewijch and Beatrice is the freedom from all impediments to union with God. This is really a freedom to be fully immersed in God. This freedom is the zenith of divine union between God and the soul. It can only be ultimately realized after this life; however, both Hadewijch and Beatrice understand that this type of freedom in God can be significantly experienced on earth. Such an understanding is a departure from Cistercian male authors, and a reason for further exploration of these women’s theological depth. How Hadewijch and Beatrice develop innovative ideas that move beyond other mystical theologies of their time is what is of most interest to me in this study. Because Beatrice’s and Hadewijch are women writing to an audience of women, I am most interested and concerned with their handling of gender in their writing.

I see their understandings of gender as foundational to the innovation that I see present in their theological work.

Throughout this study, freedom will be held up as a primary concern of Hadewijch's and Beatrice's theological anthropology. Both internal to their theological projects and integral to understanding their context, freedom must be attended to for a deeper understanding of how these women translated the immensity of mystical experience of God into language and how they sought to teach others how to understand the incomprehensible. Concern for freedom also directs our minds to the context of these and other *mulieres religiosae*, who struggled with, moved within, and innovated the theology of a male cultural context, which sought to circumscribe them and their religious authority. Finally, in the generation after Hadewijch and Beatrice, freedom became foundational to movements against the so-called heresy of the Free-Spirit, to the condemnation and burning of the beguine, Marguerite Porete, and to a larger suppression of beguine communities at the Council of Vienne. There is no doubt about the centrality of importance of this aspect of Hadewijch's and Beatrice's teaching and of its reception in the larger medieval context.

Further, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the freedom and authority to speak their theologies at all is an issue with which medieval women theologians constantly struggled. The limited freedoms of women in a male-dominated and clerical context are juxtaposed with the extravagant freedoms some of them felt they enjoyed by virtue of being chosen by God. Their difficulties in making their voices heard renders their theological understandings of the human person all the more extraordinary.

HADEWIJCH, BEATRICE, CISTERCIANS AND FREEDOM IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Hadewijch has proven to be somewhat of a puzzle to theologians and historians. Nothing is known for certain of this thirteenth-century beguine, other than what can be gleaned from her own writings. In this regard, Hadewijch differs greatly from other women writers from the period whose work has survived. Most women writers of this time period, such as Beatrice of Nazareth, Mechthild of Magdeburg, or Gertrude of Helfta would have had a male confessor who wrote a life of the woman in question, or her memory and biography would have been kept alive by the religious community in which she lived. In Hadewijch's case, no biography was left behind. While this is frustrating in many ways, Hadewijch's lack of a biography or the pious accretion of a popular cultus, allows the reader to come to her text without preconceived notions or a tradition of somatic objectification present in so many of the other medieval mystics' lives.

What *is* discernible about Hadewijch's life comes directly from her own writings. She was a Flemish beguine probably active during the first half of the thirteenth century in Antwerp. Like her contemporary, Beatrice, she seems to have been quite well educated, and thus most likely came from an upper class family. Her patrician status would also fit with data on wealthy women supporting the formation of early beguine communities, and there is the possibility that Hadewijch herself was one of these community founders.

Hadewijch's educational level can be gleaned from both the way she writes and what she writes. A medieval education consisted of the seven liberal arts: grammar, rheto-

ric, dialectic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music.⁴ Additionally, she proves herself well-versed in the traditions of courtly love lyric, which she used to develop her own understanding of the soul's relationship to God, and formal letter-writing, which comes through very clearly in the epistles to the young beguines in her community. Her knowledge of Latin and French, in addition to her native Flemish, also comes through in her expert use of all three languages throughout her corpus. The texts do not relate where Hadewijch received her education, but the fact that she received one at all spills out into the material of her writings.⁵

A number of literary sources come through in Hadewijch's work, most prominently her knowledge of scripture to which she makes frequent allusion and direct quotation. She also displays strong familiarity with the liturgy and other Latin poetry, the influence of which can be detected in her poetic output. Her spirituality is clearly formed by knowledge of Cistercian and Victorine sources, into which more thorough treatment will be made later in this chapter. Mother Columba Hart, in her introduction to the English translation of Hadewijch's work, points out that at points out that the mystic wholesale borrows material directly from Richard of St. Victor and William of Saint Thierry in two of her letters. Veerle Fraeters makes a compelling case for Hadewijch having knowledge of the writings of Hildegard of Bingen, the great visionary writer of the century preceding Hadewijch's own.⁶

⁴ The liberal arts were grouped into two sections. The *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music).

⁵ Mother Columba Hart, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*. New York: Paulist Press, 1980, 5.

⁶ Veerle Fraeters, "Handing on Wisdom and Knowledge in Hadewijch of Brabant's *Book of Visions*," in *Women and Experience in Later Medieval Writing: Reading the Book of Life*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker and Liz Herbert McAvoy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 157.

Hadewijch seems to have been a leader in her beguine community. This can be surmised from the many letters of instruction to young beguines and the potentially didactic nature of her recorded visions that make up a part of her writings.⁷ Also, suggesting an authoritative role for the mystic in her community are the hints of conflict in her writings. These brief pericopes in the texts point toward a struggle for leadership in her beguine community, and possibly meddling from secular or church authorities in the affairs of the group. Hart proposes that Hadewijch may have been undermined by some within her own community because of pressure from outside authorities consumed by jealousy of her position and irked by her high and unremitting standards for spiritual practice. Further, she seems to have been charged with teaching the heretical position of quietism, which brought with it the possibility of coming to the attention of the Inquisition.⁸ This was a real danger known to Hadewijch if her List of the Perfect is to be believed, where she mentions a beguine “whom Master Robbaert put to death on account of her true love.”⁹

The hints of dissension toward Hadewijch’s leadership that can be found in her writings are a particularly thought-provoking piece of the scant biographical material about her. She seems to have been in the center of a disagreement specifically concerning the doctrine of divine/human relationship that will be examined in this study. The absolute nature of Hadewijch’s ideas allow no room for error, and her critique of alternate “ways” of

⁷ Mother Columba Hart, Grace Jantzen, Paul Mommaers and other Hadewijch scholars make a compelling case for a reading of Hadewijch’s visions being used as a teaching tool for beguines in training. This develops and revises Fr. Reypens’ earlier assumption that an unknown spiritual director instructed Hadewijch to record the visions. A dynamic that, in other women mystics of the period, is well-documented.

⁸ Hart, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 4.

⁹ Helen Rolfson. “List of the Perfect by Hadewijch of Antwerp” in *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 5:4 (1988): 277-87.

beguine spirituality likely put her at odds with church authorities, her own fellow beguines, or both.

Though not clear from her writing how or when the decision took place, Hadewijch seems to have been expelled from the community and exiled over the disagreement about her theological understandings. Hart conjectures, based upon Hadewijch's instructions on the vocation of a beguine, that after her expulsion she may have taken up residence in a leprosarium or hospital, where she would have been able to continue doing apostolic work with the sick and while still having access to a chapel. In doing so, Hadewijch would have followed directly in the footsteps of the *mulieres religiosae* who went before her, taking whatever avenue best allowed them to live out a life modeled upon the earliest followers of Christ.¹⁰

Hadewijch's writings are quite diverse, including letters to other beguines, over whom she seems to have had some kind of authority; transcriptions of visions; short poems and long poems. Hadewijch undertakes a diversity of approaches to the divine in each genre of her own work. At one moment she is relating an understanding of the Trinity received in a trance state; at another she is advising a young beguine in the practical ways of experiencing God in the vocation to which they are called; in still another piece, she lauds the divinized and personified love above all loves, *Minne*. Hadewijch's way of interacting with each instantiation of the divine is unique and, taken as a whole, gives a fuller picture of her theology of God and of theological anthropology. It is this innovative and robust theol-

¹⁰ Hart, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 5.

ogy that is of interest to both theologians doing historical theology and those working toward recapturing some of the wisdom of theological foremothers for a contemporary age.

Beatrice was a Cistercian prioress who lived and wrote during the mid-thirteenth century, until her death in 1268. Unlike Hadewijch, Beatrice did have a biography written about her that was ostensibly based upon her own spiritual journal. Like Hadewijch, Beatrice received an education in the liberal arts, and was sent to live with the beguines of Zoutleuw¹¹ so that “she might more freely make progress in virtue.”¹² Beatrice spent a year being instructed by the beguines and then returned home, but quickly sought entrance into a Cistercian convent. Beatrice entered the community of Florival,¹³ but was sent to Rameya to learn the art of calligraphy. It was at Rameya that Beatrice met her first major spiritual mentor, Ida. Ultimately, Beatrice moved to the new Cistercian community at Nazareth, and it is here that she apparently wrote her extant theological treatise, *The Seven Manners of Loving*. As, Amy Hollywood says of Beatrice, “The external events of Beatrice’s life ... were unexceptional. Yet the treatise suggests that her inner life boiled and teemed with waves of violent love and insane desire.”¹⁴ Textually and theologically Hadewijch and Beatrice have much in common.

¹¹ Zoutleuw was one of the earliest organized beguine communities. Walter Simons lists its foundation date as between 1207-1245. Walter Simons. *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003, 259.

¹² *Vita Beatricis*, Book I, 3:20-21.

¹³ Beatrice’s father, Barthelmy De Vleeschouwer, was a strong proponent of the Cistercian reform. He sponsored the community at Florival, as well as Nazareth, where Beatrice eventually became prioress.

¹⁴ Hollywood, Amy. “Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Biographer.” In *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999, 80.

I have chosen Hadewijch and Beatrice as the topics of this project because I see many points of intersection between them. There is no evidence that these women knew each other or of their respective work; however, during a time when spiritual networking was an integral resource for *mulieres religiosae*, it is very possible that they at least knew of each other.

The commonalities between Hadewijch and Beatrice are many: Both women were well-educated during a time when educational opportunities for women were limited, both lived and wrote during the mid-thirteenth century in Flanders,¹⁵ both spent time in beguine communities, and both have some level of exposure to Cistercian theology, both wrote their own theologies for their own communities and were leaders of those communities, and for both, freedom is an important component to understanding their theology of the ultimate human end, namely, union with God.

The freedom of the human being is a particularly strong belief of Christian theological history. Without freedom, Christians would not be able to respond to the special revelation of God in Christ, which is a fundamental belief in the Christian faith. Regarding the general medieval position on freedom, the fourteenth-century theologian, Thomas Bradwardine would go so far as to say, "All the theologians, all the logicians, all the moral philosophers, and almost all the natural philosophers unanimously testify that free decision must be posited."¹⁶ That said, *how* free human beings are and what constitutes freedom has been much discussed in theology throughout its history, and particularly the discussions

¹⁵ What is today, Belgium.

¹⁶ *On God's Cause*, cited in Robert Pasnau. "Human Nature." in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Philosophy*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003, 224.

revolved around the issue of free will. Hadewijch and Beatrice's discussions of freedom take free will into account, but it is by no means the primary focus of how they deal with freedom in their theologies.

The Cistercian reform of the late twelfth century laid out important foundational materials for the *mulieres religiosae* movements – those movements which would ultimately coalesce into the robust beguine communities of which Hadewijch was a member, and by which Beatrice was trained.

Hadewijch and Beatrice are both much indebted to the Cistercian spiritual tradition for their understanding of freedom. Bernard of Clairvaux, a leader of the Cistercian reform, is identified as being the preeminent architect of medieval spirituality. The abbot's mellifluousness not only drew multitudes to the Cistercian order, but, perhaps more importantly, had a profound and lasting effect on how people of faith understood the divine/human relationship. His "affective" spirituality inserted emotion, namely love, into an experience-oriented mystical discourse previously dominated by an intellectual approach.¹⁷ This spirituality, and particularly the concept of the soul as bride of Christ developed under Bernard's hand and transmitted via his Cistercian community, had far-reaching effects upon the religious imaginations of spiritual writers throughout the Middle Ages. Affective mysticism is not only rooted in love, but more fundamentally in an understanding of the freedom of the human subject to respond through love to God. On this topic of human freedom, Bernard was a preeminent thinker in the Middle Ages.

¹⁷ An "intellectual" approach in line with Pseudo-Dionysius and Augustine; this is not to say that love was absent from their discussion of the mystical life.

The medieval discussion of human freedom was heavily dependent upon the thought of Augustine. The Bishop of Hippo, in his battles with Pelagianism, had traced out a theological anthropological view of human freedom's ability only to sin without the help of divine grace. Despite Augustine's normativity, however, Bernard McGinn cautions against too facile a conception of medieval understandings of freedom.

We must not think that Early Scholastic speculation on grace and free choice was nothing more than a repetition of Augustine or a series of footnotes to his treatises.¹⁸

Here Bernard of Clairvaux stands out as a medieval authority of freedom, faithful to the tradition of Augustine, while still providing an innovative reading on the dynamism of human freedom. This understanding of freedom, filtered through Cistercian communities, stands as a fundamental ground upon which Hadewijch and Beatrice build their theologies.

As in Augustine, freedom for Bernard of Clairvaux always began with divine initiative, but human freedom to respond to that graceful gift of God was nuanced. For Bernard, there were three aspects of freedom present in the human person. In two of these aspects, freedom from sin and freedom from sorrow, human beings were captive to sin and, thus, un-free. Where humans remain free, by virtue of their being created in the image of God, is what Bernard calls freedom from necessity. This freedom is natural to humanity and gives the soul the ability to choose to cooperate with grace or to belong to the devil.¹⁹

McGinn further elucidates Bernard by saying

¹⁸ Bernard McGinn. "Introduction." In Bernard of Clairvaux. *On Grace and Free Choice*, 2-50. . Translated by Daniel O'Donovan, OSCO. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1977, 11.

¹⁹ Ibid., Chapter 3.

The Abbot [Bernard] says that the essence of freedom is to be affirmed or denied from the point of view of the willing subject and not from the point of view of the willed object. In other words, where we have subjects acting spontaneously and free from external coercion, we have free choice.²⁰

This positive anthropological picture allows for the human soul, with the help of divine grace as *a priori* assumption, to respond to God's loving call to relationship. Hadewijch, Beatrice, and other holy women of the thirteenth century follow Bernard's positive view of human freedom, using it as a starting point to further develop human freedom.

While in Scholastic theology, the question of freedom began to revolve around painstaking explorations of free will, Hadewijch and Beatrice accepted that the human being was free to grow into what they were created to be, namely in loving union with God. This union with God was, in reality, a full restoration to "likeness" with God. As DeGanck comments on Bernard's understanding of this,

To be restored to the likeness in all its splendor the soul has only to consent to its *real nature* (emphasis my own), its inborn capacity for God, and to God's grace which is always waiting for its consent.²¹

The "liberating grace" that the holy women of the thirteenth century pursue is a second movement of this innate freedom: the freedom, without any impediment, to become that real nature.

Hadewijch's and Beatrice's discussions of freedom, then, are influenced largely by Bernard, and other monastic authors, yet what they seem to be discussing in terms of freedom has an unique thrust. While virtue and will are definitely a component of their discus-

²⁰ McGinn, "Introduction." In *On Grace and Free Choice*, 25.

²¹ Roger DeGanck. *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991, 117.

sions of freedom, both women are actually concerned about the ultimate freedom afforded a soul who has become what God created her to be and how, on earth, this reality can be “lived.”

HADEWIJCH AND BEATRICE IN CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Stephanus Axter’s *The Spirituality of the Old Low Countries*, translated into English in 1954, recognized the theological contributions of Hadewijch and Beatrice; however, he relegated them to a chapter entitled “Before Ruysbroeck,” which surveys the spirituality of the Low Countries from the time of Athanasius of Alexandria up until the fourteenth century. The works of Beatrice and Hadewijch are treated in this chapter, but their theologies are positioned to be prototypical of what would come into full fruition with Jan van Ruysbroeck.²² A contemporary of Axter’s, J. van Mierlo labored to identify the elusive Hadewijch and to provide scholarship with a critical edition of her works.

Amy Hollywood’s article “Inside Out: Beatrice of Nazareth and Her Hagiographer” raises the topic of freedom in Beatrice’s theology. Here Hollywood brings the issue of freedom in direct association with the discussion of mystical experience treated above.

Women’s writings from the thirteenth century are both visionary and apophatic; often there is an unproblematic movement between the two, the visionary moment serving as the material that is subsequently negated in a union without distinction between the soul and the divine.²³

²² Stephanus Axter. *The Spirituality of the Old Low Countries*. Translated by Donald Attwater. London: Blackfriars, 1954. See Chapter 1, 20-26.

²³ Hollywood, “Inside Out,” 97.

Further, Hollywood points out that the interiority described by Beatrice increases in parallel to the subject's desire for freedom.²⁴ Ultimately, Hollywood argues that within Beatrice's work there is a claim of freedom that is both theological and consistent with her mystical milieu and also "an autonomy of the internal self ... to free herself from the cultural demands for a visibly suffering female body."²⁵ Here Hollywood is underscoring the act of freedom Beatrice (and Hadewijch) undertakes by writing her own theology, over and against the male clerical culture's expectation of the female religious: namely that she be receptive to instruction, that she display somatic signs of holiness, and that she undertake mortification of the flesh.²⁶

Roger DeGanck also devotes two dozen pages to the topic of "Liberating Grace" in the first volume of *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, which traces out the importance of freedom in both Beatrice and Hadewijch.²⁷ Here DeGanck briefly discusses the two-fold nature of freedom found in these authors, beginning with "man's (sic) metaphysical freedom" inherited from the deposit of patristic thought, and followed by the "particularly striking" movement in some of the holy women "to be freed from all obstacles to the love of God, and unhindered by anything that could diminish their liberty or hold it captive."²⁸ That both Hadewijch and Beatrice held positions of authority and leadership in their com-

²⁴ I would argue this is also overtly present in the writings of Hadewijch.

²⁵ Hollywood, "Inside Out," 98.

²⁶ All of these being attributes that Beatrice's hagiographer inserts artificially into his "translation" of her spiritual journal.

²⁷ DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, 168-192.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 169.

munities, and thereby had a teaching role, further underscores the import of more deeply exploring the role of freedom in their theological writings.²⁹ This exploration of freedom has begun in the leading scholars on these mystical authors, and this present work I seek to more deeply articulate the centrality of freedom in their texts.

HADEWIJCH AND BEATRICE AND THEIR WORK

Though the flowering of the beguine communities took place after his death, Bernard's voice spoke to women like Hadewijch and Beatrice through their involvement with Cistercian monks, who acted for them as spiritual directors, chaplains, and biographers or hagiographers.³⁰ The Cistercians' spiritual support of beguines in the northern Low Countries is far from negligible, which may be further underscored by the eventual vocations of former beguines, Beatrice of Nazareth being one, to the Cistercian monastic life. But while this important influence must be taken into account, it would also be a mistake to paint Hadewijch's and Beatrice's mystical theologies as a simple repetition of Bernard. Just as the beguine way of life differed from that of their Cistercian collaborators, I propose, so did the theology of the *mulieres sanctae* and their spiritual daughters diverge in significant ways.

²⁹ Though Hadewijch's life is shrouded in mystery, her letters to young beguines display a pedagogical bent to whatever position she held in her particular beguinage. Beatrice was prioress in the Cistercian monastery at Nazareth, thus presiding over the community until her death in 1268.

³⁰ The Cistercians were not the only religious order to serve the beguine communities. Indeed, many of the "first-wave" beguines are known to us via the writings of Dominicans, canons, or secular clergy. This study focuses on Cistercian involvement due to the ubiquitous character of Bernard's writings in medieval spirituality and because Beatrice, who eventually entered a Cistercian community, will be under examination here.

The initial foundation of beguine communities remains shrouded in mystery.³¹ They began informally at the end of the twelfth century and reached the height of their popularity in the next hundred years. At the beginning, charismatic women, such as Marie d'Oignies, ardently desired a life of holiness on the model of the Christians of apostolic times. Yet what set some women apart, like Marie and others, was their innovation to pursue lives of holiness outside of the cloister. Gradually, communities coalesced around these women, living self-sufficient lives based on their own labor, taking *temporary* vows, and devoting themselves to quasi-monastic spiritual practices. Perhaps one of the most striking aspects of the beguine life was the freedom it afforded women in a time period in which they, as a rule, did not have a great deal of agency in the shaping of their own destinies.

Although the beguine communities were autonomous, as Walter Simons points out, there *was* an exceptional network of sharing between the communities in the southern Low Countries.³² Furthermore, the recent writings of Paul Mommaers and Walter Simons demonstrate that Hadewijch's theology was a discipline that encompassed the whole person and her experiences; it is conjectured that there was even a performative aspect to her poems and a liturgical component to Hadewijch's visionary literature.³³ This places both Bernard's and the women writers' mystical theology firmly in the context of the community for which they are writing, but at the same time sets the beguine's approach apart from Ber-

³¹ For a thorough discussion of the history of the development of beguine communities, see Walter Simons. *Cities of Ladies*,

³² *Ibid.*, 35-60.

³³ This recalls the activities of another thirteenth-century beguine, Elizabeth of Spalbeek, whose daily reenactment of Christ's passion is regarded by dramatists to be one of the first recorded instances of "performance art." Amy Hollywood raises a question as to whether these body-focused spiritualities were authentically those of women or the imposition of male authors. See Hollywood, Amy. "Inside Out," 78-98.

nard and his tradition, which, though it affirmed the goal of experience of the divine, had at the same time a suspicion of the value of bodily experiences. For Bernard, bodily and erotic language always points above and beyond to a spiritual concept for the value of its meaning. On the other hand, in Beatrice one finds a more methodical spiritual approach, while retaining some of the “wildness”³⁴ of Hadewijch’s theology.

Hadewijch and Beatrice stand out among the *mulieres religiosae* and have been chosen as subjects of study here because the writings of both survive at least in part. In the case of Hadewijch, her relatively recently re-discovered³⁵ oeuvre of poems, letters, and visions is available in a modern Dutch critical edition, the entirety of which is also available in English translation. Sources are not as straightforward for Beatrice. As has been noted above, one of Beatrice’s treatise, *The Seven Manners of Loving*, has survived in its vernacular Flemish, a critical edition of which was provided by Leonce Reypens almost a century ago. The *Vita Beatricis*, a Latin translation (and re-working) of her personal journal, commissioned by the abbess of Nazareth after Beatrice’s death, is also available and is included in the first book of De Ganck’s multi-volume masterwork on Beatrice.³⁶

This present study will make use of the modern critical editions of both women’s work in Dutch, relying also upon translations available, and a variety of secondary literature available. In the case of Beatrice’s journal, the *Vita Beatricis*, the Latin transcription of

³⁴ Here, borrowing a term from the later Flemish mystic, Jan van Ruysbroeck.

³⁵ Hadewijch’s work, which had been virtually forgotten since the fourteenth century, was rediscovered in 1838 by three medievalists working in the Royal Library in Brussels. See Hart, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 1-42.

³⁶ See Roger DeGanck’s 3-volume masterwork on Beatrice. Roger DeGanck. *Beatrice of Nazareth in her context*. Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1991, 2 vols.

her anonymous biographer will be used alongside the translation of Roger DeGanck.³⁷

Various lives of proto-beguine holy women (*mulieres sanctae*) will be examined in the Latin of their authors, as well as the masterful translations recently released by Peregrina Press.

MYSTICISM: EXPERIENCE, AWARENESS, AND TRANSFORMATION

Hadewijch and Beatrice both write affective mystical theology, in the tradition of Bernard of Clairvaux. This present work will approach Hadewijch and Beatrice and what they have to say about freedom “on their own terms.” Thus, we must begin with some discussion of how scholars of religion may responsibly treat and understand the loose term “mysticism.” What are twenty-first century scholars to understand when Hadewijch says she had a vision of Christ and that he embraced her, wherein she felt him in all her members? Or are we to interpret literally when Beatrice describes types of suffering she experiences in her *Seven Ways*? Recent scholarship on the meaning of mysticism will guide this discussion.

