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# **Laywomen and Authority in France During the Great Western Schism, 1378-1417.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

At Massey University, Manawatū, New Zealand

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2023

## **Abstract**

The period of the Great Western Schism (1378-1417) was one of great religious and political division in France. This crisis threatened institutional authority, creating opportunities for laywomen to become more influential. Though historians have considered the fascinating imagery produced by female visionaries during this time and the role that noble and religious women played in the Schism, they have not fully considered how laywomen were able to capitalise on the political and ecclesiastical crises of authority to make their voices heard. Starting by exploring the medieval models of sanctity for women, this thesis considers the experiences of three visionary laywomen and how they adapted or adopted certain hagiographical topoi to legitimise their voices as God's messengers. Marie Robine (d.1399), Constance de Rabastens (d.1386), and Ermine de Reims (d.1396) lived in different areas of France and supported different papacies, yet all experienced life-changing visions influenced by the Schism. The social networks they formed around themselves also impacted the level of influence these women attained. While Marie and Constance attempted to use their visions to influence Schism politics, Ermine tried to hide hers away but was forced into the public eye by her confessor. The experiences of these women reveal more clearly the tensions between gender, authority, and agency for laywomen during a brief but tumultuous period in France's history. This thesis provides a clear example of how medieval laywomen of non-noble social status were not just silent witnesses of great political and religious turmoil in their communities, but actively engaged and eager to influence those in power.

## Acknowledgements

The process of completing a Doctor of Philosophy can be a lonely journey, particularly during a global pandemic, but it was not one that I had to undergo alone. There were several people and organisations who walked this journey with me and provided me with support, to whom I would like to extend my immense gratitude.

Firstly, thank you to Massey University for awarding me the Massey University Vice Chancellor's Doctoral Scholarship to fund my study. Your continued support of me as a student and acknowledgement of my hard work has been greatly appreciated. Thank you to Associate Professor Geoff Watson and the staff in the School of Humanities, Media, and Creative Communication at Massey University, both academic and administrative, who supported me, encouraged me, and directed me during this process. Thank you as well to the staff in the Graduate Research School who supported me and connected me to other doctoral candidates to help us form a sense of community. To Brenda Johnson and the Massey Library staff, thank you for your repeated assistance in finding sources for my case studies and doing everything possible to obtain all the necessary sources during the global pandemic, including getting physical texts from libraries overseas which at times seemed impossible.

I would also like to thank Associate Professor Graeme Bird, from Gordon College in Massachusetts, for his dedicated assistance with translating Marie's visions from medieval Latin into English. The months of weekly video calls and the couple of in-person meetings were fundamental to the translations and improving my understanding of Latin, as well as keeping me sane during the many lockdowns. Thank you for volunteering your time to help me achieve what at the time seemed like an impossible goal.

To FRAMESPA and the University of Toulouse Jean Jaurès, thank you for inviting me to join you as a student researcher for six weeks. I would also like to acknowledge the colleagues I met there who were so kind and eager to share their research with me and to learn more about mine. To Associate Professor Kirsty Carpenter, Massey University, thank you for putting my name forward to FRAMESPA, making me aware of this great opportunity, and supporting me through the application process. Thank you to Campus France for funding my research trip to France. Being able to access the archives and work with the original manuscripts was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Also, thank you to the School of Humanities, Media, and

Creative Communication at Massey University for their funding contribution to my research trip.

I also want to extend a massive thank you to Professor Andrew Brown and Dr Amanda McVitty for their support as my supervisors. I appreciate your willingness to meet either in person or via video calls regularly, your encouragement, and your guidance. Your feedback was always quick and insightful, and helped shape my research and writing. I am grateful to have had you guiding and supporting me on this journey.

Finally, I want to of course acknowledge with gratitude the support from my husband Lewis, as well as my parents, family, and friends. Thank you for cheering me on, listening to my excited ramblings on these medieval women, and (at least pretending) to find it interesting. Thank you for always making sure I kept a good balance between research and the rest of my life, not letting me get totally absorbed in the medieval world. Lewis, thank you for always believing in me and my goals, and pushing me to keep going when I was tempted to give up.

The combined contributions of each of you have helped get me here today. I very much appreciate the time and support you have given me as I completed this journey to become a Doctor of Philosophy.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

*And the Lord, who showed all of these things to the aforementioned Marie, spoke to her, saying: "There are several who have said and can say that visions or revelations are not necessary for them. I reveal to them through your mouth that Saint Peter has converted many more in a certain one of his sermons that he gave than there are faithful people in the Christian religion at the present time. I say to you that they are idolaters. And these things which you have heard and seen, say them to the Masters of Theology at the University of Paris... Command them in writings...; and if they rebel against these things that I am commanding to them through you, they will rebel against themselves."*<sup>1</sup>

Power and authority in the medieval period were traditionally associated with men and the clergy. Yet during the Great Western Schism (1378-1417), many laywomen assumed an active role in the ecclesiastical and political environment. How these women could claim the authority to influence men in the highest ranks of the clergy and laity is a question central to this thesis. The revelations of Marie Robine (d.1399), quoted above, indicate that one important source of this authority was the special relationship with the divine that lay visionaries might assert. Marie was among many female visionaries who actively claimed direct access to God in the late medieval period, thus circumventing clerical mediation while claiming an authority to challenge anyone in power whose words and deeds seemed incompatible with divine will. The nature of this authority among laywomen in particular deserves more attention. These laywomen actively attempted to engage in Schism politics and yet their authority to do so is rarely considered. Instead, scholarship on female visionaries has generally focused on the imagery of their visions and their theological relevance, rather than on their agency in accessing

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<sup>1</sup> MS. 520, c.15th Century, 115-127: Vision 6, 120r, Bibliothèque de Tours, L'Abbaye de Marmoutier. English translation is my own (see appendix for a full English translation of Marie Robine's visions).

authority to influence powerful men. Less attention has also been given to female visionaries from lay and humbler backgrounds than to those in religious orders or from the nobility. This thesis will consider how laywomen in France actively used their visions as a means to gain authority, and how these women were received in their communities and among male clergy. It will also consider the gendered nature of the authority they claimed and of the reactions towards them. The period in question was one of great political and ecclesiastical turmoil; how far this turmoil presented opportunities for female visionaries to gain authority will also be evaluated.

The term “authority” used in this thesis takes its cue from the Latin *auctoritās*, meaning authority, influence, and prestige, rather than the executive or instrumental form of power associated with *potestas*. It is defined by Marie A. Kelleher as the ability to influence people and achieve goals using strategies to negotiate accepted concepts and practices of society.<sup>2</sup> While studies on queens, countesses, and abbesses have made fundamental contributions towards our understanding of medieval women and authority, they tend to limit discussion of authority to its appearance within formal institutional structures, or among women holding office, which excludes the large majority of women and the ways in which they too could exercise forms of authority.<sup>3</sup> Although women were associated with the private sphere, this did not automatically mean a lack of authority. Moreover, from the thirteenth century the increase in mendicant movements and female-dominant groupings such as the béguines meant that women were not as confined to the private sphere as they once had been. Kelleher argues that women exercised authority if they set out with the intention of affecting others.<sup>4</sup> Given that this thesis focuses on laywomen, this more informal kind of authority and intention to influence others is the context for how authority will be evaluated for the case studies.

This thesis will also consider the agency of medieval laywomen. The concept of agency has been the subject of debate in recent scholarship, especially in relation to women and gender history.<sup>5</sup> In her article *Historicising Agency*, Lynn M. Thomas considers how the rise of social

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<sup>2</sup> Marie A. Kelleher, “What Do We Mean by ‘Women and Power’?,” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 51, no. 2 (2016), 104.

<sup>3</sup> For an example of such studies, see Lois L. Huneycutt, “Power: Medieval Women’s Power through Authority, Autonomy, and Influence,” in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kim M. Phillips (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Kelleher, “What Do We Mean by ‘Women and Power’?,” 111.

<sup>5</sup> See Shireen Hassim, “Critical Thoughts on Keywords in Gender and History: An Introduction,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (2016).

history in the 1960s and 1970s led to debates around structure versus agency.<sup>6</sup> Thomas' research, predominantly focusing on African and women's history, argues that agency as an argument is still relevant in women's and gender history.<sup>7</sup> However, Thomas suggests that historians considering agency should either historicise agency, or use agency as one conceptual tool for exploring a wide range of analytical and thematic concerns; otherwise, agency becomes a "safety" argument. Scholarly debates on agency should instead attend to multiple, intersecting, and shifting forces and concerns.<sup>8</sup> Allyson M. Poska argues that scholarship has previously viewed women's independent activity as reactive to or exceptional in a patriarchal context, whereas Poska considers the possibility that patriarchy was not the sole ideology behind gender expectations in early modern Europe. Poska uses the term "agentic", having or expressing agency, to highlight the early modern expectation that women had the opportunity to act independently and exert power and authority in various aspects of their lives.<sup>9</sup> Female agency in history is not "exceptional"; rather, by recognising women's agency, scholars can understand better how agentic expectations interacted with patriarchal ideas and religious differences.<sup>10</sup> Agency, from this perspective, can most clearly be seen through acts that contradict perceived societal norms or the expectations of institutional authorities. Thus, the term "agency" in this thesis will refer to the actions taken by the women considered in the coming chapters to achieve their goals; whether that was to have their voices heard or to keep their experiences secret. Exploring lay female agency within the wider debate around their authority at a time of religious and political turmoil will give greater understanding of the levels of influence non-noble laywomen were able to attain in their communities.

The authority laywomen exercised was also gendered. Gender differences in relation to authority are quite apparent in medieval Europe. Kim M. Phillips argues that while 'manhood' was demonstrated with positive traits such as authority, responsibility, and control of self and others, 'womanhood' required conquering the frailties of femininity and perfecting the virtues of maternity, humility and piety.<sup>11</sup> The simplest way for a woman to be seen as having conquered her vices was by embracing the cloistered life.<sup>12</sup> Otherwise, the routes to authority

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<sup>6</sup> Lynn M. Thomas, "Historicising Agency," *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 329-30.

<sup>9</sup> Allyson M. Poska, "The Case for Agentic Gender Norms for Women in Early Modern Europe," *ibid.* 30 (2018), 354-55.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

<sup>11</sup> Kim M. Phillips, "Gender and Sexuality," in *The Routledge History of Medieval Christianity, 1050-1500*, ed. R. N. Swanson (London: Routledge, 2015), 310-1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 313.

for women were narrow and closely watched. There were accepted paths through *revelatio* (mystical revelation) and *prophetia* (prophecy). Various other hagiographical topoi also came into play when recording their visions. If women kept within these parameters and gained clerical approval, they could possess spiritual authority. Courage and assertiveness could be positive traits in women, but only if used in the face of significant threats to their chastity or ‘national’ security.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the fraught period of the Schism also coincided with the increasing codification of the process of the discernment of spirits which sharpened scrutiny of female visionaries. This thesis will examine the gendered nature of the authority claimed by visionary laywomen and the difficulties of exercising it.

## The Case Studies

Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski’s scholarship has brought to light numerous visionaries, poets, and saints of various religious and social statuses across Western Europe, and their writings inspired by the Schism.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is to build on this work by analysing more specifically how visionary laywomen could access authority and exercise agency within the medieval Church in France during the Schism. I have chosen three laywomen who will be the central focus of this thesis, as introduced below. To better understand their relationship with authority, the following chapter considers a historical framework on which the case studies will be based, looking at what scholarship has revealed about various male and female noble, religious, and lay visionaries who also sought authority. For the main case studies, I have sourced key primary texts including recorded visions, letters, and a papal bull. These case studies will provide a spectrum of visionary activity and attempts at influencing the political and ecclesiastical hierarchy from which I can analyse laywomen’s agency in accessing authority in France during the Schism.

The first of these case studies is Marie Robine (d.1399), a peasant from a poor family in Béarn. Her miraculous healing in Avignon was recognised and witnessed by Pope Clement VII, and she was thereafter supported financially by the Church by papal bull. Living as a recluse, Marie began to have visions, of which twelve were recorded by her confessor. Marie’s visions were directed to the King of France and his entourage and sought a resolution of the

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<sup>13</sup> Kim M. Phillips, “Introduction: Medieval Meanings of Women,” in *A Cultural History of Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kim M. Phillips (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.

<sup>14</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

political troubles. Marie was (at least initially) strongly in favour of the Avignon Pope. Marie was sent to Paris by Benedict XIII to try to prevent King Charles VI from withdrawing his support of the Avignon pope. She was ultimately unsuccessful and returned to Avignon. On her return, Benedict XIII refused to grant her an audience, and Marie became disillusioned with the Avignon papacy and the French monarchy's stance in the Schism. She retired to her oratory and stayed there until she died on 16 November 1399. When scholarship has considered Marie, it has largely been in passing due to her prophecy of a "virgin saviour" of France, a prophecy that would seem to point to Joan of Arc (d.1431). However, the twelve recorded visions and the papal bull provide solid primary sources from which to analyse Marie's own claims to authority. Her visions, translated from Latin into English, are included in full in the appendix.

In contrast to Marie, Constance de Rabastens (d.1386) supported the Roman pope, against the popular opinion of her region. From the Languedoc region, Constance's visions not only concern the Schism but the Hundred Years War as well. As with Marie, little is known of Constance's life and what is known is taken from her revelations, recorded by her confessor Raymond de Sabanac, a law professor from Toulouse. Constance had a husband, a daughter, and a son, who was a Benedictine monk in Toulouse, and at one point Constance was in prison. After the death of her husband, Constance began receiving these visions, which rapidly moved from the personal to the political, including the alleged treachery of the Count of Armagnac and the denunciation of the Avignon papacy. As her revelations were transcribed and circulated, her reputation increased. For some, she became an oracle to be consulted on political questions, such as the significance of the duke of Anjou's death or how long the Schism would last. For clerical authorities, she was a major nuisance as a woman who was publicly denouncing the Church's policies. Her visions of the Avignon pope and his cardinals burning in Hell landed her in jail; however, imprisonment did not silence her, and she used her son to carry messages to the inquisitor of Toulouse. It is possible that the Catalan translation of her revelations that survives was made to circulate as pro-Urban VI propaganda to convince the Spanish kingdoms to ally themselves to the Roman pope.<sup>15</sup> Again, scholarship on Constance has been limited, though we are left with sixty-seven visions and four of her letters. Her visions have been translated to English by Blumenfeld-Kosinski.

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," in *Two Women of the Great Schism: The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens by Raymond de Sabanac and Life of the Blessed Ursulina of Parma by Simone Zancchi*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Bruce L. Vernade (Arizona: ACMRS Press, 2010), 15.

Ermine de Reims (d.1396) is the final case study. She moved with her husband to Reims in 1384. After the death of her husband, and in the last ten months of her life, Ermine experienced nightly visions of both angels and demons. In these terrors, she was attacked by animals, beaten, and kidnapped by devils in disguise, and exposed to carnal spectacles. However, she was also blessed by saints and was even visited by the Virgin Mary. Her confessor Jean le Graveur, an Augustinian subprior, recorded all of Ermine's visions in vivid detail, providing us with fascinating insight into a woman's visions that teetered on the border between orthodox and heretical. Blumenfeld-Kosinski has written a comprehensive study on Ermine, but it has raised further avenues for future research into comparing Ermine to other contemporary visionaries, analysing the impact of the Schism on her visions, and looking more specifically at Ermine's agency (or lack thereof).<sup>16</sup> Thus, it will be fruitful to compare her experiences with Marie and Constance, who had more politically focused visionary experiences.

Extensive scholarship has considered the roles Saint Birgitta of Sweden (1303-1373) and Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380) played in the lead up to and early stages of the Schism.<sup>17</sup> However, consideration of the roles visionary laywomen played in the midst of the Schism in France has been under-examined. Circumstances could determine the extent of authority that women were able to wield. Therefore, the next section will consider the historical context in which these women existed. The events of the Schism impinged not just on the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the political leaders of the period, but also on the lives of the laity who were not exempt from or unaware of the turmoil existing in their communities. The atmosphere of confusion, fear, and an impending sense of the end of the world and the coming of the Antichrist created by the division in the Church was not only felt by laypeople but was vividly reflected in the visions and letters of the case studies. The imagery in these visions, and the influences on them, will be explored in later chapters. To understand why in this period

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<sup>16</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> For an example of such scholarship, see Blake Beattie, "Catherine of Siena and the Papacy" in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Kienzle (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2011); Unn Falkeid, *The Avignon papacy contested: An intellectual history from Dante to Catherine of Siena* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2017); Unn Falkeid and Maria H. Oen, "A Companion to Birgitta of Sweden: and Her Legacy in the Later Middle Ages," in *Chapter 3 The Political Discourse of Birgitta of Sweden* (Brill, 2019); Joan Isobel Friedman, *Politics and the Rhetoric of Reform in the Letters of Saints Bridget of Sweden and Catherine of Siena* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2007); Francis Thomas Luongo, *The Sainly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (Cornell University Press, 2006); Diana L Villegas, "Examining Catherine of Siena's controversial discernments about papal politics," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 77, no. 2 (2021).

more laywomen were able to speak out about their visions, and why they also faced difficulties when doing so, some context on the momentous consequences of the Schism needs to be considered first.

## **Historical Context**

### **The Great Western Schism (1378-1417)**

The Schism was a time of exceptional disunity in the Church, one that severely affected institutional and traditional forms of authority. Even before the Schism, the fourteenth century had been a troubled time for papal authority, especially because of the prolonged stay of the Papal Curia at Avignon.<sup>18</sup> Many saintly figures such as Birgitta, Catherine, and Fr. Pedro of Aragon (1305-1381) urged Gregory XI to return the papacy to Rome, which he did in January 1377, dying in Rome in March 1378. Curial accounts of the conclave to elect his successor tell of a general atmosphere of confusion, fear, and panic during and after the election of Bartolomeo Prignano as Urban VI. Urban VI's tactless attacks on the cardinals' extravagance and his refusal to return to Avignon meant that by June 1378 a divide between the pope and his electors was clear. The cardinals made use of the riotous background to the April election and claimed their decision was made under duress. They formally challenged Urban's election in July 1378, proceeding in August to proclaim it null. In Anagni on 20 September 1378, the cardinals elected one of their own, Cardinal Robert of Geneva, as the new successor to Gregory XI. Significantly, Robert was closely related to the French royal family.<sup>19</sup> As pope, he took the name Clement VII; however, Urban VI refused to resign, and thus the Schism commenced.

By 1380, the Schism had two distinct papacies in Rome and Avignon. Urban VI reigned in Rome until 1389, succeeded in turn by Boniface IX (1389-1404), Innocent VII (1404-6) and Gregory XII (1406-1415). Clement VII held the throne in Avignon until 1394, followed by Benedict XIII (1394-1417/1423). Though previously historians have claimed that "the Schism was an affair of learned clerics, of university scholars and of political elites near to the king and his council," the female visionaries discussed in this thesis were clearly affected, and they were

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<sup>18</sup> For a sample of the extensive scholarship on the Schism, see R. N. Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979); *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)*, ed. Joelle Rollo-Koster and Thomas M. Izbicki, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, (Boston: Brill, 2009); Noël Valois, *La France et le grand schisme d'Occident*, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1896).

<sup>19</sup> Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism*, 7.

neither learned clerics nor political elites.<sup>20</sup> Philip Daileader's research has shown how the divisions caused by the Schism were not just felt at a national level, but within individual dioceses, where a bishop may have supported one pope but his flock did not unanimously follow suit.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the split in the Church severely damaged perceptions of authority at every level of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. This had implications, as we will see, for the authority claimed by visionary laywomen.

After the second papal election, the Church divided into two camps: the Urbanists and the Clementists. While the Schism affected all of Europe, not all countries were equally impacted. In countries such as England, who chose an obedience early on and stuck to it, laypeople were not as involved in Schism polemics as they were in French or Italian territories. Similarly, for the Holy Roman Empire, few voices outside the official circles were recorded. Thus, Italy and France provide an unmatched context for lay, and particularly female, interactions with the Schism. This has significant implications for this thesis because the writings of these French women considered here provide us with a glimpse of how laywomen could become involved with the contemporary political landscape. With the added political context of the Hundred Years War, France provides a politically tumultuous background for a plethora of visionary activity. Considering the impact of the Schism on the authority of Italian lay visionaries is outside the scope of this thesis.

The Schism generated staggering amounts of writing in a multitude of genres; more literary, visionary and prophetic activity than the twenty or so earlier schisms combined.<sup>22</sup> Contemporary chroniclers such as Jean Froissart (c.1337–1404) commented that the Schism's detriment to Christian's spiritual wellbeing was comparable to the Black Death's effect on their physical health.<sup>23</sup> For Christine de Pizan (c.1364–c.1430) the Schism was a pestilence, "painful, poisonous, a contagious plant that was thrust into the bosom of Holy Church at the instigation of the devil." It was a scourge, "a painful calamity, and a purulent wound."<sup>24</sup> The plague and the various beasts of the Apocalypse became frequent metaphors for the

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<sup>20</sup> Jean Favier, "Le grand schisme dans l'histoire de France," *Genèse et débuts du grand schisme d'Occident: Colloque international tenu à Avignon, 25-28 Septembre 1978* (1980).

<sup>21</sup> Philip Daileader, "Local Experiences of the Great Western Schism," in *A Companion to the Great Western Schism (1378-1417)*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster & Thomas M. Izbicki, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Boston: Brill, 2009), 89-121.

<sup>22</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jean Froissart, *Chroniques*, 28 vols., ed. Le Baron Kervyn de Lettenhove (Brussels: Devaux, 1867-77), 9:46.

<sup>24</sup> Christine de Pizan, *Le livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*, 2 vols., ed. Suzanne Solente (Paris: Société de l'Histoire de France, 1936-40), 2:155-56.

Schism. The Church was also seen as being adulterous or having been raped by one of the popes, changing the perspective of the Church as the guilty party or victim depending on who composed the texts.<sup>25</sup> Honoré Bonet placed Urban VI in the centre of an apocalyptic scheme at the beginning of *Arbre des batailles*, while Eustache Deschamps accused Benedict XIII of desiring the reign of the Antichrist.<sup>26</sup> Pierre d'Ailly framed the Schism as a wish fulfillment of the devil, whom he called the Leviathan in his writing. The Schism was part of salvation history and the future of Christianity was at stake. The devil was hoping that further missteps of the ecclesiastical leaders would bring his victory. This concept of the Schism was furthered by medieval exegesis of 2 Thessalonians 2:3, where Paul tells the Thessalonians that the Antichrist will not arrive until there has been a great division in the Church.<sup>27</sup>

The proximity of the beginning of the Schism to the Black Death (1346–1353) meant the period was influenced by a newfound atmosphere of fatalism and mysticism, with a growing fixation on the Passion and death. It also influenced the widespread concern with superstition and sorcery.<sup>28</sup> Female visionaries often focused on the suffering of Christ and emulated the physical beatings in reality or sacrificed themselves during their ecstatic experiences to bear the punishments for all human sin. There was a significant focus on martyrdom and a desire to suffer to the point of death for the salvation of the Church. There are also accounts of both male and female visionaries claiming to receive the stigmata, though it was usually only visible to the visionary themselves. Uncertainty about who was the right pope undermined confidence in ecclesiastical leaders and ecclesiastical authority generally, and was felt by all levels of society. Moreover, Blumenfeld-Kosinski states that:

prophecy is anchored in contemporary reality and responds to the challenges and changes of a given period... [and] while political prophecy existed at all times, it was at the time of the Schism that it became most explicit and militant.<sup>29</sup>

The whole ethos of the century from 1350-1450 was one of change, reformation, alteration, and frustration. Thus, the political concerns in France during the period 1378-1417 are reflected in the subsequent visionary activity that emerged. Understanding and acknowledging the

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<sup>25</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 5.

<sup>26</sup> Honoré Bonet, *L'arbre des batailles*, ed. Ernest Nys (Bruxelles: Muquardt, 1883), 26-27.

<sup>27</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Conceptualization and Imagery of the Great Schism," in *A Companion to the Great Western Schism*, ed. Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Thomas M. Izbicki (Boston: Brill, 2009), 154-57.

<sup>28</sup> Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 166.

relationship between the two will help us to further comprehend how social and religious politics influenced the paths to authority available to laywomen during this tumultuous period.

It was not only the ecclesiastical hierarchy whose authority was questioned during the Schism. The authority of the University of Paris was also challenged, with King Charles VI demanding it support his cousin, Clement VII. When John Rouse attempted to argue the university's suggestion that a General Council be called to solve the Schism, Rouse was dragged from his bed the following night and thrown into jail until the university agreed to remain silent on the matter. Shortly after, Rouse and other outspoken scholars fled Paris.<sup>30</sup> The university was viewed as a source of expertise in the eyes of the public, a position that was exploited by royal and papal propaganda machines. However, the political sermons of Jean Gerson (1363-1429), Chancellor of the University of Paris, during the period were part of a wider effort to turn that propaganda value of academic consensus into a viable and independent source of political authority that kings and popes could not afford to silence.<sup>31</sup> Gerson was successful in reaffirming the authority of the University of Paris in ecclesiastical politics, and discussions at the university circled around three different ways of solving the Schism: the *via facti*, or armed conflict; the *via cessionis*, the abdication of both popes; and the *via concilii*, the summoning of a General Council. Although the latter option was preferred, the principal question in the debate was who had the authority to convene a General Council, the pope (and if so, which one), the cardinals, or the secular rulers? While this was being discussed, in France the movement for both popes to abdicate was gaining in popularity. A 1394 poll taken at the University of Paris showed majority support for the *via cessionis*. The hope was that if Clement VII abdicated, the Roman pope would follow.<sup>32</sup>

When Clement VII died, King Charles VI of France and King John I of Aragon immediately sent messengers to urge the Avignon cardinals to delay electing his successor in the hope of ending the Schism. However, the cardinals entered the conclave on 26 September and elected the Spanish cardinal Pedro de Luna as Pope Benedict XIII. He ended up being the most tenacious of popes and clung to what he considered his rightful papal throne until long after the Council of Constance deposed him in 1417. Although Pedro had taken a solemn oath to abdicate if necessary, he clearly had no intention of doing so. The French unsuccessfully

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<sup>30</sup> Nancy McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender. Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France, Gender and Sexualities in History*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 26.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>32</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 8-9.

tried to force him to do so many times. In July 1398, the third Council of Paris voted to withdraw obedience from Benedict, which, even though it put him in a difficult situation, still did not force him to resign. Nor did being abandoned by his own cardinals and being besieged in the papal palace in Avignon. Because no overt political allies declared themselves, the French were forced to restore obedience to him in 1403, with strong support from the dukes Louis of Orléans and Louis of Anjou. It did not help that the bouts of madness of King Charles VI, which first manifested themselves in 1392, often created a power vacuum in which conflicts between the Orléans and Burgundian factions were exacerbated. Moreover, the deposition and death of the English king Richard II in 1400 ruined any chances of agreement with the French, and any joint action to try to end the Schism. Under Henry IV, the hostilities of the Hundred Years War flared up again. Such an unsettled political climate fractured perceptions of authority in France. This had implications, as we shall see, for laywomen's access to authority.

Even though the withdrawal of obedience from Benedict XIII had failed to secure his abdication, it revealed there was a new unionist sentiment that could no longer be ignored. Boniface IX's successors in Rome, Innocent VII (1404–6) and Gregory XII (1406–15), both agreed to negotiations should the other side be willing. There was an agreement that no formal recantation of error was necessary on either side, and thus would lead to no further discussions on the legitimacy of either pope. However, Benedict XIII moved farther south from Avignon to Genoa in 1404 and 1405, capitalising on what he perceived as weakness in Innocent VII. The French government again withdrew their obedience from Benedict in 1406 due to Benedict's fiscal policies and other transgressions. In 1408, France declared itself neutral in the papal conflict, pressuring both popes to finally come to an agreement. The cardinals finally assembled the Council of Pisa from March to August 1409, yet the two papal opponents refused to appear; Benedict convened his own council in Perpignan, while Gregory did likewise in Cividale. In a decree from the Council of Pisa, both popes were deposed and accused as "schismatics, fosterers of schism, notorious heretics deviating from the faith, ensnared in notorious crimes of perjury and violation of their oaths, and notorious scandalisers of the church: ...they have been notoriously incorrigible, contumacious and stubborn in these respects."<sup>33</sup> This Council initiated the conciliar movement which would have long-lasting implications regarding authority in the Church, undermining the ultimate authority the papacy would hold thenceforward.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 10.

The Council further complicated the Schism by adding another papacy with the election of Alexander V. On Alexander's death in 1410, John XXIII was elected. While Benedict and Gregory had reduced obediences, large parts of Europe, including most of the Empire, France, England, and Portugal, now adhered to the Pisan pope. The weakness of all three popes made a move towards unity again an option. Emperor Sigismund announced a universal edict on 30 October 1413 that a General Council would be held the following year in Constance. Another attempt to end the Schism was made at the Council of Constance (1414-1418). John XXIII and Gregory XII were removed, and Benedict XIII was deposed again; but as in 1409 Benedict refused to accept the Council's decision and remained in his Spanish stronghold of Peñíscola. At Constance, Martin V was elected pope in 1417, and rapidly secured almost universal recognition. Benedict XIII refused to concede and led a fragment of the Church until his death in 1423. Following his death, his recently created cardinals divided into two parties, with the majority electing Clement VIII as their pope, while Jean Carrier carried out an election on his own and chose Benedict XIV. Clement VIII submitted to Martin V in 1429, while Benedict XIV's pontificate is quite obscure. Despite these lingering remnants of the Schism, it was to all intents and purposes over by 1419, ending a decades-long division in the Church.<sup>34</sup> Thus, the period 1378-1417 in France was one of substantial challenges to both the ecclesiastical and political hierarchies.

This was by no means the only crisis affecting Europe during this period, in what was a century of intense turmoil from the Black Death in 1349-50 through to the fall of Constantinople in 1453.<sup>35</sup> Swanson argues that while they were not caused by the Schism, these crises further allowed divisions to be exploited within the Church to legitimise pre-existing international political rivalries, as is evidenced by the split loyalties. There was a desire for widespread reform in the Church, with calls for both a fragmentation of the papal monarchy into smaller, semi-independent national churches in some areas, and the adoption of a simpler, more 'apostolic' ecclesiastical system in others.<sup>36</sup> The latter desire spawned numerous heretical and semi-heretical movements and the Observation Reform movement. The universities also felt the effects of these crises, the Schism acting as a catalyst for fundamental transformation during the period. There was an expansion of faculties of theology during the Schism, as more popes were willing to permit a wider number of faculties in university foundations. However, this

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<sup>34</sup> Swanson, *Universities, Academics and the Great Schism*, 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

increase in theological centres also increased the demands of universities to have a right to participate in Church affairs, demands which reached their peak at the Council of Constance, with Jean Gerson pronouncing that anyone who disagreed with the University of Paris' decision on tyrannicide was guilty of heresy.<sup>37</sup> Hence, the many crises during this period significantly impacted French communities and those who lived in them. This unstable environment provided the laywomen discussed in this thesis with opportunities to have their voices heard in places where they may not have been listened to previously. However, the turmoil in the Church and fear of the Antichrist also meant that these women were examined more closely than their predecessors.