When introducing mystical writers while teaching undergraduate courses on theology, I always begin by asking the students what connotation the word “mystical” brings up in their minds. The better answers involve a constellation of ideas that mysticism is somehow hidden knowledge that is beginning to be discovered. The less heartening answers have to do with fairies and unicorns. Though not as extreme, perhaps, scholarly approaches to mysticism can have a similar range. Denys Turner’s question about what really is a mystical experience has opened up this conversation quite fruitfully. Turner wonders,

³⁷ Jos Huls’ recent translation of Beatrice’s *Seven Ways* using the Hague manuscript is also being utilized in this study. Jos Huls. *The Minne Journey: Beatrice of Nazareth’s “Seven Ways of Minne”. Mystical Process and Mystagogical Implications*. Leuven: Peeters, 2013.

... whether or not there was any such thing as ‘mystical experience’. And I wondered about this question because on the one hand there seemed a common, informal view around that the ‘mystical’ had something to do with the having of very uncommon, privileged ‘experiences’; and, on the other, because when I read many of them – like Eckhart or the Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* – made no mention at all of any such experiences and most of the rest who, like John of the Cross or Teresa of Avila, did make mention of ‘experiences’, attached little or no importance to them and certainly did not think the having of them to be definitive of ‘the mystical’.³⁸

Turner is quite correct in pointing out the tension within mystical writing between experiences of God and the authentic vocation to love God. This appears overtly in the writings of Hadewijch in particular, who is very distrustful of what seems to have been a trend in beguine circles of languishing in love with God. That said, perhaps a more nuanced approach to “mystical experience” must be explored. Amy Hollywood, as will be discussed more below, is critical of dismissing the importance of experience.

As Denys Turner himself recognizes, some mystical authors do speak of experience. Experience looms large in the writings of both Beatrice and Hadewijch, and it seems it would be irresponsible to go so far as to say that these experiences are of “little or no importance.” Particularly noteworthy in this regard is that both authors’ theology relies upon sacramental and liturgical language, both of which are, by their very nature, experiential, i.e. dealing with sight, sound, taste, and touch.³⁹ That said, experience is by no means the end of mysticism, but rather seems to be the gateway to a mature spiritual life. Hadewijch writes much of her suspicion of experiences and those who cultivate these types of states and nothing more. For Hadewijch, states of mystical experience are markers on a road to

³⁸ Denys Turner. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 2.

³⁹ For example see Hadewijch’s *Vision 7* and Beatrice’s “Christmas vision” as described by her Cistercian translator. See DeGank, *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth*, 67-75.

something much greater, the freedom to truly seek “to love God in the highest possible way.”⁴⁰

This dynamic of movement from imagery and experience toward apophysis described by Turner is very much alive in Hadewijch and mystics who would follow her. His argument that mysticism in the Middle Ages, as an *exoteric* rather than *esoteric* enterprise, also finds particular examples in both Hadewijch and Beatrice.⁴¹ More to the point, it is precisely this movement from contemplation to a challenging spirituality that pushes the soul outside her boundaries. This movement is the focus of Hadewijch’s and Beatrice’s mature theologies, namely, the embrace of God’s will. Inward experience continues to be of significance and, as Amy Hollywood points out, the organic movement between inner and outer present in the writings of these two women is rather artificially misrepresented by attempting to separate the two categories.⁴² Further in addition to the tension between experience and apophysis, Hollywood rightly points out the fundamental role of experiences as authoritative in medieval women writers, who largely did not have access to other forms of authority:

What Turner misses is the place of medieval women mystics and their religious experience – visionary, auditory, and sensory in response to the demand of their contemporaries for some authorizing, divine agency, yet also increasingly interiorized in an attempt to escape from the externalizing demands of male-defined female sanctity. Women’s writings from the thirteenth century are both visionary and apophatic; often there is an un-problematic movement between the two, the visionary moment serving as the material that is

⁴⁰ Bernard McGinn, ed. *Meister Eckhart and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete*. New York: Bloombury Academic, 1997, 11.

⁴¹ Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 268.

⁴² Hollywood, “Inside Out,” 97.

subsequently negated in a union without distinction between the soul and the divine.⁴³

Such is definitely the case in Hadewijch and also in Beatrice if her *Vita* is then compared to her treatise *The Seven Manners of Loving*.

Bernard McGinn's multivolume work on mysticism, *The Presence of God*, provides helpful insight into the influx of visionary experiences into mystical theology, particularly in the thirteenth century. He, very rightly, demarcates the difference between visionary experiences and mystical theology; however, this does not mean that they are mutually exclusive categories. As he says,

If all experiential accounts of visions and auditions from the celestial realm, no matter *whom* they involve (God, Christ, Mary, angels, saints), and *what* they teach (messages about reform of the church, or about future events, doctrinal disputes, etc.), are to be considered mystical, then the mystical element in Christianity is in danger of losing connection with what most mystics themselves have claimed to be essential, that is, *a special consciousness of the presence of God that by all definition exceeds description and results in a transformation of the subject who receives it.* (Emphasis my own.)⁴⁴

The major thrust of the work of Hadewijch, for whom visions and poetry are of such pedagogical importance, and Beatrice, for whom experiences are implied but not overtly discussed, is this transformation of the subject. Hadewijch and Beatrice believe in the ability freely to pursue union with God through human striving. Thus, the reality of this transformation for these authors must be taken into account in exploring their understanding of freedom in their theological anthropologies.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 97

⁴⁴ Bernard McGinn. *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism, Vol. III The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998, 26.

The focus on experience, then, for Hadewijch and Beatrice is somewhat misleading because it draws away attention from what their theologies are actually about. The spirituality of both women was, like any spirituality, a confluence point of their time period, life experiences, and their particular contextual location. To try to psychoanalyze backwards from texts is unhelpful.⁴⁵ What sources they were drawing from to write these theologies are, in many ways, closed to us now so too are exactly the intentions and audiences of these texts.⁴⁶

What does come through in both Hadewijch's and Beatrice's writings is the supreme and life-changing importance of relationship with God. Their ideas about this relationship were shaped by their lives in religious communities, by liturgical practice, by communal and personal prayer, sermons and exhortations, and by visual arts. Both women expressed themselves in poetry, which by its very nature is not to be taken literally; their insights were dependent upon other theologians' and poets' works, and what results is a theology and theological anthropology with a deep understanding of the freedom of each human person to become what they were created to be. This theology did not strive for extraordinary, supernatural states, rather it focused on action and service to God and to the other. In this sense, in this study, I will be reading Hadewijch and Beatrice as being fundamentally aware of the reality and transformative potentiality of living, as Hadewijch says, "God with

⁴⁵ See Jerome Kroll and Roger DeGanck. "Beatrice of Nazareth: Psychiatric Perspectives on a Medieval Mystic." *Cistercian Studies* 24 (1989): 301-323 and Pedersen, Else Marie Wiberg. "The In-carnation of Beatrice of Nazareth's Theology." in *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact*. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, eds. Turnhout: Brepols, 1999.

⁴⁶ Concerning Hadewijch in particular, see Mommaers & Dutton, 39-57. Josef van Mierlo, "Hadewijchiana. De Latijnse verzen van het 45e der Strofische Gedichten", *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 17 (1943), 179-184. Schottmann, Hans. "Autor und Hörer in den Strophischen Gedichten Hadewijchs", in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 102 (1973), 20-37.

God,” but not reading the spiritual states they described in their texts as literal representations of the truths they attempt to convey in their theologies.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 2: Freedom to Speak: Thirteenth-Century Theological Interaction of Men and Women. To begin to examine Hadewijch and Beatrice on freedom, we must first take a broad look at the experiences and context of religious women in medieval northern Europe. By looking over this landscape, we find that, what I will call in this study, an overarching male clerical culture provided many roadblocks to freedom for both women in certain ways. Hadewijch and Beatrice both struggle against this culture of religious repression of women’s voices, both knowingly in some cases, and (perhaps) unknowingly through their writings. I do not mean to say that these medieval mystics are anachronistic or proto-feminists, as doing so would seem to be difficult to demonstrate and conjectural nearly 800 years later. However, both women do offer a prophetic voice, diverse yet still complementary to the overarching male theological voices of their time.

A primary example of this demonstration of male clerical culture is seen in Jacques de Vitry’s embrace of the beguine communities, a burgeoning religious movement starting in the twelfth century that was influential to varying degrees on both Hadewijch and Beatrice. The influential churchman, Jacques de Vitry’s, enthusiasm for the beguine way of life was unusual for the thirteenth century. It was due, in part, to this enthusiasm that the beguines enjoyed a high level of popularity and support from male clerics. As Jacques rose in the ranks of the Church hierarchy, his support of communities of holy women reached even to the ear of the Pope. That said, Jacques de Vitry’s introduction to the *Vita* of Marie

d'Oignies gives an insight into his understanding of what would become the beguine way of life. His description of holy women highlights aspects of the lifestyle that would not be endorsed by Hadewijch; in fact, her writings provide a counter-position to the descriptions of holy women's spirituality found in Jacques' text. This raises a question as to what it was that Jacques de Vitry and Hadewijch really prized in the communities of holy women, and which writer provides a more accurate picture into the wider phenomenon of beguine life in the thirteenth century.

The tension between male interpretations of medieval women's spirituality and the understanding of the women themselves, in the cases of both Hadewijch and Beatrice, seem to diverge starkly from one another. For Hadewijch, this issue looks to be one of the causes of her running afoul of ecclesiastical authorities and her ejection from her own beguine community. This is not to set up a false dichotomy between male and female theologians in the Middle Ages, for, as will be discussed below, Hadewijch and her sister-theologians relied much upon contemporary clerics and the venerated writings of the earlier male theologians. This chapter, ultimately, will seek to delineate places where Hadewijch and Beatrice encountered lack of freedom in their contemporary contexts, to further illuminate the role that freedom plays in their writings on the mystical life.

Chapter 3: Freedom and Image of God: Hadewijch, Beatrice, and Bernard on Freedom. The third chapter will go into more depth in explaining how Hadewijch and Beatrice are heirs to Bernard of Clairvaux's Cistercian, monastic understanding of freedom. Cistercian authors by no means are the only sources to which Hadewijch and Beatrice had access;

however, I have chosen to focus on their Cistercian connection particularly because of affective mysticism, which Bernard popularized so forcefully in the late twelfth century.

As pointed out above, Bernard's concept of freedom in the human person was quite startling in both its faithfulness to authorities like Augustine, but also its positivity regarding human freedom. Hadewijch and Beatrice both approach their theology of divine encounter with God from this foundational understanding of the human person being truly a creature made for relationship with the divine. Without this radical freedom of the human being to respond to God's call to relationship, their theologies would have no beginning point! Bernard's theological anthropology, which is so rooted in the freedom of the human subject, is also intimately tied with the affective mysticism with which he is so well known. This dynamic of freedom and love intertwined is most overtly present in the writings of both Hadewijch and Beatrice.

This chapter will explore and explain the places in their texts where Hadewijch and Beatrice show themselves to be working from this orthodox understanding of freedom bound with loving. Understanding and experience of this fundamental relationship prepares the way for the full union between human soul and God. This full fruition is the height and end of human "noble freedom," which is the topic of the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Growing in Likeness: Hadewijch and Beatrice on Noble Freedom and Union with God. From the foundational freedom inherent in human beings, Hadewijch and Beatrice develop a program of growing in freedom, love, and union with God. Particularly for Hadewijch, training in how to "do" this is the matter of her letters of instruction to young beguines. For Beatrice the *Seven Manners of Loving* details how the soul responds to

initial freedom, and cultivates growth in unhindered freedom, which culminates in her echo of St. Paul, "*Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo!*"⁴⁷

This chapter will take up the question of what Hadewijch and Beatrice understand to be the goal of this union. I will seek to answer the question, what does it mean to be free to "be God with God?" In an attempt to fully understand this most important aspect of their theologies, both authors' texts will be fully examined on this topic. I will also underscore the ways in which Hadewijch and Beatrice's theology of divine union is a true development of affective mystical theology, particularly in the ways in which understand and innovate on ideas of gender.

Finally, in conclusion, I will give some brief, final thoughts on freedom in Hadewijch and Beatrice. At the end of this work, I hope to be able to demonstrate in a more comprehensive way, the centrality of freedom to the theologies of Hadewijch and Beatrice and the continued importance of their writings. Here I will underscore the innovations of the women, focusing on two main points of gender language and care of the community. Doing so will accomplish several things. First, it will provide a fuller understanding of the medieval discussion of freedom outside of the "official" theology of scholastic development, providing a space for medieval women's theology. Second, and more importantly, this exploration will uncover further depth of understanding and appreciation for the texts of Hadewijch and Beatrice for the twenty-first century. Finally, it is my hope that this deeper appreciation of these medieval women's voices will further point to the continued recovery

⁴⁷ "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ." Letter to the Philippians 1:23-4.

and importance of theological texts by women in the history of theology and for the contemporary church.

CHAPTER TWO

MYSTIC WOMEN IN MALE CLERICAL CULTURE

Hadewijch and Beatrice lived and wrote during the thirteenth century in northern Europe, a time of limited opportunities for women both in society and the Church. Religious life in some ways may have afforded more freedom to women than did a secular life. However, no matter the social status of the women, their experiences in the thirteenth century, both religious and secular, were largely dictated by men. As this study is examining a theology of freedom, it is first important to see the dynamics of freedom and non-freedom that these women dealt with in their everyday lives. Because Hadewijch, Beatrice, and the other *mulieres religiosae* lived lives to varying degrees governed by men, I think it is important to explore this reality to see how it relates to freedom in women's writing. Male clerical culture sought to set the boundaries for women's religious experience, corralling them into categories that were codified and approved by that same hierarchy of male clerical traditions. This male clerical culture displayed a marked ambivalence to the *mulieres religiosae*, by turns cultivating their new expressions of religiosity, and treating them with suspicion and censure. In this chapter I will point out the ways in which male clerical culture provided challenges for women theologians like Hadewijch and Beatrice.

Much has been and still can be written about this very broad topic of the flowering of women's religious vocations in the Middle Ages.⁴⁸ Regardless of their motivations, there was an explosion of religious fervor amongst women in thirteenth-century northern Europe. A steady stream of women sought to follow a religious vocation in traditional monastic communities.⁴⁹ At the same time, women were also engaging in more innovative ways of engaging in apostolic ways of life. These women, categorized as *mulieres religiosae* or *mulieres sanctae*, came from diverse backgrounds and approached their vocations in different ways: Marie d'Oignies convinced her husband to live chastely and join her in an extreme penitential regimen; Elisabeth of Spalbeek lived with her family, graphically reenacting the passion of Christ every day; the wild Christina Mirabilis, eschewed any expression of being tied down, preached and did public penances of the most astonishing nature (hence her epithet). All these women had a certain amount of autonomy in their religious endeavors, and served as the foremothers of the communities of women that would become known as beguines.

Men and women in a medieval spiritual context did not have one way of interacting with one another. There was a whole range of how individual men and women and male and female religious communities built relationships, ranging from the dynamics of confes-

⁴⁸ For instance, the "Woman question" is one such theory, which sought to connect the flourishing of women's vocation to religious and quasi-religious ways of life with the scarcity of marriageable men. An influential articulation can be found in Bücher, Karl. *Die Frauenfrage im Mittelalter*. 2nd ed. Tübingen: H. Laupp, 1910. Simons discusses the problems with *frauenfrage* and its inherent misogyny in Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, x-xi and 155, n. 35.

⁴⁹ Roger DeGanck offers the startling statistic that in the medieval Low Countries (what is today, roughly, the state of Belgium) there were sixty-six Cistercian communities of women, compared to fifteen of Cistercian men. DeGanck states that this would be a ration of 4.4 Cistercian religious women to every one male. See DeGanck, Roger. "The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century" in *Cistercian Studies*, vol. 5, 1970. 169-187.

sor and penitent through master and disciple to object of devotion and devotee. Further complicating these roles is that the relationships between male clerics and women mystics did not always fit into neat categories. For example, Jacques de Vitry served as confessor and spiritual guide to Marie d'Oignies, and was simultaneously awed and exhilaratingly devoted to her as a *mulier sancta* – in one role he serves as her superior, in another, her devoted disciple. At the same time, Jacques, in his writing about Marie, clearly circumscribes the actual woman to fit her into his very male-oriented view of her spirituality.

Richard Woods' exploration of these issues points out succinctly that they were a ubiquitous aspect of gender relationships, stretching out to norms governing medieval society in general.⁵⁰ Within the Church, women had one of the more ideal range of options and a modicum of education and authority. Beatrice in her own textual record, seems to be struggling against the male view and (mis)understanding of her writings; or, conversely, the male editor seems to be wrestling with the original writings to fit Beatrice into a normative picture of what a Cistercian nun "should" be.

While that is the case, at the same time men and women's interactions with each other cannot be collapsed into a simple picture of dominator and dominated. To varying degrees the *mulieres religiosae* collaborated with men and male religious orders to fulfill their religious goals. Many men served as scribes to women, making it possible for them to have their work and words recorded and distributed. Finally, as scholarship on the topic of the *mulieres* has recently pointed out, the early women's movements were nurtured, guided, and protected by established orders of men, particularly the Cistercians.⁵¹ There-

⁵⁰ See Richard Woods. *Understanding Mysticism*. New York: Doubleday Image, 1980.

fore, it is not a simple task to discuss the relationship of religious women to clerical men without doing a disservice to both groups. A thorough study of these issues is beyond the scope of this work; however, there are some areas pertinent to the discussion of a theological concept of freedom that must guide the structure of this work. This discussion will fall into the following categories: Male clerical culture's control (or attempted control) of women's communities, male clerical culture in its support of the *mulieres religiosae*, (although control, support, and censure are not always neat categories in this discussion, as we'll see below) and finally, the specific cases of men's involvement with Hadewijch and Beatrice themselves. Through all this material, we will find a pushing against and pulling toward, a malediction and blessing, in the attitudes of clerical males toward the exemplary women mystics and religious of the thirteenth century, making the subject of freedom a particularly thorny one. The ultimate concern here is to get a larger context for Hadewijch's and Beatrice's writings as they deal with freedom and, thereby, to come to a greater understanding of what these women have to say about theological anthropology.

CONTROL: SYNEISACTISM⁵² AND RELIGIOUS FERVOR

The story of the *mulieres religiosae* begins in the twelfth century. By this time, the Rule of Benedict was already 600 years old and some communities living it were in much need of reform. Reform was a watchword in this century for the Church as a whole, and along with it, fervor for the religious life. Monastic communities like the Premonstratensians and the Cistercians, following a stricter adherence to Benedict, were born in this cen-

⁵¹ See DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, Chapter 1.

⁵² "Syneisactism" refers to the co-mingling of male and female monastic communities. Double monasteries of men and women presided over by an abbot or abbess flourished for a period of the Middle Ages until suspicion, by Bernard of Clairvaux and others, of such structures brought them to an end.

ture. Men were not the only ones to feel this enthusiasm for the religious life and many communities saw an upsurge in women's vocations. While women were important at the foundations of these communities and women's communities flourished alongside their male counterparts, there was an increasing angst over what to do with all the nuns.⁵³

By the time of Bernard of Clairvaux, who greatly increased the popularity of the reforms of Citeaux, the woman question had come to a head. Traditions about Bernard himself paint him as a monastic ill at ease with nuns, and suspicious of women in general. His treatment of Humbeline, his own sister, in writings about his life is indicative of the angst Cistercians felt over how to deal with women. In the *Life* written by Bernard's colleague, William of St. Thierry, he records Bernard's reception of a visit by his sister. At first he refuses to see Humbeline, "hating and loathing her as if she were a snare of the devil set on luring souls". Bernard's brother, Andrew, (also a brother of Humbeline) further "rebuked her with being a parcel of dung, because of her elegant clothes".⁵⁴ Whether or not William's rendering of this episode is literal, Bernard was unquestionably an opponent of syneisactism, that is, the mingling of men and women religious in one monastery.⁵⁵ Since celibacy

⁵³ See DeGanck. "The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the 13th Century", 169-171; McNamara, Jo Ann, "Introduction" in Hugh of Floreffe. *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, translated by Jo Ann McNamara. Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 2000. 9-33.

⁵⁴ This scene between Bernard, Andrew, and Humbeline is recounted in Jean Leclercq. *Women and St. Bernard of Clairvaux*. Cistercian Studies Series 104. Kalamazzo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989. Leclercq objects to this being an accurate representation of Bernard's attitude toward women, and postulates that the episode was an invention of William's own. See also, Henriquez, Crisostomo. *Lilia Cistercii sive Sacrarum virginum Cistercensium origo, instituta, et res gestae*. Duaci, 1633, Chapter 3.3. See William of St. Thierry, Arnold of Bonneval, and Geoffrey of Auxerre. *The First Life of Bernard of Clairvaux*. Cistercian Fathers Series 76. Translated by Fr. Hilary Costello, OCSO. Kalamazzoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2015, 34 and also Jantzen, Grace. *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion 8, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 131.

⁵⁵ Grace Jantzen addresses this narrative saying that it does not matter who actually did or did not call

had recently been mandated to clerics, they were particularly distrustful of men and women working together.⁵⁶ In this climate, monastic orders that had originally been mixed in gender moved gradually toward only an option of claustration for women.⁵⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux went so far in his opposition as to say that syneisactic communities were a deliberate cause of scandal and a marker of heresy; he believed that monks did not have the ability to associate with women and also remain chaste.⁵⁸

Anne E. Lester, in her study of Cistercian nuns in Champagne, offers another Cistercian example of male hostility toward women. Lester's recounting of the *mulieres religiosae* of Chichéry and proceedings against them by the monks of Montier-la-Celle demonstrates the uneasy relationship often coming between monks and women attempting to lead an autonomous religious life.⁵⁹ The religious women of Chichéry formed a religious community in a farmhouse where they sang and prayed the office together under the supervision of a parish priest. The *mulieres religiosae* of Chichéry also adopted white habits, similar to those worn by the Cistercian communities, although they were not attached to

Humbeline a "parcel of dung" (though Jantzen updates the translation to something less sanitized than Leclerque's), its insertion in Benard's *Life* points to misogyny present in male monastic culture of the twelfth century.

⁵⁶ The First Lateran Council declared clerical marriages to be invalid.

⁵⁷ In the case of the Premonstratensians, Ricwere of Clastres organized the women's branch of the community and they ministered as nurses in the hospital of Prémontré. The women were later cloistered and ultimately women were not recruited at all. McNamara, "Introduction" in *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, 9-33.

⁵⁸ Bernard of Clairvaux, *Sermon on the Song of Songs*, 65. Translated by Kilian Walsh and Irene M. Edmonds. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979. 179-189. See also the discussion in McNamara, Jo Ann. *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996, Chapter 9.

⁵⁹ Anne E. Lester. *Creating Cistercian Nuns: The Women's Religious Movement and Its Reform in Thirteenth-Century Champagne*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011, 15-21.

any Cistercian house. The monks of Montier-la-Celle responded to this ambiguous community by making a formal complaint to Pope Gregory IX, in which they complain that the women had taken on monastic habits and installed themselves in the farmhouse by their own authority (*auctoritate propria*). Recalling Bernard's worry of women in proximity to the monastery, at Chichéry the women's failure to submit to monastic enclosure caused scandal amongst the monks. The women's ability to "wander about" caused scandal and a danger to the monks who lived nearby.⁶⁰

Suspicion and distrust of women was not reserved to monks in the Middle Ages, and the previous examples seek to point to examples of a larger trend in male clerical and monastic attitudes toward women. The scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas would codify some of these ideas on women in his treatment of Aristotle's idea that women were "misbegotten males." Aquinas, in discussing the image of God, on the one hand, says that women do bear within themselves the *imago Dei*,⁶¹ but at the same time he concludes that

But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman, for man is the beginning and end of woman, just as God is the beginning and end of every creature ... 'For man is not of woman, but woman is of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man.'⁶²

Commenting on these views of Aquinas, Grace Jantzen says they display "how thoroughly these misogynist views permeated the religious thinking of the medieval church."⁶³

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶¹ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologiae*. 1a, 93, 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1a, 92, 4.

⁶³ Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 195.

Despite an attitude of ambiguity, outright hostility (in some cases), or suspicion by male clerics toward women's vocations, Beatrice and many, many other women flocked to the monastic and beguine ways of life.⁶⁴ A consideration here could be the relative freedoms a life in a religious community might afford women, not to mention the opportunity to be educated to a degree that may not have been available to the average lay woman. It also provided space for women like Hadewijch and Beatrice to compose theological writings, which would be used within their own communities – theology written by women for women's theological formation.

Beguine communities provided means for women to take up a style of religious life as an alternative to the monastery. Jacques de Vitry, to whom we will turn next, was instrumental in rallying support for these communities, which grew out of the experiences of the *mulieres religiosae*. Jacques is an example of how male clerics were supportive of medieval women's religious lives, but also worked to model those lives into something dictated by male authority.

CONTROL AND SUPPORT:

JACQUES DE VITRY AND THE *MULIERES RELIGIOSAE*

Jacques de Vitry can be credited at least in part with the growth and popularity of what would turn into the flourishing beguine communities of the thirteenth century. Jacques de Vitry's time in the Diocese of Liège, a center of the *mulieres religiosae* activity, instilled in him a deep appreciation for the way of life of these fervent women he saw sur-

⁶⁴ See n. 2 above. Simons provides information on the demographics of beguine communities. Between 1240 and 1340, 229 beguine communities were founding. While some communities had as few as four residents, the Groot Begijnhof in Leuven boasted as many as 300 women in residence. Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, Chapter 2, Tables 1-3.

passing many monastic and clerical males in devotion and authentic living of a life modeled on Christ. Jacques set out to make a case in favor of the lives of the *mulieres* through his writings; particularly in his *Vita* of Marie d'Oignies. Jacques de Vitry's devotion to Marie went so deep that after her death he wore her severed finger in a reliquary locket for the rest of his life.

Marie d'Oignies was a model of the *mulier religiosa* ideal that Jacques experienced during his time in Liège. She was a married lay woman who sought out a life of religious devotion, convincing even her husband to live in a chaste marriage, so that she could attach herself (loosely) to a community of Augustinian Canons; she fasted, fed the sick, tormented her own body, while caring for the bodies of others; she had visions of souls in purgatory and was seen as a powerful intercessor for them; she had the gift of tears and conversations with Jesus Christ, and used this authority to chastise clergy who didn't think she was as holy as she was. Jacques' lengthy exposition of her life highlights all these exemplary attributes and, as he rose in the ranks of the Church, was able to negotiate sanction for the anomalous communities of holy women. Papal approval of the *mulieres* living together in community became the prototype for "cities" of beguines that grew up in the burgeoning urban centers of Northern Europe.

At the same time, regardless of his enthusiasm for Marie and her sister holy-women, Jacques displays a very particular interpretation of women's spirituality that fits, perhaps, more into his a priori assumptions about religious women than it depicts their reality. As we saw in the previous chapter, Jacques's description of the spirituality of the *mulieres* focuses not on their independence and freedom to live a spiritual life of their choosing, but rather of their exceptionally body-denying spirituality. We see this same dynamic of poten-

tial misunderstanding of women's spirituality and the shaping of a memorial picture of a religious woman below in the case of Beatrice of Nazareth.

Jacques' preface to the *Vita of Marie d'Oignies* includes a snapshot of his perceptions of the vocations followed by the holy women of northern Europe. He writes,

You ... saw ... some of these women dissolved with such a particular and marvelous state of love toward God that they languished with desire, and for years had rarely been able to rise from their cots. They had no other infirmity, save that their souls were melted with desire for Him, and sweetly resting with the Lord, as they were comforted in spirit they were weakened in body.... The cheeks of one were seen to waste away, while her soul was melted with the greatness of her love. Another's flow of tears had made visible furrows down her face. Others were drawn into such intoxication of spirit that in sacred silence they would remain quiet a whole day, with no sense of feeling for things about them, so they could not be roused by clamour (sic) or feel a blow.... I saw another who sometimes was seized with ecstasy five-and-twenty times a day, in which state she was motionless, and on returning to herself she was so enraptured that she could not keep from displaying her inner joy with movements of the body, like David leaping before the ark.⁶⁵

Here we see a prelate quite focused on the experiential, somatic wonders that surrounded some of the holy women. In this he is in line with other male biographers of holy women such as Thomas de Cantimpre's fabulous tales of the exploits of Christina Mirabilis or Philip of Clairvaux's incredibly detailed minute-by-minute description of the mystical passion performances of Elizabeth of Spaalbeek.⁶⁶ In these cases, the women's words are effaced in

⁶⁵ See Jacques de Vitry. *Life of Marie d'Oignies*. Translated by Margot H. King. Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1998, 45-46.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth of Spalbeek was a thirteenth-century *mulier sancta* who lived at home and re-enacted Christ's passion each day. The Cistercian, Philip of Clairvaux visited Elisabeth and made a record of her performance. Philip of Clairvaux. *Life of Elizabeth of Spaalbeek* in *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*. Elizabeth Spearing, ed. New York: Penguin Books, 2002, 107-119. Amy Hollywood explores the male (mis)understanding of women's spirituality and the trajectory of their bodily focus vis-à-vis women's self-understanding. Hollywood, "Inside Out," 85-91.

favor of a male gaze upon their bodies. In some cases, this focus upon the body is not without corrective comment upon their ministries.

The writings of Thomas de Cantimpré, himself a disciple of Jacques de Vitry, on Christina Mirabilis show this tension of women's ministry and how male admirers had to sanitize popular tales about women. In his *Life of Christina Mirabilis*, Thomas recounts the fantastic exploits of a *mulier religiosae* of the Diocese of Liège; however, this is a posthumous record. Thomas did not know Christina while she was alive, but rather he relied upon the testimony of "so many straightforward witnesses" of her life that he was "perfectly satisfied about the account which has been reported to me."⁶⁷ Thomas' use of eye-witness accounts to Christina's life and ministry places him in an uncomfortable position regarding Christina's assistance to her patron, Count Louis of Looz, while he was on his deathbed. As Thomas relates the story

When Count Louis was near death he called Christina to him and most persistently begged her to stay with him until the hour of death. She very obligingly granted this and he commanded all the counts who were with him to leave the bedchamber and kept Christina alone with him in the chamber. Without delay the Count pulled himself up with all the strength he could summon and lay fully prostrate before the feet of Christina and, with great lamentation, recited to her all his sins from his eleventh year right up to that very day.

This striking scene displays the great spiritual authority some of the *mulieres sanctae* had in the eyes of their peers, both men and women. Louis does not call upon a priest to hear his dying confession, but Christina! Thomas is quick to comment that Louis "did this not for absolution which she had no power to give but rather that she be moved by this atonement

⁶⁷ Thomas de Cantimpré. *The Life of Christina Mirabilis*. Translated by Margot H. King. Toronto: Peregrina Publishing, 1997, 10.

to pray for him.”⁶⁸ Here Thomas shows the tension between the iconic religious women with the messiness of some of these women’s actual practices and theology. Thomas, like many of his brethren, is quick to reshape the image of Christina into something more palatable for veneration.

One finds a great deal of tension within the writings of Hadewijch over this very issue of women’s spirituality. Writing in the generation after the original *mulieres religiosae*, Hadewijch partially recounts her trouble with spirituality lauded by Jacques de Vitry. While Hadewijch’s writings come down to us without the “translation” or redacting of a male confessor, in her own voice the mystic touches on trends in the spirituality of her milieu. In some passages, she encourages her disciples against such practices, and, in others she points to outside pressure on her community because of her high standard of spirituality. In Hadewijch’s poems in couplets she says,

And there is too much childishness in love,
When one wants many particular things (*sonderlingheyden*),
And prefers to be delight.
This is a failure in loftiness of life.
Not for feeling’s sake must we learn to serve,
But only to love with love in Love.⁶⁹

Here is a startlingly different picture of beguine life than what is found in Jacques de Vitry’s text. In Hadewijch’s writing she criticizes the priority placed on extraordinary religious experience so lauded by de Vitry. While, for Jacques, the importance of somatic and observable mystical experiences is paramount, to the point that he praises mystics for not be-

⁶⁸ Ibid., 32.

⁶⁹ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Couplets 10, 9-14.

ing able to rise from their beds. Hadewijch cautions against this kind of excess and advocates a life of active service of “love in love with Love.”

Dyan Elliot has pointed out that Jacques de Vitry and others’ support of *mulieres religiosae* is not without benefit to the male clerical culture. This is particularly true in light of the thirteenth century context of Church politics following the Fourth Lateran Council, and the troubles with heresy, namely Cathar communities. As seen above, Jacques de Vitry’s focus in the *Vita* of Marie d’Oignies and her fellow holy women is the somatic wonders that surround them. In addition to these types of verifiable “proofs” of holiness, Elliot underscores male authors’ preoccupation with respect for priestly authority (even when this takes the form of the *mulieres* chastising priests for not living up to their vows), an intense devotion to the Eucharist, an upholding of the sacrament of penance, and, lastly, concern for souls in purgatory. All of these aspects that are brought out so forcefully in the *vitae* of holy women both support the theological understandings promulgated at Lateran VI, but also take aim at Cathar beliefs and the role of women in Cathar communities. The *exempla* of the holy women capitalize on official Church teaching, and, as a result, are models for female piety against heterodox alternatives.⁷⁰

A male’s manipulation of a woman’s writing to fit her into a category approved by clerical males may be most clearly evidenced in the way Beatrice of Nazareth’ editor translated her writings, which will be examined below. While his dynamic of circumscription is present in the interactions between clerics and *mulieres religiosae*, it does not negate the

⁷⁰ See Dyan Elliot. *Proving Woman and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004, Chapter 2. Gregory IX’s approval of holy women, with Jacques de Vitry’s support, and the eventual post-Council of Vienne rehabilitation of the beguines under Innocent III further supports this thesis.

fact that men supported and encouraged medieval religious women in many ways. Despite the ambiguity of Cistercian attitudes about women's communities, there was much support by individual Cistercian communities. Caesarius of Heisterbach, a Cistercian author affirmed,

Although these [holy] women, whom we know to be very numerous in the diocese of Liège, live among the people wearing lay clothes, they still surpass many of the cloister in the love of God. They live the eremitical life among the crowds, spiritual among the worldly and virginal among those who seek pleasure. As their battle is greater, so is their grace, and a greater crown will await them.⁷¹

Caesarius is speaking specifically of the non-cloistered woman who would become known as beguines. His attitude reflects the support that monastic communities like the Cistercians (and, later, mendicant orders) showed to religious women. In this capacity men served as confessors, transcribers, and spiritual friends. Male correspondents also were involved in spiritual networks upon which beguines and other holy women relied much during the thirteenth century.⁷² Thus, much of the experiences recorded about holy women are that their interactions with clerical males were positive and affirmed. One must also keep in mind that, largely, the clerical male was the one writing this account.

HADEWIJCH, BEATRICE, AND THE CISTERCIANS

⁷¹ Caesarius of Heisterbach. *Libri VIII Miraculorum* in *Die Wundergeschichten des Caesarius von Heisterbach*. Vol. 3. Edited by Alfons Hilka. Bonn: Peter Hanstein Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1933-37, 26-27. Cited in Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, 36.

⁷² Simons discussed the sophisticated networking of beguine communities in Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, Chapter 2. For medieval women's spiritual networking in general see Coakley, John. "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*. Edited by R. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and T. K. Szell. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999. 222-246. See also Mulder-Bakker, Anneke B. *Lives of Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*. Translated by M. H. Scholz. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

The preceding sections have focused on some examples of the ways in which men and women interacted on a personal and institutional level regarding women's spirituality. Now we will turn toward an examination of how this interaction influenced the theological work of the women mystics. As we have seen, there was between Hadewijch and Jacques de Vitry some level of disagreement regarding true beguine spirituality. At the same time, Hadewijch and Cistercian writers of the previous century had much in common. There is no question that Hadewijch had quite a broad education in theological texts. She was heavily influenced by the thought of Augustine of Hippo as well as Origen, Peter Abelard, and Richard of St. Victor. That said, Hadewijch and many of her beguine sisters were especially reliant upon, both theoretically and practically, the popular monastic renewal found in the Cistercians.⁷³ Because of the similarity in the thought of Hadewijch and Beatrice, who eventually became prioress of a Cistercian community, I will focus on the aspects of the women's writing that seem to have been indebted to Cistercian thought.

The Cistercian influence of Bernard and William of St. Thierry upon Hadewijch's affective mysticism, demonstrable in her writings, is striking, although in the List of the Perfect, Hadewijch states that she knows very little about Bernard.⁷⁴ Despite many parallels, Hadewijch does come to some startlingly different conclusions, while still working within a similar framework to the male monastic authors. Grace Jantzen points out, in some detail, the ways in which Hadewijch approaches bodily experience as opposed to Bernard.⁷⁵ Ber-

⁷³ Hart, *Hadewijch*, 5-15.

⁷⁴ Helen Rolfson, "The List of the Perfect," 277-87. The authorship of the "List of the Perfect" is contested, and Hart decides not include it in her translation of the *Complete Works*.

⁷⁵ Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 133-146.

nard's vast architecture of the doctrine of Christian love, indeed, set the tone and shaped the medieval discussion of this area of theology. The beginning of Bernard's understanding of love is rooted in the human experience of love and carnality. This is the starting point because it is something natural to all humans and thus within their capacity to understand. The natural ordering of human love turns immediately to itself, as Bernard lays out in *On Loving God*; the human person loves reflexively for one's own sake.⁷⁶ Jantzen's critique of Bernard is that from this starting point in human experience, he immediately and judgmentally denigrates that experience, turning, instead, to a sublimated, body-denying discourse on love – much in keeping with his monastic context. Jantzen, however, seems to place a bit too much importance on the body-focus of Hadewijch, inserting a focus upon bodily experience with which the mystic herself may have been uncomfortable.

That said, Hadewijch feels free to embrace and bless the human experience of love and in it finds a correlation to the service of divine love in ways that Bernard and his followers did not. Hadewijch, unlike Bernard's *On Loving God*, does not manipulate love into a ladder of ascent, but rather writes of the ebb and flow, the dynamism of these experiences and the utter unknowable-ness of the status of love (much in keeping with the tradition Barbara Newman calls 'mystique courtoise').⁷⁷

This is especially prevalent in the stanzaic poems, where in one stanza Hadewijch can say,

Oh, Love is ever new,
And she revives every day!
Those who renew themselves she causes to be born again

⁷⁶ Etienne Gilson, *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, 269-270.

⁷⁷ Newman spends a chapter tracing out the mystique courtoise tradition in Newman, Barbara. *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religious Literature*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995, 137-167.

To continual new acts of goodness.
 How, alas, can anyone
 Remain old, fainthearted in Love's presence?⁷⁸

And in the following stanza, she complains,

Alas, where is Love now
 With her new good things?
 For my distress brings me
 Into many a new woe;
 My soul melts away
 In the madness of Love;
 The abyss into which she hurls me
 Is deeper than the sea;⁷⁹

Jantzen's critique of Bernard in favor of Hadewijch is illuminating, yet one must approach these comparisons with a note of caution.

Hadewijch definitely does approach love experience from a positive perspective; however one cannot accurately say that she builds her theology solely upon bodily experiences (far from it, in fact quite the opposite). Hadewijch, in reality, is quite distrustful of some aspects of mystical consolations (such as, compared to the somatic phenomena so touted by Jacques de Vitry and others) because to languish in such a state is not the true service of love, but rather the service of self and self-fulfillment. In her tenth letter, she explicitly cautions her disciples on this point:

He who loves God loves his works. His works are noble virtues; therefore he who loves God loves virtues. This love is genuine and full of consolation. Virtues and not sweetness are the proof of love, for it sometimes happens that he who loves less feels more sweetness.... Such sweetness [may be] experienced by the imperfect man as well as by him who is perfect. And the imperfect man imagines he is in greater love because he tastes such sweetness; yet it is not pure but impure. Besides, even if the sweetness is pure and wholly divine, and this is a delicate question to decide, love is not to be measured by

⁷⁸ Hadewijch, *Poems in Stanzas*, 7.3.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.4

sweetness but by the possession of virtues together with charity, as you have heard.⁸⁰

Here Hadewijch is possibly critiquing the spirituality of some of her sister beguines. Beguine spirituality seems to have had adherents and male admirers who focused on this very superficial kind of experience, as has been discussed above.⁸¹ Despite her suspicion, Hadewijch's approach to bodily experience is much more positive than the ascetic denigration found in male monastic writers. Hadewijch, then, shows herself as a true theologian in the tradition, crafting her own ideas based on theological reflection upon the texts of her forbears in the discipline. She is not a theologian in the sense of her thirteenth-century scholastic contemporaries, but extends a trajectory of development from Augustine and the Fathers. One might go so far as to call it a parallel line to the monastic theologians in the tradition of Bernard and William. Thus, Hadewijch displays in her writing a desire for freedom in a sense, thereby opening up the rather narrow mystical ascent of her theological forefathers and crafting a theology that values women's experiences of the divine. This is important because Hadewijch shows herself to be drawing from the "orthodox" theology of the Fathers of the Church, while still moving forward theological ideas in her own innovative way. Such questions of orthodoxy bedeviled Hadewijch during her lifetime and the beguines as an entire community in the following century.

In regard to Hadewijch's handling of bodily experience in the discourse of love, what is really at stake is an issue of intelligibility i.e. how she knows what and how God is teach-

⁸⁰ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letters 10.1-25.

⁸¹ This clash of understandings of spirituality is discernible in comparison between Hadewijch's writings and the descriptions of proto-beguines lauded by Jacques de Vitry.

ing her. For Bernard the human understanding of divine love begins in experience,⁸² but then goes no further in a human realm; in Hadewijch's writings the problem is not whether the experience of human love is an appropriate analogue to divine love, but rather how one acts upon love.⁸³ It is here, on the issue of intelligibility that a reader can discern how Hadewijch draws upon the twelfth century sources with which she is acquainted and develops the ideas in her own way. As Mommaers and Dutton say, "This woman [Hadewijch] says something new in a new way."⁸⁴ It is apparent from Hadewijch's writing that she was intimately acquainted with monastic sources from the twelfth century to the point that she quotes some of them verbatim in her own writings.⁸⁵ It can be surmised that Hadewijch was influenced by the growing popularity of Cistercian communities throughout Europe, but particularly in Northern Europe (what is today Belgium). As previously mentioned, the freedom afforded by beguine life was very present in the experiences of the holy women of Northern Europe in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Hadewijch's theology is a case in point for this theological sharing.

According to Hadewijch herself, the textual influence of Bernard of Clairvaux was minimal. In her *List of the Perfect*, Hadewijch (or the anonymous author writing in her name) lists Bernard as 18th of the 21 fully-fledged lovers of God in times past; however, she

⁸² Bernard, *On Loving God*, 8.23-8.24.

⁸³ This theme is interwoven throughout Hadewijch's 31 letters to young beguines.

⁸⁴ Mommaers & Dutton, *Hadewijch*, 58.

⁸⁵ See Hart, *Hadewijch*, 6 and 66n.44. As Hart points out, Hadewijch's Letter 10 is a free adaptation of Richard of St. Victor's *Explicatio in Cantica Canticorum*, 6. Hadewijch also borrows from William on St. Thierry in Letter 18.

adds, “I know little about him.”⁸⁶ Although, there must be some measure of textual knowledge, as Hadewijch does quote Bernard directly in her Letter XV on the journey of Love.⁸⁷ Regardless of her direct knowledge of the Cistercian’s writings, the very ground on which Hadewijch is standing was prepared for her – and for the whole of spirituality and mystical theology of the Middle Ages – by Bernard. Hadewijch is continuing the conversation that Bernard began in the twelfth century. A hinge upon which this conversation turns is the issue of how love between God and humanity is the primary way that the soul can know and understand God, and, following upon that, Hadewijch’s ability to speak with authority on this subject.

Bernard’s contribution to medieval mystical theology provided a watershed change in the discussion, and intelligibility was one of the key issues he tackled. Just how far the human intelligibility of divine love went is what I will be examining in Hadewijch’s writings. For Bernard, the human person’s ability to love in a human way was the beginning of a pedagogical process by which the human person can come to know and love God. This affective spirituality was called thus because it was an ascent to God through love rather than through the mind. Bernard says the human mind cannot know God through reason but *can* know through love. As he writes in his fourteenth sermon on the Song of Songs,

⁸⁶ List of the Perfect, 167. Concerning the authorship of the “List of the Perfect”, Columba Hart decides in her translation of the *Complete Works*, to refrain from including the document. In the manuscripts, the “List” follows the “Visions;” however, Hart does not include it because “The comments that accompany the listings, however, lack the mature discretion that characterizes all her other writings. The “List” as it has come down to us does not, therefore, enhance her literary standing . . .” Other scholars, including Paul Mommaers, use the “List” without quibble, and for the purposes of this study, it seems prudent to assume the original work has merit for an understanding of Hadewijch.

⁸⁷ Hadewijch Letter 15, 109-114 includes a short quotation from Bernard’s *Sermons of the Song of Songs*, 15, 3.6.

I recognized his [the Word, the Bridegroom] coming; it was not by any of my senses that I perceived he had penetrated to the depths of my being. Only by the movement of my heart, as I have told you, did I perceive his presence.⁸⁸

The ability to know God through love is available to humanity naturally. The most basic love a human experiences is the love of oneself. This love can be the beginning point in a journey toward divine love, as Bernard points out in his treatise *On Loving God*.⁸⁹ Hadewijch echoes Bernard's point on intelligibility of God through love rather than sense or reason, starting very forcefully in Letter 12,

All that man comes to in his thought of God, and all that he can understand of him or imagine under any outward form is not God. For if men could grasp him and conceive of him with their sense images and with their thoughts, God would be less than man, and man's love for him would soon run out.⁹⁰

Thus, Bernard and Hadewijch are agreed on the beginning point of the journey toward knowledge and love of God. One important point on which Hadewijch departs from Bernard seems to be on just how far the human being, before beatitude, can go on the journey of love with and into God.

Both Hadewijch and Bernard have a positive theological anthropology and an optimistic view of human nature. Bernard uses images of natural growth and fruit and flowering images to illustrate how grace suffuses the whole process,

... God is the reason [*causa*] for loving God. That is right, for he is the efficient and final cause of our love. He offers the opportunity, creates the affection, and consummates the desire. He makes himself, or rather he is made love-able.... His love prepares and rewards ours.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Bernard, *Sermons on the Song of Songs* 14, 91.

⁸⁹ Bernard, *On Loving God*, 8.23-8.26.

⁹⁰ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter XII, 31ff.

For Bernard, sin weakens us, but it is still our nature to love; grace strengthens and transforms this love incrementally through the four stages. The ability to love is implanted in us by God by virtue of our similarity to God's purpose for us enshrined in the *imago Dei*. In our fallen state, this loving begins with our selfish love of self. Grace prevails upon the human to know God and, thus, this selfish love begins to love God. This second stage is still selfish, for Bernard teaches, it is still for selfish reasons that the human person loves God. Eventually, the soul begins to love God for Godself, and, finally, the highest stage for Bernard, is to love oneself for God's sake. This stage of loving is the pinnacle of the human ability to love, wherein the human person is turned back from self toward God. Bernard expresses doubt as to those who, in this life, can attain the fourth stage of love. He accepts that it may have been achieved by the martyrs during their sufferings, but otherwise, "those who are already free of the body."⁹²

For Hadewijch, the "problem" for human love is the finitude of human ability that is unable to match God's infinity. Faithfulness and trust in God's unending love is required on the part of the human, but, at a fundamental level, the human natural ability of love does not change. Very much in line with Augustine, love is in danger of growing lax, misdirected, and selfish. Hadewijch fears this misdirection of selfish love towards things other than God, but does not seem to see it as our starting point, very unlike Augustine. Faithful human love loves to its full potentiality, causing itself pain in its lack of infinity -- its lack of ability to satisfy God in God's ineffable eternity. Fidelity despite these painful trials will be rewarded by God's continued response of love to the human soul. Learning the ways of

⁹¹ Bernard, *On Loving God*, 22.

⁹² Bernard, *On Loving God*, 11.30.

love keeps the soul growing in freedom and pride. This is not a sinful pride; rather it is a state of nobility wherein the soul begins to recapture what it truly is and was meant to be.