### **The Discernment of Spirits**

The period of the Schism was one of intense turmoil and distrust within the Church. This distrust extended to female visionaries who were claiming to bring the word of God to comment on the situation and offer solutions. In a world where there was no consensus on who had the authority to rule the Church, there was also the question of who had the right to discern the origins of visionary activity. When the visionary activity involved women, who were unable to claim theological education or clerical authority, their desire to speak on spiritual matters was even more suspect in the eyes of the Church. Jean Gerson stated in 1423 that:

Every teaching of women, especially that expressed in solemn word or writing, is to be held suspect, unless it has been diligently examined by another... and much more than the teaching of men. Why? The reason is clear; because not only ordinary but divine law forbids such things. Why? Because women are too easily seduced, because they are too obstinately seducers, because it is not fitting that they should be knowers of divine wisdom.<sup>38</sup>

It is certainly not a coincidence that three leading thinkers on ecclesiastical politics during the Schism also produced the most significant treatises on the discernment of spirits; that is, Henry of Langenstein (c.1325-1397), Pierre d'Ailly (1351-1420), and Jean Gerson. They also authored treatises warning against unlearned people, particularly women, who claimed divine revelations that may spur them on to political action. Alfonso of Jaén (d.1389), in support of Birgitta of Sweden's orthodoxy, wrote that there were seven signs under the principles of *discretio*

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>38</sup> Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 10 vols., ed. Palémon Glorieux (Paris: Desclée, 1960-73), 9, 468.

*spirituum* by which one might tell a true visionary: the person lived a virtuous life under the supervision of a spiritual director; the soul was inflamed by God's love and charity by a vision, and her faith, obedience, and reverence to the Church was strengthened by it; the visionary felt a deep inward knowledge of the truth of the revelation; the revelations were always and only of true things that agreed with scripture and accepted teachings; a true vision was known by the fruit which it bore; the visionary had the day and hour of her death revealed to her; and posthumous miracles unquestioningly established the status of the visionary.<sup>39</sup>

*Discretio spirituum* was restrictive for female visionaries but it could also empower them. It provided a model of behaviour and communication which, if followed, could facilitate acceptance of their divine message. In many ways, *discretio spirituum* gave female visionaries a means to navigate the prescriptions of the path to authority to have their visions understood as divinely ordained in the eyes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Most visionary women wanted to be deemed orthodox and to have their messages from the divine viewed as legitimate by the Church. Even though many lay visionaries called for reform and accountability within the Church, so too did many religious women and even some clerical men. It was not uncommon to decry the observed corruption in the lives of the clergy, and to blame any negative world events such as plagues, famines, and schism on the moral failings of the pope, cardinals, and bishops. By adhering to the expected pathways for holy women, visionary women were at times able to comment publicly on more controversial matters.

It was also important for holy women to submit themselves to their confessor and the Church. Alfonso of Jaén was the first to prioritise a female visionary's meekness and humble obedience to her spiritual director as evidence of her legitimacy. Gerson was then responsible for formally articulating the appropriate demeanour for a visionary and outlining the importance of the visionary-spiritual director relationship. The spiritual director was seen as vital to *discretio spirituum*. The danger of visionaries relying on their own judgements was emphasised, and as Rosalynn Voaden notes, this was recognition by the Church of the charismatic power of visions and visionaries and the need to harness such forces. Through the spiritual director, the visionary could be counselled and controlled, throughout the process of *discretio spirituum*.<sup>40</sup> Both Alfonso and Gerson argued that the spiritual director should have had transcendental experiences himself, although Gerson wrote that at the very least, the spiritual director should

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<sup>39</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices. The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries* (York: York Medieval Press, 1999), 50.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

be a sound theologian and an advanced contemplative. These qualifications defined the ability to exercise *discretio spirituum* as almost exclusive to men, given the restrictions on female theological education. Thus, the understanding, skill, and knowledge of a visionary's spiritual director was of great importance to her authority, as well as his role as devotional instructor, counsellor, writer, translator, and often distributor of her revelations. Even more could be done when he was socially adept and well-versed in ecclesiastical politics, enabling him to gain acceptance for the visionary who as a woman was restricted in promoting herself. But this relationship was not one-sided; through her direct access to God as His intermediary, a visionary had a mark of holiness that her spiritual director was unlikely to achieve. Moreover, there were dangers for spiritual directors in connecting themselves with a visionary; were she to be perceived as deluded or heretical, he was unlikely to have a strong clerical career ahead of him.<sup>41</sup>

The discernment of spirits relied heavily on scriptural knowledge and education. Alcuin Blamire's study on the medieval Church's monopoly on the Bible reveals for our purposes how the monopoly inhibited lay discernment of spirits and maintained the clergy's control on mediation with the divine. The Church actively discouraged laypersons of both genders from interpreting or reading the Bible throughout the Middle Ages, as clerics believed untrained minds would misunderstand it and drift into error. Transmission of the Word was the responsibility of preaching clergy. The layperson's desire to understand the scriptures could be commended, but the threat of usurpation of the priest's role by lay evangelising movements prompted churchmen to emphasise that it was the clergy's role to understand the faith and for laypeople simply to believe it. Though scholarship has shown that more women were literate than previously thought, women were particularly 'disenscriptured' in comparison to their male lay peers.<sup>42</sup> Laywomen were expected to gain their salvation through extracts of scripture and liturgical books; generally, only the Psalms were deemed suitable for women.<sup>43</sup> Even in religious life, biblical study, though substantial in the early Church and Saxon period, declined in the later medieval period. Blamires argues that the availability of Vulgates in nunneries was slight, and that Dominican sisters were by no means expected to emulate the academic efforts of their brothers. Moreover, any direct knowledge of the Vulgate attributed to holy women in

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 58-60.

<sup>42</sup> Alcuin Blamires uses the term 'disenscriptured' to highlight that while access to scripture was limited for all laity, this was even more so for laywomen (excluding noblewomen, who were the exception). Alcuin Blamires, "The Limits of Bible Study for Medieval Women," in *Women, the Book and the Godly. Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. Lesley; Taylor Smith, Jane H. M. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 3.

their writings was open to question as an editorial delusion.<sup>44</sup> In the thirteenth century women were also barred from universities, the centre of biblical analysis.

As the fourteenth century progressed, many influential male authors rejected the validity and authority of visionary experiences and those who had them. The anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, a fourteenth-century English mystical text, mocks visionaries who are “like sheep with the brain disease”, who “hold their heads on one side as though a worm were in their ears” and who squeak and splutter and waggle their heads and smile continuously “as though they were girlish gossips or amateur jugglers unsure of their balance.”<sup>45</sup> This condemnation gives an indication of the extent to which authority was being reclaimed from visionaries. The author repeatedly links visionaries with heretics who are deceived by the devil.

Similarly, Gerson implies (according to modern scholarship) that pious women who claim to be recipients of divine revelation are in fact insane, possessed by the devil, or desired an excuse to spend time alone with their male confessors. Gerson warns that visionaries, though they may at first appear to have good intentions, may actually be hiding a more sinister intent:

it is possible that the first effect appears good, beneficial, and offered for the edification of others, which in the end will fall into scandal in many ways, either because the ultimate end does not correspond to the first, or because something false and erroneous is discovered about the person which previously had been reported as a sign of holiness and piety. Our age has taught us this about the teachings of Jean de Verrenes [sic] and John Hus, and of others like them. Moreover, when something can be accomplished by human endeavour, whether this is in a life or this is in teaching, why is it necessary to seek or to wait for a divine communication from Heaven? Certainly this seems more like tempting God than honouring Him.<sup>46</sup>

The reference to John Hus and Jean de Varennes places the questions of discernment and sanctity within their wider ecclesio-political context. Grouping all sources of disorder in the Church as part of the same phenomenon shows the perceived threat of the collapse of the appropriate hierarchy, which in Gerson’s eyes included the University of Paris as an integral part. Nancy McLoughlin convincingly argues that Gerson’s discrediting of any intellectual,

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. James Walsh, *The Classics of Western Spirituality*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 223.

<sup>46</sup> Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 9, 182-83.

spiritual, or political ability of women is reflective of his struggle to improve the University of Paris' own authority in the eyes of the Church. The many stereotypically "female" rhetorical strategies which Gerson employs are intended to promote the university as an effective agent of political reform.<sup>47</sup> However, in doing so, he effectively silenced and demonised the voices of female visionaries.

Certainly, Gerson's many works contributed to a discourse that thoroughly discredited the ability of uneducated ascetic women to commune directly with the divine or to speak with any authority on contemporary intellectual or political matters. His discernment treatises were extremely influential in the prosecution of Joan of Arc (d.1431) and in the descriptions of witches popularised by Johannes Nider. Despite the fact that Gerson supported Joan, his effectiveness at discrediting or calling into suspicion all women's claims to visionary experiences was so strong that his own strategies were used against her. The treatises by Gerson and others credited visionary experiences to mental illness, prideful ambition, or diabolical illusion. McLoughlin argues that:

By establishing hierarchical obedience, ordered physical comportment and gender-appropriate humility as signs of orthodoxy, sanity and good will, these authors robbed ascetic women visionaries of the charismatic basis of their authority. No longer would their ability to go without food, tendency to be caught up in ecstatic states that removed them completely from their senses, or constant battle with demons signify an ascetic woman visionary's communion with the divine.<sup>48</sup>

Gerson's discernment treatises were within a broader trajectory of clerical attitudes concerning women's authority, which developed into a significantly harmful misogynist discourse.

Medieval female visionaries posed risks for two main reasons: their perceived innate weaknesses including their gullibility and their desire for attention and notoriety, and their contaminating effect on others. The first concern included not only women who were deceived by the devil, but also those who inflated their own imaginings to the level of divine revelation. From this standpoint, it was easy to believe that some women deliberately invented visions for attention or to gain power. Because their paths to power were so few, Voaden argues that there must have been an awareness among women of the possibilities offered by visionary power. However, even if their visions were true, they could be seen as exploiting their visionary status

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<sup>47</sup> McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender. Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France*.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

to get attention. The second main concern reflected the difficulty of keeping women who claimed to speak the word of God in their “proper womanly place”. It was a common trope that extended periods of close contact between a holy man and a holy woman, or a close ongoing spiritual relationship, to cause both to be led astray and succumb to fleshly desires, contaminating the holy man.<sup>49</sup>

Hence, the combination of controversial mysticism and female activism raise the possibility of visionaries being seen as heretics. As in any period, what some believers interpret as heavenly revelations, others see as delusions or satanic error. An example of this is the visions of Ermine de Reims (d.1396). Ermine was pulled between demons and saints in her nightly visions, exemplifying the need for discernment of spirits and the vulnerability of female visionaries.<sup>50</sup> Discussed further in chapter five, Ermine’s visionary experiences form an interesting comparison to the more “traditional” ones that appear in the other case studies. Ermine’s visions are difficult to place, but the difficulty is a perennial one. Ecclesiastical leaders have been unable to settle fundamental doctrinal issues related to human perceptions of the supernatural. A reported vision only gains Christian meaning by being shared and approved by other believers. Christians judge the validity of visions by criteria derived from sacred texts, historical precedents, local environments, common sense, and their own personal views concerning, in effect, the discernment of spirits.<sup>51</sup> The Apostle Paul urged the practice of discernment of spirits; in other words, deciphering the supernatural source of revelations, whether God, Jesus, angels, or magicians or the devil.<sup>52</sup>

Female visionaries and those who wrote for them were well aware of the suspicion that their revelations would likely arouse. Thus, they preemptively used strategies of validation which were different from those deployed by male visionaries; exploring these strategies in more depth is one of the aims of this thesis. Such strategies included listing female antecedents, such as Old Testament prophetesses, classical sibyls, and Desert Mothers, to establish precedents for themselves. Establishing their virtue was also necessary, focusing on their humility, obedience, chastity, patience, and prudence, as well as their willingness to submit to their confessor. Moreover, they could argue for their passive capacity to receive divine visions

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<sup>49</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices. The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, 66-68.

<sup>50</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*.

<sup>51</sup> Lisa Bitel, “Seeing the Invisible God: Discerning the Supernatural in the History of Christian Visionary Experience,” in *Religion: Super Religion*, ed. Jeffrey J. Kripal (Farmington Hills, Michigan: MacMillan Reference USA, 2017), 105-06.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

on the basis that God chose the weak to humble the powerful. Finally, they had to display deliberate conformity to *discretio spirituum*.<sup>53</sup> However, these strategies were not universally successful, and were at times still met with strong opposition. Gerson and other scholars like him were concerned to contain or silence ascetic female visionaries' voices as part of a larger effort to promote the authority of university-trained theologians within the realm of ecclesiastical and royal politics. This was during a time when for Gerson himself, his own authority was tenuous.<sup>54</sup> The crisis of authority of the Schism, the politically unstable kingdom of France, and the university's own struggle to confirm its authority in both contexts created a fraught arena for women to enter.

### **Heresy and Witchcraft**

Suspicion of women, particularly those claiming visionary experiences, was not new. However, there were growing concerns around heresy from the twelfth century onwards; this is reflected in the rise of inquisitorial procedures, which increased the risk of attracting persecutory attention, especially for women who publicly expressed their faith. While saints such as Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena were accepted as papal and political advisors, more and more women were deemed heretics for actively expressing their faith, particularly if they supported the "wrong" pope for their geographical location. Hence, Constance de Rabastens' support of the Roman pope will be an interesting case in this regard. As we have seen, establishing proof of holiness and divine legitimacy became increasingly vital for women attempting to gain spiritual influence.<sup>55</sup> This concept of proof will be particularly useful when considering the different strategies used by the case studies to validate themselves in such a politically volatile environment.

The Fourth Lateran Council's insistence in 1215 on compulsory auricular confession through male clergy was a reaction against growing fears of heresy and a means of tightening control over believers. Raymond of Peñafort, a thirteenth-century canonist, pushed for confidentiality in confession to be subordinate to the welfare of the Church: confessions of heresy or unorthodox behaviour could become ammunition in heretical persecutions.<sup>56</sup> The role

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<sup>53</sup> Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices. The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, 71.

<sup>54</sup> McLoughlin, *Jean Gerson and Gender. Rhetoric and Politics in Fifteenth-Century France*, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

of the confessor, then, was significant for the safety of a visionary. The affiliations and status of the confessors linked to the women in this thesis will need to be considered. Moreover, a confessor's view of visionary women was also crucial to his involvement in recording and promoting his protégée. The increasing fear of heresy and stricter definitions of orthodoxy in the medieval period weakened women's (and laymen's) ability to publicly express their spirituality or challenge religious leaders.<sup>57</sup> Yet two of the women considered in this thesis were outwardly focused, concerned for reform and unity in the Church, proving themselves vocal and determined to be heard by ecclesiastical leaders. In the following chapter, we will explore what scholarship has previously argued was expected of women in this context. This will illuminate the points of contrast presented by the case studies and provide a fuller picture of the agency some women had within their faith.

A fear of female visionaries and their growing popularity grew throughout the period. In John W. Coakley's analysis of nine case studies of holy women and their confessors, all the male authors considered their female subjects to be claiming their own authority to speak, to be heard, and to affect the lives of those around them. This authority was based on their evident extraordinary access to God, through visions, revelations, and ecstasies, and it was given to them directly by God rather than from the possession of any ecclesiastical office.<sup>58</sup> However, Ermine de Reims, considered in chapter five, did not want or claim the authority that came with divine visions, and it was her confessor who tried to claim it for her. The increase of spectacular prophetic-visionary works towards the end of the Avignon papacy and through the Schism, particularly by women, provoked an increasing irritation among broad circles of the ecclesiastical elite. The Schism was a catalyst for seers to speak out, and the period of greatest visionary, poetic, and prophetic activity was before 1400.<sup>59</sup> Divine authority legitimated women in the exercise of their "informal" powers. The men recording the experiences of these women had to navigate how to position the authority of these women against their own authority, which generally derived from their status as officeholders in the Church. Previously, in the early thirteenth century, these two kinds of authority coexisted, with the women's authority interacting with and complementing the authority of the clerics. By the end of the fourteenth century, in the atmosphere of distrust and disunity, the harmony between the two types of authority faltered.

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<sup>57</sup> Paul Rorem, "The Company of Medieval Women Theologians," *Theology Today* 60, no. 1 (2003), 85.

<sup>58</sup> John W. Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 213.

<sup>59</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 211.

For women who desired to be active in their faith, the exclusion from clerical office meant they had to seek other ways to express themselves. For many, this was through visionary or ecstatic experiences. A woman's lack of the authority attached to clerical office also made her a powerful signifier of the limits of that authority. Her divine experiences which circumvented clerical mediation undermined the control the Church was trying to have over individual faith. As the fifteenth century progressed, the positive possibilities of a visionary's special relationship with the divine were replaced in the clerical mind by the more sinister and heretical images of the supernaturally powerful. Jean Gerson noted that it was much easier for "uneducated wretched little women" to experience visions than well-trained men.<sup>60</sup> He believed sensory visions such as those felt by Catherine of Siena led ultimately to insanity. Clerics became more cautious than Raymond of Capua had been with Catherine of Siena about placing themselves as characters within their narratives of saintly women. It was not until the early-modern period that Raymond's *vita* of Catherine again began to exert widespread influence on hagiographers.<sup>61</sup> This allowed the cleric to distance himself more easily from a visionary should their ecstatic experiences be found to be fictional or demonic in inspiration, judgements that became increasingly common with the rise of witchcraft accusations.

The similarities between testimonies of witchcraft and the experiences of female visionaries are outside the scope of this thesis, but we might note the connections between them. The growing repudiation of visionaries and visions as a source of spiritual authority was a taste of the later condemnation of women imagined as devil-worshipping witches. The same condescending descriptions of ecstatic states used for earlier visionaries were to be used to describe witches, as in *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>62</sup> Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* (c.1436) had already linked doubts about the veracity of late medieval visions with the emerging anxiety around diabolic witchcraft. It is not coincidental that this work was written at the same time as Joan of Arc's trial and condemnation, which Gábor Klaniczay claims was a decisive turning point in the appreciation of visions and apparitions.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, Nider was at the Council of Basel (1431) which focused on the question of papal supremacy; disputes over authority in the Church continued well after the Schism and had wide-reaching disruptive effects. Nider's

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<sup>60</sup> Letter to Barthélemy Clancier, in Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 2, 208-09.

<sup>61</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 220.

<sup>62</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, "Cry Out and Write': Mysticism and the Struggle for Authority," in *Women, the Book and the Godly. Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 75.

<sup>63</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, "Learned Systems and Popular Narratives of Vision and Bewitchment," in *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions. Demons, Spirits, Witches*, ed. Gábor Klaniczay & Éva Pócs (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 58.

sceptical view of holy women of “high repute” is evident in his numerous examples of women who were seemingly simulating ecstatic experiences for attention. In response to this scepticism, confessors increasingly recorded their visionaries claiming visible bodily proofs of contact with the supernatural, such as the signs of the stigmata. Significantly, in *Formicarius* the stories of ecclesiastical authorities discerning the truthfulness of laypeople’s claims to divine visions are placed alongside an anecdote relating to the capacity of witches in a state of ecstasy to fly.<sup>64</sup> Nider used the exposure of these women’s experiences as fake to support his scepticism towards the veracity of all visions and supernatural manifestations. Nider’s work coincided with the emergence of the diabolic apparition of the witches’ Sabbath in documents from the early fifteenth-century witchcraft persecutions in Switzerland and Savoy.

It is important to remember that female mystics and visionaries were largely within the Church and wished to remain so – particularly the women considered here. None generally wished to be seen as heretical, and they genuinely believed the teachings of the Church to be true. They saw their role as a vessel for God’s words as a direct result of the failure of the male clergy to reunite the Church or adequately care for the faithful. Though they pushed at the male-defined boundaries, they believed in the Church’s theology for their salvation. In this respect, women’s spirituality could be considered an alternative to the normative tradition.<sup>65</sup> The usual routes of education and ecclesiastical preferment were not open to them, despite some women, particularly in convents, having access to a level of learning. Their reliance on experiential more than intellectual spirituality is what differentiated them from their male counterparts. It was this experience that became the basis for their authority.

This section has provided some key social, political, and religious context for the period in which the women considered in this thesis lived. The Schism, political rivalries, and rising suspicion of and attempts to control visionary activity in the latter part of the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries are the backdrop to the visions that will be considered in this thesis. The influence of the period’s turmoil is evident in the lives of Marie, Constance, and Ermine, and we shall see in the coming chapters how the historical context impacted the way these women presented themselves and their revelations to their communities. We will now place this thesis within a historiographical context to better understand how the approach used for the interpretations of these case studies and their visions fits within previous scholarship.

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>65</sup> Grace M. Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 158.

## Literature Review: Religious Women and Female Agency

In a period where the established concepts of authority were being challenged, how did this affect women? Just as the questions around institutional authority were impacting male clergy and the positions of influence they wielded, so too were the opportunities open to laywomen changing. The historiographical debate surrounding gender inequalities when it comes to authority in the medieval period is not new, as we shall see below. This thesis aims to build on the current scholarship by widening the focus from religious and noble women and their relationship with authority to a wider group of women. To do so, it is necessary to understand what historiography has previously explored, as a better foundation for the coming chapters.

The historiography on religious women, and medieval religion more generally has changed considerably over the past two centuries. John H. Arnold's survey of medieval Christianity in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historiography reveals a strong nationalist focus which has shaped the way women's participation has been viewed across Europe.<sup>66</sup> Though earlier scholarship focused on more official channels of religion, historians shifted focus to 'lived religion' in the twentieth century. In particular, they began to pay attention to how religion flourished as part of the world and how it was shaped by economic, social, and cultural factors. This was particularly true in the *Annales* in France, which considered religion the *mentalité* of a past age and was accorded considerable power as a context for social and political action.

In the late twentieth century, early modernists such as Natalie Zemon Davis highlighted the need for the laity to be understood as active participants in their own faith. Instead of focusing on the top-down religion imposed by the institutional Church, scholarship began considering the folkloric or unorthodox beliefs of the laity and how they shaped lived religion from the bottom-up. Notable studies were Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1975) and Jean-Claude Schmitt's *The Holy Greyhound* (1979). Women especially were linked to these movements as active participants. However, the focus on the margins of society (witches, heretics, the superstitious) tended to posit a cultural gulf between clergy and laity and ignored the agency of laypeople in organised orthodox religion.<sup>67</sup> This realisation triggered studies on

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<sup>66</sup> John H. Arnold, "Histories and Historiographies of Medieval Christianity," in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Christianity*, ed. John H. Arnold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28-29.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-5; see also Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c.1400-c.1580*, 2 ed. (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2005).

béguines, the Bianchi movement, and parochial religion, among many others. By the end of the twentieth century, discussion on medieval religion held society and culture to be at the heart of the understanding of the medieval Church. Studies on the institutional Church also evolved to include a more socially informed notion of what an ‘institution’ might be. Social issues of gender, the body, sexuality, and social status were also explored as integral to an understanding of medieval religion.<sup>68</sup> And while earlier scholarship focused on the outpouring of religious enthusiasm among women, and drew an affinity between women and heresy, recent research has challenged that assumption and is offering more nuanced approaches to the role gender played in medieval religion.<sup>69</sup>

Twentieth-century academic feminism has provided the foundation for further scholarship on women’s experiences in the Church throughout history, including the medieval period. Historians such as E. Jane Burns, Jo Ann McNamara, and Suzanne Wemple have written on social mobility, the formation of collective identity, and empowerment for women in the medieval Church based on evidence for well-educated elite women living in religious communities.<sup>70</sup> Late twentieth-century studies of women’s writings focused on legitimisation and authorisation.<sup>71</sup> Several analyses argue that women’s practices and rhetorics (their prophesies, visions, and mystical experiences) were their agency. The concept of agency for the women considered in this thesis will focus largely on their visions and prophecies, and how these women tried to utilise their visions (or not) to influence their communities. It is important to note that there is the issue of authorship when looking at primary sources for medieval women and how this may impact how their agency is demonstrated; this issue will be addressed in the following chapter when dealing with medieval ideals of holiness and hagiographical topoi.

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<sup>68</sup> As seen in Caroline Walker Bynum, “‘...And Woman His Humanity’: Female Imagery in the Religious Writings of the Later Middle Ages,” in *Gender and Religion: On the Complexity of Symbols*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum, Stevan Harrell and Paula Richman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986).

<sup>69</sup> Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2011), 19.

<sup>70</sup> E. Jane Burns, *Bodytalk: When Women Speak in Medieval French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Jo Ann McNamara, & Suzanne Wemple, “Sanctity and Power: The Dual Pursuit of Medieval Women,” in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal & Claudia Koonz (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977).

<sup>71</sup> See Elizabeth Alvida Petroff, *Body and Soul: Essays on Medieval Women and Mysticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua to Marguerite Porete* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Barbara Newman, *Sister of Wisdom: St Hildegard's Theology of the Feminine* (Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1997).

Historians have also considered the role of women in the new forms of religious life which emphasised mysticism that developed from the twelfth century, such as the béguines in the Low Countries. Mystical movements were seen to fulfil the needs of laywomen wanting to live pious lives without joining a convent.<sup>72</sup> Though scholarship has varied on the definition of mysticism, there seems to be a broad agreement that it refers to an intense psychological state, described as either a direct experience of God, or as visions, locution or other extraordinary phenomena.<sup>73</sup> An ‘authentic’ mystic is classified by Michael Stoeber as one who grants these extraordinary experiences a central premise of their life.<sup>74</sup> The modern interpretation of mystics is largely inherited from William James, who defined mystical experience as essentially involving the four characteristics of ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity.<sup>75</sup> The most important elements for the mystics themselves tend to be extolling God’s majesty, decrying the sinful states of the soul, and warning against the dangers of deception.

Divine visions gave well-known medieval female saints authority in the Church’s eyes to preach (Mechthild of Hackeborn), form orders (Birgitta of Sweden), write rules (Clare of Assisi), and even mediate for and advise the papacy (Catherine of Siena). However, there is little written evidence of female mysticism in France before 1300.<sup>76</sup> This absence of active female contemplatives in a new era of spirituality might explain the more negative treatment of French female mystics and visionaries in the later medieval period. There was less of a legacy for the women considered in this thesis to tap into and build upon. Valerie M. Lagorio highlights Saint Liutberga of Wendhausen (d.c.1860) and Marguerite d'Oingt (d.1310) as the only French female mystics with any significant notice.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the negative reception of the lay mystic Marguerite Porete (d.1310) amongst the French clerical elite reinforces how threatened theologians could feel by female mystics.<sup>78</sup>

Scholarship has shown that female mystics were more concerned with intense extraordinary experiences such as visions than their male counterparts. Early Christian writers

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<sup>72</sup> Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Béguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>73</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> Michael Stoeber, *Evil and the Mystic’s God: Towards a Mystical Theodicy* (London: Macmillan, 1992), 80.

<sup>75</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience. The Gifford Lectures of 1901-2*. (Glasgow: Collins, 1960), 367.

<sup>76</sup> Valerie M. Lagorio, “The Medieval Continental Women Mystics: An Introduction,” in *An Introduction to The Medieval Mystics of Europe*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 177.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>78</sup> For more on the reception of Marguerite, see Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

spoke of the “mystical meaning of scripture”, and this usage of “mystical” continued throughout the medieval period. The emphasis on the mystical meaning of scripture consolidated male appropriation of spirituality and mysticism, as study of the scriptures was inaccessible to women and indeed to many men.<sup>79</sup> When only a few of those in the inner circle could also understand the hidden, mystical meaning in those texts, those men were powerful indeed. This focus on scripture and interpretation remained throughout the medieval period. While men could use interpreting scripture and commenting on its mystical meaning as a way to assume authority, women who felt called by God to teach or write were obliged to find another source of authority than scriptural commentary.<sup>80</sup> Hence, scholarship has shown that female mystics were more concerned with intense extraordinary experiences such as visions than their male counterparts. Interestingly, men who did have visionary experiences, such as Francis of Assisi (d.1226) and Richard Rolle (d.1349), were often accused of being ‘feminine’ in their dress, behaviour, and activity. Rolle clothed himself in his sister’s cast-offs, and Francis tended lepers, by tradition a woman’s job. They did not place much emphasis on formal education, nor did they undertake the mystical exposition of scripture or the speculative mysticism of Eckhart or Ruusbroec.<sup>81</sup> With some exceptions, such as Fr. Pedro of Aragon, most male visionaries did not emphasise their visions when claiming authority to speak, perhaps in part due to this negative stereotype of the female mystic. This difference between the ways men and women regarded their visionary experiences will be discussed further in chapter two.

Elizabeth Alvida Petroff’s works on mysticism and the mystic’s reception in society provide a framework for analysing mystical and visionary literature.<sup>82</sup> Petroff argues that visions are inseparable from a mystic’s autobiography and agrees with Walker Bynum’s theory that the internal study of ‘self’ in the medieval period was a search for the soul, the part of oneself made in the image of God. The purpose of self-discovery was to get closer to God.<sup>83</sup> This is why bridal imagery, and its use of intimate marital connotations, is so common in women’s writings. Mystics’ recordings of visions generally have two voices – that of the mystic and that of God – which have been united by the union of the mystic’s soul to God. The female

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<sup>79</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 59.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>81</sup> Jantzen, “Cry Out and Write’: Mysticism and the Struggle for Authority,” 75.

<sup>82</sup> *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, ed. Elizabeth Alvida Petroff (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Petroff, *Body and Soul*.

<sup>83</sup> *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, 22.

voice expresses doubt in its authority to speak, and the male voice (God) gives authority, approval, and encouragement.<sup>84</sup>

The focus on religious women in these studies excludes most women in medieval Europe who could not access the sanctioned authority that came with being an abbess, proto-saint, or spiritual advisor. In response, scholarship is starting to focus more on the vibrant spiritual experiences of noble laywomen. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker focuses on those who served their community circles, lived independently, and took part in civic and religious politics.<sup>85</sup> While Mulder-Bakker's study furthers historiography on laywomen's spirituality in late medieval Europe, it is still limited to a minority of the population by focusing on the nobility. Yet, the turbulent period of ecclesiastical authority during the Schism seems to have enabled women from a wider social range to speak out on spiritual matters and Church politics. Why and how these circumstances permitted laywomen to become involved will be considered in this thesis.