Hadewijch summarizes this very simply when she says in Letter 2 on vocation,

“If, in fine, you wish to have what is yours, give yourself completely in abandonment to God, to become what he is. For the honor of Love, renounce yourself as far as you can, to be purely obedient in all that belongs to your greatest perfection, both in doing and in omitting. To this end you must remain humble, and unexalted by all the works you can accomplish, but wise with generous and perfect charity to sustain all things in heaven and on earth, as benefits true charity, according to their order. Thus you may become perfect and possess what is yours! – if you wish.⁹³

Bernard approaches love as the soul’s natural affinity toward God (*naturarum tanta cognatio*).⁹⁴ While this is so, and while all humans because of their capability to love have access to God, they may not realize it and must go through stages of realization and transformation to reach true spiritual love.⁹⁵ Thus, Bernard maps out four stages of ascent from base human loving to its highest level in *On Loving God*. The first stage being the innate self-love common to all human beings; this type of love finds its eventual perfection after rising through the other two stages in the love of self for the sake of the divine will. Freedom, in this context, ultimately points specifically to freedom from the earthly body – the fourth stage being the human reunion with God after death.

Another facet of male clerical culture’s misunderstanding (at best) or co-opting of the spirituality of *mulieres sanctae* comes to the forefront in the handling of Beatrice of

⁹³ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letters 2.163ff.

⁹⁴ Bernard, *On the Song of Songs*, 80.2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.9, “But that carnal love is worthwhile since through it sensual love is excluded, and the world is condemned and conquered. It becomes better when it is rational, and becomes perfect when it is spiritual. Actually it is rational when the reason is so strong in faith that in all things concerning Christ it strays in not even the slightest degree because of any false likeness of truth, nor by any heretical or diabolical deceit does it wander from the integrity of the sense of the Church.”

Nazareth's writings after her death. Whereas the life of Hadewijch of Brabant remains shrouded in mystery, with only glimpses and conjecture able to be pieced together from her writings, Beatrice of Nazareth's life was not only written down, but composed by her own hand. Uniquely, Beatrice's *vita* and her own writings are both extant; however, the contemporary scholar still runs into a significant problem with much of what has come down through the centuries. Amy Hollywood makes a strong case that the autobiography written by Beatrice herself, which was "translated" by a male tertiary member of Beatrice's community, was misunderstood and misrepresented by that later redactor.⁹⁶ As such, the *Vita Beatricis* is almost more illuminating in what is edited from the text than what the biographer chooses to include.⁹⁷

Roger de Ganck states,

It would be unfair to say that [the biographer] mistreated Beatrice's vernacular. Nor would it be correct to maintain that he intentionally corrupted the original text, for we have to allow any translator some leeway.¹

Amy Hollywood, on the other hand, takes a view that Beatrice's biographer re-imagined her work much more dramatically due to his masculine misunderstanding of the mystic's subtle work. Following Hollywood's ideas, the posthumous dynamic that we see between Beatrice and her male redactor is one of misunderstanding on the part of the male Cistercian. This misunderstanding led to his skewing the words of Beatrice to fit a male-authored model that focused upon bodily control of women rather than their theological ideas. The

⁹⁶ See Hollywood, "Inside Out", 89.

⁹⁷ Discussion of authorship vs. translator of Beatrice's texts are discussed in: Ritamary Bradley, "Beatrice of Nazareth (c.1200-1268) A Search for Her True Spirituality," in *Vox Mystica: Essays for Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clarke Bartlett et al. New York: DS Brewer, 1995, 63. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast* University of California Press, 1988, 160.

editor himself says that he changed the text of Beatrice's spiritual journal and redacted theological portions of it because they were too difficult to understand for the average reader, and perhaps here he is betraying his own lack of comprehension of the subtle points of Beatrice's theology.⁹⁸ Whether or not to read the editor's mangling of the theological points in the text as deliberate sanitizing hagiography of Beatrice, simple ineptitude, or something in between is not at issue – the point is, our ability to compare his work to Beatrice's extant treatise shows that the editor did a poor job in conveying her ideas. What is certain is that some level of male clerical culture's influence on the *Vita Beatricis* translated the text not only from its original Flemish to Latin but also from the subtly ingenious theological anthropology of Beatrice into the somatic-spirituality comprehensible to and condoned by male religious authorities.

We turn next to Beatrice of Nazareth's *Seven Manners of Loving*, her treatise that survives in the original Flemish. Beatrice, like Hadewijch, works within the male theological traditions to bring new insights to the intelligibility through love of divine encounter. The first "manner" of loving in her treatise is to make the point that the soul seeks after God through desire, and serves God motivated by love not fear – both standard, fundamental points to mystical, affective theology of the Cistercians (*theologia caritatis*).⁹⁹ As the soul becomes more influenced, trained, and transformed by love, Beatrice concludes that she becomes freer both to pursue training in how to become closer to God and to be trans-

⁹⁸ *Vita Beatricis*, III, 276.

⁹⁹ Else Marie Wiberg Pederson. "The In-Carnation of Beatrice of Nazareth's Theology". In *New Trends in Feminine Spirituality: The Holy Women of Liège and their Impact*. Medieval Women: Texts & Contexts, 2. Juliette Dor, Lesley Johnson, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds. Turnhout, Brepols, 1999, 70.

formed by God into what the soul was created to be, namely a full participant in the divine life.

As for Hadewijch, love (*minne*) is the principle for understanding divine love (*Minne*) and the process of going deeper into this understanding, in this life, is never ending, though it can and should result in states of bliss that prepare one for the eternal love banquet beyond this life.¹⁰⁰ Here both women diverge starkly from and develop the male theological heritage. Training in love is not one of a ladder of divine ascent, chronologically moving through steps or stages. Beatrice's seven manners of love are mistranslated as grades or stages. There is an ebb and flow to training and sacred geographies of transformation for Beatrice's. Experiential spirals markedly present in Beatrice are also found in Hadewijch's theology.

Longing for love, leads to suffering, leads to greater knowledge, leads to greater loving, leads to deeper longing, leads to more intense suffering. Though all these peregrinations the soul becomes more free to pursue God and to become one with God.

This is most starkly exemplified in the seventh manner of loving in Beatrice's treatise,

The will of the soul is set up there among those spirit; it is there that it longs to be, and most of all among the flaming seraphim; and whilst still here in the body it finds its rest and its dearest dwelling-place in the immense Divinity, in the exalted Trinity. ... It [the soul] knows Him, it loves Him, it longs for Him, so much that it cannot heed saints or angels, men or created things, except in that common love which it has towards Him in whom it loves all.

And further, after this sublimity,

¹⁰⁰ I have followed modern translators of Hadewijch and Beatrice in retaining the Flemish word "minne" instead of "love," due to its specialized meaning in these authors' texts. I have also retained the capitalization of the word, as found in the translations, since it points to a personified understanding the concept.

And now this earth for the soul is a cruel exile and a dire prison and a heavy torment: it despises the world, and earth revolts it, and here is nothing earthly which can console or satisfy it, and it is for the soul a great punishment that it can live in this estrangement and appear so alien¹⁰¹

Like Hadewijch, Beatrice points to the ebb and flow of experiences of the divine, rather than a simple ladder of perfection. The most important aspect of these experiences is that the women mystics remain free in their openness to God and free to do God's will in their earthly lives. Neither woman regards following God's as simply collapsing into intense bodily mortification. This stance is contrary to male writers such as Beatrice's editor and Jacques de Vitry who are very concerned about the place of bodily mortification in women's lives. Hadewijch and Beatrice both underscore the freedom to live a vocation of love (which includes suffering), but not of artificial suffering.

Women in thirteenth century northern Europe (particularly religious women) had opportunities to exercise a certain amount of liberty in their lives. However, they existed in a male-dominated culture, and men circumscribed even those opportunities of liberty available to them. The preceding chapter has shown some examples of how women navigated this situation in their religious lives, highlighting the varieties of relationships possible between women of the thirteenth century and clerical males. While there were many positive interactions between clerics and *mulieres religiosae* ranging from spiritual direction to enthusiastic support of them and their ways of life, we have also seen how clerical male culture contributed to a climate of limited freedom for religious women, and even situations where male clerics and monastics were supportive of women involved a high

¹⁰¹ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 7.4-5. See Petroff, Elizabeth Alvilda. *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986, 204-5.

level of misunderstanding between them. Hadewijch and Beatrice, whom we will examine more closely in the following chapters, wrote in this context.

This chapter should give an overview of the world in which these two authors were writing, thus helping to clarify their teachings on true freedom. Both women writers under discussion place freedom at the center of their theologies. They most certainly rely upon male theological scholarship, specifically in the vein of Bernard of Clairvaux; however, they develop their theologies in innovative ways. Whether actively attempting to do so, Hadewijch and Beatrice provide theologies of religious freedom contrary to expectations for what it means to be a woman in union with God foisted upon them by the power structure of male clerics. This chapter has also shown how both mystics worked from within a male-dominated ecclesiastical culture, using texts of male authors of the previous century to develop their own interpretations of theology for their women disciples. In the following two chapters the examination will turn to the two ways in which Hadewijch and Beatrice understand freedom functioning in and central to their theologies, and how it is, precisely, freedom that allows them to become more fully what they believe God has created them to be.

CHAPTER THREE

FREEDOM AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Hadewijch and Beatrice were women in good company with the other *mulieres religiosae*. All were ardently seeking to live a life of fidelity to God and in full communion with God even when it put them outside the realm of acceptable behavior for women in the later Middle Ages. As this study seeks to prove that the concept of freedom of the soul is central to the theologies of Hadewijch and Beatrice, this third chapter will begin to delve into the two different ways that freedom functions in their theologies. The first topic in reference to freedom that I will examine upon this larger backdrop will be the dynamics of freedom in understanding who God is and who the human person is by virtue of being created in the image of God. The question of intelligibility of God, that is, how the human soul can begin to know the infinite God, touches directly upon the heart of their spiritual theologies. Intelligibility of God through love is the way in which these two mystics approach and get some level of knowledge of a God who remains for the most part wholly a mystery. Freedom seems to inform this discussion in at least two ways.

The first way freedom and intelligibility inform one another is exactly the issue of how Hadewijch and Beatrice – or the human person in general – can approach the divine. Constitutive of the way to know God is the freedom to begin this approach. Here, Bernard of Clairvaux's conception of human freedom from coercion is a key underlying understand-

ing for Hadewijch and Beatrice. Because the human person is created in the *imago Dei*, the image of God, she has a special freedom to move toward the original of which she is a reflection. Both Hadewijch and Beatrice, though they do not cite knowledge of Bernard's writings, seem to have picked up this general idea of the soul and its relationship to God in freedom.

Secondly, freedom is fundamental to what it means to be a human being because every soul is made in God's image and has the ability to be converted by love from a life of distracted sinfulness. Hadewijch goes further to say that it is the soul's *duty* to undergo this way of conversion. Freedom to love and be transformed by love is the first step in a long journey toward likeness with God. Beatrice and Hadewijch echo Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry in their thinking that love and reason interpenetrate one another as the soul travels deeper into the abyss of God. Thus, freedom is the goal of this movement toward deeper knowledge of God. That freedom is both a component of the outset of the journey and also the final goal may seem a bit of a paradox. Studying the writing of the mystics necessitates becoming comfortable with these types of seeming non-sequiturs.

In this chapter, I will begin by showing the indebtedness of Beatrice and Hadewijch to Cistercian understandings of freedom, love, and human anthropology. This theme is interwoven with medieval spirituality in general, but was a special focus of Cistercian authors and was thus taken up by the women mystics. Related to this point, I will show how Beatrice and Hadewijch understand this first stage – or “manner”, to borrow language familiar to Beatrice – of freedom. The human subject must act in accordance with the soul's original freedom to achieve true freedom in God. This discussion leads into the topic of *who* may embark upon the journey to freedom. For Beatrice and Hadewijch there is both a

sense of divine election of God's special beloved, and also, more pronounced in Hadewijch, that every soul is called. I wish to trace out the connections between the women theologians and their male forebears to set a baseline from which to see more clearly the ways in which Hadewijch and Beatrice offer new understandings of theological anthropology. Hadewijch and Beatrice's writing on gender and the role of the body within spirituality are built upon a foundation of medieval Christian, and particularly Cistercian, thought and from there they make their own unique contributions to the spirituality of the Middle Ages.

In service of this concern for gender and the body, the chapter will close with a discussion of inner experience versus bodily experience and how this factors into the union between human and divine, anticipating further developments in Chapter 4. This issue is must be handled quite carefully, as both women have a sense of movements in the soul and experiences of the body that are inseparable from one another. It would be a mistake to try to categorize these experiences rigidly apart from one another. At the same time it is my concern not to collapse what Beatrice and Hadewijch are doing in their theologies into the assumptions of what male theologians were writing about women during the time period. Both women are writing from a tradition of monastic theology – whether directly, in the case of Beatrice, or indirectly, with Hadewijch – but they certainly develop their material in subtle and innovative ways.

THE CISTERCIAN INFLUENCE

BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX

First we turn to the theologies of Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry. These two giants of the young Cistercian order wielded great influence upon Cistercian spirituality and medieval mysticism, and they are a beginning point of this conversation of

freedom to know God.¹⁰² Ritamary Bradley provides a helpful summary of Bernard and William's understanding of the connection between love and intelligibility later taken up by some of the women mystics:

St. Bernard taught the first Cistercians that the feeling part of the soul is the deepest part and that faith, hope, and charity awaken the image of God within the soul. For Bernard's friend, William of St. Thierry, however, the affective part is not the core of the soul, but through the development of the affective part, the intellect comes to deeper knowledge of God. The intellect remains itself, but is raised above itself by grace.¹⁰³

Bernard and William both stress that the human soul remains freely open to God. This freedom is afforded the soul by virtue of its being created in the *imago Dei*. This image of God, open to God through loving desire, can be converted and re-formed into likeness with God, and thereby transcend earthly bonds. In the first chapter I attempted to trace out in broad strokes Bernard's approach to freedom of choice. Here I will link his understanding of this freedom vis-à-vis love. Both of these components are intimately tied to Bernard's understanding of the human soul and its relationship to God.

Bernard's writing on the freedom of the soul to pursue relationship with God is by no means systematic. Like Augustine before him, Bernard's teaching comes in various genres and *ad hoc* circumstances. However, what comes through very clearly in his work is an idea of the soul retaining the ability to make free choice. Bernard does not contradict Augustine's writing on grace and free choice, but the two have different methodologies. For

¹⁰² DeGanck discusses the influence of Cistercian spirituality upon the *mulieres religiosae* in general in *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, 13-18. He points out that some scholars, including Joseph Greven and Simone Roisin, to varying degrees saw beguine communities as outgrowths of or even unofficial branches of the Cistercian order. See also, Simone Roison. "L'Efflorescence cistercienne et le courant féminin de piété au XIIIe siècle," *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* 39 (1943): 342-45.

¹⁰³ Bradley, "Beatrice of Nazareth," 58. See also, Louth, Andrew. "William of St. Thierry and Cistercian Spirituality" in *Downside Review* (October, 1984), 262-263.

his part, Bernard takes the topic of free choice for granted, focusing instead on how grace and freedom of the soul to make choices work together. Much like Augustine before him (and so too with Beatrice and Hadewijch in the next generation), Bernard relies upon divine grace as the initiative for the soul to freely choose.¹⁰⁴

Carmen Cvetkovic's discussion of this is helpful, particularly in comparing Bernard's positions to those of the later women mystics. Cvetkovic says that Bernard adopted the Augustinian emphasis upon human's inability to perform any good work without the benefit of grace. However, Bernard does not cite any direct quotations for St. Augustine in his treatise on freedom.¹⁰⁵ Further she points out that the idea of "image" (*imago*) and "likeness" (*similitude*) come from the time of Augustine and are especially used in his theology.¹⁰⁶ The likeness to God is lost by the soul through sin, but the soul being created in the image of God remains. Through grace alone the soul can grow again into likeness with God. Bernard takes up these concepts to discuss his own ideas of human freedom. This freedom of the soul to choose to cooperate with the love of God is an important point for Bernard, because, for him, love is the special realm or sense of the soul.

Again, Bernard's writing on love as a special sense of the soul, comparable to how sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch are senses of the body, is not defined concretely, but

¹⁰⁴ Carmen Cvetkovic. *Seeking the Face of God: The Reception of Augustine in the Mystical Thought of Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2012 , 47.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁶ DeGanck in his survey of usage of "image" and "likeness" points to Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine as integral figures in popularizing this theme in relationship to the human invitation to participation in the divine life. DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*,

remains ambiguous. However, in several works he places the seeds for ideas that would be later developed more fully by his friend William of St. Thierry.¹⁰⁷

Gordon Rudy identifies two places in Bernard's writing where this understanding of love as the sense of the soul appears.

The first is his *On Various Topics (De diversis)* where Bernard compares love to the bodily senses. Because of love, the soul can be converted in such a way that a transformation takes place. He enumerates this transformation based on the soul's senses as analogous to the body's senses.¹⁰⁸ Here again we see Bernard's insistence that the soul is free in a dynamic way tied intimately with our human ability to experience love. However, more directly to this discussion as it relates to Beatrice and Hadewijch is how Bernard re-works the material of *On Various Topics* in his *Sermons*.

In the *Sermons* Bernard underscores his thoughts on the soul and its capacity to love.

The most potent idea in these sermons is the idea that love is the "sense" of the soul by which we know God. It suggests that the "sense" of love is a grace that recapitulates salvation history: as God went out from himself in the human Christ in order to allow fallen humanity to return to him, so divine love goes out from him into human souls to allow them to return to him in love and thereby "know" him as by a sense.¹⁰⁹

Thus, for Bernard of Clairvaux there is a distinct link between human loving and ability to know God. Love in humanity is a reflection and gift of God and, when nurtured, allows us to

¹⁰⁷ See Gordon Rudy. *Mystical Language of Sensation in the Later Middle Ages*. Studies in Medieval History and Culture 14. New York: Routledge, 2002, 52 n. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 52-53. "The soul loves truth as by sight, on account of its freedom (*libertatem*); justice as by the taste, on account of its equality (*aequalitatem*); wisdom as by hearing, on account of its sweetness (*suavitatem*); charity as by smell, on account of its security (*securitatem*)."

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 53.

know that which we cannot see; to love the Source of all love and life. By love the human transcends itself and reaches toward the infinite.

Further on in his third series of *Sermons*, Bernard again compares love to the sense of sight (linked with the truth and freedom, as seen above). He exhorts his listeners,

It is likewise with the love of God. Taking its place in the Christian soul, it draws the soul toward a certain likeness to the divine power. For while it demonstrates that every creature is limited and short-lived, and none is worthy of comparison to God, it still confesses that all which belongs to the Father belongs to it as well, that all things cooperate with it for the good, that Paul, Cephas, life, death, indeed everything belongs to it, and that the whole world is part of the property of the faithful man.¹¹⁰

Here Bernard outlines some of the major themes that will continue to reverberate in Beatrice and Hadewijch's works. First, transformative love is the way that the soul begins to know God. The divine initiative of God toward the soul is displayed by Bernard being sure to say that love of God "draws" the soul toward "a certain likeness to the divine power." This "certain likeness" refers to the soul's creation in God's image. This image is the soul's vestige of being what God created the soul to be, namely to be in communion with God. The soul, thus, remains free to be that lofty creation. Finally, the theme of the finitude of creation is touched on here with the highlighting of God's eternity. All creation belongs to God, the whole sweep of history! Paul, Cephas, life and death are held in God's hands. So, too, Bernard, Hadewijch, and Beatrice believe are they are within this embrace.

WILLIAM OF ST. THIERRY

Where Bernard of Clairvaux leaves off, William of St. Thierry begins. While Bernard's theology flows amorphously through different avenues of transmission, William af-

¹¹⁰ Bernard of Clairvaux. *The Parables and the Sentences*. Translated by Michael Casey, OSCO and Francis R. Swietek. Cistercian Fathers Series: 55. Kalamzoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 2000, 253.

fords himself the time to produce more well-developed reflections upon the Cistercian way of life. William's theology also seems to have been a direct influence upon both Beatrice and Hadewijch, particularly in their understanding of image and likeness of the soul.¹¹¹ Thus we will look briefly at William's positions on love, knowledge and the soul to further clarify Beatrice and Hadewijch's writings.

On the journey toward knowledge of God, William writes in his treatise *The Enigma of Faith*

Now it is by three degrees of understanding that faith must progress in its ascent to God and the knowledge of God. The first is to investigate diligently what it should believe about the Lord its God. The second involves the way in which to think of and speak about that which is correctly believed. The third is already the experience of things in thinking of the Lord in goodness as those think of him who seek him with a simple heart. ... Now, the third degree is that of illumining the beatifying grace which puts an end to faith, or rather transforms it beatifically into love. It conveys a person from faith to vision by initiating a knowledge which is not that which faith possesses. This knowledge begins to exist with faith during this life in the man who believes, but concerning it the Apostle says, 'Now I know in part, but then I will know even as I am known.' This is the knowledge which perfect love begins in this life, and which is to be perfected in the next.¹¹²

For William, understanding of God begins with exploration of rational investigation, but love is where knowledge of God truly begins to culminate. As he says, the human person may begin to know in this way in this life, but it only comes to completion in the beatific vision.

¹¹¹ See, for example, Bernard McGinn's discussion of Hadewijch in McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 200-222 and a thorough section on William in DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in Her Context*, 103-107.

¹¹² William of St. Thierry. *The Enigma of Faith*. Translated by John D. Anderson. Cistercian Fathers Series, 9. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1973, 68-69.

The progression of love also has three stages, according to William. The first is the soul being in love with God, the second is “perceiving him in the act of loving,” and, finally, being totally transformed, “not indeed into the nature of divinity, but still into a certain beatitude.”¹¹³ William takes up from Bernard the idea of love being the special sense of the soul, thereby rooting this transformation by love in the soul’s dignity as image of God.¹¹⁴ For William, the image of God is precisely that which draws the soul toward God and impels it on toward growth in likeness.¹¹⁵

Again, William is clear that the human soul being created in the image of God is only at the beginning point or invitation by God to further relationship. This is why the transformation by love is so necessary. Roger DeGanck interprets William’s doctrine of the *imago Dei* as life-long fidelity to God through virtue. This undertaking centers around rational choice to obey the commands of God. Doing so brings the human person into what William calls the “third likeness,” which is unity of spirit between God and the human being: “*Man’s liberty of choice has then become a liberty of fidelity, the culmination of human perfection, here on earth.*”¹¹⁶

¹¹³ William’s *Mirror of Faith* 101, translated in McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 250.

¹¹⁴ For a thorough discussion of William of St. Thierry’s thought on *imago* and *similitudo*, see David N. Bell. *The Image and Likeness: The Augustinian Spirituality of William of Saint Thierry*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984.

¹¹⁵ Odo Brooke. “The Trinitarian Aspect of the Soul to God in the Theology of William of St. Thierry,” in *Recherches de science religieuse* 26 (1959), 98; Bell, *The Image and Likeness*, 102; DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in Her Context*, 103.

¹¹⁶ DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in Her Context*, 107.

“Dedicating himself to a virtuous life in fidelity to his *animus* [i.e. the rational part of the soul], and striving toward the realization of his capacity for participation, man approaches what has been called William’s third likeness. The first is the natural likeness by which the soul’s ubiquity in the body corresponds to God’s ubiquity in creation. The second likeness is closer to God ‘in-

William's understanding of the rational *animus* is important. The rational soul strives to be virtuous, that the human will to be in accord with the will of God. William is saying that the will is free to be in communion with God in an imperfect way through desire to be attuned to God's will. The "third likeness," as DeGanck points out, is where the human will is so very closely aligned to the divine will that it becomes unified with God, that is, the human soul cannot but will what God wills. Human fidelity draws it to unity with God.

These ideas of the Cistercian fathers filtered down to Beatrice and Hadewijch through Cistercian houses, and their influence upon the women writers is undeniable. Both follow them in conceiving that the way to know God is through love, that God draws the human being to Godself through love in the soul, and that love is a freedom afforded to all men and women by virtue of the image of God.