Coakley identifies three main categories of women's revelations. The first are revelations of the state of souls, which reinforced the priest's power by directing people to confession and mass. This was the most common revelation medieval women had. The second are revelations on matters of Christian doctrine, scripture, or obscurities of God's dispensations. These were more popular with twelfth-century mystics. The third, and most relevant category of revelations for this study, are revelations on matters of ecclesiastical, geopolitical, or broadly historical importance, implying a public audience beyond a woman's immediate context. While these types of revelations are not absent from women's hagiographies in the two preceding centuries, the figure of the politically focused female prophet of the late fourteenth century was without major antecedents (with the exception of Saint Hildegard of Bingen, d.1179).<sup>86</sup> As will be argued, the Schism allowed women's prophecies greater opportunity for legitimisation than a secure ecclesiastical establishment would have allowed. As such, it is this third category of revelations that we will be focusing on in this thesis.

Scholarship has also thoroughly debated the idea of gender equality in the medieval Church. Caroline Walker Bynum supports the theory that all human beings are gendered and

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *The Dedicated Spiritual Life of Upper Rhine Noble Women: A Study and Translation of a Fourteenth-Century Spiritual Biography of Gertrude Rickeldey of Ortenberg and Heilke of Staufenberg* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2017).

<sup>86</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 13-16.

argues that religious experience is not the same for a man as for a woman.<sup>87</sup> Hence, the comparison of male and female religious authority has been well worth the extended scholarship. Religious authority, Walker Bynum argues, comes to women from charismatic and prophetic gifts, but to men from ecclesiastical office.<sup>88</sup> Coakley agrees with this argument, contrasting for example the commonality among women of extreme asceticism and identification with Christ's passion, resulting in physical stigmata, with the more limited appearance of these phenomena among men.<sup>89</sup> Compellingly, E. Ann Matter argues that Saint Augustine of Hippo's proposition that men and women were created equally in the image of God according to humanity dominated medieval theology and was not debated during the medieval period. Some women even circumvented their exclusion from clerical office by positioning themselves as living in and performing the image of God. They challenged the accepted dogma in "positive and hard to argue ways."<sup>90</sup> While twentieth-century-feminist biblical criticism uses Genesis 1:27 (the co-creation of man and woman) as a basis for gender equality, Matter argues that medieval women themselves did not contend for their physical equality with men, but for their spiritual equality. She states that Augustine's argument that women were intellectually inferior to men was not debated either. 'Woman' was the manifestation of the active mind (*scientia*), whereas the masculine part of the mind was for the meditative wisdom of God (*sapientia*).<sup>91</sup> The influential perspective of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) in the late thirteenth century of the human body reflecting God was based on Augustinian principles.<sup>92</sup>

This theory of women's spiritual equality and whether it was actually recognised in the medieval period has been strongly argued by historians. Patricia Ranft questions the assumption that medieval Christianity was dominated by misogyny and claims that female spirituality was viewed as a separate issue from women's physical and social status.<sup>93</sup> However, Ranft acknowledges that she only focuses on canonical and orthodox holy women. Ranft's argument for female spiritual equality rests partly on the quantity and popularity of sainted women in written texts and popular art forms. For example, she claims communal support for anchorites

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<sup>87</sup> Walker Bynum, "Introduction: The Complexity of Symbols," 2.

<sup>88</sup> Walker Bynum, "'...And Woman His Humanity'."

<sup>89</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 10.

<sup>90</sup> E. Ann Matter, "The Undebated Debate: Gender and the Image of God in Medieval Theology," in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. and Clare A. Lees Fenster (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 42.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>93</sup> Patricia Ranft, *Women and Spiritual Equality in Christian Tradition* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), ix.

is evidence of reverence for holy women. The greater number of female over male anchorites, Ranft argues, is evidence of society acknowledging women's "superior spiritual status within the community."<sup>94</sup> Ranft disagrees with the idea of a universality of symbols and gender. Yet, she argues that the centrality of Mary in medieval culture is proof all women were spirituality esteemed across class, gender, and geography.<sup>95</sup> She also claims that the 'New Spirituality' was a major shift in religious focus from knowledge to emotion, which enabled the foundation of mysticism and the spiritual equality of men and women, placing women firmly in the midst of medieval spiritual tradition. For Ranft, women's inclusion in mysticism on an equal footing with men is proof of society's deep-seated deference and esteem for holy women.

However, Grace Jantzen strongly disagrees with such an argument, instead claiming that the patriarchal hierarchy has consistently changed the meaning of mysticism in ways that continually exclude women. Postmodern philosophy acknowledges that knowledge and power are interconnected; thus, what is allowed to count as knowledge can never be far removed from an investigation of power relations. In feminist thinking, any investigation of power relations reveals issues of gender. Jantzen claims that there has been very little attention paid in scholarship to the way in which the delimiting of mysticism was crucial to maintaining male hierarchical control in the Church and society, nor to the ways in which issues of power and gender are intertwined in contemporary philosophical discussions of mysticism.<sup>96</sup> Jantzen argues that the idea of 'mysticism' is a social construction, which has been constructed in different ways at different times. Changes to ecclesiastical and mystical views on what counted as a mystic changed over time and were linked to changes in patterns of authority and gender relations. This is particularly significant for this thesis as these visionaries were active at the same time as the process of the codification of the discernment of the spirits was being developed, leading to the increased possibility of female visionaries being accused of witchcraft in the later fifteenth century. It was inevitable that those with the power to define who counts as a mystic, usually those of high standing in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, influenced the definition from their perspective. Jantzen claims that those who were seen as having the power to define knowledge did not remain the same. It passed from monks and abbots to bishops; gradually the authority of the Church gave way to secular kings and rulers, and in modern society philosophers and theologians in universities are characterised as holding true

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 163-66.

<sup>96</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 2-3.

knowledge.<sup>97</sup> Therefore, Jantzen argues that women's claims to religious experience become permissible in direct proportion to the decline of overt public importance of religion.<sup>98</sup> This seems particularly pertinent for the time period encompassing the Schism, when the Church was losing its credibility and secular rulers and the University of Paris were wielding more influence in both the religious and secular spheres.

There is also a distinct focus in medieval gender studies on analysing women's status and authority in comparison to that of their male peers. Coakley surveys how religious women's authority enhanced their male spiritual director's power.<sup>99</sup> He contrasts the different types of authority each gender had, to demonstrate their stronger agency when united. This raises the issue of the significance of male clerical support in promoting the authority of women in the medieval Church. The reception of each of these women by their respective popes will need to be considered, as well as who recorded their visions and what if any personal connection they had to their respective visionary. Considering the religious affiliations of their confessors will be insightful as well. This is also relevant when considering the social network female visionaries built around themselves, the members of which were often promoters of the holy woman's sanctity. This was certainly the case for visionaries such as Catherine of Siena and her *famiglia* in the fourteenth century, and it will be an interesting point to consider for the women presented in this thesis.

Overall, the issue of gender in medieval literature has been well covered in scholarship. Walker Bynum has done extensive analysis on gender categories in late medieval religious writings. She explains her approach as one that focuses first on the texts, without an agenda of modern subjects such as politics or oppression in mind. She also cites the importance of exploring the context of the texts in relation to other texts they were grouped with when read and preserved at the time of writing.<sup>100</sup> Ann-Marie Rasmussen argues that to further understand the debate surrounding gender in secular literature, the social and geographical context must influence analysis.<sup>101</sup> Rasmussen and Walker Bynum's theory of contextualising the texts in their original published form will not only aid in understanding how the women discussed here

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., xvi.

<sup>99</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*.

<sup>100</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 22-23.

<sup>101</sup> Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Thinking Through Gender in Late Medieval German Literature," in *Gender in Debate from the Early Middle Ages to the Renaissance*, ed. Thelma S. Fenster, and Clare A. Lees (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 106.

viewed the debate between gender and authority, but how receptive their audiences were to them. Moreover, their research will provide a solid foundation on which to reflect how politics has influenced the perception of these women and the survival of their visions in modern interpretation.

While twentieth-century academic feminism introduced women's experiences into scholarship, a problematic aspect of this is its usage of modern concepts when analysing medieval sources. These tend to obstruct an understanding of the way women viewed their own experiences in the Middle Ages. Amy Hollywood argues that religious experience is, by definition, inadequately explained, and a subject's own explanation is not considered true by social scientific researchers. Ideally, social history should be free from modern categories of analysis, as these shape the way we read the past – yet modern understanding and explanation is what makes the past comprehensible to us.<sup>102</sup> Feminist scholarship tends to read into medieval women's writings agency and conspired authority that was not necessarily expressed by those women themselves. It often valorises women as passive or victims, and not fully responsible agents of violence, evil or oppression. This is influenced by the significantly different life views medieval visionaries and historians as post-enlightenment secularists hold regarding temporality.<sup>103</sup> As a historian, it is necessary to recognise the power of a subject's beliefs and their absolute truth in the mind of the believer. Modern secular cynicism regarding divine authority needs to be set aside when examining the spiritual writings and visions of medieval women who fully believed the words they spoke were of God. This is even more important when considering women hearing from God on opposing sides of the papal divide. Female visionaries in particular saw authority as a necessity to share what God had spoken to them, not as an end goal in and of itself. Thus, the dissemination and influence of a woman's visions is key. Visions were the necessary credentials for a medieval woman seeking an active role in a larger world. During the period of the Schism, in some cases visions enabled women to mediate and influence the most significant ecclesiastical event of the age.

As we can see, key aspects of women, gender, and agency have been debated in historiography, with the focus largely remaining on religious women and comparison to their male counterparts. However, religious women were not the only women who claimed to receive divine visions, particularly during the period of the Schism. Though scholarship seems to

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<sup>102</sup> Amy Hollywood, "Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography," *The Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (2004).

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

suggest negative reception in France for visionaries, or even a comparative dearth of visionary activity compared to other Western European kingdoms, more recent scholarship is revealing French laywomen who were eager to follow the call God placed on their lives to involve themselves in the politics of the day. This thesis will build on this more recent scholarship, using the case studies to show that there are examples of French laywomen who were navigating the same pathways to authority as their religious counterparts or those in other regions in Christendom. To understand this, their visions, and the ways they present themselves in them, will form the core of each case study. This thesis will also analyse how the methods used by these women differed from earlier pathways to give a fuller understanding of how a wider group of women engaged with the concepts of authority, gender, and agency during the Schism.

## **Conclusion**

The medieval Church, and its beliefs and practices, was institutionally dominated by men. How, then, could women claim authority and exercise agency within it? The Great Western Schism raised fundamental questions about the nature of institutional authority – and about the agency and authority of laywomen within the Church. During the early period of the Schism, when the fear of the Antichrist and the apocalypse was at its height, an exceptional environment was created where women were able to assert an authority in the public sphere. It did not last. The codification of the discernment of spirits around the turn of the fifteenth century and the fear of heresy and witchcraft made the relationship between visionary women and ecclesiastical authorities increasingly tenuous and fraught. Once the Schism was mended, the Church's openness to alternative sources of hearing from God, outside of the clergy, diminished.

The assertion of authority by laywomen, in exceptional circumstances, has yet to receive the full attention of historians. Scholarship has created a solid foundation for understanding gender, authority, and agency in the medieval period, though it has focused largely on noble or religious women. From the twentieth century onwards, historians have increasingly focused on lived religion and personal experiences but again, much of this scholarship has concentrated on heretical, noble, or religious women, rather than on laywomen wanting to be active in orthodox Christianity. Through an in-depth study of particular women in a time of disruption, this research seeks to further understandings of several wider issues: how gendered role models were utilised by women to achieve recognition and influence others; and how women, like other groups excluded from institutional forms of spiritual and political power, could adapt or subvert

dominant concepts, language and practices to exercise agency and authority. This thesis will use the voices of lay female visionaries to provide a fresh perspective on gendered authority in the late medieval period.

How these women could claim authority also needs further exploration. There were accepted models of holiness and pathways to sanctity through which these women could access authority, but they were also being challenged during the Schism. The number of canonisations rose during this period, as rival popes elected saints who were close to their cause; laywomen were prominent among the new saints, but they were also open to partisan criticism. The same was true of men, and models of sanctity that pertained to men. The following chapter will consider the models of holiness, and their gendered nature, to better understand the expectations placed on the three visionary women who form the case studies of this thesis.

## **Chapter Two: The Medieval Model of Female Sanctity**

This chapter will examine how a holy woman was expected to look and act in the late medieval period, particularly with reference to hagiographical topoi. This will provide the foundations for the analysis of the three main case studies in this thesis and their paths to authority. As noted in the previous chapter, much scholarship has been done on noble and religious visionaries, and this has also included discussion of the expectations of these women and their relationship with authority. This scholarship provides a valuable point of comparison for understanding the expectations of holy laywomen discussed in this thesis. This chapter will also look at the importance for women of social networks, and of more informal forms of social authority, in the process of having their spiritual authority recognised. It will also compare how expectations and forms of authority differed for men, particularly those in clerical office during the Schism, when institutional authority was unstable and uncertain.

### **Expectations of Holy Women**

#### **Medieval stereotypes**

André Vauchez describes the epitome of the thirteenth-century medieval female saint as a girl of modest origin who had lost her father, abandoned active life in adolescence to avoid male attention, and was set on keeping her virginity. To escape marriage, she ran away to a tertiary community linked to a mendicant order, spending her days in prayer and meditation, living an exclusively religious life, and experiencing mystical states regarding Christ's passion. She chose extreme asceticism and identified with Christ's suffering. Her states of ecstasy aroused local interest, and her death would be greeted by a surge of popular enthusiasm, with prodigies

and miracles. Some of these women believed they were charged by God to deliver prophetic warnings to the Church and the world and became ideal mouthpieces for reform movements.<sup>1</sup>

While this image of a holy woman was still familiar during the period of the Schism, it was slightly altered in the late fourteenth century with less focus on her upbringing:

One day an ordinary laywoman, generally a very pious person, would hear God summon her to the ministry of the Word and would receive visions and revelations. She would then seek to communicate them in the form of messages addressed to the pope and the rulers, since the object of the messages was the good of the Church and the salvation of the Christian people, a responsibility which rested primarily on the shoulders of the leaders. Not content with writing them letters, the inspired woman would try to meet them in person to persuade them of the authenticity of her mission and provide them with unmistakable signs of her divine election.<sup>2</sup>

There are certainly similarities between the two stereotypes for holy women, but a significant difference is that a visionary during the Schism was expected to address those at the top of the ecclesiastical and political hierarchies. The focus was less on their asceticism and suffering (although piety was still important) and more on communicating their message from God, a very different but still active demonstration of their faith. It is also significant that almost all the visionaries who spoke out during the Schism were women, having previously been denied a voice by the institutional Church. This is often a dimension of the holy woman's experience during the Schism that is not apparent from the stereotype. Moreover, the clergy were not fascinated by these women's wifely or maternal qualities, but by the affective, irrational, and sometimes even pathological aspects of their personalities. It was their exceptional sanctity that made them stand out from a sinful society.<sup>3</sup>

By adhering to stereotypes of holiness, women could achieve a recognised form of spiritual authority. The nature and significance of these stereotypes, and whether or not they changed in periods of ecclesiastical turmoil, need to be further considered within the context of the Schism. There was a shift in depictions of female sanctity from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries. While high-status nuns were more the focus of attention in the earlier period, by the

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<sup>1</sup> André Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, trans. Jean Birrell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 210-11.

<sup>2</sup> André Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, trans. Margery J. Schneider, ed. Daniel E. Bornstein (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 256.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

latter part of the medieval period more humble laywomen associated with groups such as béguines and *mantellate* were held up as examples of sanctity.<sup>4</sup> The lives of these later women emphasise even more raptures, visions, and other paramystical experiences. Catherine Mooney argues that these later women appear more passionate, socially diverse, and unstable, an instability which typified their experiences:

these women frequently changed their states of life, from married to celibate or from one religious order or affiliation to another; they moved between vigorous social involvement and reclusive enclosure; some people would suspect them of heresy even as others venerated them as beacons of orthodoxy. The mental and emotional states of many of these women is represented as erratic, and in their spiritual lives they often swung wildly between excruciating doubt and an overwhelming sense of certitude.<sup>5</sup>

The relationships between holy women and their male confessors and scribes also changed. The efforts of confessors to control the danger they sensed in holy women they both admired and sometimes feared frequently appear as strained as the efforts of the women themselves.<sup>6</sup> This sense of strain was heightened by a greater concern during the Schism that the orthodoxy of visions would be scrutinised more intently.

Stereotypes of holiness influenced the way visionaries were received in their communities as well as the ways they presented themselves and their experiences. Key medieval hagiographical topoi focused on divine authority, prophecy, illiteracy, humility, obedience, physical asceticism, and chastity. These aspects of holiness were often more emphasised in women's *vitae* than in their own visions or writings, though they do still play a role in those as well. However, being a noblewoman or religious woman also made acceptance as a holy woman more likely. The case studies in this thesis lacked a noble background or religious enclosure. The difference this made to their reception will need to be compared with that of contemporary holy women from the nobility and religious houses.

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<sup>4</sup> Catherine M. Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," in *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

## Divine Authority

Women who spoke with the voice of God, with divine authority, especially from outside the walls of a convent, challenged clerical authority even as they sought its validation. They needed the support of respected confessors and other clerical figures, but if their authority was established as divinely appointed, it superseded the very authority that validated it.<sup>7</sup> It was conceivable to churchmen that a holy woman could have the power to give her cleric or those she encountered something they otherwise did not have, a sense that she could supplement the man's own religious experience. She was an access point to the divine with benefits that were not to be gained elsewhere.<sup>8</sup> However, there was also a strong sense among the Church hierarchy that such access was uncertain. Aspiring holy women were not universally regarded as channels of divine grace; women claiming such divine inspiration often elicited as much repugnance as reverence.<sup>9</sup> The question amongst leaders was whether a female visionary's voice was God-sent or a feminine dissimulation, and who was authorised to decide. This question of authority and truth was more urgent during the Schism than previously, due to the failure of traditional sources of pronouncement and their contradictory messages. The process of the discernment of spirits involved not only theologians, priests, and prelates, but also doctors and lawyers who were seeking new forensic procedures for the distillation of judgement and diagnosis.<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, the medieval concept of divine inspiration was understood by holy women and their supporters as divine spirit possession, particularly when considering mystical experiences. As we have seen in the previous chapter, this was why identifying the source of visions through the discernment of spirits became increasingly important, as there was the fear that women could be possessed by a demonic spirit instead of the divine. This was heightened during the Schism. As Nancy Caciola argues, holy women's *vitae* characteristically circle around a series of multivalent images which express divine possession from different vantage points: the mystical marriage uniting the woman's heart with that of Christ; receiving the stigmata; glimpses of Christ in the inspired woman's face; or the Holy Spirit speaking directly through the mouth of the mystic, much the same as a demon was thought to speak through the

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<sup>7</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Constance de Rabastens: Politics and Visionary Experience in the Time of the Great Schism," *Mystics Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (December 1999), 155.

<sup>8</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Nancy Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 2 (2000), 273.

<sup>10</sup> Miri Rubin, "Europe Remade: Purity and Danger in Late Medieval Europe," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001), 103.

mouth of a demoniac. The most common motif is the vision of exchanging hearts with Jesus. The symbolism showing the suffusion of the body with the Holy Spirit, replacing the human spirit with a conjoined divine spirit, extends the natural human senses into the realm of the supernatural: prophecy, visions, tears, a healing touch.<sup>11</sup> The Holy Spirit entering the fragile human heart would naturally lead to a sensory, emotional, and intellectual overload. This partly explains the greater emotionalism, visionary focus, prophetic power, and somatic change for which women's mysticism was known. The Holy Spirit, coordinating the senses and emotions, would lead to a higher level of intensity and perception, particularly in the "weaker" vessel of a woman.<sup>12</sup>

How female visionaries heard from God was also important in establishing their divine authority. For many visionaries, this was through an audible divine voice. Jeanne-Marie de Maillé (1331-1414) was a holy noblewoman venerated by her contemporaries and was later beatified in 1871. Her *vita* records fifteen visions which are a mixture of saints audibly addressing her, scenes from the gospel unfolding before her eyes, and a celestial light guiding her steps. They guide her vocation and encourage her to go further in her devotion, destitution, and divine service.<sup>13</sup> She receives divine knowledge, and she "saw clearly and knew with certainty all that is known in the Old and the New Testament", while refusing to disclose the vision.<sup>14</sup> It was sometimes difficult for visionaries to fully share their revelations, whether as a result of the limitations of human language, the incomprehension of men or fear of condemnation. In Jeanne-Marie's first vision, Saint Yves Hélorcy (canonised in 1347) told her that "if you are willing to abandon the world, you will taste here on earth the joys of Heaven."<sup>15</sup> After this she entered a state of ecstasy during which she was transported to paradise. From this point on, Jeanne-Marie lived a penitential life, dividing her time between prayer, assisting the poor and the ill, and diligent visiting of sanctuaries. In 1386, after twenty-three years of penitential life, she moved into a cell next to the Franciscan convent of Tours and Brother Martin of Boisgaultier became her confessor as well as her hagiographer.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," 292.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>13</sup> Thérèse Griguer, "La sainteté en Touraine au XVe siècle (La vie et le procès de canonisation de Jeanne-Marie de Maillé)," *Annales de Bretagne et des pays de l'Ouest* 91, 1 (1984), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Anne Mériaux, "The Medieval Prophecy in the French Kingdom: Divine Light and Human Darkness," *Chronos - Revue d'Histoire de L'Université de Balamand* 32 (2015), 168.

<sup>15</sup> "De venerabili vidua ac virgine Maria de Mailliaco, domina de Seilleyo-Guilielmi, Turonibus in Gallia," in *Acta Sanctorum* (Paris: Victorem Palme, 1865), 735.

<sup>16</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 207-08.

After hearing from a divine voice, it was Jeanne-Marie's obedience and leading a penitential and holy life that proved to contemporary clerics her divine authority and legitimacy as a holy woman. Her subsequent actions after hearing the audible divine voice were the evidence of the divine authority she had been given. However, Jeanne-Marie did not attempt to interfere in politics or the Schism. Her only prophecy regarding the Schism was in 1396, when she prophesied that the imminent advent of a Franciscan pope would put an end to the Schism. This was seen by supporters to be realised in the election of Alexander V by the Council of Pisa, which earned Jeanne-Marie local veneration as a saint. However, Alexander V only ruled for eight months and the Schism did not actually end until Martin V was elected in 1417.<sup>17</sup> Even so, Jeanne-Marie's *vita* provides historians with an example of how women who heard from God through a divine voice could claim divine authority. It was particularly important that these women also submitted themselves and their visions to clerical authority to legitimise their claims to divine authority.

### **Prophecy and Teaching**

While there were varying types of messages received by women from the divine voice, one of the most important was that of prophecy. During the Schism, prophecy took on a more prominent role in holy women's authority. The connection between prophecy and divine authority in this period is clear when it came to visionaries being given permission to publicly preach or teach. As Jantzen notes, "a person who was acknowledged to have direct access to God would be in a position to challenge any form of authority, whether doctrinal or political, which she saw as incompatible with the divine will."<sup>18</sup> There was a lot of contemporary debate surrounding women preaching and teaching in the medieval Church. Female mystics and visionaries had to deal with authority for writing and speaking in ways that men did not. For men, legitimacy came from theological education and clerical status – both paths unavailable to women. The roles of authority for women were carefully circumscribed, and it was only possible for women to be presented as models of sanctity if they adhered to strict traditions. These had not originally included the role of teacher, but this began to change with the new mysticism of the thirteenth century. Clare of Assisi (d.1253), Angela Foligno (d.1309), and Catherine of Siena were examples of mystical teaching models.

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<sup>17</sup> Mériaux, "The Medieval Prophecy in the French Kingdom: Divine Light and Human Darkness," 160.

<sup>18</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 1.

Recognition of women's teaching authority required the construction of new models of acceptable female holiness.<sup>19</sup> Thirteenth-century hagiographical tradition credited Mary Magdalene and Saint Catherine of Alexandria with evangelising roles, which gave legitimacy to this new teaching tradition. Mary Magdalene was reported to have preached to defend the faith. This legend began circulating in the twelfth century when Mary's cult was vigorously promoted. Similarly, the medieval *vita* of Catherine of Alexandria claimed she out-argued fifty pagan philosophers who were trying to dispute Christianity.<sup>20</sup> The visionaries who shared their revelations, both through writing and through oration, assumed the role of teacher and advisor, whether to those around them or to the highest reaches of ecclesiastical authority.

However, medieval scholars argued that examples like Mary and Catherine were to be revered, not imitated. Thomas Aquinas argued that because of the Fall, women were submissive to men and therefore lacked authority over Christian souls to preach. Gifts of the spirit had to be used for the common benefit, but sex governed how one employed a teaching gift. Prophecy transcended gender because it explained any revelations as miraculous. Therefore, biblical prophets, Aquinas argued, were not precedents for female preaching.<sup>21</sup> Yet some women, such as Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179), Rose of Viterbo (d.1252), and Umiltà of Faenza (d.1310), were affirmed as having the gift of prophecy to legitimise their preaching in the medieval period. Moreover, as we shall see, some of the women considered in this thesis utilised the authority that came with their prophetic gifts to directly counsel and condemn not only the ecclesiastical hierarchy but the Church's political allies and enemies as well.

Though it was uncommon for women to be allowed to preach and teach, as noted above there were exceptions. Catherine of Siena was a clear example contemporary with our case studies. Catherine travelled around Italy and southern France as a female apostle, preaching peace and salvation with the pope's blessing. She was a lay consultant to ecclesiastics, and campaigned for crusades, an end to the war with Italian states, and reform in the Church.<sup>22</sup> Catherine described how in a vision, God "placed the cross on my shoulder and put the olive

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<sup>19</sup> Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism - 1200-1350*, ed. Bernard McGinn, vol. III, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 145.

<sup>20</sup> Alcuin Blamires, "Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints' Lives," *Viator* 26 (1995), 143-44.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>22</sup> Karen Scott, "Urban Spaces, Women's Networks, and the Lay Apostolate in the Siena of Catherine Benincasa," in *Creative Women in Medieval and Early Modern Italy: A Religious and Artistic Renaissance*, ed. John Coakley and E. Ann Matter (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1994), 105.

branch in my hand, as if he wanted me (and so he told me) to carry it to the Christians and unbelievers alike. And he said to me: ‘Tell them, “I am bringing you news of great joy”.’”<sup>23</sup> The cross symbolised sharing Jesus’ mission of bringing salvation to the world, while the olive branch was a sign that she must preach peace to Christendom. She was told to carry these things to the people, like the angel who announced the “great joy” of Jesus’ birth.<sup>24</sup> In other words, to spread this message, God was telling her she must travel and thus to break with social conventions. God, as the source of all legitimacy and authority, could allow anyone, even female visionaries, to do things which the Church, papacy, and society considered inappropriate. Even so, when their divine authority was recognised by the Church, female visionaries such as Catherine of Siena did sometimes get the approval of the Church or pope to carry out their divine missions.

Catherine formed close ties with Gregory XI after Birgitta of Sweden died in 1373. These ties enabled Catherine to pursue her mission as an apostle. Gregory gave Catherine permission to preach in Siena, which was unique for a woman of that era.<sup>25</sup> This was more than ‘teaching’: in principle, Catherine had the right to preach across Italy. Modern scholarship’s reluctance to term the public teaching by women as preaching has diminished the experiences of women such as Catherine who were officially sanctioned to preach. This has led to a playing-down of women who did actually preach in this period. Catherine capitalised on the precedent set by Birgitta of Sweden of a female visionary advising the papacy, and thus her authority as God’s messenger was accepted by the Church hierarchy.

Catherine’s positive relationship with the papacy continued under Urban VI before and during the Schism, allowing her to continue her public role. In fact, in her *vita*, Raymond of Capua detailed a prophecy Catherine gave in which she predicted the coming Schism. In 1375, Catherine comforted Raymond over a revolt in the city of Perugia, telling him that he “will have plenty to cry about later. Today’s news is milk and honey compared to what is going to happen in time to come.” When Raymond asked her if she meant that the clergy would revolt against the Roman pontiff, she replied that there will be “a universal scandal... not exactly a heresy, but something like a heresy which will mean a cleavage in the Church and throughout

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<sup>23</sup> Letter T219 to Raymond and others in his company, April 1376, Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanna Noffke, vol. 2 (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2001), 92.

<sup>24</sup> Luke 2:8-14.

<sup>25</sup> Karen Scott, “» Io Catarina «: Ecclesiastical Politics and Oral Culture in the Letters of Catherine of Siena,” in *Dear Sister: Medieval Women and the Epistolary Genre*, ed. Karen Cherewatuk and Ulrike Wiethaus (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 88.

Christendom.” Raymond later realised when the Schism began that it was the cleavage that Catherine had been referring to.<sup>26</sup> During this period of division, Catherine’s vocal support was beneficial to Urban as a proven intermediary between God and the Church, and staunch supporter of the ecclesiastical hierarchy. In return, Catherine maintained the authority she had gained and she continued to influence issues in the Church, while also travelling and preaching. Urban called Catherine to Rome in 1378 to help him reunite the Church. Her letters regarding the Schism are self-assured and strongly worded, and she regularly included snippets of visions as support for her arguments. Hence, Catherine of Siena’s example makes it evident that visionary activity, particularly prophecies, around the time of the Schism allowed not just men to travel and preach, but in rare occurrences women too.

However, the relationship between the Church and prophets became more fraught during the Schism. Vauchez claims that the generation of prophets in the years 1385-1400 seemed to show less respect for the hierarchy than those before them.<sup>27</sup> This was in part because of the more direct and condemning nature of their prophecies. As Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli observed:

The prophetic wave of the Avignonese era presents new and totally different characteristics, because it places itself directly in a polemic with the great political and ecclesiastical powers of the time and implies, on the part of these women, the conscious assumption of the role of a historic and spiritual guide of Christianity.<sup>28</sup>

Female prophecy was most prolific in the first two decades of the Schism. Earlier visionaries such as Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden had already set the tone for female prophets during the Schism. Despite what Vauchez claims, though, these saints did adopt threatening tones towards the hierarchy. Some of Catherine of Siena’s letters harshly warn and condemn political and ecclesiastical leaders. The call for a crusade, cessation of warfare, and the need to reform the Church are evident in the revelations of both generations of prophets. It was perhaps the greater sense of urgency for the unification of Christendom and an end to the Schism that

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<sup>26</sup> Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Conleth Kearns (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1980), 264-65.

<sup>27</sup> André Vauchez, “Les pouvoirs informels dans l’Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques,” *Mélanges de l’école française de Rome* 96, no. 1 (1984), 285.