Above I have attempted to trace a line from the foundational Cistercian theologies of Bernard and William to how they prepare the ground for the subjects of this present study. From here, I will turn to Beatrice and Hadewijch's own writings, looking first at what we have termed the first way that freedom functions in their theologies. Bernard continually underscores the human need for grace for growth into God, and the freedom of the soul to embrace and cooperate with grace. This essentially is the first freedom, simply that the soul may accept God's invitation to love and be loved by God. This original liberty of the will is not unqualified autonomy on the part of the human soul, but, rather, this freedom is always in reference to grace. Beatrice and Hadewijch's striving, in life and in their writings, is for

asmuch as it is freely willed. It consists in the virtues and inspires the soul as it were to imitate the greatness of the Supreme Good by the greatness of its virtue.¹¹⁶ ... The third likeness is *unitas spiritus*, unity of spirit, the inability to will anything but what God wills. *Man's liberty of choice has then become a liberty of fidelity, the culmination of human perfection, here on earth.*"

movement into full freedom, which is not unfettered autonomy. True freedom, or the “second” freedom, for the purposes of this study, is a freedom from anything that would separate the human will from the will of God. Roger DeGanck’s interpretation of this dynamic in the writings of religious women provides an important framework. The human person has freedom of self-determination, but not absolute autonomy. The freedom to self-determine is based in the ability to consciously respond to God’s fundamental call to union with the soul. This affirmative response to God moves the soul toward restoration of the likeness to God that humanity lost through sin. Further he says

What is particularly striking about some of the *mulieres religiosae* is their profound desire to be freed from all obstacles to the love of God and unhindered by anything that could diminish their liberty or hold it captive.... In fact, what the *mulieres religiosae* feared the most was ... unfreedom as they experienced it in their historical human condition.¹¹⁷

Now, we will begin to examine the works of Beatrice and Hadewijch with a focus on this original freedom that prepares the way for true freedom.

THE PROBLEM OF SIN

Augustine famously wrote in his autobiographical *Confessions* that “our hearts find no peace until they come to rest in [God].”¹¹⁸ Augustine’s theological anthropology pointed to sin, which, committed by our first parents, led the human race away from what they were created to be. Disordered desires taught human beings to love creatures rather than the Creator, and thus sin was a barrier between God and humanity. This rather standard component of Christian theology was, naturally, taken up by Hadewijch and Beatrice, and serves as a counterpoint to the freedom that they felt they enjoyed by virtue of the *imago*

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 169-170.

¹¹⁸ Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by R. S. Pine-Coffin. New York: Penguin, 1961.

Dei. In some ways their interpretation of sin was very much in line with Augustine's: sin and desire were inextricably tied. However, Hadewijch and Beatrice both are more concerned with the result of sin in general, namely that it separates human beings from God.

Sin must be taken into account when examining freedom, particularly because sin is what keeps humanity in bondage. Hadewijch and Beatrice both understand very well that the gulf that sin opens up between humanity and God is wide and treacherous. Beatrice especially displays a horror for sin in the *Vita Beatricis*. However, neither woman's focus is on individual sins *per se*, but rather the fact that sin keeps them at a distance from their beloved. Sin is a barrier that can be overcome by love, and love, eventually can scale even the highest barrier.

Hadewijch's understanding of sin is noteworthy. Amy Hollywood points out that Hadewijch has an understanding of the human soul which allows for a small part of it to remain inviolate. The soul, though bound by sin and separated from God by it, always retains an aspect that remains forever united to the divine.¹¹⁹ Hadewijch's sense is that sin is a wandering away from God toward something less, much in line with Augustine's idea of disordered desire. As Hadewijch writes in her fourth stanzaic poem

O noble souls, where are you wandering off to?
 How could you thus lower yourselves,
 Since you have long appeared as though
 You must always live on fidelity alone?
 If you had ever been touched by fidelity,
 How could you find peace in anything else?¹²⁰

And, further,

¹¹⁹ Amy Hollywood. "'Who Does She Think She Is?' Christian Women's Mysticism," in *Theology Today* 60 (2003), 14.

¹²⁰ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poem 4, 25-30.

But, O free, noble, and highborn souls,
 Not only called but chosen,
 Spare no trouble or pain in your approach
 To live in the ardor of lofty fidelity!¹²¹

Here Hadewijch asserts that all souls are capable of being drawn away from God by their foolishness, but that these souls can also live lives pleasing to God through loving fidelity.¹²²

Acting “coldly” toward the divine is a “cowardly” way of living, and keeps souls “poor.”¹²³ On the other hand, for Hadewijch, this sin can be overcome by the grace of love and human striving. This ability, powered by grace, is a benefit of the freedom God gives the soul through its being created in the image of God.

Beatrice does not seem to have the same idea of the soul being untouched by sin in a formal sense; however, she is in agreement with Hadewijch over sin being an existential barrier between herself and what she truly desires. She also has a sense that the soul’s nature as *imago Dei* gives the soul the power to reject sin, but this is by no means a facile struggle.

Throughout Beatrice’s autobiography she displays an almost debilitating scrupulosity, and her battles with temptations. Book Two relates that she was “incapacitated” by fear “when she saw the heavy burden of struggle [against sin]

¹²¹ Ibid., 36-39.

¹²² Shea, *Medieval Women on Sin and Salvation*, 107.

¹²³ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poem 11, 99-102.

threatening her on every side” and refers to sin as an “infectious virus” to be battled.¹²⁴ And further,

... it sometimes seemed to God’s handmaid that all the roads leading the Christian soul to the heavenly homeland were beset by snares and traps from beginning to end. She feared that she could never make her way along them carefully enough not to have the foot of her affection caught in one or another of the snares.¹²⁵

Just as desire for God had the potential to lead the soul in freedom, so to could desire be the cause of falling into the traps of sin. Despite this, Beatrice did not lose sight of the freedom that God affords the soul, and that fidelity to God was possible.

In Chapter 12 of Book II, the text directly connects Beatrice’s freedom against the temptations that beset her.

Beatrice daily opposed to the devil’s temptations the fact that the loving Lord had created her in *his own image and likeness* and that he does not will the death of the sinner but that he be converted and live. She also daily countered the devil’s suggestion with the fact that God had brought her early, and undefiled in body and soul, from the stormy shipwreck of the world to the harbor of monastic stability Although she perceived the author of malice resisting her bitterly, by the grace of Christ she did not rest from her struggle and resistance until she finally crushed her enemies beneath her feet.¹²⁶

The *Vita Beatricis* depicts this struggle, throughout which Beatrice remains faithful, as allowed by God for her further growth.

If, like Hadewijch, Beatrice does not have a sense of a formal self being kept free, in part, from sin, she does have a strong sense of the virtue possible to the human soul.

¹²⁴ *Vita Beatricis*, II, Chapter 12, 133.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

Beatrice's *Vita* underscores fidelity and penance, freely embraced as the route to God. Finally, in Book III of the *Vita Beatricis*, Beatrice makes an astonishing bargain with God, that she be cleansed from all her sins by taking on suffering as a scourge for her sins. While the Latin translator of Beatrice's work suggests that this suffering is bodily mortification taken up by Beatrice, her own vernacular writings suggest she had another interpretation.

In the third manner, of Beatrice's *Seven Manners*, Beatrice describes the separation between God and the soul as being a torment. This is the existential separation between the human soul and her divine Creator, which frustrates the soul and drives it mad.

It [the soul] knows quite well
that fulfilling this desire lies
far beyond its power
and beyond human reason
and beyond all sense....
All this gives it no rest,
and it's quite painful for it
to have to desire
what it can't acquire.¹²⁷

Here Beatrice's speaks of spiritual pain rather than imposed mortification of a monastic regimen. Sin causes this separation and is torment enough. The soul is free to embrace this suffering or not, but Beatrice, like Hadewijch, understands that freely taking on the torment brings one closer to the divine Beloved.

Hadewijch and Beatrice both have a strong sense of sin, one that is constantly highlighted in their writings and spiritual theology. This is because it is exactly the separation caused by sin that both women want to overcome. Freedom, given to the soul by its nature as image of God, allows the soul to stay on this path. Although both women seem to have a

¹²⁷ Beatrice of Nazareth, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 3, 56-60, 69-72. Jos Huls, *The Minne-Journey*, 33.

strong understanding of the soul's defense against sin, neither can be accused of the so-called heresy of the Free Spirit. I believe this is important to keep in mind, as I next examine how Hadewijch and Beatrice begin from standard medieval theological positions, such as those of the Cistercians, and move toward the innovative ideas distinct to the *mulieres religiosae*.

DEVELOPMENT OF CISTERCIAN THEOLOGY

BEATRICE AND HADEWIJCH

Beatrice and Hadewijch seem to take up Bernard and William's views on the soul and its relationship to God through love. In terms of the *imago Dei*, the two women theologians share the concern of the Cistercian authors on the image of God being the beginning point in the soul from which relationship with God is possible for the human being.¹²⁸ The remainder of this chapter will seek to show the links between these two generations of theologians, before moving into the innovations that Beatrice and Hadewijch bring to freedom in their treatment of theological anthropology.

The first way of loving Beatrice mentions in her treatise *The Seven Manners of Loving* is desire. As she says,

The first way is a desire
which proceeds from Minne¹²⁹ as a dynamic activity.

¹²⁸ As discussed previously, Cistercian authors were not the only authors with whom Hadewijch especially was acquainted; however, the influence of Bernard stretched far in the Middle Ages. DeGanck points out that Richard of St. Victor, another influential figure for Hadewijch, was, himself, followed by Bernard in regard to free choice. DeGanck, *Beatrice of Nazareth in her Context*, 100.

¹²⁹ Put very simply, "minne" is an allegorical personification of love drawn from the secular courtly love traditions; however, this leaves the multi-dimensional way in which the women this term. Minne is a dynamic force. It is not simply love, but, as Bernard McGinn says, "*minne* is both the experience of being subjected to this overpowering force and our response to it, the power of our own activity of loving that brings us to God." McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 202.

It has to rule in the heart for a long time
before it can overcome all resistance.
It has to work potently
and with ingenious dexterity,
and it has to increase powerfully in this life.¹³⁰

Beatrice stresses that this desire is born in one who wants to serve God “faithfully,” “zealously,” and “genuinely.” Doing so, the soul orients itself toward “being-in-freedom” (dasse es gerigt in die begerde/ te vercrigene ende te wesene ... in die vriheit).¹³¹ Striving toward pure attributes of being, including freedom, pulls the soul toward its rootedness in the divine image, towards deeper communion with God through growing in likeness. Desire for Beatrice is wanting to be in relationship with the Other, and letting that desire begin to dictate her further actions.

Beatrice’s starting point of desire resonates with Bernard and William’s mystical theology of the previous generation. Love and longing are an inescapable and joyful element of the human experience, but, because of sin, they go astray from what will truly satisfy it. Beatrice and Hadewijch, like Bernard, understand that what our hearts truly desire is to be in relationship with our source, that is, to grow in likeness with the One in whose image we are made. The first step of freedom for these theologians is to orient our love toward the only true recipient of our love, and thereby to begin to tread the path leading eventually to full freedom. As Bernard lays out in his *On Loving God*, love’s universality to the human experience demonstrates the point that the human being is radically free to pursue God. That is, God made us to love, but we must learn how to love rightly. However, as said before, this is only the first step of freedom. Bernard teaches that the human being

¹³⁰ Beatrice of Nazareth. *The Seven Manners of Loving* I, 1-7.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, I, 15-19.

is free from *coercion* to sin, not from sin itself. This is not to deny his understanding of the depth and inescapable nature of human sinfulness. What Bernard is saying is that the human person, although born in sin, is not, by a power outside of her own coerced into committing acts against their nature. The *imago Dei* is proof and promise of this.

The path to true human freedom, the noble freedom of growth in likeness to God, begins with this original freedom, but, as Beatrice and Hadewijch point out over and over again, it must be disciplined and developed. Both mystics provide ways in which the soul may strive for growing in this way, but they also have a deep understanding that the soul does not do this on its own. There is no tinge of Pelagianism in Beatrice and Hadewijch's theology of human striving for the divine; quite the opposite. While both either implicitly or explicitly point toward Bernard's understanding of original freedom, they both, also, have a deep sense of the giftedness and privilege of being called to this journey into the likeness of God.

Beatrice, in her fourth way, points to the difficulty the human soul experiences in regard to this being called to higher things.

For
 the more it's [the soul] is given from above,
 the more it demands,
 and the more it's shown,
 the more it adheres to the desire
 to draw near to
 the light of truth,
 of purity,
 of nobility
 and of the enjoyment of Minne.
 Unremittingly, it's increasingly
 Provoked and tormented.
 It's neither satisfied nor pacified.¹³²

¹³² Ibid., 4: 110-122.

The human soul is chosen for this journey, but it is a chosen-ness that brings with it a great deal of responsibility and miseries. “What provokes [the soul] and wounds it/ is also what most/ heals and pacifies it,/ and what wounds it most deeply/ is what makes it most healthy.”¹³³ This passage underscores the difficulty of the path the human soul undertakes when it is chosen and gifted by God.

The *Vita Beatricis* provides a narrative about a more positive aspect to the gift of divine desire. Beatrice’s relationship with the *mulier sancta*, Ida of Nivelles, is another example of the spiritual friendships and networking that were so important to religious women of the thirteenth century.¹³⁴ After a year of being instructed by the beguine community at Zoutleeuw, Beatrice’s father called her home to “test her about her total conversion.” The result of this testing was Beatrice’s being received into the Cistercian community of Florival, which had been founded by Bartholomew.¹³⁵ Beatrice spent a year as a novice at Florival before she was allowed to profess vows. Very soon afterwards she was sent to the neighboring Cistercian community of Rameya to “learn the art of writing manuscripts, which she would later use in writing the books necessary for her own church.”¹³⁶ It was at Rameya that Beatrice first met her great spiritual companion, Ida of Nivelles. Both the *Vita Beatricis* and the *Life* of Ida contain vignettes about the two friends’ spiritual bond. It is in

¹³³ Ibid., 4: 123-128.

¹³⁴ *Vita Beatricis*, 2, 12.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 1:23.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 1:50.

the context of this friendship that we find the idea of divine initiative and election to a life of extraordinary love of God.¹³⁷

Once they had met and their “spiritual love was contracted,” Ida was given intimate knowledge that her friend was called to life with God. As the *Vita Beatricis* recounts:

Ida of Nivelles learned by revelation of the Holy Spirit that our [Beatrice] would surely be taken by the Lord as his special spouse, and that the fullness of his grace would be poured superabundantly into her soul. Therefore Ida gave herself wholly to [Beatrice’s] service¹³⁸

The account further describes how Beatrice follows the example and guidance of Ida and responds to her pronouncements about Beatrice’s chosen-ness with a deep humility and perhaps some skepticism. Ida responds that Beatrice was chosen,

“Not so much for the merits and virtues with which I see you adorned do I love you with such an indissoluble charity, but rather for those by which I see for certain you will be raised up in the future by the Lord. For the loving merciful Lord will certainly open his eyes of mercy on you and will choose you for his own most faithful spouse, and will pour out on you the fullness of his grace. Stir yourself then not to be ungrateful for such benefits in the eyes of his Majesty. Carefully empty your heart of anything superfluous lurking there and, as far as you can, prepare your heart an acceptable place for divine grace. For He who has now begun to show some signs of his liberality toward you will in no way withdraw his habitually kind hand from you. If only you will take care to use well his sweet gifts of grace in this world, he will multiply the glory in the world to come.”¹³⁹

In this passage, Ida speaks with authority of Beatrice’s spiritual life and the favors imminently coming to her. She knows these things by divine revelation, so Beatrice understands that it would behoove her to listen. What Beatrice must *do* is, to the best of her ability,

¹³⁷ See DeGanck, Roger. “Chronological Data in the Lives of Ida of Nivelles and Beatrice of Nazareth” in *Ons geestelijk erf* 57 (1983): 14-29. Also a brief discussion of this in Bradley, “Beatrice of Nazareth,” 57.

¹³⁸ *Vita Beatricis* 1:50.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

empty herself of all that is contrary to the will of God. Love that is not for God or in accordance with God's will is "superfluous."

It is important to remember that the *Vita Beatricis* is based upon material written in Beatrice's journal and later redacted by a male editor, but, that said, this passage does provide a summary of the *mulieres religiosae's* foundational understanding of the way to God through love. God is always the one who initiates the gift of communion between human and divine, but human cooperation is necessary. Beatrice may be elected by God to love, but she must respond with a grateful focus upon making room for God in her heart. Human love is free to cooperate with grace, but it must desire to do so.

The anonymous *Life of Ida of Nivelles* does not specifically mention Beatrice, but a "person" who appears in Chapter 25 of the text is likely Beatrice.¹⁴⁰ Chapter 25 records the following about this person,

One day Ida was raptured away in spirit and had a divine revelation about a person familiar and very dear to herself. She saw how this person was undergoing the same affective experience that she herself was used to, and was being drawn aloft into the sacred recesses of the divine majesty in the same way she herself was often plunged into the abyss of divine light. Likewise, the person in question had a similar revelation regarding Sister Ida, a revelation in which *it was also seen that a love, greater or less, was stirring many holy souls and was drawing them up* [emphasis my own] to the superlatively delightful mansion of the divine majesty on high.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Leonce Reypens includes Chapter 25 as an appendix for comparison in his critical edition of the *Vita Beatricis*. See *Vita Beatricis*, Edited by Leonce Reypens in *Beatrijs van Tienen O. Cist., 1200-1268*. Antwerp: Ruusbroec-Genootschap, 1964. Appendix 6. Martinus Cawley, translator of Ida's *Life* into English, believes the unnamed friend could "well be Beatrice of Nazareth". See Martinus Cawley, OCSO, trans. *Send Me God: The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of La Ramée, Arnulf, Lay Brother of Villers, and Abundus, Monk of Villers by Goswin of Bossut*. University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p. 70 n. 117.

¹⁴¹ Cawley, *Send Me God*, 70.

As is the case in the Beatrice material, Ida's life attests to a certain election by God through human loving that draws "holy souls" like hers and that of her friend. As Beatrice's first *way* of loving, quoted above, mentions, this drawing through love must exist in the soul for a long time. This suggests that the soul must patiently be formed in love to even begin the journey toward union with God. The human soul can freely and joyfully accept this invitation to love. Accepting God's invitation, the soul continues to grow in love and in wisdom – the more deeply one loves, the more deeply one is able to explore the abyss of divinity, that is to *know* God. With this understanding of freedom in the soul to accept God's invitation to love, Beatrice is displaying a belief similar to Bernard and William's of the supreme dignity and freedom of the soul based upon its creation in the *imago Dei*. Next we will turn to a similar understanding in the writings of the beguine writer, Hadewijch.

Hadewijch, though not a Cistercian, views mystical anthropology through a similar lens as that of Beatrice. Unlike Beatrice, Hadewijch uses multiple genres to develop her thoughts on freedom. Some of the clearest material on this first type of freedom comes from letters of instruction to young beguines. In these letters, Hadewijch encourages and instructs her disciples, mentoring them in a relationship similar to that seen between Ida and the young Beatrice.

In Hadewijch's first letter, she begins saying

Since God has manifested by his virtues that radiant love which was uncomprehended, whereby he illuminated all the virtues in the radiance of his love, may he illuminate you and enlighten you by the pure radiance with which he shines resplendent for himself and for all his friends and those he most dearly loves.¹⁴²

¹⁴² Hadewijch, *Letters*, 1, 1-7.

Hadewijch understands that the human soul is called and chosen by God to be one of “those he most dearly loves.” She most forcefully calls these chosen souls to fully embrace this vocation.

... I exhort you, as a sister [to] her dear sister; and I charge you, as a mother [to] her dear child; and I command you in the name of your Lover,¹⁴³ as the bridegroom commands his dear bride: that you open the eyes of your heart to see clearly and contemplate yourself in God as holiness demands.¹⁴⁴

Hadewijch’s instruction to her listeners is to be awake to the reality of their soul’s nature, namely that it is the image of God. Thus, for Hadewijch, God’s call to the soul is a product of divine initiative, but it is not a restricted call. Each soul, made in God’s own image is commanded to convert its love to God. The “uncomprehended”-ness of divine love works through its human analog to draw the soul to God. Similar to Beatrice, Hadewijch underscores the importance of the virtues. In this context, what she means resonates with Beatrice’s command from Ida to empty herself of all that is unnecessary. Virtues are born and nurtured in the soul through the working of grace, and thus, aligning the human will with God’s will beautifies the human soul with virtues. For Hadewijch, this innate call to the soul bears the weight of much more sense of duty than was present in Beatrice. All the same, the underlying sense is that the soul is free to undertake the journey.

Hadewijch further displays this Cistercian understanding of freedom of the soul when she says in *Letter 18*,

In this manner earnestly maintain the noble perfection of your invaluable and perfect soul. But consider the meaning of this. Remain undivided and withhold yourself from all meddling with good or bad, high or low; let every-

¹⁴³ Columba Hart points out a parallel here with Bernard’s *De consideratione*, “I will instruct you therefore not as a master, but as a mother; in fact as a lover.” Hart, *Hadewijch: The Complete Works*, 47 n. 4.

¹⁴⁴ Hadewijch, *Letters*, 1, 18-24.

thing be, and keep yourself free to devote yourself to your Beloved and to content him whom you love in Love. This is your real debt, which, according to the truth of your nature, you owe to God and to those with whom you live in him¹⁴⁵

The noble perfection Hadewijch refers to is the image of God that the soul bears. Devoting oneself to the way of love is to single-mindedly be formed by the desire for God, that is to be free to be devoted to God. This understanding draws closely to Beatrice's writing about the freedom and responsibility each human soul has, resonating also with the Cistercian spirituality of Bernard and William. Again, Hadewijch underscores the freedom and vocation of the soul with a sense of duty toward its Beloved, and thereby brings a new dimension to the freedom that occurs in the writings of the Cistercian theologians. For Hadewijch, the soul is more in bondage by not answering God's call.

Later in *Letter 18* Hadewijch very clearly states her doctrine of the nature of the soul, saying

Now understand the deepest essence of your soul, what "soul" is. Soul is a being that can be beheld by God and by which, again, God can be beheld. Soul is a being that wishes to content God; it maintains a worthy state of being as long as it has not fallen beneath anything that is alien to it and less than the soul's own dignity. If it maintains this worthy state, the soul is a bottomless abyss in which God suffices to himself; and his own self-sufficiency ever finds fruition to the full in this soul, as the soul, for its part ever does in him. Soul is a way for the passage of God from his depths into his liberty; and God is a way for the passage of the soul into its liberty, that is, into its inmost depths, which cannot be touched except by the soul's abyss. And as long as God does not belong to the soul in his totality, he does not truly satisfy it.¹⁴⁶

This lengthy passage encapsulates Hadewijch's understanding of the soul and its calling. She refers to God being the passage of the soul into God's liberty. This points to the two-

¹⁴⁵ Hadewijch, *Letters*, 18: 51-63.

¹⁴⁶ Hadewijch, *Letters*, 18: 63-79.

tiered nature of freedom that I seek to demonstrate in this study. The soul is unquestionably bound by sin and subject to the distractions that fracture its true desire for God; however, Hadewijch understands that some level of perfection – that by its being made in the *imago Dei* – is never taken away from the soul. Part of this perfection is constituted by freedom to follow its longing for God. To follow this desire for God is what leads the soul to true and lasting freedom, that is, the freedom of union with God. Barbara Newman correlates this in Hadewijch to the mystic's platonic ideas filtered through a Christian lens. In this regard, Hadewijch echoes Augustine, whom she so venerated. Newman says,

“Becoming God” or Love denotes a process of psychological and spiritual growth rooted in a prior metaphysical truth. A good Christian Platonist, Hadewijch believed firmly in exemplarism, the doctrine of all creatures' real and eternal existence in the mind of God. Thus she took comfort in the thought that although her earthly, empirical self might still be immature and far from union, her eternal self was already glorified in the beatitude of perfect love.¹⁴⁷

Hadewijch has a very real sense that striving in freedom to grow into similitude with God is really to become what she was created to be. “Really” is the operative word here, because in reality, who Hadewijch *is* is this figure she conceives to always be, in some sense, in God's presence. Echoing ideas similar to Augustine's own Neoplatonism, Hadewijch understands that her true self and all that is really true exists in a formal sense in God's mind. Bernard McGinn highlights the heights to which this exemplarism reaches when discussing Hadewijch's *Vision* 13. Here Hadewijch sees herself enthroned next to the personification of Love (*Minne*) and addressed as “mother love.” A seraph declares that, due to the favor of the visions she has received, Hadewijch

¹⁴⁷ Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 146.

is accorded extravagant praise ... [and her] vision of love surpass[es] that given to any created being, including Mary prior to her assumption! She [Hadewijch] has truly become the perfected soul, higher even than the seraphim.¹⁴⁸

From this belief, Hadewijch is able to speak of her “pride” in love, but, again, this is not hubris on account of something she herself has done. On the contrary, Hadewijch is proud because she is a special creation of God, and that “formal” self never loses its lofty placement in the divine mind. The mystic’s struggle is bringing this truth of who Hadewijch is into connection with her physical self. Hadewijch (and other women mystics like her) viewed Christ as being an example. Not only was he an example in the way he lived his life, through his actions and teaching, but because he never allowed himself to be separated from God. Christ was successful in bringing the formal self, always in God’s presence, with the physical self, which the Son deigned to take up for love of creation.

As is clear above, Hadewijch’s concept of freedom and the movement into deeper freedom is not a physical freedom, but a disposition of the soul. This understanding of freedom resonates with what Beatrice describes in the *Seven Manners of Loving* and is an important counterpoint to the prevalent body-focused theology that male authors wrote for and about women in the Middle Ages. The embrace of suffering, both bodily and spiritual, is a key component to the journey toward freedom. This will be taken up more directly in the following chapter; however, it is important to point out here that Hadewijch and Beatrice’s understanding of this relates very directly to freedom.

¹⁴⁸ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 208. McGinn also notes, in relation to this vision, that claims of superiority to the Virgin Mary were among the heretical errors identified by the Dominican Albertus Magnus. See McGinn’s note 56. This is likely an example of the type of theological understanding that caused a rift between Hadewijch and her community.

Hadewijch and Beatrice both provide a nuanced understanding of how suffering and other bodily experience lead the human person to freedom. This theology in itself is a cry for freedom from male-authored texts on the ascetic practices proper to religious women that privilege bodily mortification above all else. Laurie A. Finke calls this dynamic between male expectation and the writing of medieval women mystics “linguistic empowerment,” going on to say, “[t]he discourse of the female mystic was constructed out of disciplines that the mystic consolidated her power.”¹⁴⁹ Finke’s purpose is to defend the authority of medieval women writers, but I think this also sheds light on the mystics’ understanding of their times, and their ability to work within structures that were repressive to them.¹⁵⁰ This is most clearly demonstrated in Beatrice’s work because of the manner in which her male redactor handles the material from her journal. Amy Hollywood’s work on Beatrice is very instructive in this regard.

Beatrice’s hagiographer consistently externalizes passages of the *Seven Manners of Loving* in his Latin translation of that text, inserted within the *Vita Beatricis*. Examination of the Latin translation of Beatrice’s work shows the editor’s project to collapse the inner states of the soul described by Beatrice into outward devotional practices. Whereas Beatrice’s Flemish original of *Seven Manners of Loving* makes no mention of mortification or embrace of bodily sickness as a spiritual practice, the male redactor’s version of the text does just that. Comparing his work to the original text show the level of difference between

¹⁴⁹ Laurie A. Finke. “Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision,” in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*. Edited by Ulrike Wiethaus. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993, 29.

¹⁵⁰ Michelle M. Sauer comments upon Finke’s passage with a similar conclusion. See Michelle M. Sauer “Divine Orgasm and Self-Blazoning: The Fragmented Body of the Female Medieval Visionary,” in *Sexuality, Sociality, and Cosmology in Medieval Literary Texts*, 2013, 129.

the two texts.¹⁵¹ Hollywood points out how common body-focused writing was for and about women in the thirteenth century and sees Beatrice's Flemish treatise as a "resistance to prevalent cultural norms." Further Hollywood says that Beatrice "implicitly rejects" a facile association between women and the body, and therefore the yoke of bodily suffering that occurs time and again in hagiography about women.

Her desire for freedom, then, can be understood as a desire to free suffering women's bodies from their literalistic identification with the suffering body of Christ. She crucially displaces typical understandings of the "life of Christ," arguing that it is not the present life of suffering imprisonment, but rather life in internal and eternal rapturous identification with divine love.¹⁵²

I think this comparison between freedom through suffering of the body versus suffering of the spirit illuminates a parallel understanding of how the soul can be free in the image of God and also bound through sin. Hadewijch and Beatrice both believe in the soul's freedom through the image of God and infusion of grace, but that freedom does not shield them from the human condition of sinfulness. At the same time, the radical nature of their freedom as images of God pulls them toward coming back to what they created to be.

For both Beatrice and Hadewijch, sin and freedom exist concurrently in the person. That said, the life of perfection is constantly strived for, and both women believe markers of this sublimity can be experienced both bodily and spiritually in this life. As John Coakley summarizes, commenting upon the work of Carolyn Walker Bynum, "[medieval women's] asceticism with its embrace of bodily suffering [w]as something profoundly anti-dualistic,

¹⁵¹ Beatrice's Flemish text does not prescribe any kind of bodily mortifications; it deals exclusively with movements of the soul. On the other hand, her anonymous male translator underscores Beatrice's embrace of bodily sickness, which she punctuates with extraordinary ascetic practices. For a thorough discussion of this, see Jessica Barr. "The Secret Chamber of Her Mind: Interpreting Inner Experience in the Vita of Beatrice of Nazareth" in *Exemplaria*, 23:3, 2011, 221-243.

¹⁵² Hollywood, "Inside Out," 94.

and world-affirming,” and led to positive parallels between female life experiences and the figure of Christ.¹⁵³

Body and soul are a unity that cannot be undone. While Christianity wrestled with questions of body versus spirit since the earliest centuries, a rejection of gnostic body denigration was always a parameter for orthodoxy. That said, punishment of the body for the sake of the soul is a common *topos*, particularly in the monastic tradition, and perhaps doubly-so was it foisted upon religious women.¹⁵⁴ For Hadewijch and Beatrice there is an organic (and healthy) sense of balance between body and soul. Though, by turns, they may focus in their writing more on one than the other both are integral to reading their theologies correctly.

In closing this chapter, what I have attempted to show is that both Hadewijch and Beatrice understood themselves to be free due to their being created in the image of God. What this freedom meant for them was that, in their innermost being, they had some kind of link to God. That link allowed them to *know* and come to some level of understanding of God. This knowing and understanding is an invitation to the soul to become even freer by drawing closer and closer to union with God – from image to likeness.

¹⁵³ John Coakley. “Christian Holy Women and the Exercise of Religious Authority in the Medieval West,” in *Religion Compass* 3/5 (2009), 850.

¹⁵⁴ This dynamic evolved by the later Middle Ages into, sometimes, rather lurid obsession with female mortification of the flesh. A peculiar early example of this can be found in Venantius Fortunatus’ sixth-century *Life* of Radegund which includes lengthy and extravagant descriptions of ascetic practices of the sainted queen of the Franks. See *The Life of Holy Radegund* Book I: 25-26, and English translation of which can be found in McNamara, Jo Ann. *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1992. Much scholarship has been devoted to the issue of medieval women and relationship to the body. Some particularly salient to the present work can be found in Bynum, Caroline Walker. *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*. New York: Zone Books, 1991; Elliot, Dyan. *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500*. The Middle Ages Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

It is important to point out that separating the manners of freedom in Beatrice and Hadewijch's writings is, in some sense, an artificial project. The women themselves were not focused on such distinctions; for them, the meaning of their lives rested in loving service to God, transformation by love, and striving for union with the source of their love. At the same time, this study attempts to draw out a deeper understanding of what was meaningful to these thirteenth century women, and also to place them within a context of larger theological movements of the time period. However, the reason I engage in exploring these categorizations is for a greater purpose. Denoting how freedom functions in different ways on different registers of the two women's theologies opens up the theological anthropology operating in their works. As we have seen in this chapter, Beatrice and Hadewijch's language for discussing the ultimate concern of the soul, that is, growing into likeness and union with God, comes down to them from Cistercian authors who had wide-ranging influence upon medieval spirituality. Their understanding of the primacy of love as the way to know God; their unfailing reliance upon the initiative of God in leading them in freedom on the life-long journey to union; and, finally, their commitment to enunciating a countercultural understanding of how to cooperate with grace to live in freedom with God are preparatory ingredients to "fruition" of this ultimate concern.

It is precisely within Beatrice and Hadewijch's approaches to vocation that we find some of the most innovative aspects of their theology as it relates to freedom. From their foundation, steeped in Cistercian spirituality, Beatrice and Hadewijch drive forward a spirituality of what it means to be authentically and fully a human being. The following chapter will draw out a fuller understanding of these ideas of vocation, freedom, and union with God, by graceful growing into likeness with God, which was especially important to

mulieres religiosae. Hadewijch and Beatrice develop understandings of these concepts in new ways from within their religious communities of women.

CHAPTER FOUR

FREEDOM AND GROWING IN LIKENESS

In the previous chapter I examined the first way that freedom functions in the writings of Beatrice of Nazareth and Hadewijch. The soul, created in inalienable dignity, by virtue of the *imago Dei*, is invited to cooperate with grace to grow into its full potentiality with God. What we will call the second way of freedom in the writings of these two mystics is growing into likeness, and ultimately, union with God. This “likeness” is a deep communion between the human soul and God, recalling the human being to what she was originally created to be. In this chapter I will seek to clarify how freedom is so important in how Hadewijch and Beatrice understand God and the soul’s relationship to God. I will also show how both women approach union as something that can be experienced in this life. On this point, Hadewijch and Beatrice both move beyond the Bernard and William of St. Thierry. The continual journey of the human being into deeper love with God transforms each daily experience into one marked by grace. Ultimately, the soul finds itself united with its Creator in all aspects of human experience.

This chapter will explore *how* Beatrice and Hadewijch understand themselves to be growing into union with God and what the result of this union means to their theology. What does it mean to “be God with God,” as Hadewijch says, and how is the work of these women authors an innovative development upon the monastic theology of the previous generation? I will highlight two main areas of inquiry to sharpen the focus on this topic.

First, I will examine how Beatrice and Hadewijch understand the importance of experiences of the body and of the soul, and how these experiences are instructive and authoritative. These experiences fall into three distinct yet closely interrelated categories: work, suffering, and “fruition.”¹⁵⁴ In all three cases, the mystics’ thought is grounded in some aspect of freedom, building upon the material discussed in the previous chapter, and looking forward to a culmination in which the soul comes “face to face” with the ineffable God, so long desired.

Following this discussion I will show where Hadewijch and Beatrice offer authentic development of the theological tradition. This chapter will underscore the claim these two women must be taken seriously as theologians in their own right within the tradition of western Christian theology. Specifically in this chapter I will bring to conclusion the thesis that a concern for freedom is constitutive of Hadewijch and Beatrice’s writing on the relationship of the human soul to God.

BODILY EXPERIENCE AND FREEDOM

In their writings Beatrice and Hadewijch do not approach the subject of bodily experiences in exactly the same way. That said, they do share an analogous understanding of how the embodied soul’s experiences contribute to the journey toward total freedom in God. To be very clear, as was stressed in Chapter 1, bodily and affective experience is an authoritative source for both women. It includes visions, prophetic messages, and painful and ecstatic movements in the soul that, in some cases, result in overwhelming, and vivid

¹⁵⁴ *Ghebruken* is typically translated in English as “fruition” or “enjoyment.” Here, I follow Mother Columba Hart’s translation of *ghebruken* as “fruition.” Enjoyment is more of a direct translation of the word, but, on the other hand, “fruition” gives the sense of something growing into its full potential. This concept is woven throughout Hadewijch’s and Beatrice’s work.

somatic experiences of God. The sensory material ranges from ecstatic delight to intense suffering. Both mystics see these experiences as preparation for and movement into true freedom with God. In general, there is a movement throughout both mystics' work of God drawing the soul by loving desire from moments of ecstasy through intense spiritual work and suffering into ultimate union. This union is true freedom wherein the soul is truly what God created her to be.

Because there is more extant work of Hadewijch, it will be easier to provide a full picture of her understanding of bodily experience and the journey toward freedom. Throughout her diverse genres of work Hadewijch develops an idea of mutuality between the soul and God that will be discussed below with her understanding of what work the soul is to do, *i.e.* her vocation, how the soul engages in pedagogical suffering, and how she responds to divine consolation.

Regarding Beatrice's texts, this chapter will focus on her handling of experience and freedom as recorded in her vernacular *Seven Manners of Loving*. Here Beatrice describes a variety of movements of the soul and fluctuations of her emotional state. Each of the seven ways of loving provides a complex picture of Beatrice's experience of God.

In dealing with the issue of bodily experience, one must be very cautious. Hadewijch's and Beatrice's brilliance and innovation in their theologies is due in part to their embrace of the body. At the same time, I want to be careful not to collapse their understanding of divine union into purely somatic experiences. To do so would be to fall into the same faulty assumptions to which Jacques de Vitry, Beatrice's biographer, and other male authors seem to return constantly. Beatrice and Hadewijch both trust and rely upon movements in the soul and experiences of the body to inform their understanding of union

with God; however, they themselves are careful to be very clear about the limits of such experiences and how they should be approached in the spiritual life.

As developed in the previous chapter, freedom is inherent in the soul afforded to it by being created in the image of God. For Hadewijch and Beatrice this beginning point of liberty of choice affords them the ability, through grace, to embark upon a rigorous and life-long journey toward union with God. This journey is marked by three main themes: the work of love, suffering for the sake of love as a way toward growth, and the enjoyment of love.

VOCATION: DESIRE AND WORK

As we have seen, love is the driving force of Hadewijch and Beatrice's ability to know God. Deeper love comes with deeper knowledge and the engine moving all of this forward is desire. God seeks out the human soul inviting her into this relationship of love and the soul desires to know more and to love more. God's love for the soul is what transforms it back into likeness with Godself.¹⁵⁵ The vocation, or work, that the soul undertakes is one of nurturing this desire and doing all that one can to be drawn into the depths of God. The soul must love much, but must also work hard to be conformed to the will of the divine Lover. Beatrice and Hadewijch are, again, indebted to Bernard and William of St. Thierry in their understanding of desire as the way to transformation.

¹⁵⁵ DeGanck, *Towards Unification with God*, 358 n. 12. This refers to Hadewijch's Platonist understanding of the ideal self vis-à-vis the earthly self. Barbara Newman discusses the goal of the two selves becoming one in "bridal union, which is the union of equals, of lovers both full-grown in their eternity." Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 147.

Desire is the beginning point to the mystics' vocation. The work that they do is born from desire for God; it attracts them and draws them after it. Beatrice begins her treatise on the ways of love saying,

The first way is desire
Which proceeds from Minne as dynamic activity.
It has to rule in the heart for a long time
before it can overcome all resistance.¹⁵⁶

Beatrice understands that love is working through her desire to make a change in her, and that this action of love is something that takes time. Love transforms the soul gradually and unceasingly in this life. No matter how much the human person does to conform herself to love's demands, there is always more to accomplish. Desire on the part of the finite creature for the infinite God is never satisfied. As Hadewijch complains in her 29th Letter, "... the unattainable desire, which Love has always given me for the sake of fruition, has injured and wounded me in the breast and in the heart."¹⁵⁷ Desire is what moves the soul toward God, but it is overwhelming. It is finitude coming face to face with infinity.¹⁵⁸

Though overwhelming, this confrontation with infinity urges the soul onward. Beatrice explains that

The good soul desires
to spend its whole life in this desire,
to work with this desire,
to grow
and to climb

¹⁵⁶ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 1: 1-4.

¹⁵⁷ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 29.

¹⁵⁸ The specific word Hadewijch uses to describe this impelling desire for God is *ghebreken*, meaning the desire for fruition. Hadewijch's juxtaposition of these similar sounding words is important to her poet's ear. Beatrice also uses the term *ghebruken*. However, when speaking of desire, she employs the term *bergerde*.

to greater heights of Minne
 and to a more intimate knowledge of God,
 until it reaches that perfection
 for which it has been made
 and to which its Creator calls it.¹⁵⁹

This encapsulates the vocation of the mystic: to climb higher, or perhaps more aptly, to delve more deeply into the abyss of divinity to find the truth of who the human person was created to be. The *imago Dei* desires to grow in likeness with its Source – full growth is the ultimate freedom. Following this desire for God sets the tone for all of Hadewijch’s and Beatrice’s actions. Beatrice very succinctly summarizes the work of the soul, quoting Philippians 1:23, “I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.” DeGanck points out that this following of desire is focused on being “purified, free from defects and egocentricity in order to be free for union with God.”¹⁶⁰ Beatrice and Hadewijch sought not to be annihilated by God, but come fully into accord with the will of God. When this takes place, the soul and God have become Bride and Bridegroom.¹⁶¹ Beatrice will speak of herself as being “our Lord’s bride”¹⁶² and Love acting as a “housewife” to keep the affairs of the soul in order.¹⁶³ Hadewijch, on the other hand, is not satisfied with the role of bride alone, though she will use this imagery as well.

¹⁵⁹ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 1: 23-32.

¹⁶⁰ DeGanck, *Towards Unification with God*, 371.

¹⁶¹ In her tenth vision, Hadewijch hears a voice saying of her, “Behold, Bride and Mother, you like no other have been able to live me as God and Man!” Vision 12 depicts the celebration of the soul as bride and her vesting in the adornments of the virtues.

¹⁶² Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 6:3

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 6:41.

Hadewijch's thoughts on vocation are not merely regarding the love that flows between the soul and the divine lover. Vocation is the natural outgrowth of that relationship, the fruit that the union of human and divine brings forth. This love must shake out into real, tangible service. Following Hadewijch's courtly imagining of the knight and lady, the faithful soul-knight MUST do virtuous work to win and keep the love of the divine lady.

Be docile and prompt toward all who have need of you, and satisfy everyone as far as you can manage it without debasing yourself. Be joyful with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be good toward those who have need of you, devoted toward the sick, generous with the poor, and recollected in spirit beyond the reach of all creatures.¹⁶⁴

These acts must be motivated by and a mirror of "the self-emptying, gracious love exhibited by God for God and for humanity."¹⁶⁵ In acting with love in cooperation, the human person becomes Love and is thus loveable to Love. As Hadewijch says in Letter 10,

For if he works with [God's] grace, he pleases God; but if he does not do so he becomes culpable For as virtue becomes vice when it is practiced out of its time, so grace is no longer grace except under the influence of grace.¹⁶⁶

Cooperation with the action of Love transforms the human person into Love. This cooperation is in doing acts of virtue, thus building up the community and drawing them collectively closer to the union which, for Hadewijch, is the ultimate truth of the human experience. On the other hand, sounding a note that is very much like Augustine, Hadewijch says that even a virtuous act, if it is made without motivation by and cooperation with Love is not a graced action.

¹⁶⁴ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 2:19-28.

¹⁶⁵ Shea, Mary Lou. *Medieval Women on Sin and Salvation: Hadewijch of Antwerp, Beatrice of Nazareth, Margaret Ebner, and Julian of Norwich*. Bern:Peter Lang, 2010, 109.

¹⁶⁶ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 10: 86.

In Hadewijch, this transformation has a markedly Christocentric orientation. As she says in one of her final letters of instruction to beguines in training, the vocation of love is to be another Christ. This is not simply a contemplative *imitatio Christi*, but

to work with his hands; to walk with his feet; to hear with his ears where the voice of the Godhead never ceases to speak through the mouth of the Beloved ... [to] live for no one else but for the Beloved in love alone; live in him as the loved one in the Beloved, with the same way of acting, with one spirit, and with one heart; and in one another to taste the unheard-of sweetness he merited by his sufferings. Oh yes! To feel heart in heart, with one single heart and one single sweet love, and continually have fruition of one full-grown love. And lastly, that one must ever know certainly, without any doubt, that one is wholly in the Unity of Love. In this state one is the Father.¹⁶⁷

The vocation of the soul, born of desire, is to bear out in human life the human life of the divine-made-human. For Hadewijch, using Christ as a mode, the human person can have loving communion with the Father, just as Christ had communion with the Father. In the passage above, Hadewijch is saying much more than we should be *like* Christ; she is saying the human soul becomes divine by emulating Christ, who was both human and divine. Christ is the model human being because his love for God stayed steadfast even to the crucifixion.

Acting in cooperation with Love is both active and passive, and is the work of the soul in moving toward full freedom. There is freedom in the vocation of the soul: Acting in accord with God's will, emptying oneself of desire for anything but God, and remaining steadfast in this vocation no matter the cost. There is freedom along the way and freedom is the goal. When the soul, like Christ, can empty herself of anything that impedes the relationship with God, it becomes freer by uniting her will to the divine will.

¹⁶⁷ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 30: 127-144. Hadewijch's understanding here is that the soul has become so deeply swallowed up in the Godhead that she is indistinguishable from it.

The next aspect of the journey of the human person toward union is more difficult. Suffering, embraced in freedom, is an important and recurring theme in both Hadewijch and Beatrice's work. It also highlights very clearly their reliance upon bodily experience as instructive for the human soul in its journey toward divine union.

BODILY EXPERIENCE: SUFFERING

Bernard McGinn says of Hadewijch that

[Her] teaching on the mystical character of common human experience, especially the painful experience that seems far from God, was to have many analogues among later medieval mystics. It also provides a key for understanding how her following of the way of Jesus led her to a life of responsibility for others. The beguine agrees with most Christian mystics that it is not feelings of sweetness but rather the practice of the virtues that proves true adherence to *minne*.¹⁶⁸

This points to the importance of suffering to the mystics' vocation. Hadewijch and Beatrice will both freely embrace affliction as integral to the journey into union with God. They do this because it is what Christ did while incarnated. Thus, by embracing affliction, Hadewijch and Beatrice are not simply imitating Christ, they are *being* Christ. Beatrice's fifth manner of loving introduces startlingly violent language in regard to the soul's experience of Love.

It also happens now and then
that Minne
is powerfully awakened in the soul
and comes to life like a storm,
with a lot of noise
and with intense affirmation,
as if she were
going to break the heart with violence,
and draw it out of itself¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 220.

¹⁶⁹ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 5:2-11.

Love comes “like a storm” battering and shaking the soul to continue in her vocation. This storm of love is, by turns, both sweet and an affliction. Here, Beatrice makes use of extremely somatic metaphors to describe the suffering she experiences being unable to fully sate her desire for God. Further in the fifth way she describes that Love “becomes so excessive and tempestuous ... that [the] heart is wounded time and time again,”

[The heart] thinks
 that all its blood vessels are bursting,
 that the blood surges to a boil,
 that its bone marrow melts away,
 that its bones grow weak,
 that its breast is burning
 and that its throat is parched
 in such a way that its face and all its members
 feel the heat from within
 and experience the violent impetuosity of Minne
 At the same time, it also feels
 a shooting pain
 running from its heart to its throat,
 as if it were deprived of its senses.¹⁷⁰

Beatrice is describing the movement of her soul experiencing suffering due to the violence of Love’s action upon it. This language recurs throughout both mystics’ works.