<sup>28</sup> Alessandra Bartolomei Romagnoli, “Mistica, profezia femminile e poteri alla fine del Medioevo” (Il ‘Liber’ di Angela da Foligno e la mistica dei secoli XIII-XIV in rapporto alle nuove culture: Atti del XLV Convegno internazionale (Todi, 12-15 Ottobre 2008), Centro Italiano di Studi Sull’alto Medioevo, Spoleto, 2009); Trans. in Esther Cohen, “Holy Women as Spokeswomen for Peace in Late Medieval Europe,” in *Religion and Peace* (Routledge, 2017), 132.

made the later prophets stand out from their predecessors. So too did the more hostile reactions to them. These later prophets were not content to write and publish their visions like their twelfth-century predecessors. Instead, they considered it their duty to intervene publicly in contemporary politics.<sup>29</sup>

Notably, prophets seem to fade into the background once the conciliar movement gained momentum near the end of the Schism. It is not clear if this was because prophets were silenced by the councils, or that the need to reunite the Church was back in the hands of theologians and no longer in those of prophets, or that there was just less of a need for prophets as there was less anxiety about the fate of the Church. The conciliar period did see one further female prophet, though – Francesca Bussa (d.1440). Though she did not spend a significant portion of her life involved in politics, she was concerned with the state of Rome and feared the outbreak of another Schism enough to try to advise the pope to be flexible in face of the Council of Basel.<sup>30</sup> The end of the conciliar movement also did not see the end of political female visionaries, though they were sent back to their ranks for a while. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the inspired word was again readmitted into the Church with a place of honour, with the likes of Teresa of Ávila (d.1582), Jeanne of Chantal (d.1641), and Marguerite-Marie Alacoque (d.1690).<sup>31</sup>

### **Bridal Mysticism**

While some women claimed authority through their prophetic messages, many female visionaries who claimed special access to the divine portrayed their relationship with God as a mystical marriage. Catherine of Siena revealed just such an intimate relationship between herself and God as a source of her authority in her letters and book, *The Dialogue*. Catherine called Christ her Bridegroom and used bridal imagery to convey the intimacy with which she was bonded to the divine.<sup>32</sup> Her confessor, Raymond of Capua, also described Catherine's mystical marriage to God as an exchange of a gold ring with a diamond and four pearls, placed on her right hand and visible only to her. The four pearls, Raymond claimed, were symbols of the fourfold purity in Catherine's heart.<sup>33</sup> This use of bridal imagery in conveying the

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<sup>29</sup> Cohen, "Holy Women as Spokeswomen for Peace in Late Medieval Europe," 140.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 139-40.

<sup>31</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 252-3.

<sup>32</sup> Letter T371 to Raymond, 15 Feb 1380, Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanna Noffke, vol. 4 (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2008), 362.

<sup>33</sup> Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 107.

visionary's special relationship with the divine was a common medieval convention. By claiming to be Christ's bride, the emotional intimacy of such a relationship justified why women were told God's secrets. A divine marriage gave Catherine the authority to carry out God's mission to speak, share her revelations, and have a public role in politics and society.

### **The Call to Write**

Having established that a holy woman had a special relationship with the divine, the problem arose as to how God's messages received by her should be shared. The recorded revelations of visionaries often began with a "call to write" from God. The more female visionaries could minimise their human agency, the more effective the portrayal that their writings were the result of divine will.<sup>34</sup> For Ursulina of Parma (1375-c.1408), a laywoman who lived between the Avignon-loyal French Kingdom and Italian city states loyal to the Roman pope, this divine command to have her revelations recorded came at the age of fifteen.<sup>35</sup> Later, on Easter 1393, the voice of God told Ursulina to prepare for a journey to Avignon to confront Clement VII. Ursulina was a strong Roman papacy supporter. According to her *vita*, Ursulina spoke with Clement at length, so terrifying the prelate that he refused to see her again. Her *vita* was written over sixty years after her death by Simone Znacchi at the request of the nuns at San Quintino, as they wanted to use the text to promote Ursulina's cult; the call to write was one of the hagiographical topoi employed by Znacchi to legitimise Ursulina's actions and establish the cult in her name. Catherine of Siena, who also received the "call to write", was canonised in 1461, around eleven years before Znacchi penned the *vita*, and the influence of Catherine's example over the framing of Ursulina's life is evident. However, unlike Catherine of Siena, the role of Ursulina's visions in her *vita* are significantly downplayed, highlighting the problematic nature of visions as a source of authority.

Furthermore, some women also included a divine call to their scribe, which served to validate the writing even more, authorising the scribe as fit to transmit the divine word from the visionary to their audience. We will see this in the chapter on Constance de Rabastens. This validation went both ways, as scribes were often clerics, and able to check orthodoxy and claim

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<sup>34</sup> Rosalynn Voaden, "God's Almighty Hand: Women Co-Writing the Book," in *Women, the Book and the Godly. Selected Proceedings of the St Hilda's Conference, 1993*, ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 60.

<sup>35</sup> Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Bruce L. Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism: The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens by Raymond de Sabanac and Life of the Blessed Ursulina of Parma by Simone Znacchi*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Bruce L. Venarde (Arizona: ACMRS Press, 2010), 12.

ecclesiastical authority through the discernment of spirits. It was also important that female visionaries lived in obedience to a spiritual director, who was often involved in the writing process. His approval was often incorporated into the women's writings, such as for Mechthild of Magdeburg (d.c.1282), Hildegard of Bingen (d.1179), and Margery Kempe (d.1438).<sup>36</sup>

### **Humility and Modesty**

Just as the call to write was a way to minimise women's human agency, key to a holy woman's acceptance by her peers was clear evidence of her humility and modesty. As recent feminist scholarship has shown, humility could be empowering for women as an authorising topos.<sup>37</sup> A holy woman could not be seen as seeking out these special experiences or favour from God. Holy women, more so than men, spoke of themselves as conduits of God's grace, deriving from Him their authority to speak out, instruct and advise. This "assumed modesty" topos was used to put listeners in a favourable and attentive state of mind. Because women were traditionally associated with weakness and illiteracy, they were able to bring an authenticity to fulfilling the topos that educated men could not. It was a powerful validator of truth in women's writing. Acknowledging their weakness as women had authoritative precedents in the learned tradition, because they were acknowledging that which was regarded as objectively true.<sup>38</sup> A mystic's use of the topos of writing under compulsion in part seems to be related to their consciousness of the inadequacy of language to express what they saw, felt, and understood in their visionary experiences. The 'poor little woman' topos could force audiences to interpret and act upon the message themselves.<sup>39</sup> The call to write also enabled the women to defend their humility while having the presumption to write.

Women received and passed on their visions in significantly different ways. Some watched their visions as an uninvolved spectator. Others were an active participant, completely immersed in the action. Others still were somewhere in between the two, not so captivated by the action that they forgot themselves but involved enough that they could converse with God or others in the visions. Sometimes women had a mix, such as we shall see with Marie Robine;

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<sup>36</sup> Voaden, "God's Almighty Hand: Women Co-Writing the Book," 62-4.

<sup>37</sup> Michelle Voss Roberts, "Retrieving Humility: Rhetoric, Authority, and Divinization in Mechthild of Magdeburg," *Feminist Theology* 18, no. 1 (2009); Damien Boquet, *Sainte vergogne: Les privilèges de la honte dans l'hagiographie féminine au XIIIe siècle*, Polen-pouvoirs, lettres, normes, 2490-8460 ; 18, (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2020).

<sup>38</sup> Kate Greenspan, "Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography," in *Gender and Text in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1996), 221.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

in some visions she observed and in others she was actively involved. This also meant that there were differences in the ways holy women claimed authority through their visions. The “modesty formula” which likened them to Mary, mother of Jesus, has been well documented. By claiming divine authority and affirming their unworthiness, they could bypass the expected routes of authority such as theological education. It emphasised their role as a passive vessel, who must have been speaking God’s words as she was not educated enough to make such visions up herself. Authority through modesty and humility could be claimed in various ways by women, but again not without difficulty. Modesty and humility had to be emphasised to reassure audiences that these women were not striving to have a special relationship with God, but that their visions were a divine gift that they did not deserve or seek. If visions were divine gifts, then women could suitably be deemed passive vessels.

### **Overcoming the Body**

Having accepted women’s inherent weakness based on theological arguments, holy women needed to conquer their female bodies to explain their worthiness to hear from God. There were clear gender differences regarding the hagiographical tradition of physical asceticism and overcoming the physical body. The medieval identification of women with the sinful body meant that their sanctification had to occur in and through that body. More and more as fears of heresy progressed, outward signs were necessary to prove the validity of visionary experiences to gain authority, because the body was the site of both sinfulness and holiness.<sup>40</sup> Thus, while there was the potential to redeem oneself, this was more difficult for women, though, at the same time, more rewarding. Accounts of intense ascetic activities in women’s mystical texts before the fourteenth century are extremely rare. Bodily asceticism appears more frequently in the fourteenth century when béguines and other women religious were increasingly being persecuted and viewed with suspicion. Expectations for extreme asceticism are found in accounts of early béguines and trial records after the Council of Vienne (1311-1312). Notably, they are more commonly seen in hagiographical texts than in the women’s own accounts. Women were noted to starve themselves, survive only on the Eucharist, beat their bodies, wear irritating clothing, and overcome sexual temptations.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Amy Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, & Meister Eckhart* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), 182.

<sup>41</sup> On the religious significance of fasting for holy women, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

Proving total control over one's body and the sinfulness of the flesh was demonstrated by holy women in various ways. This could be by the way they conducted their lives but also by the suffering they experienced as a direct result of their ecstasies. Many visionaries experienced severe torture and beatings by demons while in an ecstatic state; this was the case for Catherine of Siena and, as we shall see, Marie Robine and Ermine de Reims. Moreover, divine possession in mystics and visionaries was seen as possession of the spirit, and the spirit's association with nearly every aspect of human physiology meant that it could be used to explain a wide variety of physical symptoms. However, the external 'symptoms' of feminine mysticism and demonic possession were regarded as quite similar. Though demonic spirits did not enter the heart, they tempted and confused the soul by controlling the bodily senses and relaying false information to the soul.<sup>42</sup> This meant that discerning whether a visionary was possessed by a divine or demonic spirit could not be based on external behaviours alone. However, saints were expected to be calm and controlled, while demoniacs either displayed signs of physical upheaval or dissociative behaviour. Thus, external "calm" behaviour was a sign of divine possession. As this increasingly became the symbol of holiness in the late medieval period, traditional aspects of female mysticism, such as ecstatic trances, somatic miracles, and severe asceticism, were devalued. Thus, the discernment of spirits became the discernment of bodies, and the female body, more than the male, was increasingly suspected of being a potential habitation for demons.<sup>43</sup>

### **The Role of the Confessor and Issues with Sources**

Women and their portrayal were vulnerable when male contemporaries (usually their confessor) were recording their visions or *vitae*. Confessors played an important role in the reception of their visionaries because they were often the intermediaries that connected these women to significant rulers and the Church, shared their recorded letters and visions, and discerned the validity of their divine authority. Mooney argues that the differences in experiences between holy men and women are highlighted by the vast common heritage shared by female saints and their male interpreters:

they typically occupied the same geographical space and chronological time; they were devout Christians, most were members of religious orders, many evincing similar rules

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<sup>42</sup> Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe," 284.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

and spiritualities; they heard much the same by way of biblical interpretations, liturgical celebrations, sermons, and pious literature; they imbibed together the same cultural messages regarding masculinity, femininity, and the proper roles for each sex regarding leadership, oral and written expression, and the pursuit of holiness. The very vastness of the common ground they shared and the fact that no absolute dichotomies can be drawn between women and men make the marked differences between them all the more striking.<sup>44</sup>

While the mother language of the saints and their interpreters may have been the same, their accents most certainly were not. Where women do appear to speak for themselves, they often speak of themselves in much more active and assertive terms than do their male promoters. For example, though Hildegard of Bingen considered herself to be God's prophet, Gottfried of Disibodenberg remodelled her as an aristocratic abbess and foundress, and Thiofrid of Echternach portrayed Hildegard as a mystical bride. Catherine of Siena presented herself as an assertive and self-assured apostle, while Raymond of Capua emphasised her mystical marriage and divine obedience.

Modern scholars have attempted to compare the voices of holy women in their own individually authored texts with the voices of men who admired them and wrote about them. They have also tried to distinguish between women's and men's voices in collaboratively authored texts by saints and their admirers; and to search for traces of women's experiences preserved within male-authored texts discussing the women. Mooney queries whether the voices one hears in these contemporary texts are gendered, and the extent to which women's and men's separate ideas and experiences of sanctity are influenced and distinguished from each other in the texts.<sup>45</sup> Hagiographical texts that chronicle the lives of holy women range widely in genre, from inquisitorial records, theological treatises, and papal bulls, to letters, visionary tracts, prayers, and poetry. The varying purposes of the distinct genre of writing influence the representations of sanctity propagated within the texts.<sup>46</sup>

While male-authored texts regarding male saints reveal clearly men's thinking about male sanctity (whether or not the male saint would have always agreed with his hagiographer's representation of him), in male-authored texts of female saints the disparity between men's and

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<sup>44</sup> Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

women's concepts of gendered types of sanctity is clearer. The misogynistic and patriarchal cast of medieval society has made some scholars sceptical that such texts can reveal ideas on sanctity from the females themselves. However, these sources can be reinterpreted to better understand how the gender of a medieval author influences the ways in which they either self-represent or represent others. By using the texts that women themselves wrote, one can discern the ways in which women's self-representations diverged from those of their male contemporaries.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, understanding the relationship between the female subject and her male author reveals the dynamics driving male authorial representations of medieval holy women.

Male hagiographers were wont to see their female subjects as mysterious and otherworldly, yet they were more likely to diminish or omit their subjects' activities in this world. This could have stemmed from fear of offending the Church or from the public's opposition to feminine assertiveness. The male hagiographer's own agenda could also have played a part, including unconsidered assumptions about women and female sanctity or their own self-interest. The "otherness" of visionary women included their proximity to the supernatural, a holy intimacy these men felt incapable of imitating. The focus of Raymond of Capua on Catherine of Siena's mystical experiences as a subject in and of itself, rather than Catherine's positioning of them in the context of her role as an apostle, reveals the fascination these men had for these unattainable otherworldly experiences.<sup>48</sup> Other hagiographers had different agendas. Simone Zancchi, who wrote Ursulina of Parma's *vita*, downplays the significance of her visionary experiences while emphasising instead her pious lifestyle as a role model for other holy women.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the priorities and agenda of the hagiographer greatly influenced what was recorded regarding their subject.

Furthermore, male manipulation of female texts and saintly portrayals continued long after the women themselves died. Guibert of Gembloux's promotion of Hildegard of Bingen's cult and establishment as mother of mystics, and Gebeno of Eberbach's widely read selected anthology of Hildegard's writing, arguably did more to keep Hildegard's public persona alive in the late-medieval period than the reading of her own writings. Similarly, representation of male-female relationships, such as that between Clare and Francis of Assisi, are often over-

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>49</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 19.

emphasised or downplayed depending on the author's agenda.<sup>50</sup> It is clear from comparisons between women's vernacular writings and their Latin translations that the scribe often did not just simply translate these writings word for word. The Dutch treatise of Beatrice of Nazareth (d.1268) can be compared to the Latin "translation" of her hagiographer to show how fancifully he embellished and transformed her text.<sup>51</sup> How many more texts for which we only have a translated version have been embellished, or made more orthodox, or otherwise significantly altered from the voice of the female who wrote or dictated them? This is a particularly pertinent question given that the visions recorded for Marie and Constance considered in this thesis do not survive in their original vernacular language. Moreover, none of the case studies recorded their own visions; they were all documented by male clergy. This practice of liberal editing was common in the medieval period and needs to be considered when utilising visionary texts.

In considering the common patterns and themes in the portrayals of female sanctity across the medieval period, whether texts were authored by men or women, most texts regarding women bear the indisputable signs of men's controlling influence. Many women's stories would never have been recorded, much less survived the centuries, had they not been sanctioned by the male clerical elite. Some women depended on male clerics for a sense of self-confidence as writers or dictating authors. Vernacular accounts dictated by these women often reach us not in the vernacular but in the learned Latin of their male scribes, confessors, and promoters. These men gave such women a 'home of literacy', a home which was often strange or foreign to them but helped them answer the 'call to write' from God.<sup>52</sup> Most clerical writers, even when they claimed not to be, were much more than simple scribes and translators as we shall see in the coming chapters.

Questions of authorship and attribution surround any primary text from this period, not least the extent to which it has been altered by the scribe or editor of the surviving translation. Female-authored (or dictated) texts, notably when they include controversial visions, are especially problematic. The previously held assumption that literary works by religious women were exceptional has been replaced by the recognition that these women formed their own class and that both male and female authors captured these women's exceptionality, be that visionary experience, prophetic power, or even administrative ability.<sup>53</sup> Modern scholarship has

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<sup>50</sup> Mooney, "Voice, Gender, and the Portrayal of Sanctity," 9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>53</sup> Greenspan, "Autohagiography and Medieval Women's Spiritual Autobiography," 317.

recognised that their literary works were previously misconceived as exceptional, and that these works can instead be considered as more representative of the sex or culture of the authors. Thus, recordings of visions regarding the Schism are not just 'exceptional' texts but can in fact reveal laywomen's awareness of the political climate and their fears for the Church, as well as show the active roles women could play in the ecclesiastical environment.

However, scholarship has been divided into two camps regarding the veracity of texts significantly altered or edited by their scribes, and their arguments apply to hagiographical texts of women as well. Siegfried Ringler emphasises that the genre of a text significantly alters the way it should be interpreted.<sup>54</sup> Historians must consider what the conventions of the genre are, and to what specific end the text was written. Thus:

what determines what is narrated about a holy person is not whether it actually occurred, but rather whether it is part of the genre to which the text belongs and whether it helps the text achieve the purpose for which it is written.<sup>55</sup>

Since texts on the lives of holy people are not primarily written to impart information about their subjects but to exemplify holiness and edification, the content is determined with this in mind. Hence, "one can only talk about the text and not about the kind of experience upon which it is based."<sup>56</sup> On the other side of the debate, Peter Dinzelbacher argues that writings of holy lives, visions, and miracles, are reflections of actual experiences and events, if not always entirely accurate.<sup>57</sup> One should not consider hagiographers as insincere or dishonest; more that their reverence for the saints conditioned what they saw as relevant testimony, and their predisposition to the saints could colour their recollection. Thus, fiction and legend naturally crept into the narration of holy lives.<sup>58</sup> Frank Tobin argues for a middle ground, where one must consider that the different genres of writing may yield results for connection to historical events differently, but that one must also not discount altogether the possibility of drawing historical

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<sup>54</sup> Siegfried Ringler, *Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur in Frauenklöstern des Mittelalters: Quellen und Studien* (Artemis Verlag, 1980); Siegfried Ringler, "Die Rezeption mittel-alterlicher Frauenmystik als wissenschaftliches Problem, dargestellt am Werk der Christine Ebner," in *Frauenmystik im Mittelalter*, ed. Peter Dinzelbacher and Dieter R. Bauer (Schwabenverlag: Ostfildern bei Stuttgart, 1985), 178-200.

<sup>55</sup> Frank Tobin, "Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel. Was the *Vita* a Cooperative Effort?," in *Gendered Voices. Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 126.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>57</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981); Peter Dinzelbacher, review of Ringler, S., "Viten- und Offenbarungsliteratur", *Anzeiger für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 93 (1982), 63-71; Peter Dinzelbacher, "Zur Interpretation erlebnismystischer Texte des Mittelalters," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 117 (1988), 1-23.

<sup>58</sup> Tobin, "Henry Suso and Elsbeth Stagel. Was the *Vita* a Cooperative Effort?," 127.

truths from medieval texts.<sup>59</sup> These issues will be considered when analysing the visionary tracts of the case studies in this thesis.

### **Expectations for Male Visionaries**

There were certainly differences between how holy women and holy men claimed authority during the medieval period. As we have seen, women claimed a form of ‘informal power’ through their assertion of many forms and expressions of divine authority. The informal powers of advice and insight deriving from supernatural visions were based on the authority of an individual charisma, a gift bestowed directly on individuals by the Spirit. Max Weber argued that this divine or extraordinary gift of charisma is the basis of extraordinary people being treated as a leader or given some position of authority and that it is not limited by gender.<sup>60</sup> Where bureaucratic authority is rational, bound to intellectually analysable rules, charismatic authority does not recognise positions of power being gifted by virtue of possession of property or position. The only basis for charismatic authority is that it is proved and accepted within a community. Charisma, in traditionalist periods, is a revolutionary force.<sup>61</sup> Thus, for our purposes, visionary women (or men) claiming authority based on a divine gift was in direct contrast to clerical men who claimed ‘institutional power’ from the exercise of a function of the hierarchic type or from the appearance of a privileged status.<sup>62</sup> For clerical men, legitimacy and authority rested on their offices, given to them by the institution. However, this definition is complicated by the fact that the offices of the Church, and the Church itself, were considered to be charisms, gifts of the Spirit. A priest's power was thereby institutional, in the sense that it derived from his office in the Church; however, it was no less ‘charismatic’ in the medieval (non-Weberian) sense of manifesting a spiritual gift, than was the informal power granted to prophets or visionaries. The medieval priest possessed the spiritual authority to perform the miracle of the sacrament and to exorcise demons.<sup>63</sup> In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul speaks of both spiritual gifts and of incipient offices. Thus, both informal and formal forms of power were

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>60</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society - An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, vol. I, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (California: University of California Press, 1978), 241.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 244-45.

<sup>62</sup> Vauchez, “Les pouvoirs informels dans l'Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques,” 281.

<sup>63</sup> Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*, 23-24.

gifts from the divine. In theory, this ambiguity opened a small door for female visionaries to possibly claim the same kind of ‘charism’ as a priest, although it was much more contentious.<sup>64</sup>

However, informal divine authority was harder to prove than the formal kind recognised and appointed by the Church. Thus, how men and women tended to claim authority was different. Male visionaries did not tend to emphasise a divine authority gifted to them through their visions, at least not as often as women did. Instead, they tended to emphasise their formal or institutional power. This tendency is evident in the case of Jean de Varennes (c.1340-c.1396), who is linked to Ermine de Reims (see chapter 5). Jean was a law professor at the University of Angers, then auditor of rote in Avignon in 1380. At the pontifical court, Jean was the papal official and chaplain of the young cardinal Pierre de Luxembourg.<sup>65</sup> Jean accumulated numerous ecclesiastical benefits as well as a significant income, and he was on the verge of becoming a bishop or cardinal when he had a vision of God commanding him to leave the Curia in May 1392. Jean chose to live as a hermit in Saint-Lié and was venerated by the locals who flocked to him to hear his preaching and receive miracles of healing.

Jean did not overtly claim that his visions or sermons came directly from God, and so he did not embody the typical passive vessel that many female visionaries adopted to claim divine authority. Also, as an educated, ex-clerical male, it would have been difficult to convince his readers that he was passive in his messages. He did mention some divine revelations, and that God called him to preach like Moses on Mount Sinai.<sup>66</sup> However, Jean did not continually emphasise being sent by God for the purpose of sharing God’s message, as female visionaries did. He did not target ecclesiastical and secular rulers with his messages, but instead focused on the laity. He also did not emphasise his passivity or reluctance to be used by God. Nor did he claim divine literacy, as he had been well-educated at university. It is not even clear if Jean recorded his visionary experiences in detail, as only his more reasoned writings survive. Instead of relying on his visions as the evidence of his divine authority, Jean is a clear example of how

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<sup>64</sup> The term ‘charisma’ is problematic when considering the medieval period, as it is a relatively modern term. Exploring this term fully and how it may or may not apply to medieval visionaries is outside the scope of this thesis. For more discussion on ‘charisma’, see Weber, *Economy and Society - An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, I.; Andrew D. McCulloch, *Charisma and Patronage. Reasoning with Max Weber* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak and Martha Dana Rust, *Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West*, Explorations in Medieval Culture, (Leiden: Brill, 2018); Tim Weitzel, “Charisma in Relation: Peter the Hermit and the Ecclesiastic Hierarchy,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 12, no. 2 (2019).

<sup>65</sup> André Vauchez, “Un réformateur religieux dans la France de Charles VI: Jean de Varennes (+1396?),” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 142, 4 (1998), 1112.

<sup>66</sup> André Vauchez, “Visionnaires et prophètes dans la France des XIIIe-XVe siècles,” in *Histoire du christianisme en France*, ed. Alan Tallon & Catherine Vincent (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014), 190.

male visionaries tended to depend on their clerical status and theological education as evidence of their spiritual authority. After he gave up his formal authority by leaving the Curia, Jean became a target for the Church once his preaching started to disagree with the Avignon papacy. No longer having an official role in the Church and failing to justify his views using his divine visions as a source of divine authority, Jean was imprisoned and likely died while in custody.<sup>67</sup>

As we saw for Jean de Varennes, much of a male visionary's authority came from his theological education and knowledge. The content of his visions was often based heavily on scripture, rather than deriving from a special relationship with God. As we saw in the previous chapter, the term 'mystic' was associated with early Christian writers who spoke of the 'mystical meaning of scripture', and this usage of 'mystical' continued throughout the medieval period. Such an emphasis on scripture consolidated male and clerical appropriation of spirituality and mysticism, as study of the scriptures was inaccessible to women and to many men.<sup>68</sup> The relatively few men who could also understand the hidden, mystical meaning in those texts that were revealed through visionary experiences were, thus, powerful indeed. This focus on scripture and interpretation remained throughout the medieval period. While men could use interpreting scripture and commenting on its mystical meaning as ways to assume authority, women who felt called by God to teach or write were obliged to find a source of authority other than scriptural commentary. Understanding the spiritual meaning of scripture required purity of heart, which generally necessitated severe discipline of the body.<sup>69</sup> As noted above, because of their closer link to the flesh, women were less likely to be able to perceive the mystical meaning of scripture. Thus, education was deemed to be wasted on women and their restriction from it was justified. Ultimately, once a rational mind had achieved perfect knowledge and was sufficiently purified, it proceeded to contemplation and an immediate knowledge of God. This was equated with women's experiences of union with the divine.<sup>70</sup> This was a key difference between the visionary experiences of men and women, and the role visions played in the attaining of authority.

Some male visionaries did claim divine authority that was at least in part credited to their visions. One example was Fr. Pedro of Aragon (1305-1381), a contemporary of Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden. Pedro actively engaged in Schism politics, basing his authority to do so on a combination of his familial connections, visionary activity, scriptural knowledge,

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<sup>67</sup> Vauchez, "Un réformateur religieux," 1116.

<sup>68</sup> Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, 59.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

and divine authority as a religious.<sup>71</sup> However, despite his clerical status, his visions were also called into question. Visions, whether they were claimed by men or women, were likely to face hostile inquiry because of the conditions of the Schism. Even possession of authority through religious office as a monk or priest did not make visions exempt from this scrutiny. Hence, it was not just that female visionaries were female that meant they attracted negative attention. Like female visionaries, Pedro underwent an inquiry into his orthodoxy following the procedure of the discernment of spirits. In 1365, Pedro's visions were vetted regarding the papacy's move to Rome. They were vetted again in 1380 and were found to be "unproblematically orthodox".<sup>72</sup> In so far as visions played a central part in his life, Pedro was perhaps the male visionary most similar to the female visionaries to be considered in this thesis. The many repetitions of God's word being "revealed" and of a "revelation" show Pedro's belief in his divine inspiration.<sup>73</sup> As we see with female visionaries, such visions are a direct communication from God to people in positions of power through the mouth of a privileged seer. Pedro also experienced commands to write to key political figures to share his revelations, and he won in a struggle against the devil who tried to stop him from writing.<sup>74</sup> Despite Pedro's official status, his revelations and the divine authority gifted from them were certainly dominant in guiding his political activity. Pedro's experiences more closely mirrored his female peers than most other male visionaries. However, the clear difference for Pedro was that his clerical status at least in part likely made acceptance of his visions as orthodox easier for those who were pro-Urbanists.

The politics of the Schism clearly skewed how the Church judged visionaries, whether the visionaries were male or female. Depending on the political leanings of his evaluators, Pedro was either seen as an inspired visionary or a deluded old man.<sup>75</sup> Pedro's pro-Urbanist visions on this pope's legitimacy could not be accepted by the Clementist contingent on the panel; though they conceded that Pedro lived a holy life, they rejected his visions.<sup>76</sup> Pedro's experience shows how even a well-connected saintly aristocrat with a reputation as a visionary over several decades was subjected to the scorn of Masters of Theology, not due to his own lack of holiness, but because his visions did not align with the political agenda of Aragon. Hence, claiming divine authority, whether it was through religious office or visionary activity or both, was not universally recognised during a period of such great division in the Church. This was the case

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<sup>71</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 39.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

for both men and women. Politics, not just gender, played a significant part in the reception of those who claimed divine authority; this needs to be taken into account when considering the fate of women like Constance de Rabastens, who supported the Roman pope in France.

Despite the fragility of basing divine authority on visions, some men still claimed prophetic knowledge and used it as evidence of their special relationship with the divine. The later medieval period saw a growth in prophecy and the multiplication of visionaries, and for men this was predominantly a clerical phenomenon. There were male clergy who performed miracles and to whom prophecies were attributed, and prelates would consult "men of God" with strong spiritual lives when making important decisions.<sup>77</sup> In France, there were the Dominicans Robert d'Uzès (d.1296) and Saint Vincent Ferrer (d.1419), and the Franciscan Jean de Roquetaillade (d.c.1370), to name a few key figures. Far from heterodox or encouraging rebellion against the Church, visionary prophecies immediately preceding and at the beginning of the Schism seemed to be a refuge for the evangelism which no longer had a place in ecclesiastical institutions, and to be an expression of reformism which sought the highest of the hierarchy to act. During such a time of disruption and uncertainty as the Schism, traditional sources of answers were not reliable in a divided Church; thus, the Church was more open to receiving prophecies from visionaries, including men.

The connection between prophecy and teaching, something that was fraught for women, was clear in examples of male clergy. However, prophecy itself was usually not the basis for their right to preach; this generally came from their clerical office. Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) was a Dominican friar and confessor to the Avignon pope. His connections to the Avignon papacy meant that he was involved closely with Schism politics, travelling to kings in Spain and France, and to Emperor Sigismund to try to persuade them to support Clement VII. Vincent suffered from a severe illness which his hagiographer claimed was caused by the stress of the Schism, and was cured by a vision sometime between 1396 and 1398.<sup>78</sup> Vincent left Avignon in 1399 after this brief visionary episode which called on him to travel as a preacher.<sup>79</sup> Vincent told Benedict XIII in a letter of 1412 that the vision from saints Dominic and Francis was about the coming of the Antichrist, and that his preaching mission was to move people to repentance.

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<sup>77</sup> Vauchez, "Les pouvoirs informels dans l'Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques," 281-82.