Hadewijch understands that suffering is an inescapable part of the human experience and that it is precisely within the suffering of humanity that human experience and divine reality intersect in the person of Jesus Christ. Hadewijch’s focus on suffering, thus, is not a religious masochism nor is it necessarily physical suffering, but rather an imitation of Christ. She understands suffering as a way of coming to grasp the divination of humanity, the realization of the peak of human potentiality. Suffering is an integral ingredient to the

¹⁷⁰ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 5: 67-80.

mystic's journey to *ghebruken, ghebreken*, or the desire for fruition, itself driving the limitation of human ability to suffering, wild ends (*orewoet*).¹⁷¹

“Whatever misery we endure with good will and for God is pleasing in every respect. But if we knew how dear this is to God, it would be premature for us, for then we should have no misery.”¹⁷² This seeming paradox is one that flows throughout Hadewijch's writing. The sweetness of suffering seems counterintuitive, but must be approached with the same kenotic posture seen in the figure of the human Christ. If the suffering is too sweet, it becomes consolation. Such spiritual self-centeredness is something about which Hadewijch had a great distrust, possibly due to its widespread instances in beguine communities.¹⁷³ Is de Jacques de Vitry's version of beguine spirituality to be believed, or is Hadewijch's? Because of the opposition Hadewijch attracted by her comprehensive standards of authentic spiritual practice, it seems that perhaps the answer is that both types of spirituality flourished amongst the holy women. However, in no way does Hadewijch promote a passive and helpless descent into incapacitated love such as is found in Jacques de Vitry's mystics who cannot rise from their beds. Hadewijch's school of suffering is one of ascent into true love, a love that cannot bear any kind of division between the soul and the divine beloved. Thus, for Hadewijch, the “highest name” of love is Hell,

As she [Love} is indeed according to her nature.
For she ruins the soul and the mind

¹⁷¹ Hadewijch and Beatrice both make use of *orewoet* [intense longing, even to the point of madness] to describe the extremity to which the soul goes in suffering for God. Why is this desire for God so violent? Because of the frustration of the soul kicking against its own limitation: falling short of the infinite love of the divine. “Human longing is bound to overreach itself.” See Momaers & Dutton, *Hadewijch*, 100.

¹⁷² Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 2:53-56.

¹⁷³ Hadewijch's references against this behavior appear frequently in her Letters.

To such a degree that they never recover;
 They who love no longer have virtues to do anything
 But to wander in the storms of Love,
 Body and soul, heart and thought –
 Lovers lost in this hell.¹⁷⁴

In this sense, Hell is also a heaven, and Hadewijch seems, again, to be developing a point from William of Saint Thierry, who, Hart cites, also equated longing desire with a loving hell imposed by God.¹⁷⁵ In this way, Hadewijch seems to be acknowledging the profitable nature of suffering, but not so much suffering for the sake of suffering, but rather abandonment to the divine will. Reminiscent of a *suscipe* prayer, Hadewijch's point embracing suffering seems to be a freedom of the will when it has united with the divine will. There is no longer fear of suffering. As stanzaic Poem 12 concludes,

To all who desire love, may God grant
 That they be so prepared for Love
 That they all live on her riches
 Until, after themselves becoming Love, they draw Love into
 themselves
 So that nothing evil, on the part of cruel aliens,
 Can befall them more; but they shall live free
 To cry: *I am all Love's, and Love is all mine!*
 What can now disturb them?¹⁷⁶

The soul aligned with God's will has all that she desires, and desires only that which will draw her closer into the divine embrace. Suffering, as it is the mode in which Christ himself experienced human nature, was not focused on the suffering itself. At the same time, Christ embraced suffering because being in union with the divine will is a preeminent way for the soul to serve Love. This is not to glorify suffering for suffering's sake, but is to remain in un-

¹⁷⁴ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Couplets, 16:199-205

¹⁷⁵ Hart, *Hadewijch*, 357, n. 70.

¹⁷⁶ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Stanzas, 12: 61-68.

shakeable love and union with God's will no matter the vicissitudes of life. Suffering, here, is a training ground for the divine life of the soul.

Beatrice provides a similar idea that suffering embraced in the service of Love moves the soul toward its true nature in God. She closes her fifth section of the *Seven Manners of Loving* saying of the suffering Love imposes,

What most
provokes [the soul] and wounds it
is also what most
heals and pacifies it,
and what wounds it the moves deeply
is what makes it most healthy.¹⁷⁷

Here, again, we see the notion of suffering making the soul "most healthy" by wounding it deeply. This suffering jars the mystic into coming face to face with the reality that there is more to know about God than the experiences of consolation and the vocation to charity. Suffering in the parlance of Hadewijch and Beatrice is most often referring to the awareness of the barrier between the infinite God and the finite self. Thus, it is a barrier that also urges the soul on to seek greater union.

As has been pointed out, neither Beatrice nor Hadewijch's concept of suffering revolves around self-imposed, fantastical penances as are found within many of the *vitae* and writings of her contemporary women mystics and those in following centuries.¹⁷⁸ It is, rather, a free acceptance of suffering as a natural product of the deep, loving bond between

¹⁷⁷ Beatrice, *Seven Manners of Loving*, 5:123-128.

¹⁷⁸ The behavior of the *mulieres sanctae* often times is recorded as including these types of self-imposed agonies. Christina Mirabilis' life of reparation for the sinners she saw in purgatory, Marie d'Oignies' extreme fasting and ferocious penances, Elizabeth of Spaalbeek's daily reenactment of the passion of Christ are just a few examples. Women mystics of southern Europe also engaged in extreme ascetic practices, such as Angela of Foligno and Catherine of Siena's eating scabs or drinking the pus of the sick for whom they cared.

the soul and God. The soul longs for what is ontologically beyond it, causing it to be fully aware of the lack of what it desires most. This suffering is the vehicle by which she is able to more fully understand that which she wishes to become, i.e. fully immersed in divine love, the model for which is Christ.

Beloved, if I love a beloved,
 Be you, Love, my Beloved;
 You gave yourself as Love for your loved one's sake,
 And thus you, Love, uplifted me, your loved one, with you!
 O Love, were I but love,
 And could I but love you, Love, with love!
 O Love, for love's sake, grant that I,
 Having become love, may know Love wholly as Love!¹⁷⁹

As mentioned before, Hadewijch's divine love is enflamed by the devotion to the human Christ, whose kenotic love led him to suffer, thereby making the way for Hadewijch's subsequent love. By uniting herself to this experience of loving suffering, Hadewijch is drawn more deeply into understanding of the one whom she loves, and in this deeper understanding of "Love wholly as Love," she also becomes more deeply united with that Love.

For Beatrice, the free embrace of all that Love brings, whether joy or misery, moves the soul to more conformity to God's will and to becoming God's bride. As she describes the different manners of loving, Beatrice continually repeats "freedom" (*vriheit*) and uses language of liberation. Desire for God frees the human soul from bondage. This desire to be free allows the soul to remain faithful to her vocation no matter the suffering she endures – even to the point of embracing suffering joyfully for its instructive benefit. This embrace of suffering is a test for the soul, by which it exercises freedom and moves closer to freedom

¹⁷⁹ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Couplets 15:45-52.

in God. What the soul truly desires is the reward, so suffering is actually preferable to consolations from the Beloved. As Beatrice writes in the seventh manner of loving,

So the soul remains
unsatisfied and un comforted
with all gifts
as long as it still has to do without
the presence of its Minne.
This is an extremely laborious life,
since it doesn't want to be comforted here
unless it has acquired
what it so incessantly seeks.¹⁸⁰

Beatrice underscores that she does not seek consoling favors, but only true Love alone. This passage also brings up the issue of created existence and union with God in this life, which will be discussed below.

BODILY EXPERIENCE: FRUITION

Despite the importance of suffering to Beatrice and Hadewijch's theology, one should not fall into the false assumption that it is the only component of human spiritual journey. As has been noted above, the interplay between suffering and fruition, *ghebreken* and *ghebruken*, is interesting precisely because both aspects of the spiritual life are important to the mystics' theology. Fruition is the centerpiece of her understanding of the goal toward which the divine and human relationship orients itself.

It is important to Hadewijch and Beatrice that the soul remain faithful and constant in its loving vocation despite what happens to it, freely accepting God's will. This reliance upon God regardless of the trials of the soul in its spiritual journey toward fruition is key. As she says in Letter 5, writing to some of her young disciples,

¹⁸⁰ Beatrice, *The Seven Manners of Loving*, 7:187-195.

What I was now most glad to see is that God supported you with peace, consoled you with his own goodness, and enlightened you with the noble-mindedness of his Spirit; this he will do, and willingly, if you will entrust things to him and rely on him sufficiently.

O dear child, lose yourself wholly in him with all your soul! And lose in him likewise whatever befalls you (apart from all things love is not); for adversities are many, but if we can stand firm, we shall reach our full growth.¹⁸¹

Hadewijch, then, attempts to prepare those she is instructing for the difficult road of the vocation of love as has been detailed above. Ecstatic experiences come and go, but the soul must not be shaken though the “adversities are many.”

Hadewijch has a distrust of excessive ecstasies without the hard work of perseverance. In a possible critique of some of her sister beguines, and a stark critique of the *mulieres sanctae* described by Jacques de Vitry, she says in Letter 6, “Under cover of holy desires, the majority of souls today go astray and find their refreshment in an inferior consolation that they can grasp. This is a great pity.”¹⁸² Consolations help along the way in Hadewijch’s conception of the journey of the soul, but it is all too easy to be waylaid and driven off-track by these periods of refreshment.

Union with the kenotic posture of the human Christ and an abandonment to the divine will are both fundamental aspects of Hadewijch’s understanding of the vocation of lovers to live like Christ. The Letters direct us to a fertile ground in which Hadewijch’s vocational expectations for her adherents come to full flower. It is in embracing this kenosis of Christ that the soul can become “full grown” and love fully in accordance with the perfection of Love, which is loving God with and in God. The soul who does this is able to be free

¹⁸¹ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 5:2-12.

¹⁸² Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 6:215ff.

and proud.¹⁸³ This soul, also, achieves union with God in a sense of mutuality that is unique to Hadewijch and the women writers of *la mystique courtoise*.¹⁸⁴

Hadewijch's spirituality of the Eucharist also brings up themes that point back to her understanding of the importance of bodily experience, both of which are tightly interwoven with the experience of fruition. Caroline Walker Bynum's important work on medieval female spirituality has demonstrated the complex multivalent nature of women's relationship to body and food. One of the areas she has illuminated is the tendency of women to associate devotion to the humanity of Christ very specifically with Eucharistic devotion. Bynum argues that women's generalized classification with the body (vs. men's classification with the spirit) helped fertilize this field of women's spirituality.¹⁸⁵ Taking Bynum's scholarship as a baseline, examination of Hadewijch's spirituality of the Eucharist is particularly interesting.

¹⁸³ Hadewijch uses the term *fierheit* rather frequently in this sense throughout her writings. It is pride, but pride not in a sinful, self-focused sense; rather a pride in living into one's perfect self – the self which God created the human person to be. See example in Letter 6: 191. Hadewijch, herself being from Flanders, may have been acquainted with the Flemish folk saint Fiere Margariet, whose gruesome tale was transcribed by the Cistercian Caesarius of Heisterbach in the sixth book of his *Dialogue of Miracles*. Margariet's plan to enter a convent is frustrated by her being kidnapped and murdered. Ultimately, the proud saint, posthumously, is able to bring her violators to justice by miraculous deeds. Caesarius holds up Margariet as a model of simplicity; however, her story can also be read in light of the concept of *fierheit*, in which her abandonment to the divine will leads to her heavenly glorification and power over earthly events.

¹⁸⁴ Barbara Newman believes that what she calls *la mystique courtoise* is a blending of understandings of human love and divine love that is particular to the women mystics, like Hadewijch and Beatrice. This distinctive contribution of women writers goes beyond earlier male of authors of affective mysticism because those authors always sought to juxtapose the "two loves". See Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 137-138. For a similar understanding of the mystics' innovation on this, see Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 138.

¹⁸⁵ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 154-161.

Vision 7, in which Hadewijch details her experience of fruition with Christ, is quite possibly one of her most illuminating writings regarding the importance of bodiliness and divine union. Hadewijch records that she has a vision in church during Matins in which

My heart and my veins and all my limbs trembled and quivered with eager desire and, as often occurred with me, such madness and fear beset my mind that it seemed to me I did not content my Beloved, and that my Beloved did not fulfill my desire.... I desired that his Humanity should to the fullest extent be one in fruition with my humanity, and that mine then should hold its stand and be strong enough to enter into perfection until I content him....¹⁸⁶

Following upon this violent (and very somatic) desire for oneness with the Beloved, Hadewijch sees an eagle fly toward her from the altar, announcing that the union she desires will soon take place.¹⁸⁷

Then he [Christ] came from the altar, showing himself as a Child; and that Child was in the same form as he was in his first three years. He turned toward me, in his right hand took from the ciborium his Body, and in his left hand took a chalice, which seemed to come from the altar, but I do not know where it came from.

With that he came in the form and clothing of a Man, as he was on the day when he gave us his Body for the first time; looking like a Human Being and a Man, wonderful and beautiful with a glorious face, he came to me as humbly as anyone who wholly belongs to another. Then he gave himself to me in the shape of the Sacrament, in its outward form, as the custom is; and then he gave me to drink from the chalice, in form and taste, as the custom is. After that he came himself to me, took me entirely in his arms, and pressed me to him; and all my members felt his in full felicity, in accordance with the desire of my heart and my humanity. So I was outwardly satisfied and fully transported.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 7:3-7.

¹⁸⁷ Hadewijch, tapping into the iconography of the eagle linked with John the Evangelist and the author of the Book of Revelation, often utilizes in her visions the image of the eagle as God's nuntius, particularly of revelations having to do with Hadewijch's own spiritual state.

¹⁸⁸ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 7:57-74.

Here, vividly, Hadewijch illustrates her understanding of union with God, her humanity and God's divinity, her humanity and Christ's humanity, as cohesive. In the setting of the Eucharist, she is able to participate in both the humanity of Christ and in his divine union with God, and, she says, both lovers "each wholly receive the other in all full satisfaction of the sight, the hearing, and the passing away of one into the other."¹⁸⁹ For Hadewijch, reception of the Eucharist was a symbol and foretaste, not only of being a part of Christ's mystical body, but of inhabiting that body in a very immediate and physical way. Thus, Hadewijch displays an understanding of divine loving and divine union that is not only much more bodily-oriented than her male forbears such as Bernard, but also startlingly more dynamic and immediate.

This experience, while deeply felt, is also anomalous for Hadewijch; it is exactly the type of ecstasy against which she cautions her beguine students from falling into false satisfaction. That said, the union of wills that it symbolizes is something that Hadewijch believes the loving soul, the knight-errant, can rely upon through all the storms and sufferings of life. Holding to this union of wills in fidelity is the true vocation of God's human lovers with the result of an overflowing of love and loving service, a life of "noble service in all works of virtue, and a life of exile in all obedience."¹⁹⁰

Beatrice too describes a certain ambivalence about *ghebruken* in the spiritual life. On one hand, she describes how it may distract from what she truly wants, *i.e.* immediacy with God. On the other, fruition draws the soul's focus back precisely to what the soul wants, by showing it what it is not. Jos Huls' summarizes this dual understanding,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 91-93.

¹⁹⁰ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 6: 364-5.

No matter how unbearable this life may seem, no matter how intensely we, in this immediacy, may be focused on a life which, as the telos of Minne, remains beyond our grasp, this is the life in which we, in the grip of Minne, are united with God. That's what Beatrice means with her use of the phrase *my soul refuses to be comforted* Living in this immediacy, we can endure no comforting intermediaries.¹⁹¹

The ecstatic experience of God, is a reminder of what is to come, but also holds a danger in that it can lull the lover into complacency. Beatrice and Hadewijch both understand that to fall into such a trap is the opposite of freedom. It is bondage to this-worldly sense. Here we see how the mystics understand the spiritual life to be a constant journey – even a struggle. The journey will never be complete if the soul stops to rest at a pleasant oasis on the road to its true destination.

BEYOND BERNARD: BEATRICE AND HADEWIJCH ON DIVINE UNION

Hadewijch's handling of bodily experience brings to light her understanding that there is actual mutuality between human and divine that takes place in fruition.¹⁹² Here she makes a marked departure from Bernard. Her development of this can be seen above in her ideas of work, suffering, and fruition. Beatrice, too, speaks of the mutuality of the relationship between human lover and Divine Beloved. While both women firmly understand that God is the initiator of the relationship, they also develop the understanding of this dynamic in important ways.

¹⁹¹ Huls, Jos, *The Minne-Journey*, 310-11.

¹⁹² John Milhaven, in a rather personal exploration of Hadewijch's work, states "... Hadewijch claimed by *her willed, passionate desire to affect God, to cause God to respond*. Divine love, she said, could not resist her desire. It had to counter longing with longing. It could not stay away. Hadewijch celebrating her triumph in in unfaith over God is unprecedented in the Christian theological tradition in that she rejoices in herself as a strong agent." See Milhaven, John Giles. *Hadewijch and Her Sisters: Other Ways of Loving and Knowing*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993. 68. Milhaven's argument may take Hadewijch's understanding a bit further than the mystic would herself. Hadewijch is proud because she has become her true self; however, she does not lose an understanding of God's initiative in the whole divine love relationship.

For Bernard, writing for his Cistercian brethren, the soul is the bride of the divine Bridegroom. The human soul is always the passive and receptive party in the love relationship. The soul is acted upon by God rather than being active. Carnal love in Bernard's writing is something to be surpassed to reach an otherworldly, affective charity. This type of loving is the pinnacle to which the soul strives, and it can only be reached once the soul is freed from the body.¹⁹³ As one contemporary Cistercian author paraphrases, regarding Bernard's approach:

In man's growth toward perfect love Bernard distinguishes three kinds of affection: the first is the offspring of the flesh – it does not submit to the divine law. It is pleasant but sinful.... The first, evil as it is, has no place here¹⁹⁴

Though Bernard is an influence on the women's spirituality, they diverge from him on this point. For them, the experience of human love, including physical manifestations of that love, enriches their understanding of the preeminent love between God and the soul.

Beatrice's and Hadewijch's trust of their experiences of love in this life and have the conviction that precisely this type of love can teach and prepare the soul for union. The women mystics, too, have an understanding that union will not be eternal until the next life. At the same time, they hold a much more robust belief in the ability for the soul to be united with God this side of the afterlife.

Regarding union with God in this life, Jos Huls comments eloquently on Beatrice's seventh manner, taking special care to point out the important themes of God as mediated presence and the closeness of God experienced in divine union. Especially salient to the discussion of

¹⁹³ See, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux's 50th sermon *On the Song of Songs*.

¹⁹⁴ Halflants, M. Corneille. "Introduction" in *On the Song of Songs I: Sermons 1-20*. Translated by Kilian Walsh. Cistercian Fathers Series: 4. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971, xxvi.

the women mystics is the mutuality Huls underscores in the seventh way, and of the almost incomprehensibility of the experience of God, spiraling from emptiness, to fullness, and then emptiness again. The human soul's experience of God through desire gives a window into eternal divine existence. At the same time it makes the soul so very aware of the great gulf between human existence and God's life.

Since we've become one with God's-desire, and since every other orientation has fallen away in our hiddenness from ourselves, the only thing left for us is the fall into the infinite abyss of Minne. That's why nothing else can comfort us anymore, except the eyes of the Other who seeks us in this fall, who desires us in this fall, who loves us in this fall. Beatrice sharpens our realization that union with Minne as encounter leaves us empty-handed. Minne gives us nothing. She makes us die in an infinite desire which, as fall into the abyss of Minne, is union with God.¹⁹⁵

Perhaps it is overly simplistic to say that Beatrice and Hadewijch only have experience of this life, and not the next. They only know, through love, the union of God that they experience, body and soul. Both mystics know that what comes next is unending immediacy with the Beloved, but what happens now is an authentic foretaste of that immediacy. While Bernard proposes that only the martyrs have such knowledge of self-abandonment, it seems that constant direction of Hadewijch and Beatrice's writings is exactly this type of life. To approach it from Bernard's way of thinking, the martyrs completely give themselves over to the will of God to the point of death. For the Cistercian father, this seems to be the only earthly way one could experience this singular union of the soul to God. Hadewijch and Beatrice, however, experience a total resignation to God's will, striving for an ever more total immersion in God. Theirs is a death, in a sense, as well, but it is to the world of distraction from their true selves in the divine embrace. The source of their suffering and

¹⁹⁵ Huls, Jos, *The Minne-Journey*, 312.

frustration is borne out of finite and mediate expressions of divinity, but, for both women, immediacy tears through the veil of this existence and bears them up in service of God.

In the foregoing discussion, I have attempted to show how Beatrice's and Hadewijch's handling of mystical experience, including its somatic components, relates to and is rooted in a journey toward freedom. Unquenchable desire for God drives the soul along a path toward union. This path is winding through the vicissitudes of life. Fidelity and trust strengthen the soul through both delight and misery. The affliction of Love purifies, making the soul freer to embrace God, freer to hide itself away from anything that distracts from Bridegroom. It is now our task to examine how this journey through suffering to freedom is a genuine development of theology.

Beatrice and Hadewijch move beyond the traditions of affective mysticism shaped by Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry. That said, the innovation that both women bring to mystical theology is how they embrace the authoritative teaching of their experience of love and translate it into a vocation of freedom to become who they are in God's eyes.

MYSTICAL DISCOURSE AND THE LANGUAGE OF GENDER

One of the most important innovations of Hadewijch's and Beatrice's theology lies in their audacious statement about the dignity and value of women. Here they display a concern for the freedom of women to give voice to their experiences of God, affirming that women, too, are made in the *imago Dei* and called to grow in likeness with God. Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen, writing specifically about *Seven Manners of Loving*, points out,

By stressing the soul's creation in the image and likeness of God, Beatrice transcends official doctrines of the Church, as found in the *Decretum Gratiani*

and the *Glossa ordinaria* in which exclusive, male godlikeness and therefore an exclusively male ministry is maintained.¹⁹⁶

Beatrice makes this bold assertion, while continuing to use rather traditional, Bernardine language for the soul's relationship to God. Hadewijch on the other hand, fully employs the richness of poetic language to capture the mutuality of love between the human person and God and also the complexity of the vocation of the human lover.¹⁹⁷

Barbara Newman's work on women mystics and the *mystique courtoise* theology that they forged is the frame upon which I build this argument. Newman's discussion of Hadewijch and Beatrice's Neoplatonic view of the soul brings forth this important understanding held by both women, namely that the formal truth of their souls remains intact in the divine mind. Coupling this assertion with Grace Jantzen's further exploration of Newman's ideas on the innovations of affective mysticism draws together the dynamic nature of freedom in the Flemish mystics' writings.

Following Newman, the genius of *la mystique courtoise* is that in this theology the women mystics blended together traditional affective mysticism in the mode of Bernard of Clairvaux with the erotic language of courtly romance. In doing so, Hadewijch and Beatrice affirm the authority of human ways of loving and trust in their ability to deepen our understanding of divine love. Jantzen builds upon Newman's work by tracing out just how differ-

¹⁹⁶ Pedersen, "Beatrice of Nazareth's Theology", 69. Pedersen references here an argument made by Ida Raming regarding women being barred from most active ministry. See Raming, Ida. *Der Ausschluß der Frau vom priesterlichen Amt. Gottgewollte Tradition oder Diskriminierung?* Köln: Böhlau, 1973.

¹⁹⁷ For a discussion of Hadewijch's use of gender imagery in the *Poems in Stanzas*, see Petroff, Elizabeth Alvilda. "Gender, Knowledge, and Power in *Strophische Gedichten*" in *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 182-203.

ent Hadewijch's and Bernard's theologies were in terms of using human love as a basis for understanding God.¹⁹⁸

The Neoplatonic view of the soul that both mystics, no doubt, inherit from their understanding of Augustine, firmly places the reality of the person as a form in the mind of God.¹⁹⁹ As such these mystics understand the foundational truth of their existence to be that reality in the divine mind. As such, authentic freedom is to bring together the formal self and the bodily self. This is not denigration of the body, because the body is an integral part of that self, longing for union. Hadewijch and Beatrice place their trust in bodily experience, and assert that this experience of love gives us a foretaste of what it means to be in union with God. The desire for ever greater union goes beyond bodily experience, but does not transcend bodily experience in a single-direction trajectory.

What must be kept in mind in discussing Hadewijch's theology, in particular, is that it is, at the same time, mystical discourse, and one must be attentive to the specific challenges integral to it. There is a level of unknowable-ness in mystical speech, something which, as we've seen above, Hadewijch is deft at understanding and dealing with in her writing. The twentieth century philosopher Michel de Certeau says that

The mystic is driven by each experience toward a more radical interiority [*en-deçà*] also expressed as a "beyond" [*au-delà*] exceeding one's strongest moments. The unity that draws the mystic "into himself" [sic], as some say,

¹⁹⁸ Jantzen's main assertion is that Bernard's affective mysticism does not fully embrace its erotic language due to mistrust of human love. Bernard's treatment of erotic imagery, drawn mainly from the *Song of Songs* is continually spiritualized, undercutting its dynamism. According to Jantzen, Hadewijch and the other women mystics fully embrace this language (and the experiences from which it flows), using it as pedagogical and authoritative. See Jantzen, *Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism*, 123-146.