<sup>78</sup> Philip Daileader challenges the common perception that Vincent received the vision in 1398 in his monograph on Vincent's life. See Philip Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer, His World and Life: Religion and Society in Late Medieval Europe*, The New Middle Ages, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 37.

<sup>79</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 78-79.

Though in his initial treatise Vincent claimed that it was a serious obligation of a preacher to proclaim who was the true pope, his later preaching activity did not promote one pope over the other but instead focused on reform and repentance in the Church before the coming of the Antichrist.

Distancing himself from the Avignon papacy over the years after he left the papal court, it was finally in 1416 that Vincent publicly denounced Benedict XIII. His vision in 1398 effectively called him away from political involvement in the Schism, and he refused to have his prophetic and visionary powers enlisted for the support of the papacy.<sup>80</sup> This was the opposite experience of many female visionaries, whose visions were the very thing that pushed them into political activity and promotion of the papacy. Furthermore, as well as the vision, we are told that Vincent's "divinely issued apostolic legation" was also confirmed by many signs and by scriptural authority. Daileader notes that as Vincent had publicly written against those who claimed visionary basis for their knowledge in 1380, to have experienced such a revelation himself may have been traumatic.<sup>81</sup> Hence, Vincent avoided changing his stance on visionary authority (and the potential charge of hypocrisy) by legitimising himself using other methods such as his theological training and scriptural knowledge. As a man, it was not necessarily his claims of prophecy that authorised him to teach, but his theological and religious background.

By understanding how holiness was perceived in men and women in the late medieval period, the coming chapters will demonstrate how Marie Robine, Constance de Rabastens, and Ermine de Reims aligned or departed from these topoi, and how that affected their ability to claim and exercise their authority and agency as holy women. The expectations of holy women cannot be detached from the social environment in which the ideals were formed. Therefore, the next section will consider the social contexts and the reception of visionaries within the networks that they built.

### **Social Contexts and Networks**

For men, clerical office provided an institutional infrastructure on which to base their authority. However, this institutional basis was unavailable to women. Studies of holy women have shown that other social connections were more significant in strengthening their claims to legitimacy,

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>81</sup> Daileader, *Saint Vincent Ferrer, His World and Life: Religion and Society in Late Medieval Europe*, 37-38.

as in the case of Catherine of Siena and her *famiglia*. These relationships were often mutually beneficial; while the holy woman borrowed authority from her more powerful supporters, she also lent her spiritual authority to movements or religious houses who promoted her. This in turn raised the religious house's own standing in society. Though less official, these informal social networks could still promote a visionary to the status of holy woman, at times even through to canonisation. Vauchez's comprehensive survey of sainthood in the medieval period has shown that canonisations were four times less numerous during the Avignon papacy than the century prior.<sup>82</sup> However, the number of canonisations rose after the Schism as both Roman and Avignon popes elected saints who were close to their cause or their political allies. The number of canonisations during this period was a direct reflection of the weakened authority of the Church and its need for support.<sup>83</sup> Holy women whose divine visions revealed the "true" pope were spokeswomen for either the Avignon or Roman papacy. Local archbishops and bishops also promoted cults of 'saints' and the most successful of these lay saints were women, including Jeanne-Marie de Maillé and Catherine of Siena. Whether or not local or episcopal support translated into official canonisation depended on the popularity of the cult and its perceived political benefits. But whether successful or not, candidates for sainthood needed to conform to various criteria of sanctity that would prove their saintly credentials, as we have seen above.

The social class of a female visionary also played a part in the strength of her social network. Being of the nobility was an advantage to women in proving their saintly authority, because, as we saw above, the stereotype of a medieval holy woman was one of noble origins, who pursued poverty and asceticism, pious works, and had supernatural revelations. It was their rejection of the luxuries of noble life that emphasised their holiness. This is shown in the *vita* of Jeanne-Marie de Maillé, who was related to the French royal family. Jeanne-Marie donated the château of Roches-Saint-Quentin to the Carthusians of Liget and distributed her fortune to the poor and the Church. She chose to give away her wealth and live a penitential life.<sup>84</sup> The generosity she showed and hardships she endured by choice demonstrated her divine calling to her peers.

Furthermore, Jeanne-Marie's noble background gave her an advantage when it came to building a powerful network of supporters. Among her supporters were the count of the Marche

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<sup>82</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 61-2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>84</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 207-08.

and king of Hungary, Jerusalem and Sicily, the queen of Naples, the queen of Cyprus, and the duchess of Anjou. She even met with King Charles VI and Queen Isabeau of Bavaria, after she successfully prophesied about which gate of Tours the king would enter through. There were also a significant number of witnesses from the bourgeois, upper nobility, and clergy who testified in her favour at the inquest into her holiness in 1414.<sup>85</sup> Notably, many in this social network went on to support Joan of Arc as well. Hence, there is evidence of strong social networks in France which supported holy women and visionaries in particular. However, the case studies considered in this thesis were not of the nobility, and so forming a strong social network of supporters was much more difficult.

While men were overall more likely to be canonised in the medieval period, in the fourteenth century seventy-one percent of canonisation processes were for women. This figure slipped back thereafter, and the balance returned in favour of male saints after the Schism.<sup>86</sup> Theoretically, therefore, the women in this study lived during a period when the Church was more receptive to them than they would have been earlier or later, particularly given the propensity of the rival popes to promote saints supporting their own cause. Ursulina of Parma was sent to Avignon as a messenger for the Roman papacy; meanwhile, Marie Robine was employed by the Avignon papacy to try to maintain the support of the French crown, as will be seen in chapter three. Moreover, the chances of canonisation were greater for laywomen: women in conventual life were the minority compared to the vast number of faithful women following mendicant orders while in a lay state. But the opportunities for women to become saints were not the same in all regions of Europe. Lay sanctity was most strongly represented in France, Italy, and Germany. The influence mendicants had explains in part the regional differences in the number of canonisations; where mendicant movements were strongest, as in Italy, there were more lay saints. The strong hold of feudal and monarchical power in northern Europe, and the continuing power of bishops, explains some of the attachment to traditional forms of sainthood in these areas.<sup>87</sup> The reception of visionary women was significantly impacted by the political and spiritual allegiances of the society around them.

Social networks also played a part in the veneration of holy men, but to a much lesser extent. As noted, access to clerical office generally trumped sanctity promoted by the people.

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<sup>85</sup> Griguer, "La sainteté en Touraine au XV<sup>e</sup> siècle (La vie et le procès de canonisation de Jeanne-Marie de Maillé)," 33.

<sup>86</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 269.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

However, some men were able to garner support from both. Jean de Varennes had the benefit of holding a clerical office, through which he interacted with a number of influential people, including the Avignon papacy, the University of Paris, the French royal court, the bishop of Laon, the marshal of Sancerre, the clergy of Reims, and the Archbishop of Reims.<sup>88</sup> Jean also had a significant following from those outside the ecclesiastical institution. His preaching and holy life attracted devotees who called him the “*saint homme de Saint-Lié*”.<sup>89</sup> Jean wrote two pastoral texts to reach people he could not reach by speaking, further expanding his social network. The two works were written to elaborate on how to live and die well as a Christian and were designed for the laity to be able to read themselves or for priests to deliver at a Sunday mass. The few surviving copies (four) of these texts suggest that they were not widely disseminated, though the manuscripts do suggest they were read by members of the Burgundian nobility.<sup>90</sup> All of this indicates that Jean had a considerable level of influence and authority among the laity at one stage.<sup>91</sup> However, once he left the clergy, he left the solid foundation for his authority, and his standing among the clergy slowly declined. Starting from April 1396, Jean’s support from the reformist clergy in Reims waned, though he was still popular with the people, and he was no longer able to offer an effective resistance to the Archbishop of Reims’ schemes against him. Jean was eventually arrested. Despite the public support, ultimately the condemnation from an ecclesiastical institution, still powerful despite the Schism, managed to silence Jean. Some weeks or months after his arrest, he died. Hence, for men it seems that the support of a social network did not compare to the authority held through clerical office; once Jean surrendered this official authority, his overall authority gradually declined.

## Conclusion

This chapter has considered the expectations of late medieval holy women and how they could attain authority. These examples provide a basis of comparison on which to analyse the three women considered in this thesis. We have seen how hagiographical topoi influenced how female visionaries’ *vitae* were written, and the contrasting way male visionaries authorised

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<sup>88</sup> Jean de Varennes, “Joannis de Varennis. Pastoris sancti leti in dioecesi Remensi. Responsiones ad capitula accusationum quibus impetebatur,” in *Joannis Gersonis Opera Omnia*, ed. M. L. Elies du Pin (Antwerp: 1706), 924-25, 28, 34.

<sup>89</sup> Claude Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan: Les visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*. (Florence: Sismel, 1997), 19.

<sup>90</sup> Geneviève Hasenohr, “Deux écrits pastoraux de Jean de Varennes: *L'Épître du Miroir de chrétienté et la Médecine de l'âme en l'article de la mort*,” *Revue Mabillon* 31 (2020), 151, 61-62. For a more in-depth look at Jean's pastoral writings, see Hasenohr.

<sup>91</sup> Vauchez, “Un réformateur religieux,” 1120.

themselves by emphasising or minimising their revelatory experiences. Men in general had more ways to claim authority and so had less of a need to emphasise their visionary experiences. Significantly, if the above descriptions of a holy woman were how women's sanctity was perceived, then the ways in which Marie, Constance, and Ermine presented themselves in and through their visions would have affected their reception as a holy woman by contemporaries. Once these female visionaries had been seen, they often worked hard to have their voices heard. Furthermore, the social networks holy women were able to foster also played a significant part in their access to authority. As we will continue to see in the coming chapters, visionaries with their mystical and visionary discourses, which were an extension of the fervent and intimate dialogue that these sanctified souls had with the Creator, rushed to the aid of imperiled hierarchies. From these hierarchies, they sometimes received in return a legitimacy and consideration that had previously been limited or withheld.

## **Chapter Three:**

### **Case Study: Marie Robine (d.1399)**

As noted in chapter one, the Great Schism and conciliar crisis unsettled the certainties of the clerics and shook people's confidence in ecclesiastical institutions. Because the Church and society were greatly corrupted by sin, reformers realised that God's word, grace, and salvation could no longer be communicated through the usual channels. Instead, it would need to come through a few designated exceptional beings with extraordinary gifts. As we saw in chapter two, there were key ways in which these extraordinary people proved their sanctity and legitimacy as messengers of God. Marie Robine (d.1399) was one of these exceptional laywomen who used her divine visions to try to influence the pope and king of France during the Schism.

Marie Robine, given the name Marie d'Avignon "la Gasque" when she moved to Avignon, was from Héchac, a small hamlet about three kilometres from Madiran in the Hautes-Pyrénées region.<sup>1</sup> Unlike the other two case studies, her original surname is known. However, nothing is known about her before she travelled to Avignon with her mother in 1387. She was on a pilgrimage in the hopes of being cured from an illness which caused paralysis in her arms and legs. The reputation of Saint Pierre de Luxembourg (d.1387) for healings was what initially brought Marie to Avignon, and Marie was declared miraculously healed at his tomb at the church of the Celestines. Pope Clement VII witnessed this miracle and Marie's healing was used as proof of the Avignon papacy's legitimacy. Financially supported by the Church, Marie settled as a recluse at the cemetery of Saint Michael.

After her healing, Marie began to have prophetic visions, of which twelve visions were recorded by her confessor and have survived. Pope Benedict XIII sent Marie to Paris as his spokeswoman in 1398 to try to persuade the king not to withdraw France's obedience to the Avignon papacy, based on her visions. Though Marie was unsuccessful in gaining an audience

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the biographical information on Marie is sourced from Matthew Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome. Moyen-Age, Temps Modernes* 98, no. 1 (1986).

with the king, she did meet with Isabeau of Bavaria, the king's wife. Isabeau entrusted Marie with a message for Benedict XIII, calling on him to resign.<sup>2</sup> However, Benedict refused to see Marie on her return. The trajectory of Marie's visions went from passionate support of the Avignon papacy and a strong desire to be involved in French politics on the pope's behalf, to complete disillusionment not only with French royalty but the very papacy whom she had so passionately supported and whose saint had interceded for her healing. Marie died in November 1399, less than three years after her first recorded revelation.

Marie's twelve visions in *Le Livre des Révélationes de Marie Robine (d.1399)* are recorded in MS. 520 in the Tours Municipal Library. The manuscript was among a large collection of prophetic texts from the Benedictine Abbey of Marmoutier's library, where there were numerous transcribers and copyists. The manuscript has 229 folios, including two lost pages but excluding numerous flyleaves. Marie's visions occupy folios 115r to 128r. The Benedictines' intention to create a sort of encyclopaedia of Christian prophecy is clear from the manuscript.<sup>3</sup> Other authors in the manuscript include Merlin, Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden, and Vincent Ferrer. Not only is the size of MS. 520 impressive but it is surprisingly coherent, which suggests that it has not been altered since its creation. Its coherence despite the numerous authors is uncommon for such a compilation on prophecies.

The manuscript was compiled around the 1430s or 1440s, near the end of the Hundred Years War, when the clergy were looking to see if the destruction had been predicted and was therefore necessary, or if it had been a cruel game of chance. The book does not represent any one definable political opinion, nor does it take a specific spiritual or doctrinal position, but its conviction is that in prophecy, one finds the key to the mysteries which surround the actions of humans.<sup>4</sup> Prophecies of the Hundred Years War dominate the first part of the manuscript. The Schism is the focus of folios 115 to 145. Notably, the last image in the final text *Vaticinia de summis pontificibus* is of the beast, the sign of the Antichrist, occupying the papal seat, reflecting the bitterness felt by those who had lost all hope in seeing the day of a reigning "*pape angélique*."<sup>5</sup> It is evident that the manuscript is the result of much research by a team who had access to a vast number of sources. The positioning of Marie's visions amongst those of

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<sup>2</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 259.

<sup>3</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 230.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Tobin, "Une collection de textes prophétiques du XVe siècle: le manuscrit 520 de la Bibliothèque de Tours," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 102, 2 (1990), 417-18.

<sup>5</sup> MS. 520, 225v.

significant prophets shows the respect and esteem in which Marie's prophecies were held by the monks who compiled the manuscript.

Noël Valois's works at the start of the twentieth century brought a number of primary sources regarding Marie to the attention of historians.<sup>6</sup> However, Marie was then left largely ignored in scholarship until the late twentieth century. Matthew Tobin has written multiple articles both on MS. 520 as a whole and on Marie's revelations. His articles from the late twentieth century brought Marie's experiences back into focus for modern historians, with his commentary giving some background information on Marie and discussing the imagery Marie used in her visions, placing her within her historical context.<sup>7</sup> Other than Tobin's works there have been mentions of Marie in other scholarship, but as yet there has not been a substantive study on the ways Marie grew her authority and her own agency in doing so. Furthermore, the manuscript has not been translated to a modern language, limiting the scholarship on Marie to those who can read medieval Latin. Hence, a translation of Marie's revelations to English is necessary, and is included as an appendix to this thesis. The background on Marie provided by Tobin will be built on in this thesis to better understand the question of how Marie established herself as a holy woman to gain such a level of esteem as a visionary.

To answer this question, it is necessary to consider the various social networks Marie built around her to affirm her legitimacy, looking specifically at her relationship with the Avignon papacy, the wider Church, and the French royal court. Furthermore, we will observe how Marie presented herself in her visions and promoted key hagiographical topoi, including divine authority, humility, illiteracy, prophecy, and physical suffering and martyrdom. As we shall see in this chapter, Marie does adopt many of the traditional topoi highlighted in chapter two; however, she adapts them slightly to better suit her agenda during the context of the Schism. Moreover, other expected topoi such as bridal mysticism are ignored. By analysing these key aspects of Marie's life, we will better understand how laywomen were able to present themselves as holy women to gain authority within their societies, and what that looked like in Marie's example.

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<sup>6</sup> Noël Valois, "Jeanne d'Arc et la prophétie de Marie Robine," in *Mélanges Paul Fabre* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing, LLC, 1902); Noël Valois, "Conseils et prédictions adressés à Charles VII, en 1445 par un certain Jean du Bois," *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* 46, no. 2 (1909).

<sup>7</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition.;" Matthew Tobin, "Les visions et révélations de Marie Robine d'Avignon dans le contexte prophétique des années 1400," in *Fin du monde et signes des temps: Visionnaires et prophètes en France méridionale (fin XIIIe-début XVe siècle)*, Cahiers de Fanjeaux (Toulouse: Private, 1992); Tobin, "Une collection de textes prophétiques du XVe siècle: le manuscrit 520 de la Bibliothèque de Tours."

## Building Authority: Marie's Social Networks

### The Avignon Papacy

As we saw in chapter two, key to a female visionary's success in having her authority recognised was the social networks she could establish to support and endorse her spiritual authority. Significantly, Marie gained this approval from two of the Avignon popes, Clement VII and Benedict XIII. It is clear from a papal bull in 1395 that Marie was viewed as a holy woman by the Avignon papacy. It notes the "sincerity of your devotion with which you honour us and the Roman Church, and also your praiseworthy piety and earned virtue, about which you have been commended by testimony among us faithfuls."<sup>8</sup> It also mentions that she has "rejected worldly delights" and lives a "life of austerity."<sup>9</sup> It is because of these merits, the bull declares, that she will be provided for by the Church. Marie also fitted the criteria of chastity as she was unmarried and, presumably, a virgin. However, it is likely that Marie's healing would have been just another statistic in the miracles that happened at the tomb of Pierre de Luxembourg had Clement VII not seen this pious woman's potential as an intercessor in the Schism. The circumstances around her healing made her contemporaries believe that Clement played a personal role in it, and as such it proved his legitimacy as pope.<sup>10</sup>

Marie's healing was not just a sign of legitimacy for Clement VII, but for the Avignon papacy as a whole. The timing of Marie's healing was clearly after the death of Pierre de Luxembourg (2 July 1387) and before the death of Urban IV (15 October 1389).<sup>11</sup> In 1389, both the Dominican Robert Gervais, bishop of Senes, and Philippe de Mézières, previously connected to the Celestines of Paris, echoed the miraculous proof Marie's healing provided to the papacy.<sup>12</sup> The papal bull confirmed that Marie was also the patron of the successor of her healer, Benedict XIII. We do not know if Marie established herself in Avignon immediately after this miracle, obtaining her second name "d'Avignon" at that time. However, this name would have been significant in her role as spokeswoman for the Avignon papacy. Tobin

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<sup>8</sup> Benedict XIII, Bulle de Benoit XIII, du 3 Janvier 1395, attribuant une pension a Marie Robine et a son confesseur, 1395, Reg. Avenion. III Benedicti XIII, Vatican Archives, 197v. "*Devocionis tue sinceritas qua nos et Romanam Ecclesiam reveris, necnon laudabilia tue pietatis et virtutis merita, super quibus apud nos fidedignorum commendaris testimonio, promerentur ut illa tibi libenter concedamus que tibi fore conspicimus oportuna.*"

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. "*spretis mundanis oblectacionibus*"; "*sub austeritate vite*".

<sup>10</sup> Valois, "Jeanne d'Arc et la prophétie de Marie Robine," 453.

<sup>11</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 232.

<sup>12</sup> Hélène Millet, "Écoute et usage des prophéties par les prélats pendant le grand schisme," *Mélanges de l'école française de Rome* 102, 2 (1990), 438.

explains Marie's role as a "*fonctionnaire spirituel*" (spiritual employee of the state), but without the modern negative connotations of such a term.<sup>13</sup> By 1395, Marie's fame in Avignon was such that Benedict provided for her financial needs and it was up to the Celestines to provide this from the tomb of Pierre de Luxembourg. The bull outlined the provisions to be made. Marie was given twenty-four florins for herself, another twenty-four florins for her confessor, and twelve for her servant from the offerings made by the faithful at Pierre's tomb. The Celestines were threatened with excommunication and suspension of their convent if they did not fulfil this order by Benedict.<sup>14</sup> The threat to the Celestines should they not provide for Marie reflects the value Benedict saw in her ability to be propaganda for the Avignon papacy, as does the size of the stipend. Benedict was a clever politician; in his eyes, Marie was living proof of the spiritual and, by consequence, temporal legitimacy of the Avignon papacy.

During the Schism, each obedience sought temporal alliances with princes, but they also used mystics and prophets who could strengthen their claims to the papal throne.<sup>15</sup> The institutional and spiritual crisis created a receptive climate for the voices of visionary laywomen such as Marie. The bull mentioned above incorporated Marie into the ecclesiastical hierarchy, having her needs met by the Curia, and whether she wanted to be or not, she was associated with the Clementine camp, with all the political consequences that entailed. During the Avignon papacy, faced with strengthening national monarchies, the administrative and political character of the ecclesiastical hierarchy became increasingly centralised, which took away a lot of the bishops' prerogatives and prestige and developed state-type financial structures. Benedict exploited Marie's sincerity and the prestige that had grown around her since her healing by sending her to Paris to defend his cause at the royal court in 1398. As we will see below, Isabeau of Bavaria then tried to use her to send Benedict a message to abdicate. However, Marie slowly became aware of her role as a political pawn.

Interestingly, while we saw in chapter two that the vision of Vincent Ferrer in 1398 *turned him away* from political involvement and triggered the steady withdrawal of his support from the Avignon papacy, Marie's first vision called her to *support* the Avignon papacy and propelled her *into* the world of Schism politics. Vincent refused to have his prophetic and

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<sup>13</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 233.

<sup>14</sup> "*ipsi prior excomunicacionis et conventus suspensionis sentencias incurrant, dictumque monasterium ecclesiastico subiaceat interdicto*", Bulle de Benoît XIII, du 3 Janvier 1395, attribuant une pension a Marie Robine et a son confesseur, 197v.

<sup>15</sup> Vauchez, "Les pouvoirs informels dans l'Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques," 283.

visionary powers exploited for the Avignon papacy, in whose legitimacy he no longer believed.<sup>16</sup> Marie, on the other hand, believed fervently in the legitimacy of the Avignon papacy initially and was willing to play the part of political messenger. This can be seen in her earlier visions, where she tries to influence French leaders to not withdraw their support for Benedict XIII because he is the true pope.

However, Marie was far from a docile servant in the hands of the powerful. As her visions progressed, one can witness the growth of a deep distrust towards the papacy. The Avignon papacy's reputation for materialism and overindulgence conflicted with Marie's personal conviction for penitence and austerity. The hypocrisy and lying that she saw in the papacy became unbearable. By the seventh vision we start to see questioning of the Avignon papacy's legitimacy. In the vision, Saint John the Evangelist is astonished that Jesus does not indicate who is the true pope. In fact, the Lord does not say anything more on the Schism. Instead, he advises men to be careful not to end their days badly, and that each should assure his own salvation by doing the works of God.<sup>17</sup> Making war in order to be right on the matter of faith was a contradiction that Marie could not support. She had participated in it, though indirectly, by being sent by Benedict to Paris to intervene with the king. However, from this point on, salvation became disassociated in the mind of Marie from all political or ecclesiastical attachment.

The eighth vision blatantly reveals Marie's disapproval of Clement VII – the very pope who had witnessed and validated her healing at Pierre's tomb all those years earlier. In the vision, Clement appears to Marie, urging her to guard herself from sin and telling her that on the day of Pentecost, "certain things will be shown to you, some things that you have never seen, nor anything like them." After Clement leaves Marie, "because of his failings which she herself had seen in his life, she doubted his words, thinking in her mind: 'You have failed me in your life, and now you could fail me again.'"<sup>18</sup> Marie accuses Clement of being a liar both in life and the afterlife. This scathing indictment of Clement strongly suggests that Marie no longer believes that he was in fact the true pope and calls into question the legitimacy of the entire Avignon papacy. Also, it shows that Marie does not automatically credit her visions as

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<sup>16</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 81.

<sup>17</sup> MS. 520, Vision 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., Vision 8, 121v. "*‘Maria, sta in domino et custodi te a peccato tantum quantum poteris; quia in die penthecostes domini, ostendentur tibi alique que nunquam vidisti nec similia illis.’ Et tunc disparuit. Et nichil aliud dixit ei. Et in illa visione propter defectus suos quos ipsa viderat in vita sua, dubitabat in dictis suis, cogitans in mente sua: ‘Tu defecisti michi in vita tua, et nunc tu posses michi etiam defficare.’*"

divine but questions their veracity, showing a level of spiritual discernment. Marie seems not only to be questioning Clement's words here, but also from whom they were sent.

It takes another vision, and an angel accompanying Clement VII, to prove the validity of his words to Marie. The angel tells Marie not to "doubt in that which Pope Clement has said to you. For that will be true. And in his life, he lied to you; only, presently he cannot lie to you."<sup>19</sup> Challenging Clement's authenticity and producing an angel who calls him a liar clearly show how low Clement, and by extension the Avignon papacy, has sunk in Marie's esteem. Showing this disregard for Clement marks a decisive step in the spiritual progress which will eventually liberate Marie from any hindrances in expressing herself in her visions.<sup>20</sup> The final three visions in the *Livre* are noticeably richer in detail and more elaborate than the earlier visions. Maturing for a long time in her mind, these final passages eloquently experiment with her indignation, her hunger for justice, and of course her fundamental optimism. Interestingly, the tenth vision follows on 18 May, the day of Pentecost: Clement did not lie. Yet in that vision, the current Avignon pope is specifically rebuked by the Lord for not following through on his promise to abdicate should the Roman pope be willing to do the same.<sup>21</sup> Even though Clement did not lie, still the Avignon papacy is clearly denounced by Marie, and Marie shows her own wisdom in questioning the veracity of her visions. By turning against the Avignon papacy, Marie lost a key promoter of her authority. Marie could no longer serve the pope's agenda as his messenger when she did not support his legitimacy. By losing this key social connection, Marie's authority decreased.

## The Church

As mentioned above, Benedict's papal bull provided for a priest of Marie's choosing to say daily mass in her oratory and to act as her confessor and spiritual director. The role of a confessor was important for female visionaries in confirming their legitimacy and often in connecting them to the wider Church network. With confessors who act as scribes, there is also always the question of how much they masked the female visionary's voice when transcribing the visions, as we saw in chapter two. The authority which a visionary woman gained from her

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., Vision 9, 121v-22r. Emphasis added. "*Iterum die martis sequenti, idem papa cum angelo suo apparuerunt Marie, hora ut supra, et angelus ejus locutus est, papa Clemente nichil dicente, dicens Marie sic: 'Marie, non dubites in illo quod papa Clemens dixit tibi. Illud enim erit verum. Et in vita sua mentitus est tibi; modo non potest amplius tibi mentiri.'* Marie respondit: '*Fiat voluntas creatoris mei.*' Et tunc ambo disparuerunt."

<sup>20</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 242.

<sup>21</sup> MS. 520, Vision 10, 124r.

spiritual journey and the spiritual gifts she received demanded respect from the transcriber.<sup>22</sup> Thus, it is interesting that in Marie's recorded visions, her confessor makes the conscious decision to relay everything in third person, leaving the centre stage for Marie and not involving himself more than necessary. He is only mentioned once in the eleventh vision, does not interject with a personal commentary, and has dated and ordered the visions chronologically rather than editing them to be ordered thematically. However, it is possible that he added in the prophecy of the Antichrist in the eleventh vision (discussed further below). The fact that Benedict ensured the payment of a confessor for Marie may have meant that he wanted to keep an eye on Marie and ensure her complicity.<sup>23</sup> This would also have influenced her confessor's agenda in recording her visions.

A confessor also played a significant role in the spread of mystical texts and stories of holy women's lives. For example, through surviving correspondence, it is clear the significant impact Hildegard of Bingen's works had on those in Germany and the Netherlands, and further afield, particularly through béguines. Similarly, Henry de Nördlingen's role in spreading Mechthild of Magdeburg's texts through other convents also ensured Mechthild's influence spread amongst her contemporaries. The role of a spiritual director or confessor was significant in facilitating this spread of writings and the authority of the visionary.<sup>24</sup> The fact that only one manuscript of Marie's visions survives suggests that her confessor was not as active in promoting Marie as other visionaries' confessors were of their protégées, limiting Marie's lasting influence and authority. However, the surviving manuscript was produced sometime in the 1430-1440s, so clearly Marie's legacy continued for at least a time after her death.

We can be fairly confident, though, that MS. 520 does not contain all of Marie's visions, as it includes references to other visions which have not survived in text. It could be that they were initially recorded and have not survived or are yet to be discovered, or that these twelve visions were deliberately chosen for the specific agenda of her confessor or the compilers of the manuscript. Though it is not as straightforward as blaming Marie's confessor for her lack of influence and fame, he certainly would have played a role in the dissemination (or lack thereof) of her visions. His own involvement in local and Schism politics would likely have

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<sup>22</sup> Madeleine Jeay, "Marie Robine et Constance de Rabastens: Humbles femmes du peuple, guides de princes et de papes," *Le petit peuple dans l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003). par. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Tobin, "Les visions et révélations de Marie Robine d'Avignon dans le contexte prophétique des années 1400," 314.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

impacted this as well, but it is nearly impossible to ascertain what level this was from the little information we have about him.

Aside from Marie's confessor, it is also useful to consider the role the Celestines played in her path to authority. Pierre de Luxembourg's tomb in Avignon was a sign of the Avignon papacy's legitimacy, yet historians have largely ignored the Celestine convent and its church by which the tomb was placed. Rollo-Koster argues that the Celestine convent played a crucial symbolic role in the balance of spatial and royal power within the city.<sup>25</sup> The convent's significance was confirmed when Clement VII's body was moved from the Notre-Dame-des-Doms to the church of the Celestines, literally transplanting the sanctification of the papal palace to the convent.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the Celestine convent was intricately connected to Schism politics. Moreover, the church of the Celestines became the anchor of the new symbolic boundaries of the city, which the king of France altered from being around the old city and papal palace.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the church with which Marie was associated was significant in the society she inhabited, not just the politics of the Schism. By association, Marie's relationship with the Celestines would have been beneficial for her own claims to authority and influence.

Given the central role they played in Avignon society, the Celestines would have connected Marie to a wider social network. It was through them that Marie was made known to the author Philippe de Mézières, who wrote of her miraculous healing. Philippe based no fewer than twenty-seven chapters of his *Songe du Vieil Pelerin* on the stay of some pilgrims in Avignon, including Marie. After being contacted by Philippe, Clement VII confirmed Marie's healing, and this success, mentioned in Philippe's story, consolidated Marie's legitimacy in the eyes of those who had doubted her.<sup>28</sup> Marie's healing, according to Philippe, was clear proof of Clement's spiritual and temporal power. Financially, the Celestines provided for her material needs, and it was likely because of their support that she was able to stay in Paris for so long

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<sup>25</sup> Joëlle Rollo-Koster, "The Politics of Body Parts: Contested Topographies in Late-Medieval Avignon," *Speculum* 78, no. 1 (2003), 89.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>28</sup> Philippe de Mézières, *Le songe du vieil pelerin (BN français 22542)*, ed. George William Coopland (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 373-74. "la tressimple en Dieu et tresdevote et catholique creature Marie Robien (sic) appelle, des partie de Gascoigne, par revelacion et relacion dudit benoist cardinal, son pie ramièrement tout sain et a grant doleur tortu en un moment, et apres sa main saine et ouverte et en un moment close et restraicte tenant la corde de la clochette, à la seule bendiction du pasteur Debonnayre du pie et de la main ladictte Marie publiquement guerie en sa douce creance, et conforte ma douce suer en nostre election... A la seule benediction du pasteur Debonnayre du pie et de la main ladictte Marie publiquement guérie en sa douce creance, c'est assavoir que le pasteur Debonnaire, souventesfois repete, est souverain lieutenant de vostre tresame Pere, le benoist Filz de Dieu... Je confesse doulcmnt que le Debonnayre, pape Clement, est souverain lieutenant en terre du doulx Jesus et souverain chef de l'Église."

when she went to visit the king. However, in 1401, two years after Marie's death, Nicolas Gerson, brother of Jean Gerson, entered the convent of the Celestines. It is likely that this change influenced the Celestines to be more prudent regarding visionaries, based on Jean Gerson's *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis*, also written in 1401.<sup>29</sup> These guidelines would have impacted how active the Celestines were in promoting Marie after her death and limited her posthumous reputation and the distribution of Marie's visions.

There were also likely other key connections that Marie made within the Church while living in Avignon, though we only know of one with some certainty and another as speculation. The first was Robert Gervais, bishop of Senes. Robert mentioned Marie in his *Myrrha electa*, where he argued that Marie's healing was proof that Clement VII was "*le vrai monarque de l'Église catholique universelle*".<sup>30</sup> Written before October 1389, it shows that within two years of arriving in Avignon, Marie's name was well-known. Even though Marie's healing was skilfully used as propaganda for the Avignon papacy, it is worth noting that she had a name for herself before her recorded visions commenced and before her mission to Paris. Furthermore, Tobin suggests that due to their connections to Benedict XIII and their similar views on healing the Church, it seems highly likely that Marie and Vincent Ferrer crossed paths. Vincent left Avignon exactly one week after Marie's death, to preach values that they both promoted. He became an itinerant preacher, or what Tobin equates to the male version of a spiritual recluse.<sup>31</sup> Marie retired as a recluse towards the end of her life, as she became disillusioned with the papacy. Thus, through her placement in Avignon and her reputation as a visionary, Marie was able to create an influential social network within the Church. While the Celestines played a role in connecting Marie to some key figures who supported Marie for their own agendas, Marie herself also actively developed links to support her claims to authority.

### **The King of France and His Court**

Endorsed by the approval from the Church, Marie sought to advise the highest secular powers of the messages she received from the divine. The French monarchy had a number of significant challenges in this period, not least of which was the numerous episodes of madness King Charles VI experienced starting from 1392. Some historians argue that had Charles VI not

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<sup>29</sup> Millet, "Écoute et usage des prophéties par les prélats pendant le grand schisme," 441.

<sup>30</sup> Qtd. in Tobin, "Les visions et révélations de Marie Robine d'Avignon dans le contexte prophétique des années 1400," 313.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 326.

suffered from a mental disorder, then the scramble for power amongst his family which led to civil war headed by factions of his royal relatives would likely not have happened.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the significant losses France had to England during the Hundred Years War after Henry V restarted English campaigning, including the defeat at the Battle of Agincourt (1415), have also been attributed in part to Charles's mental illness and added to the tensions in the royal court.<sup>33</sup> However, writing in the late 1390s, Marie does not seem to address these earlier bouts of Charles VI's mental instability and still sees him as a credible leader.

The affection and respect French laypeople could have for their king at the time is perceivable in Marie's first vision in the form of a letter in 1397. Marie left her oratory in 1398 with the purpose of proclaiming her message in person to the most powerful in the kingdom after her letter was not answered. Comparing the hard tone of the letter and the more apocalyptic tone of the second vision a year later, one can see a certain gentleness in the threats accompanying the first message. Though the king does not escape threats on his position in the world, the threats are integrated into Marie's prophecy as a warning and so are softened. Marie goes so far as to say that the king will be rewarded if he listens to the guidance she is giving. He will gain eternal life and will never taste the pains of Purgatory, and God will also give him "victory over all Christian men and one large section of the Saracens."<sup>34</sup> Here, the term Saracens is clearly referring to crusading, a common theme amongst visionaries of this period in calling for reform of the Church. Moreover, if the king obeys God's commands, he will be "more fruitful in his deeds and he will advance more in the things to be done better than anyone else for the next one hundred years."<sup>35</sup> Even if he does not do as God commands, God will not leave him. His life will be shortened, and he will not have victory over his enemies, but he will not lose eternal life.<sup>36</sup> In the manuscript, there is a margin note from the copyist, saying "*Ita contigit*" (so it happened).<sup>37</sup> As noted earlier, this manuscript was compiled to try to make sense of the Schism and Hundred Years War. Not all of the prophesies can be verified but in this case,

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<sup>32</sup> R. C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392-1420*, AMS studies in the Middle Ages: no. 9, (New York: AMS Press, 1986), 19-21. For more on the impact Charles VI's mental health had on his court and the growing rival factions, see *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Graeme Small, *Late Medieval France*, European History in Perspective, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 133-34.

<sup>34</sup> MS. 520, Vision 1, 115v. "*daboque ei etiam victoriam super omnes homines christianos et super unam magnam partem Sarracenorum.*"

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 1, 116r. "*Si rex faciat istud preceptum et alia que ei mandavi in lege mea, ipse plus fructificabit in factis et proficiet in agendis quam aliquis alius in centum annis citra.*"

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 1, 115v-16r.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 116r.

the copyist seems to confirm that Marie got something right. Being correct on a prophecy to the king would have provided evidence of Marie's legitimacy, though admittedly after her lifetime.

Marie's gentle threats and unusual encouragements to the king in the first vision show that she was full of hope at this time. Marie believed that the king would listen and she did not hesitate to tell him the position he should take in the Schism. She also gave him a plan for reform which was, in reality, impractical. This shows Marie's ignorance of the realities of politics, the inertia of the institutions, and the distrust of the powerful towards those who would like them to speak justice and reason.<sup>38</sup> Thus, Marie's visions begin with a strong belief that the king of France will do what is right and bring unity in the Church. Though God, through Marie, warns Charles VI not to make a decision that will be displeasing to Him, there is the underlying expectation that he will be faithful.

However, Marie's disappointment in the king becomes evident as the visions progress. By the eleventh vision, it is clear the king has not been obedient. It is interesting to note in this vision that Charles is seen as specifically failing the "*ecclesie militantis*"; although Marie does not explicitly call for a crusade to save the Church, this concept of a militant Church further aligns Marie with the popular visionary rhetoric of calling for crusades to unite the Church, such as those from Philippe de Mézières who was equally gloomy about the sins of France. Because of the king's disobedience, in Marie's vision God says He will:

“depose them [the monarchy] from their seats in the midst of their subjects and there will be some of them who will die in large rivers of blood, and our people will be true martyrs. And others will die in the blood of iniquity, and there will arise for them infernal punishments, and others will live as true confessors; and the trees will flourish and bear fruit, and when dry they will fall into the fire.” And then Marie saw that the saints were gathering together the bones of many, and on them they were placing fire and they were burning the bones in this way.<sup>39</sup>

This vision warns that because of the king's failure to obey God's commands through Marie, his very public and violent deposition will be the start of a long period of tribulations and

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<sup>38</sup> Tobin, “Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition,” 236.

<sup>39</sup> MS. 520, Vision 11, 126r. “*Nos autem mandavimus regi Francie quod ipse reparaet debite status ecclesie militantis, et ipse nichil vult facere pro nobis. Nos deponemus eos de sedibus suis per medium subjectorum suorum et erunt aliqui eorum qui morientur in magnis fluminibus sanguinis, et nostri erunt veri martires. Et alii morientur in sanguine iniquitatis, et crescent eis pene infernales, et alii vivent veri confessores; et arbores florebunt et fructificabunt, et sicce cadent in ignem.*’ Et tunc Marie vidit quod sancti congregabant ossa multorum, et in ea ponebant ignem et ardebant hujusmodi ossa.”

suffering for France. The prediction shows what is already obvious to Marie; she sees a lot of destruction around her and she feels that nothing is improving. It is also within the same context that we can understand the prophecy from the twelfth vision which foresees the destruction of Paris.<sup>40</sup> Not even the capital is spared from the destruction created by war and disorder. Where the greatest failures lay, that is, within the University of Paris and the royal court, there shall the greatest destruction fall. The sentiments in Marie's revelations pass progressively from the idea of the corruption of ecclesiastical institutions to the idea that there is nothing more that can be expected from the religious hierarchy and that the salvation of Christendom will come from a great prince. And when the latter disappoints, such as with Charles VI, Marie does not spare him her threats.

The Schism was not just a religious crisis, but involved many political powers across Christendom, and thus had significant implications for temporal power. Some visionaries were able to exploit this, and prelates were aware of this in their double roles as pastors and advisers to princes. The reaction of the general assembly to Marie sums up their views on her authority. Marie went to the council at the royal palace in June 1398, where Pierre Ravat defended Benedict XIII for the second time, but she was rejected without being seen by the king.<sup>41</sup> There is no further mention of the court after 2 June in the *Livre*, and the minutes from the council do not mention any "Marie d'Avignon", suggesting she was ultimately unsuccessful in gaining an audience with the king.<sup>42</sup> Theologians in Paris were generally relentless against those who said they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. In calling for discernment of spirits and multiplying their guards, they stopped the spreading of new oracles. The prelates at the council were mostly law graduates and the only theologian present who viewed private revelations with favour was Robert Gervais.<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, Hélie de Lestrangle, a faithful of Benedict and bishop successively of Saintes and of Puy, prepared a speech for the assembly of clergy in 1398 but did not actually deliver it. In the speech Lestrangle compared the subtraction of obedience from the pope to the fulfilment of the prophecies regarding the end times. Even so, he also took care to express his contempt for prophecies not from Holy Scripture.<sup>44</sup> It is likely that such opinions on prophets and visionaries are what prevented Marie from being admitted and heard at the council.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., Vision 12.

<sup>41</sup> Millet, "Écoute et usage des prophéties par les prélats pendant le grand schisme," 439.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 439-40.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 440.

Marie's sixth vision seems to be a response to this disappointing experience; however, we only see the reply and not the actual event. During this vision, God shows Marie the different "states" of Christianity, each lived in by idols. Somewhere else, men go around a star, crying hot tears. Angels collect the tears to then pour them over the men's heads, so that they can continue to lament. God leaves no doubt on who these men lamenting are; they are the doctors and theologians of the University of Paris, who believe neither in the truth or the usefulness of visions, but who make idols out of their own works.<sup>45</sup> Although this virulent denunciation of the masters of the university could be a sign of Marie's latent anti-intellectualism, it is more likely to be a response to a second failure at the royal court.<sup>46</sup> After not having been able to address the council, Marie had to try to make those with responsibilities at the university understand. This explains the bitter tone, because she was no better received on this second attempt than the first at the Palais de la Cité. As spokesperson for the papacy in Avignon, Marie failed miserably.

However, despite the assembly's supposed disdain for prophecies, three speakers at the assembly incorporated the arguments of Téséphore de Cosenza (1356-1390). Téséphore was a priest, hermit and prophet who had a vision regarding the outcome of the Schism.<sup>47</sup> Pierre Le Roy, Abbot of Mont-Saint-Michele, mentioned the constant intervention of secular princes to put an end to the Schism. Pierre Ravat recalled in his first speech that the kings of France had never followed a heretical pope, and in his second speech he used the symbolism of lilies to develop this theme as Téséphore had done. Pierre Plaoul, the spokesperson of the University of Paris, echoed Pierre Ravat's argument. If the house of France had the grace never to favour the schismatics, then it had to stop obeying Benedict XIII, the one who caused the Schism, as soon as possible. Moreover, in Guillaume d'Ortolan's, the bishop of Rodez, ballot papers, one can detect the cross influences of royal propagandists and Téséphore. At the assembly in 1406, Ameil du Breuil, the archbishop of Tours, spoke of 27 or 28 prior Schisms, also seemingly referencing Téséphore.<sup>48</sup> Téséphore also gives in one of his commentaries the figure of 27 intrusions of false popes. Téséphore's relative anonymity (although Millet has attempted to trace his lineage) also seemed to have given him great success where Marie had failed.<sup>49</sup> Thus,

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<sup>45</sup> MS. 520, Vision 6.

<sup>46</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 240.

<sup>47</sup> Millet, "Écoute et usage des prophéties par les prélats pendant le grand schisme," 447.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 448. For a further comparison between Marie and Téséphore, see *ibid.*

it was not necessarily Marie's status as a prophet that caused her to be rejected from the assembly.

Was it, then, Marie's gender? Certainly, Téléphore is a remarkable example of prelates using prophecy during this assembly. His prophecy was selectively used in official debates, but the prelates were careful to refrain from citing their source of information, somehow building a mixture of duplicity and credulity using prophecy. As users of prophecy, the prelates seem to have acted more out of interest than conviction. The partisan character of the prophet seems to have blinded the prelates and suggests that 'the end justifies the means' prevailed over all other considerations. But these manipulations, Millet argues, are exceptional.<sup>50</sup> Hence, Marie's failure to have her prophecies heeded by the general assembly is likely less to do with her gender and more to do with the fact that her revelations did not serve the agenda of the assembly.

Vaucher argues that the most evident consequence of the prolongation of the Schism was the politicisation of women's visions and revelations, as well as their stressing of the Messianic character of Jesus. Yet neither side could impose the law of its reason on the other because it was not so much a question of orthodoxy in the face of heresy but of two different sides of the same Church.<sup>51</sup> The Church was becoming increasingly politicised with churchmen finding themselves more aligned with royal politics and allegiances rather than with the ideals of a universal Church. In France, the king was a sacred figure who not only governed the nation but was expected to protect the Church and ensure the salvation of his subjects (declared in Catherine of Siena's letter to Charles V).<sup>52</sup> Notably, the king was not against using prophets in certain circumstances. In 1393, the king of France and his uncle Philippe de Bourgogne allowed the prophet Robert the Hermit to come to the peace negotiations at Leulinghem, where peace was sealed. Nevertheless, Anne Mériaux suggests that this was most likely due to Robert's connections with the royal court rather than his prophecies, as Philippe was well known to prefer astrological predictions rather than prophecies.<sup>53</sup> However, Marie was clearly not viewed as a valuable tool for the king's purposes like she was by the pope.

This is not to say that Marie did not have positive encounters with the royal court. Though we do not know the names of many supporters of Marie, we are told of two very significant ones: Marie de Blois, queen of Sicily, and Isabeau of Bavaria, the wife of King

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 445.

<sup>51</sup> Vaucher, "Les pouvoirs informels dans l'Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques," 287.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Mériaux, "The Medieval Prophecy in the French Kingdom: Divine Light and Human Darkness," 163.

Charles VI. We are told in the second and third visions that the queen of Sicily witnessed Marie receiving revelations from God, among a number of other witnesses. The presence of Marie de Blois in Avignon is not as surprising as it may seem. Her presence in the crowd of curious and faithful indicates that by this time Marie Robine had already gained a certain notoriety.<sup>54</sup> This would also support the idea, noted above, that the first recorded vision that survives was in fact not Marie's first visionary experience. Having such a prominent witness vouching for her legitimacy would have been significant for Marie's authority. Marie de Blois took Marie Robine to Paris with a letter of recommendation for Isabeau of Bavaria. Through this network, Marie was able to connect with two very powerful and influential women. When Marie was unsuccessful at gaining an audience with the General Assembly, Isabeau heard the story from a chronicler attached to Benedict's court, and she decided to use Marie to weaken Benedict's obstinacy and persuade him to abdicate.<sup>55</sup> However, when Marie returned to Avignon, she found Benedict under siege in his palace, by troops from the sacred college. In vain Marie attempted to get permission to speak to him. The cardinals saw a protégée of the pope, who could not justify her mandate from the queen. Jean de la Grange, cardinal of Amiens, arrested the cleric and theologian who accompanied Marie. He released them a few days later, and they returned quickly to Paris.<sup>56</sup> It is also possible that Benedict and his cardinals refused to see Marie because they knew that the message she was carrying was not favourable to them. However, the direct actions that both queens took in an attempt to support Marie show that she had some significant women within her network, bolstering her claims to social authority.

Marie's development of relationships with others shows her attempts to navigate both religious and secular spheres to build a social authority in order to have her visions heard. Certainly, Marie's healing generated some celebrity for herself, as well as legitimacy for the Avignon papacy. Remaining at the site of the healing, in a small oratory in the cemetery of Saint-Michel, allowed for crowds to come and witness this holy woman and see for themselves the miracle that had occurred, spreading her reputation further. Both Cohen and Tobin claim that Marie's second and third visions were preached openly to a crowd in the Avignon cemetery.<sup>57</sup> However, the justification for this is not clear. Ultimately, Marie's attempts at building social networks were met with varying levels of success and her authority was not

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<sup>54</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 236.

<sup>55</sup> Valois, "Jeanne d'Arc et la prophétie de Marie Robine," 458.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Cohen, "Holy Women as Spokeswomen for Peace in Late Medieval Europe," 136; Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 238.

accepted by everyone. However, her relations with others, and her attempted involvement in contemporary religious politics, were also built upon the spiritual authority she demonstrated in her visions. As we will see, there were various ways in which this authority had to be developed.

## Marie as a “Holy Woman”

### Divine Authority

As we saw in chapter two, the most important hagiographical ideal expected of holy women, and one that did not change throughout the medieval period, was their demonstrable consciousness of divine appointment. Through their revelations a transfer of power took place from Christ to the women, and they were promoted to God’s spokesperson, a responsibility not taken lightly or easily by those to whom it was given. But the divine voice reassured them and promised them true wisdom far beyond what theologians could know, often following the Biblical theme of God giving his message to the weak to humble the powerful.<sup>58</sup> Apart from the rare exception, such as Catherine of Siena, laywomen who were called by God to share his messages did not generally speak in their own voices. Any message they shared was presented as coming directly from a certain heavenly voice.

Marie’s case follows this pattern throughout her visions. Any commands or prophecies Marie shares come directly from God. In writing to Charles VI, Marie tells him that she “saw a certain really wonderful vision. And I heard and understood a certain voice by divine virtue according to the will of God addressing me and speaking to me.”<sup>59</sup> This divine voice gives Marie the command and the authority to address the king directly: “Go to the king of France and tell him on my behalf that I wish he will not forget me.”<sup>60</sup> Moreover, the first vision ends with God reassuring Marie that if the king “asks you on whose behalf you said this, answer him: God, the Lord of Lords.”<sup>61</sup> Marie’s visions repeatedly reassure the audience that the commands are coming from the divine and not from Marie herself. However, the directness of the first vision is surprising. For many holy women, we witness the slow development of their

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<sup>58</sup> 1 Cor. 1:27

<sup>59</sup> All translations of Marie's visions into English are my own. From MS. 520, Vision 1, 115r. “*Vidi visionem quamdam valde mirabilem, et audivi, ac intellexi vocem quamdemper virtutem divinam et secundum Dei voluntatem me alloquentem et dicentem michi*”.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., Vision 1, folio 115r. “*Vade ad regem Francie et dic ei ex parte me aquod me nolit oblivisci, quoniam causam non habet hoc faciendi; name ego eum feci et exaltavi super omnes homines hujus mundi.*”

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., Vision 1, 116r. “*Et si ipse querit a te quis tibi hec dixit, responde ei: Dominus dominantium Deus.*”

confidence in their divine authority the more visions they receive, as we will see with Constance in the next chapter. Yet, from the first vision, Marie is confident in the divine authority she has been given. The Marie we meet here is a woman at the peak of a process of devotion, confident and bold in her assertion of what God has told and shown her. This supports the idea that Marie had already gained a reputation in Avignon for her holiness and that these twelve visions were not her only, nor her first, revelations. Though no other visions have survived, an existing reputation would go some way to explaining why her first vision is so direct and confident from the outset, unlike many other visionaries.

The divine voice repeatedly affirms Marie's divine authority to be God's messenger. In the third vision, after Marie has been shown the coming punishments for the wicked, God "*gave permission to Marie*, saying to her, 'Go and tell these things to the churches, and whoever shall have ears to hear let him hear, and whoever shall have a spirit of understanding let him understand, and praise my name publicly amongst men.'"<sup>62</sup> The scribe here notes specifically that God "*gave permission to Marie*", so that there can be no doubt that she is both allowed and commanded to share this vision with Church authorities. Moreover, the echo of Matthew 11:15 in the command reinforces the orthodoxy and legitimacy of God's words.<sup>63</sup> This divine authority is again explicitly mentioned in the tenth vision, when God "*gave authority to Marie*, saying: 'Go to the Church, and speak to them and give [this message] in writing.'"<sup>64</sup> Here we also see Marie receive the 'call to write' from God. The repetitions of God commanding Marie, giving her both authority and permission, bolster her claims to meet the criteria regarding the hagiographical topoi of divine authority.

Furthermore, the affirmation at the end of her twelve visions, where she confirmed again that the visions were from God and her agenda in sharing them, is tactfully included in case the audience should question the legitimacy of the visions or the visionary. The scribe writes that:

all these things and all the other revelations which Marie related, she herself laid down for the correction of the holy mother the Church and of all those whom it concerns. And at the moment of her death, she held and asserted them to be true and revealed to her by

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., Emphasis added, Vision 3, 118r. "*Et tunc dedit licentiam Marie, dicendo ei: 'Vade et dic hec ecclesiis, et qui habebit aures audiendi audiat, et qui spiritum intelligendi capiat, et lauda nomen meum coram hominibus.'*"

<sup>63</sup> "Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand!" Matt. 11:15 (NLT)

<sup>64</sup> MS. 520, Emphasis added, Vision 10, 124r. "*Postea dedit licentiam Marie, dicens: 'Vade ad ecclesiam et dice is et da in scriptis.'*"

God. And in that faith, she departed to the Lord on a Sunday, at the hour of Mass, eight days later than Saint Martin, in the year of our Lord 1399 [16 November 1399].<sup>65</sup>

This final word from the scribe reaffirms Marie's claims to divine authority, pre-empting any challenges to the source of her visions. It also reaffirms that her motivation for sharing these visions was not for personal gain but for the correction of the Church and its members. That Marie testified to their truth on her deathbed confirms that she believed completely in the divine source of her visions, and therefore confirms her belief that any authority she received to share these visions was also from God.

As well as receiving these divine commands, Marie's visions also follow the stereotypical fourteenth-century trope of the spirit being transported or carried away somewhere while awake. This was deemed to confirm the authenticity of divine visions.<sup>66</sup> Marie is repeatedly "seized by two flaming or fiery spirits who carried her off" before the throne of God as in the fifth vision, to John the Evangelist's dwelling as in the seventh vision, or even to Hell as in the third vision.<sup>67</sup> In these revelations, we get the sense that Marie's spirit is taken on a physical journey; she sees herself in these new locations, some not even on earth, rather than just hearing voices. Her visions are presented almost as dramatised plays, taking place in precisely described sets, and with characters who intervene and share dialogue. What is noteworthy is that Marie is often also a character in these plays, rather than just an audience. She is present in the 'sets': on the star, in Heaven, and in the underworld. Though Marie witnesses many dialogues between Jesus and others such as the Virgin Mary or John the Evangelist, Marie herself speaks with the Lord on four occasions. This is significant: Marie is not just a spectator, but actively involved in her visions. Marie does not need an intercessor to communicate with Jesus but is able to talk to him directly and the conversation goes both ways (though John the Evangelist does act as her intercessor in a couple of the visions). This direct relationship with the divine is key in visionaries' authority, and by-passes the intermediary role played by the Church. That Marie can converse with the Trinity, and is permitted to overhear their private conversations, reaffirms that she has divine authority.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., Vision 12, 128r. "*Hec igitur omnia et alias revelations quas Maria tradidit, ipsa posuit correctioni sancta matris ecclesie et omnium quorum interest. Et in articulo mortis sue eas tenuit et asseruit fore veras et a Deo sibi revelatas. Et in illa fide migravit ad Dominum die dominica, hora misse, infra octabas beati Martini, anno domini 1399.*"

<sup>66</sup> Mériaux, "The Medieval Prophecy in the French Kingdom: Divine Light and Human Darkness," 165.

<sup>67</sup> MS. 520, Vision 5, 118v. "*rapta fuit per duos spiritus flammeos seu ignitos qui eam ante thronum Dei deportaverunt.*"; Vision 7, 121r; Vision 3, 118r.

As a female visionary, Marie also had to construct a sense of her holiness and authority apart from the visible Church. Within the institutional Church, laywomen like Marie had no power; yet clerical men who did have power were seen to have failed. As noted in Vauchez's stereotype of a Schism visionary in chapter two, once convinced of their divine election, holy women tended to follow a common approach. Instead of addressing the people, they sought to reform the Church from the top, as if the *reformatio in capite* commanded the *reformatio in membris*, addressing popes, cardinals, sovereigns, and the elite. Generally, while visionaries criticised the Church's inadequacies, they tried to encourage the ecclesiastical hierarchy to play their role in correcting the Church's errors.<sup>68</sup> The Schism was believed by many to have been caused by the corruption in the Church. So, to affirm her divine authority as God's messenger, Marie highlights the many failings of the prelates, those who should be sharing God's word. From the first vision, the prelates are exposed as acting "often contrarily to the Lord and to themselves," delighting in things they ought to be grieving over.<sup>69</sup> In the third vision, when God is dividing Christians into four groups, he calls the prelates who did not follow his commands "enemies of my father" for whom have been prepared horrible torments in Hell.<sup>70</sup> Those who forgo peace and create war are God's enemies, and the prelates have prolonged the Schism and caused "war" in the Church. Thus, they are identified here as God's enemies and their coming punishment is made clear.

This is reiterated in the seventh vision, when the Lord explains to John the Evangelist that "peace and war cannot exist at the same time. Bad sons want to place me and my enemy in a certain house at the same time. And this is something that cannot happen."<sup>71</sup> This is the first hint in Marie's visions that she was beginning to believe the Avignon papacy was no longer legitimate. In the vision, the Avignon prelates are trying to justify their pope and they maintain division, 'war', in the Church because of it. When John passes this message on to Marie, he is surprised that Jesus has not specified which pope is the true pope, suggesting that in fact neither is legitimate. He commands Marie to tell the prelates that "they should have great fear for their

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<sup>68</sup> Vauchez, "Les pouvoirs informels dans l'Église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Âge: visionnaires, prophètes et mystiques," 285.

<sup>69</sup> MS. 520, Vision 1, 115v. "*Deus enim ostendit in anno gratie et tempore passionis sue status ei placentes et qui teneri debebant a prelatibus qui totiens quotiens contrarium agunt, operantur et contra dominum et contra se ipsos. Non enim colorare possunt verbis vel factis neque cooperire quod nunc deberent in tantum super eis dolere in quantum eis complacent et ipsi delectantur in eisdem.*"

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Vision 3, 118r.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Vision 7, 121r. "*pax et guerra non possunt esse simul. Iniqui filii volunt ponere me et inimicum in quadam domo simul. Et hoc est quod non potest fieri.*"

life which they have not concluded worthily.”<sup>72</sup> Again, the prelates are exposed as having failed in their duties to Christ and the Church by prolonging the Schism, and thus Marie must step in to bring God’s word.

Marie also sees the ecclesiastical hierarchy collapsing. In the fifth vision, she saw many prelates who had lost their perfection. Three men were falling as “if they were falling from one level to another” until she could no longer see them, and after these three “she saw that very many were beginning to fall.”<sup>73</sup> The prelates were falling from their positions of privilege and status due to their failures. It is not clear if Marie knew who the initial three to fall were, but quickly she saw many more falling, suggesting the downfall of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in general. God confirmed their fall from grace, cursing them and warning them of their coming suffering.<sup>74</sup> And then God commanded Marie to “say to the churches that which you have seen. And if the wolves do not want to listen to you, tell this to everyone.”<sup>75</sup> The prelates have failed as God’s messengers on earth, so God chose Marie to take on this role. God did not want Marie to let the “wolves” stop her from sharing His commands, giving her the authority to share her visions publicly if the Church, that is, the prelates who were corrupt, would not listen and take heed. This gave Marie divine legitimacy to circumvent the authority of the Church to act as an intermediary for visionaries’ words. Furthermore, it condemned the prelates to significant punishments for not listening to God’s chosen messenger.

To further establish Marie’s divine authority outside of the authority of the Church, in the sixth vision God tells her that those in the Church who believe “visions or revelations are not necessary” are wrong. God calls them unfaithful idolators who only glorify themselves.<sup>76</sup> Here, God directly challenges those who would dismiss Marie for her visionary experiences and not take heed of His warnings through her. Not only are they unfaithful Christians, but they are also idolators who have no authority to guide others in the faith until they resolve their own sins first. This clear condemnation of the corruption that has overtaken the prelates is continued in the tenth vision. In the Valley of Jehosaphat, one patriarch who speaks on behalf of the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., Vision 7, 121v. “*Dic ergo eis quod timorem habeant magnum de vita sua quam digne non terminaverunt.*”

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., Vision 5, 119r. “*videbat plures homines fictos in essential divina sicut homines qui amiserant radices totius perfectionis. Et tempore quo illic stetit, vidit tres homines in essential divina cadentes ac si caderent de uno gradu in alium, et ceciderunt omnino sic quod non vidit in essential divina aliquid illorum nisi precise creationem sui esse. Et multis aliis modis vidit quod plurimi incipiebant cadere.*”

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Vision 5, 119v.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. “*Et dic ecclesiis hec que vidisti. Et si lupi non velint te audire, dic hec omnibus.*”

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., Vision 6, 120r.

prelates challenges Jesus' authority to forgive them their sins.<sup>77</sup> Jesus identifies himself, then tells the patriarch to say the Our Father. When the patriarch says the prayer, Marie reports that she has immense grief at two points: when he says, "May your will be done" and "forgive us, and so on."<sup>78</sup> Marie calls the patriarch and prelates liars, and Jesus asks "those who were near Him, namely Saint Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist still living, Enoch, Elijah and Moses, Matthew, and Marie herself" how these prelates can be expected to forgive their enemies if they cannot even forgive their friends.<sup>79</sup> Even when the prelates claim that they believe the fundamentals of the faith, Marie knows that "in their hearts, they displayed the complete opposite."<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, Marie does not esteem the prelates in the divided Church. They have failed to distribute spiritual and material alms and care properly for the Christian people because of the division and corruption in the Church; Marie places the blame for this firmly on the prelates. God is clearly displeased with the prelates, and is calling the faithful, such as Marie, to stand up to them and remind them of their duty to their diocese. Moreover, by grouping Marie with such significant Biblical prophets in this vision, it gives her an authority above that of the corrupt prelates by her association with these men. And as Jesus calls them all to Him for their counsel, Marie's status is divinely confirmed. The authority of visionaries is reiterated in the eleventh vision, when God tells the prelates through Marie that they should value the visionary messengers highly, rather than dismissing them as they have done. This is because "they themselves may repair the Church."<sup>81</sup> Because of the prelates' failure to reunite the Church, God has sent visionaries such as Marie to do it for them.