¹⁹⁹ McGinn, *The Flowering of Western Mysticism*, 214.

also pushes him forward toward as yet unforeseeable stages of his journey, for which he or others will construct a vocabulary in view of a language that belongs to no one.²⁰⁰

The perpetual journey of the mystics into more authentic union with God, pushes them beyond their human means. Freedom to grow in union is at the same time the very union they seek even as it pushes beyond finite human experiences of God.

Hadewijch expresses her experience of the mystical encounter and uses her knowledge of the courtly love tradition to craft her mystical vocabulary. This vocabulary seeks to give some shape to and make comprehensible the ineffable experience of human and divine interaction that Hadewijch experiences. However, the horizon of the mystical experience continues to recede. In a sense there are no words to accurately capture it; Hadewijch turns to poetics and visions steeped in images to attempt to make her theology understandable, but also to open up her ideas to the multivalent abundance of an image thereby allowing for a richer meaning.

An example of this is found in her first stanzaic poem, "Vale Millies," roundly within the troubadour tradition of using an allusion to nature to explore and enhance the overall theoretical matter of the poem.

If now, alas! It is cold winter,
 With short days and long nights,
 Bold summer speedily walks in
 To set us free from distress
 In a short time: that is plainly seen
 From this new year;
 The hazelnut tree offers us fair blooms;
 The season's public token.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Michel de Certeau, "Mysticism," trans. Marsanne Brammer, in *Diacritics*, 22.2 (1992), 20.

²⁰¹ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Stanzas, 1:1-8.

In this first stanza of the poem, Hadewijch sets up the common picture of the seasons changing to encourage the young beguines under her instruction on the “seasons” and changeableness of the experiences with which they must wrestle to follow their vocation as lovers. The relationship with God is one in which the soul must stay steadfast in loving service, despite the changes and suffering that take place. Hadewijch uses familiar images to give voice to the mystical realities she has experienced and translates them into rules for her readers to follow in their own journey toward fruition.

Further, in terms of language, Hadewijch employs innovation in the “roles” assumed by Love and the Soul, to provide greater clarity to the almost inexpressible depth of relationship that can take place between them. Here is some of Hadewijch’s most interesting work for the contemporary reader, the feminist and/or queer theologian. In Barbara Newman’s work dealing with Hadewijch and other medieval beguine mystics’ use of *la mystique courtoise*, she underscores how the mystics make use of the monastic nuptial theology mentioned above, blending it with the traditions of courtly love. As Bernard McGinn states, commenting on this phenomenon, these mystics’ innovations allow “a whole new exploration of the mystery of love between God and the human person.”²⁰² For in a way, Hadewijch undoes gendered language’s power by using it in unique ways – lifting the human/divine relationship out of *apriori* assumptions of gender. Unlike Bernard’s tradition strictly constructing the human/divine relationship as being a female soul (the bride) responding to the male divine bridegroom, Hadewijch opens up and destabilizes the gendered language by interchanging the roles of human and divine, male and female.

²⁰² McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism*, 169. McGinn here offers summary of Barbara Newman’s research on *la mystique courtoise*. See also Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 137-67.

Knight and lady, bride and bridegroom, mother giving birth to a child: all are gendered metaphors for how the human soul experiences and is experienced by Love. This openness of language about God and how the soul relates to God is, perhaps, one of the most fascinating aspects of Hadewijch's work for the twenty-first century theologian.

As has been mentioned, Bernard's language of mystical encounter always falls within gendered norms and stereotypes of his context. The Lover, the Bridegroom of *Song of Songs*, is always God; it is he who initiates the relationship of love. The soul, whether that soul is embodied within a male or female, is always the female, receptive Bride. Hadewijch, too, makes use of bridal imagery in her work, most prominently in Visions 10 and 12; however, even in this, she pushes the bounds of the imagery in ways that Bernard never would. Following upon her understanding of the mutuality of the divine and human relationship, the Bride in these visions finds herself beautifully unmoored from the traditionally receptive role of a medieval bride.

In Vision 10, for example, the Bride is also equated with Motherhood, resulting in a mutuality and equality with God, "Behold, Bride and Mother, you like no other have been able to live me as God and Man!"²⁰³ The spotless bride, by fidelity, grows in virtue and is able to give birth to God in her very self, thus to live "in" God to the full potential of her humanity and touch that place wherein the soul is eternally in unity with the divine.

The image of the bride in Vision 12 stresses, again, this growth of the soul in virtues. The robe in which the bride is clothed is embroidered with symbols of the virtues that adorn her soul; hope, fidelity, charity, desire, humility, discernment, works, reason, wisdom, peacefulness, and patience.

²⁰³ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 10.

Thus is the robe of undivided will wholly adorned through the divine Nature. Thus festively attired comes the bride, with all this beautiful company represented in symbols.²⁰⁴

The bride, so adorned and in perfect union with the divine, thereby becomes inseparable from the divine. Thus, the soul and God become one -- not a union in which the soul is annihilated, but a union of mutuality – reminiscent of the Chalcedonian definition of union of divine and human in the person of Jesus. As Hadewijch says, closing Vision 12,

In that abyss I saw myself swallowed up. Then I received the certainty of being received, in this form, in my Beloved, and my Beloved also in me.²⁰⁵

With the image of the Bride, Hadewijch stresses the mutuality of lover and beloved, divine and human, in a relationship of love that elevates the soul to a cooperative level of apotheosis.

Motherhood, another gendered symbolic role that Hadewijch employs, is similarly rich. In Vision 11, Hadewijch sees the perfect lovers of God in the act of giving birth.

Then I perceived an Infant being born in the souls who love in secret, the souls hidden from their own eyes in the deep abyss of which I speak, and to whom nothing is lacking but that they should lose themselves in it.²⁰⁶

Further Vision 13 opens with an equation of the soul to “God’s mother” in a narrative that borrows from the biblical accounts of Mary, mother of Jesus. A seraph announces,

See here the new secret heaven, which is closed to all those who never were God’s mother with perfect motherhood, who never wandered with him in Egypt or on all the ways, who never presented him where the sword of prophecy pierced their soul, who never reared that Christ to manhood and who, at the end, were not at his grave²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 12.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 11.

²⁰⁷ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 13.

Marian devotion, while present in the works of medieval women writers, does not hold the pride of place that male writers would, perhaps, like it to. Hadewijch, here, does not seem to be uplifting the unattainable ideal of the Virgin Mary, by focusing on the journey toward growth in divine love in and through the humanity of Christ.²⁰⁸

Finally, following the traditions of courtly love, Hadewijch moves completely outside the traditional use of gender roles by describing the human soul as knight/lover vis-à-vis the divine lady/beloved. In so doing, she overturns a rigid understanding of the gendered language of Bridegroom/Bride, which she had already destabilized in her own usage. Here God becomes the loved one pursued while the soul is the pursuer, the human initiates and attracts the attention of the divine one, rather than the opposite!

Hadewijch will speak of human souls as a “knight-errants in Love” who must bear the buffets of living a life in service of Love.²⁰⁹ The knight must woo the lady by doing deeds that will attract and impress, but Love’s gaze is not easily won. As Hadewijch points out time and again throughout her works, the soul must remain faithful through many trials. The soul’s identity as knight requires the endurance of much hardship, as stanzaic Poem 10 recounts

But I complain of what displeases me more;
That Love, whom we should strive for,
Oppresses us with her noble burden,
And we grasp alien things close at hand,
So that Love cannot admit us to her good graces

Further,

²⁰⁸ The Virgin Mary as role model for women is problematic and unattainable because of the mutually exclusivity of motherhood and virginity.

²⁰⁹ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Stanzas, 5:48.

I know brave knights, strong of hand,
 In whom I place my fullest trust.
 They ever serve in chains of Love,
 And they fear no pain, grief, or vicissitudes,
 But they wish to fare though all that land
 Which the loving soul ever found with Love in Love;
 Their noble heart is of lordly turn:
 They know what Love teaches with love,
 And how Love honors the loyal lover with love.²¹⁰

So the soul must endure trials for the sake of Love. Far from being in a position of power, as knight the human soul must serve, and, doing so through all “vicissitudes,” allows the soul to “conquer Love with love.”

As Barbara Newman points out, the traditions of monastic nuptial mysticism and secular troubadours singing the songs of courtly love are brought into dialogue in Hadewijch and other writers of *la mystique courtoise*, thereby opening up new horizons for the understanding of the divine/human relationship. At the same time, Hadewijch’s gender-destabilizing language in this regard is on the more innovative end of the spectrum than her more traditional sister-beguine, Mechthild of Magdeburg, or of the beguine-trained Cistercian Beatrice of Nazareth. Thus, Hadewijch sets herself apart in her conception of the flattening out of the power of gendered language, while staying within an already dynamic discourse on how God and the human soul relate to one another. Hadewijch’s innovation here is further demonstrated by comparison to Beatrice, with whom, in some ways, she has much in common.

To varying degrees, both Hadewijch and Beatrice dare, in their writings, to assert the freedom of the soul to love and be loved by God and thus to be transformed into God.

²¹⁰ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in stanzas 10: 2-3

They also audaciously throw off the untenable position that the image of God indelibly grounding the soul is male. These women theologians, writing as they are to women of their communities, break new ground in theological anthropology by making this claim. From this starting point, we come to the other innovation Hadewijch and Beatrice offer regarding the soul and freedom.

COMMUNITY AND FREEDOM

As we have seen, constitutive of the service of love is service in charity to the community. This movement of service outward had very practical implications for Hadewijch and Beatrice and the women like them. Many of the *mulieres religiosae* began to be recognized precisely because of their ministry to the sick and poor in the newly burgeoning urban centers of the thirteenth century.²¹¹ The beguines had a unique opportunity to minister in these capacities because of their relative freedom of movement, living outside of enclosure. However, monastic women's communities, such as the Cistercians, were also quite active in practical care of their neighbors through administration of hospitals and leprosaria attached to their monasteries.²¹²

Hadewijch and Beatrice understood that caring for others in very material ways was an avenue to living out the perfect humanity of Christ. At the same time, such charitable acts were not the only way in which the mystics sought to serve the community. Both women's writings themselves were a ministry to others by providing guidelines for how to

²¹¹ An example of this is Yvette of Huy, who, after being widowed, retired to a leprosarium to tend the afflicted and follow a religious regimen. See Carpenter, Jennifer. "Jette of Huy, Recluse and Mother (1158-1228): Children and Mothering in the Saintly Life." In *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*. Edited by Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth Maclean. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.

²¹² Anne E. Lester discusses the care of sick as a foundational component of women's Cistercian houses. See Lester, Anne E. *Creating Cistercian Nuns*, 129-143.

grow in union with God. The very fact that Hadewijch and Beatrice write down their experience of God at all points to an understanding of this service to others. Both women write to instruct and urge onwards those coming after them in the vocation of God's beloved.

This communal trajectory of Hadewijch's understanding of vocation impelled by love and ultimate union of humanity in general with God fits into the overall picture of human nature that Hadewijch paints. As discussed above, Hadewijch, following Bernard of Clairvaux, holds to an ultimately positive view of anthropology. As Mary Lou Shea summarizes both thinkers, "Human beings, while capable of foolish and sinful diversion, were also endowed with the continuing ability to live lives pleasing to God."²¹³ Love in human beings is not misdirected out of depravity of will, but rather because of ignorance of what they should be loving or fickleness, which assails human love's steadfastness.²¹⁴

Hadewijch's concern for a universal movement of humanity toward union with the divine plays out in her understanding of how souls who love with Love are able to transform the world by their loving action. The loving of great souls is able to drag along the ignorant or fickle "sinners" by the power of the loving cooperation with God. These souls, Hadewijch assures, who "submit enough to the power of Love" are granted fidelity and empowerment, to really become Love. In so doing, they bring others with less strength. As Hadewijch says in Letter 6,

Those who already love God, you can sustain with love, helping to strengthen them so that their God may be loved; this is profitable, but nothing else is. And for the lowest, who are sinners and estranged from God, neither efforts nor prayers to God are profitable, but rather the love we give to God. And the

²¹³ Shea, *Medieval Women on Sin and Salvation*, 107.

²¹⁴ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Poems in Stanzas, 23.

stronger that love is, the more it frees sinners from their sins and gives security to those who love.²¹⁵

Thus, the soul who submits to Love fully, by her very love helps strengthen other lovers of God and assists those estranged from God's love to draw nearer. Most strikingly, Hadewijch claims in her visions (particularly Vision 5) that she is able to love the souls of sinners out of Hell itself. As she says,

Through love I wished to snatch the living and the dead from all the debasement of despair and of wrongdoing, and I caused their pain to be lessened, and those dead in hell to be sent into purgatory, and those living in hell to be brought to the heavenly mode of life.²¹⁶

In the next breath, however, she reveals that this use of the power of love was somehow not in accordance with the divine will and was a point on which she had failed and needed to be converted.²¹⁷ Despite this, as the passage above points out, Hadewijch understands herself to enjoy a surprising level of freedom and authority due to her full growth into the vocation of love.

Further, for Hadwijch, one of the enormous evils of sin is the way in which it results in the breakdown of communities. Hadewijch entreats the young beguines under her care to guard against selfish love and petty hatreds because of how destructive it is to the community; further, it is their vocation to love and hate perfectly, i.e. in accordance with the di-

²¹⁵ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 6:67.

²¹⁶ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Vision 5.

²¹⁷ The tradition of *mulieres sanctae*, and particularly beguines, caring for souls and being of aid to them in the afterlife is well-documented. See, in particular, the *vitae* of Marie d'Oignies and Christina Mirabilis. Brown, Jennifer N. *Three Women of Liège: A Critical Edition of and Commentary on the Middle English Lives of Elizabeth of Spalbeek, Christina Mirabilis, and Marie d'Oignies*. Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts. Turnhout: Brepols, 2009.

vine will.²¹⁸ Again and again, Hadewijch underscores the importance of community and reaching out to those surrounding her. To do so is integral to the service of God.

Service to the surrounding community and the building up of the faithful through teaching others and guiding them into greater unity with God and one another: these are all foundational to the Christian experience. However, in almost all cases, these were activities mainly done by men. Hadewijch's and Beatrice's theology, written from the perspective of women and for women's communities, highlights the dignity and freedom of women as created in the image of God. In the thirteenth century this was a daring, and sometimes dangerous, assertion.

Further, and more importantly, Hadewijch and Beatrice do not engage in charitable work and write theology simply to be Christ-like. They do these things to grow in love with their communities because such communal loving and giving is at the heart of who they really are. Hadewijch and Beatrice understand the reality of their selves to be tied inextricably with the divine existence and divine existence is, by definition communal. The Trinity is the primordial community, loving and serving each other for all eternity. Thus, all the vocational aspects of Hadewijch's and Beatrice's guidance are a training ground for a more authentic expression of the divine life in the present.

I hope I have shown in the preceding pages how freedom, true freedom, is for Hadewijch and Beatrice an ongoing process. Their experiences of God fall into three distinct but interrelated categories of work, suffering, and ecstatic consolation. These experiences, taken together, orient these women toward God and, through them, come to some

²¹⁸ Hadewijch, *Complete Works*, Letter 6 and Letter 12.

understanding in this life of what it means to be in union with the Divine. Both women look forward to a future of unmediated enjoyment of their beloved in full freedom. At this point, nothing will separate them from their original Truth, in whose image the very truth of their selves was created. This life trains the human person for that life to come, and not only that, but gives an authentic and ongoing foretaste of what that life will be. This vision of life is interwoven with the life of the ineffable God and builds upon the spiritual foundations of the Cistercian fathers. However, the theology of these two women also surpasses the spiritual theology that went before by calling all souls, both male and female, to recognize the graced-ness of their being and to strive, above all else, for relationship with God in single-focused, pure, and noble freedom.

The conclusion is where I will bring these lines of argument together. Hadewijch and Beatrice were medieval women who wrote mystical theology; however, their work continues to resonate in the Christian theological community in particular for women. Highlighting Hadewijch's and Beatrice's contribution to theology in terms of freedom in theological anthropology helps us in the twenty-first century to understand better our own spiritual heritage. Further, at a time when women theologians and women religious continue to be scrutinized on the grounds of orthodoxy, Hadewijch and Beatrice's work reminds the Christian community that women have a dynamic voice in the development of theology. Not only do those voices need to be heard, women in the twenty-first century Church, must have the freedom to raise their voices in the global theological dialogue.

CONCLUSION

BEATRICE, HADEWIJCH, AND THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

At least from the time of Vibia Perpetua, at the threshold of the third century, Christian women have written down their spirituality revolving around experience of God even during times of fierce persecution. Women's voices are strong within the Christian tradition, but have been largely ignored or passed over for consideration as "theology". Women continue to flourish as theologians, but face being talked down to, talked over, and talked for. When their voices continue to speak, there is an attempt to silence them. Unlike in the case of Perpetua, this desire for control of women's understandings of the gospel doesn't come from a hostile civic state, it comes from the male leadership of their own Church – in which the shepherds wish to lead without listening to the grace-filled, transformative experiences of half the population of their flocks. Evidence of this cannot be more clear than in the experience of women in the United States, wherein, during the time of this writing, there was an ongoing scrutiny of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious and prominent women theologians, such as Elizabeth Johnson, CSJ, have had their work vaguely but forcefully criticized by members of the episcopate.

In this sense, twenty-first century women in the Roman Catholic communion have quite a bit in common with the mystics of the thirteenth century. "Official" voices in the Church on matters of theology continue to be men's voices. Women, when given the authority to speak are circumscribed by an understanding of proper women's roles or

“feminine genius” that can disallow them to fully realize their potential. In a recent book collection of essays by women, editor, Elizabeth Johnson uplifts and celebrates the voices of women in theology.²¹⁹ We still need Hadewijch and Beatrice’s theology as a reference point for the tradition of women theologians, and, more importantly, for the uniqueness of those voices. They do not speak for all women by recording their experience of the freedom in union with God, but they deserve a place at the table.

This present work has been an attempt to shed more light upon two women in particular within the broad sweep of Christian history, who dared to write down their experiences of God and to put forth a fresh and unique perspective on what it means to love and be loved by Love itself. These women did not seek male clerics to speak for them, but rather composed theology of their own in cooperation with or in spite of the androcentric culture of the medieval Christian world. Hadewijch and Beatrice are products of their time and speak the language of medieval theology. They stand at the threshold between a time of theological innovation in the Middle Ages and the Reformation period that ushered in the Modern World. Hadewijch and Beatrice inhabited a unique moment in history wherein a recapturing of the apostolic life of the first Christians drove people of faith to search for new ways of living out their vocations. Their concern for relationship with God included a robust reliance upon grace and cooperation in this life with that grace. These themes would eventually whip up winds of the Protestant Reformation, changing the face of Western Christianity and ushering in Modernity.

²¹⁹ See Johnson, Elizabeth, ed. *The Strength of Her Witness: Jesus Christ in the Global Voices of Women*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016.

Their thought cannot be lifted out of the thirteenth century and placed without inspection into the twenty-first. They are, however, foremothers in Christian theology -- unique voices writing predominantly *to* women about their experiences *as* women and they cannot be ignored. They have wisdom to share with the women and men of contemporary theology. In this context, reading Hadewijch and Beatrice through a lens of freedom seems all the more important.

The task of recovering women authors from obscurity is integral for our understanding of medieval theology. However, the task of this scholarship is not to cast the *mulieres religiosae* proto-feminist figures or an attempt to foist their theology or practices artificially into the present time. Carolyn Walker Bynum, in *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, speaks to this very issue, saying that the *mulieres religiosae* of the Middle Ages really remind of our need to reexamine and make more robust our symbolic language.²²⁰ I argue that an analogous lesson can be learned from Hadewijch and Beatrice in terms of freedom and relationship to God. Our contemporary, First World understandings of liberty and free choice have much to gain from a reexamination of what it means to be truly free and in the search for authentic meaning in our lives. In closing, I will point out two ways Hadewijch's and Beatrice's empowering understanding of the freedom of the human person with and in God resonates for the contemporary world.

VOCATION, CONNECTION, COMMUNITY

The twentieth-century Jesuit, Egide van Broekhoven, read Hadewijch and her later disciple Jan van Ruysbroek, using their theologies to inform his own conception of how the

²²⁰ Bynum, *Holy Feast, Holy Fast*, 297-302. Bynum's concern in the text is to discuss how medieval women related to and used images of food.

human person could find union with God and with neighbor. Broekhoven's spiritual journal focuses upon searching out the authentic self in relation to God and neighbor through spiritual friendship. In his personal writings he paraphrases one of Hadewijch's poems, prayerfully exclaiming

[In prayer] we find the immense spaces where friendship, joy, humility, God's love come to meet us This open space which I experience almost sensibly and which attracts me, is God Himself .

“All that exists wearies and oppresses me;

You alone, You are my space, so great, so wide”

Lord, I want to live all my life on the edge of that space, I mean, within range of Your attraction; let nothing turn me away!²²¹

Broekhoven's reading of Hadewijch led him to share her vision of the inexhaustible abyss of God, drawing us always to the liminal space between this life and a life of blessedness. His desire to “life on the edge of that space” was situated in the freedom to be with others through friendship in God. Here Egide van Broekhoven taps into the mystagogy of Beatrice and Hadewijch: nurturing freedom to always be open to the divine plan and to draw others into these mysteries of love.

Similarly to Beatrice and Hadewijch, van Broekhoven understood that the divine essence, being Trinity, is inherently communal. The human person comes to the deepest realization of herself through the communal self-giving of the Godhead. Just as the Trinity is infinite and eternal communion, the human person is freed from the trap of selfishness when she opens herself up to this fundamental communality built into her very nature as being made in the image of God. Again, the women mystics teach us that to learn who one truly is, one must tap into the understanding of God always calling the human person to

²²¹ Broekhoven, Egide van. *A Friend to All Men: The Diary of a Worker Priest*. Edited by Georges Neefs. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1977, 41.

greater community, both with God and our fellow human beings. Once the soul has accepted that union with God, she is impelled on, in the image of the Trinity, to overflow with love for neighbor. Hadewijch and Beatrice did this in their teaching to their communities and through loving service to those in need in their communities – Egide van Broekhoven followed this example, opening the scope of community wider beyond his Jesuit confreres to the world at large.

CLOSING

In their own thirteenth-century context, Hadewijch and Beatrice wrote and lived a spiritual theology rooted in the freedom they experienced as persons created in the *imago Dei*. Their lives and spiritual guidance continually remained on the single-focused goal to be who God created them to be. As we have seen, the sense of truth suffuses the writings of both women and provides the framework for their understanding of human nature and the experience of God. From this grounding, Hadewijch and Beatrice developed their own innovative ways of recording the importance of this spiritual wisdom in their own language and deeply rooted in their experiences as women.

This focus on freedom led both mystics to develop their theologies in ways that enlarged the theology of their time. Like male theologians such as Bernard and William of St. Thierry, the women mystics pointed to transformative love as the way to understand and approach God. From that starting point, Hadewijch and Beatrice both underscored the human experience of love and the authority of those experiences, in ways that moved beyond the male authors from which they learned. These women's innovation of expression in terms of gender language and their specific focus on community and the communal trajectory of salvation displays a concern for freedom on multiple levels. Hadewijch and Bea-

trice are separated from us by centuries; however, the lessons they teach have a long resonance. Our twenty-first century theology would do well to be enriched by these writers on the value of our creaturely experience, the importance of community, the dignity and value of women, and the self as intimately in relationship with that which is beyond us. The two ways of approaching the centrality of freedom in Hadewjch and Beatrice writings has been the fundamental freedom as human beings to choose God, and further to grow more free by greater union with the divine. The dynamic truth of these points is that the human person has value and dignity, is loved, and can transcend the vicissitudes of life. The person who embraces all these truths with full and authentic freedom is unencumbered from being who they were created to be.

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