Furthermore, Marie's fourth vision on 3 June 1398 was at the Palais de la Cité, where the prelates in the kingdom of France were gathered to deliberate on the Schism and whether they should withdraw their obedience from Benedict XIII. The manuscript notes that Marie "went early in the morning to the king's palace to have an audience at the council of the prelates, to say to them the command which she had been warned to say."<sup>82</sup> However, when Marie was rejected without an audience, she deferred and went to her room. Her docility in the face of

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<sup>77</sup> Valois suggests that the patriarch is actually Simon de Cramaud, patriarch of Alexandria, who was often the spokesperson of the clergy in France at the time. See Valois, "Jeanne d'Arc et la prophétie de Marie Robine," 459.

<sup>78</sup> MS. 520, Vision 10, 122r.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., Vision 10, 122r-22v.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., Vision 10, 122v. "*Sed in corde totum oppositum ostendebant.*"

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., Vision 11, 126r. "*aut quod ipsi reparent ecclesiam.*"

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., Vision 4, 118r. "*Maria Rubina ivit mane ad palatium regis pro habenda audientia in concilio prelatorum ad dicendum eis preceptum quod admonition erat ei factum (sic) ut dicat.*"

God's orders attracted reprimand from the heavenly voice: "I said to you that you should not fear<sup>83</sup> man more than me. I will speak briefly to you. Go to them whenever you know they are gathered together, until I tell you [to stop]. Hurry, therefore, and do your diligence, and thus you will be perfect in my presence."<sup>84</sup> Marie's obedience to God failed in the face of adversity in Paris, suggesting that though Marie was sure of her divine appointment, she was also conscious of her limited authority in the eyes of the ecclesiastical hierarchy and was not as confident as she appears to be in the first vision. Certainly, confidence in her appointment was not a constant across Marie's visions; there were times when she questioned her authority to receive these visions and act on God's behalf. As we shall see, these insecurities feed into the following hagiographical topoi of humility and were another strategy proving Marie's legitimacy as a holy woman. By expressing her unworthiness, Marie was able to reaffirm her divine authority by God's insistence on her completing her mission.

## Humility

The topos of divine authority is closely linked to that of humility. With being chosen by God to be his vessel came a sense of unworthiness for the role. Despite Marie's apparent boldness in her first vision directed to the king, she opens with describing herself as "an unworthy servant."<sup>85</sup> This sense of unworthiness at being God's chosen messenger continues. In the fifth vision, Marie saw a heavenly procession take place, and afterwards when everyone was surrounding the throne of God:

[Marie], quite hesitant... saw a certain empty seat between Saint Paul and the blessed Katherine; she was desiring in her heart to be carried to it and to sit in it. And then Jesus Christ spoke to her, saying in this manner: "Do you love God?" Marie replied: "Yes, but not so much as I ought." A second time He asked her, saying: "How do you wish to please Him?" Marie responded: "To join His will to mine."<sup>86</sup> And then Jesus said:

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<sup>83</sup> The Latin word here is *dubites*, but "doubt" does not make sense. Given the context and exhortation for Marie not to fear men in the previous vision, I have translated it as "fear."

<sup>84</sup> MS. 520, Vision 4, 118r-18v. "*Ego dixi tibi quod tu non dubites magis hominem quam me. Ego in brevis loquar tibi. Vade totiens ad eos quotiens tu scies eos esse congregatos usque quo ego dicam tibi. Festina ergo et fac diligentiam tuam, et sic tu eris absoluta coram me.*"

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 1, 115r. "*ego indigna, existens in oratione et desiderio ardenti super salvation anime vestre.*"

<sup>86</sup> The Latin uses *meum*, but it should be *meam* to agree with *voluntatem*. This is also an interesting sentence, as theologically it would make more sense for Marie to wish to join her will to God's, not the other way around.

“What is hindering you, Marie?” “Nothing.” And then Jesus said to Marie: “Throw this sinful part of you out.” Marie responded: “I cannot.”<sup>87</sup>

This exchange reveals Marie’s deep awareness of her unworthiness to sit amongst the saints, or to do God’s will. It also shows Marie’s awareness of a need to develop evidence of her humility to meet such criteria for holiness. In response to her desire, she is tested by Jesus on her faith, which proves itself too weak. She recognises her sinful nature, and that she is not strong enough to do God’s will or to rid herself of sin completely. We can also see from the spontaneous nature of this exchange that Marie’s confessor likely did not alter the revelation when recording Marie’s words, but instead recorded them as she relayed them. Moreover, with Marie’s final exhortation noted above, namely that “all these things and all the other revelations which Marie related, she herself laid down for the correction of the holy mother the Church and of all those whom it concerns,” the audience is reassured that Marie does not relate these revelations for her own gain.<sup>88</sup> Marie’s purpose in sharing God’s words is to be obedient to God and to try to save the Church.

Marie also does not forget her humble background. Her focus is on the fate of the *petites gens*, those who are faithful, but disappointed and helpless before the divided and corrupt Church. Marie is one of them, and she is their spokesperson. Marie’s insignificance and weakness are what made her a suitable vessel for the divine revelations. For her, as for other female visionaries called to action during the Schism, while the Church is broken it cannot play its role in the world, a role which is not only spiritual but material and social as well. That is why she entreats the king to protect the poor and the poorly educated faithful. This can be seen in the reforms for the dioceses that Marie recommends in the first vision.<sup>89</sup> However, her idealism is matched by her naivety. She did not understand the political realities, the inertia of the institutions, the instinctive distrust of the powerful towards calls to change the system. Her programme for reform in the Church was not quite practical but her attacks on corruption in the Church echoed those of other visionaries, as we will see in the following chapter on Constance de Rabastens.

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<sup>87</sup> MS. 520, Vision 5, 118v-19r. “*Et ipsa, tota verecunda... videbat quamdam sedem vacuam inter sanctum Paulum et beatam Katherinam, quam ipsa in corde suo desiderabat transferri ad locum in quo erat et in eadem sedere. Et tunc Jhesus allocutus es team, dicens in hunc modum: ‘Amas tu Deum?’ Respondit ipsa Maria: ‘Ita, sed non tantum quantum deberem.’ Iterum interrogavit eam, dicens: ‘Quid faceres bene pro eo?’ Respondit Maria: ‘Voluntatem suam juxta posse meum.’ Et tunc Jhesus dixit: ‘Quid impedit te, Maria?’ ‘Nichil.’ Et tunc ait Jhesus Marie: ‘Proice peccatricem extra.’ Respondit Maria: ‘Ego non possum.’”*

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 12, 128r.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 1.

### **Illiteracy and Building a Vernacular Theology**

As well as Marie's awareness of her unworthiness for the task she has been given, she is careful to emphasise her own illiteracy and ignorance. This is another expected ideal for holy women during the late medieval period. A desire among women for reading and knowledge could be seen in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as heretical.<sup>90</sup> Marie's revelations provide many examples of her theological illiteracy, including confessing that she does not understand the words of the hymn being sung in the fifth vision, which was part of the daily liturgy and prayers. The revelation notes that the procession was "singing a song that seemed new. Indeed, Marie did not understand that song, except when they were saying: 'Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and [to the Holy Spirit].'"<sup>91</sup> In the seventh vision, Marie observes John the Evangelist having a discussion with Jesus, and "with great reverence [John] heard [Jesus'] words which Marie did not pray to understand. However, among other things she understood well when the glorious Blessed John commended our mother the Church to the Lord."<sup>92</sup> While Marie did understand some of the liturgy while John was saying Mass, she also did not attempt to understand the private discussion between John and Jesus. This showed her desire to only seek to understand what God chose to reveal to her and not learn more than she was permitted. This would have reassured her audience that she was aware and respectful of the expectations surrounding holy women's education and divine knowledge. Marie was not seeking knowledge; any that she received was given to her freely by God.

Moreover, God assures Marie in the tenth vision that when she goes to tell the powerful the prophecy he has given her, not to doubt, "because, in all the arguments which will come about for you in this writing, Marie, I will give you responses which will be appropriate to answer them sufficiently."<sup>93</sup> Not only does this acknowledge Marie's lack of theological and political knowledge, but it also reaffirms that any knowledge she does have when she provides answers has come directly from God. Certainly, no higher authority could be given nor greater legitimacy established for her answers than by attributing them to a divine author. In the twelfth

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<sup>90</sup> Madeleine Jeay, "La transmission du savoir théologique. Le cas des femmes mystiques illettrées," *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes* 23 (2012), 229.

<sup>91</sup> MS. 520, Vision 5, 118v. "*cantantes unum canticum quasi novum. Quem quidem canticum non intelligebat Maria, nisi quando dicebant: 'Gloria patri et filio et cetera.'*"

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 7, 121r. "*et cum magna reverential audivit verba ejus que non orare Maria intellexit. Inter alia tamen bene intellexit quando gloriosus beatus Johannes domino commendavit matrem nostrum ecclesiam.*"

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, Vision 10, 124r-24v. "*Et noli dubitare quod in omnibus argumentis que tibi fient in ista Maria, ego dabo tibi responsiones quas decet eis sufficienter respondere.*"

vision, John the Evangelist comments to Marie that “I believe that you are able to understand sufficiently as much as we can that Judgement Day is approaching every day.”<sup>94</sup> When Marie asks for further explanation on the meaning of the swords given to the saints in the same vision, John replies that the meaning is not for him to tell her, but “tomorrow you will come to that place, and you will hear as much as it pleases God.”<sup>95</sup> This further solidifies the idea that any knowledge Marie has is from God himself, not even from a saint. Due to women not being permitted to study theology at this time, it was logical for women to credit knowledge as coming directly from God. However, this does not mean that it was not still an effective source of authorisation; in fact, it was expected of holy women.

Another example of Marie’s ignorance, and one that would have been well received by her contemporaries, comes in the sixth vision. As she was seized by the two flaming spirits,

there was shown to her a very obscure vision, and so obscure that she did not dare to speak one word of this vision for that whole day, but her soul remained in great fear. But on the following day about in the middle of the sixth hour, God through His power showed to the aforementioned Marie explanations of her vision.<sup>96</sup>

Through her actions in this vision, Marie shows that she does not dare to interpret her visions for herself, a task which was reserved for educated spiritual advisors. It is also significant that Marie did not share her vision with others when she did not understand its meaning, to avoid potentially leading others astray. Furthermore, this vision would have been recognised by theologians as a sign of an authentically spiritual experience; according to ideas on the discernment of spirits, God would confirm that it was a divine vision, and explain its meaning directly rather than act through an intermediary such as a confessor. Here, God is acting as Marie’s spiritual director by interpreting her vision.

Tobin argues that Marie’s proposed creation of houses in the first vision, particularly the one for educating the poor, reveals her consciousness of her weakness as an illiterate woman speaking to educated men.<sup>97</sup> This theme is revisited in the sixth vision, where God shows Marie different states of Christianity, each one with their own idols. The Masters of Theology from

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., Vision 12, 126v. “*Ego credo et tu potes satis cogitare tantum quantum possumus cognoscere quod dies iudicii appropinquit multum cotidie.*”

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Vision 12, 127r. “*Sed cras tu venies ad loicium istud et audies tantum quantum placebit Deo.*”

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., Vision 6, 119v. “*Et fuit ei ostensa una visio valde obscura, et sic obscura quod unicum verbum illius visionis non fuit causa dicere total illa die, sed ejus anima stetit cum magno timore. Die vero sequenti in mediante hora fere sexta, Deus per suam potentiam ostendit prefate Marie declarations visionis sue.*”

<sup>97</sup> Tobin, “Les visions et révélations de Marie Robine d’Avignon dans le contexte prophétique des années 1400,” 321-22.

the University of Paris are crying perpetually at their situation – the same men who did not believe in the truth or the usefulness of visions, but instead brag of their knowledge. Marie subtly undermines traditional education and the superiority of the Masters of Theology while still seeking discernment from her spiritual director, God. According to God, those who depend on their own knowledge will cry perpetual tears, while Marie and other female visionaries who receive their knowledge directly from God will solve the crises in the Church. It is a classic demonstration of the weak being used to humble the powerful.

Despite Marie's claimed illiteracy, her ignorance is perhaps more of a performance than her visions initially suggest. This would support the argument that Marie exercised agency in presenting herself as a holy woman. Marie found herself at the centre of Christianity in Avignon. Given the religious significance of Avignon, it is not implausible to expect that Marie had access to lay preachers, processions, and devotional groups who commonly gathered in the city for collective reading, discussion, and singing of Psalms and hymns. Vernacular saints' lives increased in quantity from the thirteenth century onwards, and Marie, with her own spiritual advisor and private masses as well as her proximity to the Celestine convent, would have been exposed to a lot more theological texts and sermons than many other lay female contemporaries. She was also a *fonctionnaire spirituelle* of the Avignon papacy and would have seen many processions and public spectacles in the city. This suggests that Marie could have benefited from a type of informal education which allowed her to claim a knowledge of certain sacred texts and their interpretation.

Marie would have also been exposed to the politics of the Schism given her location in Avignon. Marie arrived in Avignon almost ten years before her first recorded vision. The moment of her first vision may have been triggered by the critical moment in the development of the relations between the French monarchy and the Avignon pope. As we saw in the first chapter, after Clement VII's death in 1394, Pedro de Luna accepted the papacy with the promise that he would abdicate quickly should the Roman pope also be willing. Sometime around Pentecost in 1395, the French king sent a delegation to Avignon to negotiate Benedict's abdication, a move decided on at the national council in Paris in early 1395. However, the new pope was stubborn, and the second Council of Paris in 1396 considered what kinds of pressure France could exert on the Avignon pope.<sup>98</sup> Marie's first vision is dated the first Friday of Lent, 1397, and the subtraction of obedience was enacted in July 1398. Certainly, Marie would have

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<sup>98</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 82.

been aware of the political climate; she would have been hard-pressed not to be conscious of the events leading up to her letter to the king, given her connections to the Avignon papacy. Furthermore, Marie's visions certainly reflect and parallel the political situation of the time more precisely than some of her female contemporaries, such as Ermine de Reims. According to Blumenfeld-Kosinski, through Marie's experiences, we "find a kind of visionary transposition of attitudes prevalent in learned circles and of the endless discussions and treatises produced by the theologians at the University of Paris."<sup>99</sup> Despite Marie's formal illiteracy, there can be little doubt that she made use of her advantages as a beneficiary of the Avignon papacy to make herself aware of the political climate and develop her own understanding of the crisis at hand.

Marie's revelations also echo the teaching she would have received in Avignon, including the centrality of the liturgy. Marie's education through her spiritual advisor is evident in the theological conversation between John the Evangelist and Jesus on the subject of grace in the seventh vision.<sup>100</sup> Madeleine Jeay argues that Marie's project of political reform in her first vision for the king is not an illumination from above but her own solution. The focus of the houses taking care of the king's people is consistent with the fact that Marie, living paralysed, would have been dependent on charity until her healing and pension from the pope.<sup>101</sup> Jeay considers the elaborations of a religious nature developed by women in spite of their lack of education a vernacular theology.<sup>102</sup> Despite Marie's technical illiteracy, she has clearly taken her lived experiences and teaching from her spiritual advisor to form her own vernacular theology. Jeay's argument is certainly plausible. From such a theology, Marie is able to advise and inform her audience on a wide variety of matters, but her focus remains on the unity of the Church.

Marie would have been familiar with religious processions on the various feast days, particularly while living in Avignon and visiting Paris. The processions she would have witnessed have clearly influenced the processions she sees in her visions. In the fifth vision, which was received on the feast of the Eucharist of the Lord, the divine procession had a specific order giving a very clear hierarchy. First come the cherubim and seraphim carrying the incense, then Saint Peter carrying the host, followed by the apostles, martyred virgins, all the

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Jeay, "Marie Robine et Constance de Rabastens: Humbles femmes du peuple, guides de princes et de papes," par. 22.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., par. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Jeay, "La transmission du savoir théologique," 224.

way down to the virgin widows and, most notably, female confessors.<sup>103</sup> Marie's order in the procession would have been seen as orthodox, reaffirming the hierarchy of the Church; except, however, for the mention of female confessors ("*confessarum*"). Given that confession was overseen by male clergy, this mention in the hierarchy of the procession is interesting. Female visionaries and mystics, in particular, needed legitimation from a male confessor to validate their spiritual experiences. It seems strange that Marie would single out "*confessarum*" in what is otherwise an orthodox vision. Given its placement next to "*magnus numerus virginum viduarum*", Marie could perhaps be referring to women who were persecuted for their faith, but not to the point of martyrdom, as the title of confessor was given to male saints who lived a holy life and died in peace. On the other hand, this title is not traditionally bestowed on women either. While the procession may be reminiscent of those Marie witnessed in Avignon, the insertion of the female confessors seems entirely her own, and perhaps suggests the authority she saw holy women holding in celestial society – the 'true' Church.

Throughout her visions, one can see Marie mixing traditional theology and scripture together to create her own unique perspectives, or vernacular theology, on certain doctrines. Given the importance of the doctrine of Purgatory in the later Middle Ages, it is not surprising that Purgatory features in Marie's visions. Moreover, Marie not only endorses the existence of Purgatory but develops her own perspective on what it is. We get a glimpse of this in the third vision, where God shows Marie a city full of Christians separated into four parts. Only one of these parts goes to be with God, while the others go to Hell. Thus, the bad are definitively separated from the just and will be struck by lightning from God's righteous anger. Yet, although God's anger is terrible, it is never final – at least, not to Marie. Here we see Marie's interpretation of Purgatory as a parallel between the divine and humans; the heavenly people actively participate in earthly drama, suffering even more than men, while humans with a

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<sup>103</sup> MS. 520, Vision 5, 118v. "*Et ibi vidit processions divinas et celestes multitudines, miro quoddam ordine procedentes; procedebant enim sic circuiendo thronum Dei. Et vidit primo quemdam numerum cherubin et seraphin procedentium omnes alios, habentium turibula quinque, quibuslibet incesabant, unde tantum et tam odoriferous exibat odor quod vix humanitus explicari posset. Deinde post ipsum sequebatur primum beatus Petrus portans dominicum in minibus suis ad modum unius hominis etatis 33 annorum vel circa; et cum eo errant immediate alii apostoli suo ordine procedentes. Postea sequebantur virgins martires, miro quoddam modo ornate; portabant enim septem coronas prout ei videbatur, et omnes 7 in capite cujuslibet earum videbantur quasi una. Et omnes cum aliis circuierunt thronum Dei quinquies, cantantes unum canticum quasi novum. Quem quidem canticum non intelligebat Maria, nisi quando dicebant: 'Gloria patri et filio et cetera.' ... Et virgini gloriose Marie Dei genitrici, que sedebat quasi in pede throni Dei, inclinabant precise capita sua. Et quinta vice circuitus sui reassumpserunt suas coronas et spicas depositas. Deinde sequebantur martires suo ordine procedentes; postea confessors quilibet suo ordine. Deinde veniebant patriarche et prophete; postea sequebatur magnus numerus virginum viduarum et confessarum. Et facta hujusmodi processione, nescivit quomodo factum fuit quia omnes fuerunt circumcirca thronum Dei."*

sincere faith can attain a clear vision of the truth.<sup>104</sup> In the twelfth vision, we see that just as people on Earth pray for the souls of those in Purgatory, so too do the souls in Marie's Purgatory pray for those still on Earth.<sup>105</sup> This suggests that Marie believed the living have just as much need for help in attaining salvation as the souls in Purgatory. Instead of being separated, Marie's is a unique world where the dead and living are co-dependent.

For Marie, life is an endless succession of tests, pain, and hope, i.e., a purgatory. In Marie's life, her tests are in disappointment, from her failed attempt to gain an audience with the king to her failure to pass on Isabeau of Bavaria's message to the pope. Moreover, Marie's disappointment and disillusionment with the Avignon papacy, the French monarchy, and the theologians at the University of Paris is evident in her later visions. Thus, Marie's life can be framed as a sort of Purgatory, based on her theology evident in her visions. For Marie, Purgatory is almost beautiful, or in any case necessary, where hope can exceed suffering. This is in line with Augustinian belief in the didactic function of evil; evil is not only missing goodness, but its purpose is to persuade human beings to return to goodness.<sup>106</sup>

Marie's visions contain an interesting mix of paraphrased scripture as well as blended metaphors, which reflect what she likely heard at mass or through her priest. In the first vision, God's words reflect scripture, when He says "I punish anyone when it pleases me, and when it seems good as a sweet father. And you [Charles VI] are hindering the word that is in the sacred scripture; certainly, 'cursed is the one who trusts in man and blessed is the one who trusts in God.'"<sup>107</sup> In utilising scripture for God's dialogue, Marie ensures that it is orthodox. The first half of that quote, though it is not a direct quotation from scripture, can be supported by multiple verses in the Bible, including Revelations 3:19, Hebrews 12:6, and Proverbs 13:24. Marie's God is presented as a father who disciplines his children out of love to bring them back to Him. In the third and fifth visions, when God commands Marie to go speak, He references Matthew 11:15 and Revelation 2:29: "whoever shall have ears to hear let him hear, and whoever shall have a spirit of understanding let him understand."<sup>108</sup> Moreover, in the sixth vision, when God is commanding Marie what to tell the Church, He tells her that "whoever will pour on the

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Vision 3, 118r.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., Vision 12, 127v-28r.

<sup>106</sup> Tobin, "Les visions et révélations de Marie Robine d'Avignon dans le contexte prophétique des années 1400," 315-17.

<sup>107</sup> MS. 520, Vision 1, 115r. "*Castigo etiam eum quando michi placet et bonum etiam videtur, ut pater dulcis. Et tu remorare eidem verbum contentum in sacra Scriptura, scilicet: 'Maledictus est homo qui confidit in homine, et benedictus est ille qui confidit in Deo.'*"

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., Vision 3, 118r. "*Et qui habebit aures audiendi audiat, et qui spiritum intelligendi capiat.*"

ground and will sow seed, he will possess the land and in it he will receive his harvests; and whoever will be with me in Heaven, I will also be with him.”<sup>109</sup> The reference to sowing seed echoes the many parables and stories in the Bible about being diligent with sowing seed to ensure the success of the harvest, including in Luke 8.

Interestingly, Marie also uses her scriptural knowledge to challenge God in some of His decisions. In the second vision, Marie asks what Jesus’ enemies will say if He exacts vengeance on humanity, reminding Him of His promise to Saint Peter: that his “faith would not perish.”<sup>110</sup> Marie here seems to be referring to Luke 22:32, when Jesus predicts Peter’s denial of him.<sup>111</sup> Jesus responds to Marie also using scripture, reminding her that He will keep His promise to Peter, but that “my judgement will fall on those in whom faith is dead.”<sup>112</sup> This seems to reference James 2:17 and James 2:26, where it is declared that if faith has no deeds or actions, then it is dead. Jesus is telling Marie that those who have not acted to resolve the Schism and reform the Church do not have faith, and that therefore His judgement is justified. This is a clear indictment of the Masters of Theology, popes, cardinals, and the secular rulers who claim to support the faith but whose faith is dead because of their lack of action in resolving the Schism and the corruption in the Church. It is not only Marie and God who speak in scripture, either. In the seventh vision, John the Evangelist reminds the Lord that He has said “no one can come to you unless the Father should draw them to you.”<sup>113</sup> This dialogue references John 6:44. Utilising John’s own words from scripture would lend this dialogue an increased level of legitimacy.

Marie’s interpretation of the Antichrist is also influenced by scripture. In the eleventh vision, Marie overhears the Holy Trinity in secret counsel discussing the Antichrist. The description of the Antichrist is very similar to that noted in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-11 and Daniel 11:36-40. Marie believes that this contradicts the general resurrection, “in which each soul must rise again with its own heart.”<sup>114</sup> But Jesus replies that it will not be contradictory and goes on to explain how the Antichrist will rule two bodies with one soul. Throughout Marie’s visions, scriptural references are regularly woven into dialogue to add legitimacy to her revelations. Whether this was part of the original visions or edited by her confessor it is impossible to say.

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., Vision 6, 120r. “*Qui in terra fundabit ac seminabit, in terra possidebit et in ea recipient messes suas; et qui in celo erit mecum et ego cum eo.*”

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., Vision 2. 116v-17r. “*Tu enim promisisti ei quod fides tua non periret.*”

<sup>111</sup> Luke 22:32 (NIV) – Note, Peter was known as Simon-Peter.

<sup>112</sup> MS. 520, Vision 2, 117r. “*Sed sententia mea cadet in eos in quibus fides mortua est.*”

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., Vision 7, 121r. “*Nemo potest venire ad te nisi pater tuus trahat eum.*”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., Vision 11, 124v. “*in qua quelibet anima debet resurgere cum corde suo proprio.*”

However, we cannot dismiss the possibility that Marie herself had enough scriptural knowledge to demonstrate her orthodoxy. Given her location in Avignon and having her own spiritual director, Marie was exposed to more theology than the average laywoman at the time.

## Prophecy

While divinely given theological knowledge was one way to identify a holy woman, prophecies were also a way that holy women could claim authority in the late medieval period. Given the turbulent and uncertain nature of institutional authority during the Schism, God was believed to use women to share his words. Larissa Taylor calls Marie one of the most important prophets of the time.<sup>115</sup> While this may overestimate Marie's influence, certainly Marie's experiences are not presented as a model of holy life or inspiration for others, or as a way to create a more intimate relationship with the divine. Marie is presented through her visions as a sibyl pronouncing calamity and the end times to come. Marie's visions are full of prophecies about France, the king, the Church, and the Schism. In her early visions, God reveals to Marie the punishments that will come upon France should they withdraw obedience from the Avignon pope, and orders Marie to go to Paris. Her second vision presents a flaming wheel covered in swords waiting to bring destruction on the earth.<sup>116</sup> In Paris, Marie had an interview with Isabeau of Bavaria in which she shared these prophecies, warning that a withdrawal of obedience would throw the French Church into crisis.<sup>117</sup> This did indeed come true, and Marie's prophecies became progressively more violent towards France's downfall. Her final recorded vision details the destruction of Paris, with Marie seeing Jesus giving swords to all the saints with the inscription "It will be said this was for Paris", and God telling His son to exercise his judgement when it is pleasing to him. The vision also specifies that "just as Christ commanded, thus it was fulfilled."<sup>118</sup> This prophecy is confirmed here, simultaneously confirming Marie's spiritual authority.

Such confirmation of the accuracy of Marie's prophecies is evident in other visions as well, building Marie's legitimacy in the eyes of her contemporaries. In the eighth vision, Clement VII tells Marie that "on the day of Pentecost of the Lord, certain things will be shown

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<sup>115</sup> Larissa Taylor, *The Virgin Warrior: The Life and Death of Joan of Arc* (Hampshire: Yale University Press, 2009), 20.

<sup>116</sup> MS. 520, Vision 2, 117r.

<sup>117</sup> Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "Joan of Arc and Female Mysticism," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 1, 2 (1985), 37.

<sup>118</sup> MS. 520, Vision 12, 127r-27v. "*Dicetur hic fuit Parisius. Et sicut Christus precepit, ita adimpletum est.*"

to you, some things that you have never seen nor anything like them.”<sup>119</sup> Despite her distrust of Clement, on the day of Pentecost she does indeed receive the tenth vision, in which Marie sees many great scenes. In the vision, God also reveals to Marie that if the Church does not believe her message, “for three days before their deaths, I will show to them a clear truth. But if they do not believe previously, nothing will help them then, nor in those three days will they be heard by anyone.”<sup>120</sup> Similarly, early in the twelfth vision, Marie is told that she will receive another vision the next day and she does.<sup>121</sup> The inclusion in the *Livre* of Marie’s prophecies, particularly those which came true soon after their reception, would have affirmed Marie’s authority as a divine prophet.

Marie’s later visions became more violent and graphic in their prophecies than her earlier revelations. In the eleventh vision, Marie “heard in that hour a secret counsel in the Holy Trinity” describing the coming of the Antichrist.<sup>122</sup> He will come as a child born from a female sinner, and he “shall have all the wickedness which all the angels of Hell shall have, and he shall have all the evil thoughts and agreements through which or for the sake of which people have been condemned.”<sup>123</sup> He shall be adored for his beauty and gain followers because of their greed. More specifically, he will gain the allegiance of “the king and twelve peers of France, and in particular one king who will be called Louis.” If the kingdom of France continues to behave how they have been, then “25,300 people will die for the sake of defending the Antichrist... And the earth shall be cursed when he dies.”<sup>124</sup> This prophecy condemns the king of France and future monarchs, blaming future struggles on royal submission to the Antichrist.

The prophecy continues, explaining that after the evil child’s death,

an error will follow, because on that earth will be born a beast which will seem to be God making himself adored. And he will last for only 9 months. And finally, he will be

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., Vision 8, 121v. “*Quia in die penthecostes domini, ostendentur tibi alique que nunquam vidisti nec similia illis*”

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., Vision 10, 124r. “*Et per 3 dies ante finem suum ego ostendam eis claram veritatem. Sed si ante non crediderint, nichil proficient eis tunc, nec in illis tribus diebus exaudientur in quoque.*”

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., Vision 12, 127r.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., Vision 11, 124v. “*Et Maria illa hora audivit unum secretum consilium in sancta trinitate.*”

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., Vision 11, 124v. “*Et ille habebit omnes malitias quas habunt omnes angeli inferni et omnes malas cogitationes et consensus per quos vel pro quos homines sunt dampnati.*”

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., Vision 11, 124v-25r. “*quia in 5 die sue nativitatis puer maledictus loquetur. Et in illis 5 diebus semper tonabit et pluet in partibus illis in quibus puer hujusmodi nascetur. Et ita pulcher per naturam, quod per ejus pulchritudinem faciet se adorare. Et erit iterum baptizatus ad augmentum pene sue eterne. Et lucrabitur per avaritiam omnes quotquot dispositos, reperiet redeundo ad confusionem in qua dominus suus judicavit ad mortem. Et ultra ibi dicebatur quodlucrabitur regem et 12 pares Francie, et in speciale unum regem qui vocabitur Ludovicus. Et ille ei non evadet, et omnes milites Francie volentes bonum regni Francie. Et hoc intelligitur, si rex Francie et alii continent modum quem inceperunt, 25,300 homines morientur pro deffendendo antichristum die qua ipse faciet suum secundum obitum. Et terra erit maledicta ubi morietur.*”

destroyed by the true sons of God. And the cause of his destruction will be three Masters of Theology who will speak with one voice. Of which one will be called Stephen, another John, and another Matthew. And then Christendom will be freed from the worst demon, the French she-goat.<sup>125</sup> And Christendom will return to God the thanks and praises which should be brought to the celestial society.<sup>126</sup>

Notably, this vision attributes the destruction of the Antichrist to three Masters of Theology, Stephen, John, and Matthew. They are called true sons of God, which is in direct contrast to the many visions in which Marie sees the judgement and punishment of those in power and condemns the University of Paris. There are two potential interpretations for this. The revelation that these Masters of Theology will bring a resolution to the Antichrist could show that despite their failures in the Schism, Marie still fundamentally believes in the Masters of Theology's role in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. On the other hand, Marie could in fact be referencing the saints Stephen, John, and Matthew, and crediting them with defeating the Antichrist on behalf of the Church, due to the failure of those on earth. Given Marie's repeated condemnations of the university, particularly in her later visions, this latter interpretation seems more likely.

This prophecy regarding the Antichrist is also interesting because of its location in the text. It interrupts the description of a heavenly procession quite abruptly. Tobin suggests that the untidy insertion of this prophecy into an otherwise coherent vision could mean that it was inserted by the editor of the *Livre* out of concern for the credibility and acceptability of Marie's message.<sup>127</sup> Such an excess of diligence is understandable when one considers the importance speculations of the Antichrist had during the Schism. In her other visions, Marie does not seem particularly preoccupied with the Antichrist. Notably, this is also the only instance out of the twelve recorded revelations in which it appears there has been some obvious form of editing done to Marie's words. It reminds us of the separation that exists between modern historians and their female medieval subjects, and the mediation of their words (both intentional and not)

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<sup>125</sup> The phrase used here, *gallice crepis*, is difficult to translate. *Crepis* could perhaps be related to the word *crepa*, meaning female goat, which could be a symbol for the devil. Given that the sentence refers to "the worst demon", this translation could make sense. *Crepis* could also be an abbreviation missed in the transcript, as the manuscript has a line potentially signalling an abbreviation under the word (usually the abbreviation lines are above the word). It could be an abbreviation for *crepitis*, though this is not a standard abbreviation. If so, it could mean rattling, cracking, or clattering. However, there is no clear meaning of the phrase *gallice crepis*, so I have selected the possible translation "French she-goat" with the proviso that the manuscript is unclear in its meaning.

<sup>126</sup> MS. 520, Vision 11, 124v-25r. "*Et postea sequitur unum error quod in illa terra nascetur una bestia qui apud aliquod videbitur esse Deus faciens se adorare. Et durabit solum per 9 menses. Et finaliter erit destructa per legitimos Dei filios. Et illius destructionis erunt causa tres magistri in theologia qui loquentur una voce. Quorum unus vocabitur Stephanus, alius Johannes, et alius Matheus. Et tunc christianitas erit liberate a pessimo demone, gallice crepis. Et reddet Deo gratias et laudes que deferrantur ad celeste societatem.*"

<sup>127</sup> Tobin, "Le livre des révélations de Marie Robine († 1399). Étude et édition," 245.

by the male scribes. Though it should not discredit Marie's visions, it does remind us that interpretation of them as entirely her own words is unwise.

Further on in the same vision, after the holy procession, God states that if the king of France and his supporters will do nothing to resolve the Schism, He will depose them. Furthermore, because of their failures,

we will send such a great famine over the land and so great that there will not be anyone either small nor great who is able to be satisfied... And let them bind together the leaders who came well before them to such great wickedness against our will, and let them not sustain them in their unfairness because we have sent many tribulations to the world because of their sins or because of their failing of religion which is not seen among them. Let the king of France be warned, and his other leaders let them examine what kind of punishment they might receive from those who supported their enemies, we will carry out a similar one [punishment] concerning those who support them in their iniquities.<sup>128</sup>

Though the above prophecy of the Antichrist may have been inserted later, this second prophecy in the same vision is undoubtedly Marie's. Not only does it carry on smoothly from the earlier part of the vision, but it also continues the same themes that Marie's visions have been building on. It lays out exactly what will happen to the kingdom of France should the king not resolve the Schism.

After the Great Famine of 1315-1322, and the many other famines that had affected France in the fourteenth century, the threat of an even greater famine would have been unnerving. Famines are mentioned in scripture as a symbol of God's wrath against humanity for their sinful behaviour and lack of faith.<sup>129</sup> Medieval commentators believed that God permitted bad weather to destroy crops and create famines. Yet, it was also believed that God sent warnings of the impending disasters because he was merciful.<sup>130</sup> Because of these

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<sup>128</sup> MS. 520, Vision 11, 126r-26v. "*Nos deponemus eos de sedibus suis per demium subjectorum suorum et erunt aliqui eorum qui morientur in magnis fluminibus sanguinis... [et] propter defectum ipsorum, mitemus tantam famem super terram et ita magna quod non erit neque parvus nec magnus qui possit satiari... Et confingant eos principes qui eos obvenerunt bene ad tantam nequitiam contra nostrum voluntatem, et non sustineant eos in suis iniquitatibus quia multas tribulationes misimus mundo propter eorum peccata seu propter defectum religionis que in eis non observatur. Aviset se rex Francie et alii principes qualem vindictam ipsi caperent de illis qui sustinerent suos inimicos, similem capiemus nos de eis si eos sustineant in suis iniquitatibus.*"

<sup>129</sup> Deuteronomy 28:24; 2 Samuel 21:1; Matthew 5:45.

<sup>130</sup> For examples of the types of warnings for famines that medieval commentators recorded, see William Chester Jordan, *The Great Famine: Northern Europe in the Early Fourteenth Century* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), particularly 21-23.

warnings, famines also signalled an opportunity for repentance and change, a chance to make up for one's sins. Certainly, God sends plenty of warnings through Marie for those in power to change their ways and resolve the Schism or face His judgement.

Moreover, God states that He will very publicly depose the king and his entourage from their positions with bloody violence. Interestingly, Marie's visions do not overtly discuss the madness of Charles VI, and Marie seems to expect him to be a faithful leader even in the late 1390s. However, Charles's madness was seen by some as a divine punishment, and there are certainly many warnings of punishment from Marie to the king throughout the twelve visions. After Marie's death, a man named Jean du Bois advised Charles VII that France was in such disarray in 1445 because the monarchy had not heeded Marie's warnings.<sup>131</sup> This period of turmoil within royal circles was interpreted as divine punishment for the royalty's failure to end the Schism earlier, a punishment that Marie predicted. Jean's letter to the king shows that nearly fifty years after her death, Marie's words were still being read, spread, and used to try to influence and advise the king of France. This shows a lasting influence and authority amongst her peers.

Of course, one cannot mention Marie's gift of prophecy without noting her most famous prophecy, the one later used as divine confirmation for Joan of Arc. Though this particular vision is not recorded in the *Livre*, we have the record of a lawyer who was present when Marie apparently met with Charles VI in February 1398 and shared the prophecy.<sup>132</sup> In 1429, the lawyer recalls that Jean Erault, a Master of Theology, reported that he had spoken to Marie at the time she met with the king:

[Marie d'Avignon] had told him that the kingdom of France had much to suffer and many calamities to bear: saying moreover that she had had many visions touching the desolation of the kingdom of France, and amongst others that she had seen much armour which had been presented to her; and that she was alarmed, greatly fearing that she should be forced to take it; but it had been said to her that she need fear nothing, that this armour was not for her, but that a maiden who should come afterwards should bear

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<sup>131</sup> Valois, "Conseils et prédictions adressés a Charles VII, en 1445 par un certain Jean du Bois," 216.

<sup>132</sup> Other than this reference, we do not have any other record of Marie ever actually meeting with King Charles VI.

these arms and deliver the kingdom of France from the enemy. And he believed firmly that Jeanne was the maiden of whom Marie d'Avignon thus spoke.<sup>133</sup>

It was this vision that would confirm the legitimacy of Joan of Arc, who was the one believed to fulfil this prophecy. Though this particular prophecy is not included in the twelve visions recorded in MS. 520, it suggests that there was an oral tradition surrounding Marie's revelations that included other visions not recorded. It is also the only written confirmation of Marie successfully gaining an audience with the king. Given her failure at other times, it is questionable how reliable this testimony is. However, it does confirm that her reputation as a prophet must have been known in society and, certainly after the coming of Joan of Arc, well-respected.

### **Physical Suffering and Martyrdom**

Just as the great prophets alongside whom Marie is placed in the tenth vision suffered in their lives for following God's commands, Marie also suffered. This was in two parts; on the one hand, her paralysis earlier in her life, and on the other, demonic torturing within her visions. Although we do not have much biographical information for Marie, such as a *vita*, we can see through her visions that she subscribed to the hagiographical topoi of physical suffering and a desire for martyrdom. In fact, the physical torments that Marie faces in her visions are similar to those reported in Catherine of Siena's visions and *vita*. In the third vision, Marie is bound in chains and taken by three demons before Lucifer. He gives her two options: she can either swear an oath to him that she will no longer fight for the union of the Church and will never say anything of what she has seen, or she will be tortured forever in the burning wheels he has made to torment her. If she should choose the first option, she will be sent back to earth to do whatever she wants and to have peace with her enemies. Marie replies that "of all those things you ask of me, I will not do any of them. But if it pleases my Creator that I remain here, then let His will be done." Lucifer claims she has hindered him for a long time, but that now she will not evade his torture. He then binds her to one of the burning wheels while demons surround her to torture her. Unable to bear the pain, she cries out to God, asking him to have mercy on her, and immediately one of the spirits who had taken her there frees her from those tortures.<sup>134</sup> Marie

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<sup>133</sup> In the original Latin, see Pierre Duparc, *Procès en nullité de la condamnation de Jeanne d'Arc*, vol. IV (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1986), 59; English translation in Craig Taylor, *Joan of Arc: la Pucelle*, Manchester medieval sources series, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 303.

<sup>134</sup> MS. 520, Vision 3, 117r-17v.

is willing to, and does, suffer physical torture at the hands of Lucifer while standing up for her faith. However, this exchange also reveals Marie's inability to handle the level of physical asceticism she aspires to and is put on her in her visions. Marie's willingness to be subjected to pain to please her creator, despite her failure to withstand it, aligns her with other holy women who only wanted God's will and would have reassured her audience of her intentions to honour God.

As mentioned, when considering Marie's suffering, one must remember that she was previously paralysed before receiving visions. Certainly, this would have been considered extreme suffering and although we do not know for how long she had lived with paralysis, her experience would align her with other holy people who had endured long-term illness. Though not specifically physical asceticism, it is closely linked as another type of physical suffering to be endured, and which could serve the purpose of conquering and purifying the body of a holy woman. Yet, as in her visions, Marie had cried out to God for freedom from this suffering at the tomb of Pierre de Luxembourg, and she was miraculously healed. In some ways, Marie's healing could be viewed as another failure to endure the physical suffering expected of holy women, though it was obviously used by contemporaries as evidence of a miracle.

Despite her failings, Marie still desires to be martyred for her faith like the holy men and women whose lives would have been well-known to her. In the second vision, when Marie sees the punishments coming for humanity, she begs God, saying "Lord, if your will is such, do so that your whole judgement falls on me, so that I alone will die, and all the others will live." But God refuses, because she is "not the cause of all bad things." Again, Marie pleads, "send me away to take the punishment of the people full of iniquity." God responds that though Marie has shown Him a sign of her great love, by asking this she is hindering His will.<sup>135</sup> Though Marie offers to bear the sins for humanity, she is deemed unworthy by God. Again, Marie is unable to live up to the extreme aspirations of physical suffering and martyrdom. God refuses Marie as an offering, and instead shows her bowls full of excrement with a hardly endurable stench as a mark of His disgust for the sins of humanity.

Furthermore, in the fifth vision, Jesus asks Marie if she is willing to die for God and she answers "yes". Yet Jesus says she is being contradictory, "because you offer death and yet the words of men are weighing you down."<sup>136</sup> Again, though Marie's spirit is willing to suffer on

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., Vision 2, 116v.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., Vision 5, 119r. "*Tu contradicis, nam tu offers mortem et verba hominum gravant te.*"

God's behalf, her flesh seems to be weak when confronted with physical suffering or death. Unlike other medieval female saints, Marie fails in withstanding extreme suffering or martyrdom (even within her visions) as a sign of her piety.

Whether Marie's failure to withstand extreme physical suffering or to successfully be martyred on behalf of humankind affected her authority within society is unclear, particularly as these scenarios all took place within her visions. It was not unusual for holy women to claim that suffering endured in a vision equalled suffering in reality. Catherine of Siena received the stigmata in a vision, as well as many other demonic torments which were framed by her confessor as examples of her living martyrdom.<sup>137</sup> In Marie's fifth vision, she desires to sit between Saint Paul and the Blessed Catherine of Alexandria but realises she is not worthy. Both Saint Paul and the Blessed Catherine were martyred for their faith. This scenario reflects Marie's desire to be martyred like them, but also her acknowledgement that she does not deserve to be, reiterating the topos of humility.<sup>138</sup> Marie's awareness of the expectations of holy women in regards to physical suffering and martyrdom, and her failure at both in her visions, suggests that she herself did not believe she held as much authority as other holy men and women who came before her. In this aspect, she fails to live up to their saintly ideals. This also seems to be part of her act of humility, being unable to embrace martyrdom like the saints.

## Conclusion

Marie Robine is a fascinating example of a lay female prophet who attempted to have influence over the politics of the Great Schism. Her posthumous impact reveals that she did in fact achieve a certain level of influence. Information on Marie is included in an unpublished memoir from the middle of the fifteenth century, discovered by Jules Quicherat.<sup>139</sup> In addition, as we saw above, the use of Marie's unrecorded prophecy to validate Joan of Arc's claims also shows that there was an oral tradition around Marie, at least in the century after her death. This testimony is what has inspired much of the scholarship on Marie, and Noël Valois's dedication at the turn of the twentieth century in locating a wide range of primary sources has uncovered much of what we know about Marie today.

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<sup>137</sup> Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena*, 186, 380.

<sup>138</sup> MS. 520, Vision 5.

<sup>139</sup> *Aperçus nouveaux sur l'histoire de Jeanne d'Arc* (Paris, 1850, in-8°), qtd. in Valois, "Jeanne d'Arc et la prophétie de Marie Robine," 452.

Despite attaining a significant level of spiritual authority and being used by the Avignon papacy to further its cause for a period, Marie was ultimately unable to translate this to any real lasting temporal influence within her lifetime. Her revelations were perhaps better appreciated after her death, when France was thrown into the prophesied turmoil from its earlier disobedience. Marie does not achieve the status or influence of the pre- and early-Schism prophets, such as Saints Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden. In general, later Schism prophets had limited fame, both in length of time in public activity and in geographical renown.<sup>140</sup> Hence, we know little more about Marie than what her visions and the papal bull reveal.

However, the agency shown by Marie reveals that laywomen in France were aware of and desired to actively engage in the politics of their faith and utilised their visions to legitimise their spiritual authority to do so. Marie tapped into the hagiographical topoi expected of holy women to affirm her sanctity and role as God's messenger. However, Marie adapted these topoi to suit her own agenda, using them in slightly different ways than her predecessors. Bridal mysticism is completely missing from Marie's visions, and physical asceticism is not as central as it was for earlier mystics. It is prophecy, and Marie's role as God's prophet, that was most emphasised by Marie. Recognition of Marie holding this prophetic gift by those around her was noted throughout the visions, and the importance that Biblical prophets held in Marie's visions emphasised her own important status.

Though these differences from earlier mystics provide evidence of Marie's agency in presenting herself as a holy woman, Marie still used traditional topoi such as divine authority, humility, and illiteracy, making herself more palatable to her contemporary audience. The degree to which these were strategies employed for this exact purpose of gaining support, rather than genuine representations of Marie herself, may be debated. While claiming unworthiness to be God's messenger as a sign of humility, Marie also confidently addressed the highest ecclesiastical and political powers in France, suggesting a deep-rooted assurance of her role. Marie's claims to illiteracy and ignorance do not align with the access she had to key aspects of Christian life in Avignon and the vernacular theology she would have developed from her relationship with her own priest and the Celestines. Notably, Marie's confessor played a rather insignificant role in her visionary journey; a surprising revelation given scholarship has established the central role most confessors are credited with in their visionary's texts.<sup>141</sup> This

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<sup>140</sup> Cohen, "Holy Women as Spokeswomen for Peace in Late Medieval Europe," 137.

<sup>141</sup> See Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*.

is markedly different from the involvement of the confessors of Constance de Rabastens and Ermine de Reims who will be considered in the following chapters. Likely, Marie's direct approval from the pope and support from the Church had a significant impact on Marie's lack of dependence on her confessor.

In the coming chapters, we will compare Marie's strategies for establishing her legitimacy with those of the other case studies. Because Marie supported the Avignon pope while living in Avignon, it was perhaps easier for her to establish a social network with key figures in the Schism. By contrast, Constance de Rabastens, considered in the next chapter, was isolated by her support of the Roman papacy in the Languedoc, which officially followed the Avignon papacy. To support Constance and her visions would have meant opposing many French clergy and nobility. However, as we shall see, Constance employed many of the same topoi as Marie, and in her own way attempted to adhere to the strict pathways available to female visionaries. When she was ignored, she was even more forceful in being heard than Marie had been; while Marie retreated into retirement as a recluse following her disillusionment with the papacy, Constance fought for her visions to be recorded and shared until her imprisonment and disappearance. We shall now evaluate how Constance established herself as a holy woman within late fourteenth-century Rabastens and Toulouse.

## **Chapter Four:**

### **Case Study: Constance de Rabastens (d.1386)**

As we saw in the previous chapter, laywomen such as Marie Robine were receiving visions and, on the basis of these, were eager to intervene in Schism politics in France at the end of the fourteenth century. To do so, they had to qualify themselves as holy women, and establish a support network who could attest to their legitimacy. For Marie, as a supporter of the Avignon papacy whose miraculous healing proved the legitimacy of Clement VII, this support came from powerful places. However, Constance de Rabastens' support of the Roman papacy automatically pitted her against local clerical authorities who supported Avignon. Nevertheless, Constance was zealous in her efforts to have her voice heard and to correct the errors she saw in the Church. This chapter will explore how Constance navigated social networks to establish herself as a holy woman in her community, and to what extent she was successful at this. It will also consider how Constance and her confessor employed hagiographical topoi to legitimise her authority as God's messenger, and how this aligns with the expectations of holy women.

Constance de Rabastens (d.1386) was a lay female visionary from the Languedoc region, whose sixty-seven visions and six letters recorded between 1384 and 1386 display a passionate prophet desperate to resolve the political crises causing disunity in her community. We know little about Constance's life other than that she had a husband, a daughter, and a son, who was a Benedictine monk in Toulouse, and that at one point she was in prison.<sup>1</sup> There are surprisingly no records of Constance in the notarial acts in Rabastens despite her brushes with the inquisitor, so her family name is unknown.<sup>2</sup> The title "de Rabastens" could have been chosen by Constance, as a symbol of her self-conscious adoption of a new separate and chaste identity after the death of her husband and to separate her new self from her old role of wife and mother. Or it may have been chosen by her confessor, with this new sense of self in mind when recording her visions to align her with other notable female visionaries as a strategy to

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<sup>1</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 14th century, Ancien Fonds Colbert 787, 35r-37r, Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Pierre Hiver-Bérenghier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus* (Toulouse: Editions Privat, 1984), 65-66.

develop her authority. Constance was not part of the nobility but was likely of middling social background. Constance must have been of a social class reasonably respected in society given the confidence with which she addressed the Council of Rabastens, the inquisitor of Toulouse, and nobles who asked for her advice.

Constance's first recorded vision happened shortly before her husband's death in 1384. Constance retired from the world when she was widowed and though Hiver-Bérenguier notes that she recited all the prayers of office that she would have done had she been in a convent, there is no evidence that she became a nun, only that she frequented the convent of the Friars Minor in the suburb of Rabastens called Quartier des Cordeliers. Hiver-Bérenguier suggests that she may have been part of the Third Franciscan Order, but again, this is not stated in the primary sources.<sup>3</sup> Constance's *Revelations* are ordered chronologically and escalate from personal experiences of Christ, focusing on her own need for penance due to her sinfulness and her identification with Christ's pain, to a defined and urgent political mission concerning the Schism, the Hundred Years War, and other local issues. As with Marie, Constance repeatedly insists that these visions come to her unbidden and notes the need to reveal them to a larger public. However, unlike Marie, Constance supported the Roman pope. As Constance's revelations were transcribed and circulated, her reputation increased throughout the region. Constance's visions landed her in jail and through multiple trials; however, imprisonment did not silence her. If anything it made her more determined to be heard, and she used her son to carry her letters to her confessor and the inquisitor of Toulouse.<sup>4</sup>

Because Constance's visions were recorded over the three years of 1384 to 1386, some scholars assume that she was only active as a visionary for these three years. However, like Marie, there are references to earlier visions in Constance's revelations that are not recorded elsewhere. Constance's visions were transcribed mostly by her confessor Raymond de Sabanac, possibly a law professor in Toulouse, most likely in Latin or perhaps Provençal. However, the only surviving medieval manuscript is in Catalan. Raymond, based on his name, was from the region of Foix or Quercy; thus it is unlikely that he wrote the surviving Catalan manuscript.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Constance's words have also been mediated by a translator. Raymond also wrote a comprehensive preface concerning the discernment of spirits, repeating Gerson's warnings about discerning true visions and the rules Raymond used to test Constance's visions for

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>4</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 53v-54r.

<sup>5</sup> Amédée Pagès and Noël Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384-86)," *Annales du Midi* 8, 31 (1896), 243-44.

authenticity. The reader is assured that Constance's revelations meet all the criteria. As with Marie, Constance's prophecies are not in her own words but in the divine voice. Unlike Marie, there are no traces of Constance in works by other authors, nor are there any other documents mentioning her.

The surviving manuscript, MS. Latin 5055 in the National Library of France, is from late fourteenth-century Roussillon, near Avignon, an area that was then part of Aragon.<sup>6</sup> The revelations are the only vernacular text in a manuscript containing a variety of Latin pieces. It is the second text in the manuscript, from folio 35r to folio 58r, and is titled *Revelationes Constantiae de Rabastens quae vivebat anno MCCCLXXXIV cum aliquot litteris ejusdem ad Inquisitorem fidei (the Revelations of Constance de Rabastens who lived in 1384 with some of her letters to the inquisitor of the faith)*.<sup>7</sup> This title was given by Etienne Baluze, a famous Avignon papacy historian and Colbert's librarian, in the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> The visions are surrounded by a range of texts which cover various subjects including treatises by historians and some Church Fathers, as well as texts on anatomy and games. The rationale for this manuscript is unclear, particularly considering many of the folios have been torn out, re sewn, or bound upside down. The folios containing Constance's revelations stand out by their beautiful writing and clean pages, despite damage from damp. Though the original text does not survive, the contemporary translation of the text into Catalan shows the perceived importance of the text for that region, as will be discussed further below. The English translations of the *Revelationes* used for this thesis are from Blumenfeld-Kosinski, who translated them from the Catalan in Amédée Pagès and Noël Valois's transcription, as well as the original manuscript MS. Latin 5055.<sup>9</sup> Where the particular wording is important, I have used the original Catalan from this manuscript.

At the end of the nineteenth century, historians Amédée Pagès and Noël Valois rediscovered Constance de Rabastens and her role in the Schism. They transcribed her revelations and highlighted key primary texts regarding her.<sup>10</sup> However, the first extensive survey by a modern historian was Jean-Pierre Hiver-Bérenguier in his 1984 book *Constance de*

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<sup>6</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 13.

<sup>7</sup> Pagès and Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384–86)," 241.

<sup>8</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 32.

<sup>9</sup> Pagès and Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384–86)," 241-78. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 31.

<sup>10</sup> Pagès and Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384–86)."; Amédée Pagès and Noël Valois, "La prophétesse de Rabastens et le grand schisme," *Annales du Midi* (1896).

*Rabastens: mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*.<sup>11</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier describes the historical context in which Constance lived, particularly focusing on the Hundred Years War and local politics. Gaston Fébus, the count of Foix-Béarn, and his importance in the region is also well documented. Hiver-Bérenguier then briefly surveys the history of ecstasies before providing a commentary on Constance's visions, focusing largely on the imagery within them. At the end of the book is a translation of Constance's revelations into French, although Blumenfeld-Kosinski argues that the translation contains too many errors to be useful.<sup>12</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier's text in general uses very emotive language and embellishes details or creates them out of his own imagination, with one of the early sections of his book detailing a fictionalised account of Constance witnessing the Battle of Rabastens during the Hundred Years War. There are no historical records that support this story, and at times the book reads more like a dramatic novel than a scholarly discussion on Constance. However, Hiver-Bérenguier's work is what brought Constance back to the attention of modern historians. Blumenfeld-Kosinski has more recently considered this extraordinary visionary across a series of articles and a published translation of Constance's revelations into English. Blumenfeld-Kosinski placed Constance more clearly within the Schism context, and considered further the imagery in her revelations and compared her to other visionaries of the period. This chapter will expand on the scholarly foundations built by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, while acknowledging the contributions of Hiver-Bérenguier, Pagès, and Valois, to consider specifically Constance's agency and her strategies to gain authority as well as key relationships in her world, as witnessed through her revelations and letters. As in the previous chapter on Marie, this chapter will consider Constance's building of social networks as well as the hagiographical topoi she employed or adapted to establish herself as a holy woman and assert her authority.

## **Building Authority: Constance's Social Networks**

### **Her confessor**

Scholarship on lay female visionaries such as Catherine of Siena has shown that the social authority attained by a female visionary depended to a degree on her relationships with others and the social networks of which she was part. We have certainly seen this as the case for Marie in the previous chapter. Constance's social networks, however, were very limited, and thus a

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<sup>11</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*.

<sup>12</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 32.

lot of the social authority and legitimacy had to come through Constance's confessor, Raymond de Sabanac. Raymond plays a much more active role in Constance's revelations than Marie's confessor played in hers. Constance, and potentially Raymond as well, had connections to the Franciscan order, while the inquisitor of Toulouse was Dominican. Raymond would have been aware of the expectations for proving holy women and so he is extra careful to justify Constance's revelations and prove her legitimacy, establishing her in the tradition of other medieval visionaries in his preface to her revelations.<sup>13</sup> In particular, Raymond would have been aware of Catherine of Siena as an example of a Dominican-aligned laywoman active in the lead up to and early stages of the Schism and a prominent promoter of the Roman papacy, and likely this would have influenced his representation of Constance. Both Raymond of Capua, Catherine's confessor, and Raymond de Sabanac present their visionaries as exemplary holy women, justifying their charge's special relationship with the divine. Catherine's connections to the Dominican order made her a useful role model on which to base Constance's experiences and thus make Constance more acceptable to Dominicans. Raymond de Sabanac's preface focuses on the discernment of spirits, revealing that he was preoccupied with Constance's orthodoxy. Establishing Constance's legitimacy was even more important given her emphatic support for the Roman papacy in an area that was aligned with Avignon. Thus, the reception of her revelations was about both papal allegiances and the loyalties of the Church in Toulouse. It would have been easy for detractors to claim that Constance's visions were demonic as a way to discount her warnings.

Initially, Raymond did not believe in Constance's authority as a holy woman. For a period, at the command of the archbishop of Toulouse, he refused to record her revelations. However, the divine Voice warned Raymond through Constance that he must record them because they were truly from God, and he must obey God more than human beings.<sup>14</sup> Constance's increasingly insistent and public voice is juxtaposed with her confessor's increasing timidity. Raymond was not in the same position as Raymond of Capua who supported Catherine of Siena nor as Birgitta of Sweden's confessor. Constance was not a religious like Birgitta, nor did she have a popular network and support system like Catherine. While the trope of divine

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<sup>13</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier suggests that for a Dominican inquisitor, the Franciscans were always a little suspect. See Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 120. For an example of the scholarly discussion on Franciscan and Dominican similarities and differences in how visionary activities were seen, see Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'?": The Clash between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005); Laura Ackerman Smoller, *The Saint and the Chopped-Up Baby: The Cult of Vincent Ferrer in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.21, 45.

command overriding the reluctance to write is not uncommon in hagiographies of holy women, Raymond ran a clear political risk in transcribing Constance's controversial revelations – not only because it meant disobeying his superior, but also because Constance denounced the Avignon papacy and many of the local nobility who supported its legitimacy.

Raymond expresses a constant strain between his desire to obey a divine command and his fear of ecclesiastical authorities. This tension gives us a glimpse into the fraught relationship that could exist between a female visionary and the male cleric assigned to transcribe her revelations.<sup>15</sup> Raymond's disbelief and canonical caution is emphasised at various points in the early visions and letters. Raymond's decision to include Constance's frustrations with his hesitancy to record her revelations initially and her repeated requests to the inquisitor to send her scribes instead (discussed further below) reveals Constance's own agency in finding ways to have her voice heard.

However, Raymond shows why he came to believe in Constance's divine authority. In his preface, Raymond warns that as important as it is not to accept the visions of "a hasty, indiscreet, and thoughtless person, given to fantasies" who received false revelations, it was just as dangerous not to accept true visions for fear of demonic deception.<sup>16</sup> To truly determine Constance's legitimacy, Raymond asked God for "such an illness that no human being will be able to cure him," to prove that God wanted him to record Constance's visions.<sup>17</sup> Raymond fell very ill for seven months, and people feared that he might die. Despite this serious illness, Raymond still did not want to write until he received another sign through God removing his eyesight. His sight immediately became so bad that he could only see with his glasses on. Yet, "he still did not want to write, although many remarkable things happened to him in confirmation of the holy Catholic faith."<sup>18</sup> Constance reassured Raymond that these signs were sent by God as he requested. Raymond, convinced now of her holiness, eventually relented, and agreed to record Constance's revelations, and the Voice promised him great eternal glory for his change of heart.<sup>19</sup> With his glasses on, he could 'see' the truth in Constance's visions. Sudden blindness, as well as other illnesses, was a common trope to highlight a would-be confessor's hesitancy in recording his visionary's experiences. The illness was a sign or punishment from God for disobedience in refusing to record the visions. Miraculous healing of

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<sup>15</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 27-28.

<sup>16</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 37r. translated in de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 1, 37.

<sup>17</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 41v; de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.22, 45.

<sup>18</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.56, 62-63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.34, 52-53.

these illnesses was often used as proof of the visionary's holiness and to greater emphasise her divine authority. The contrast between Raymond's initial hesitancy and his eventual conversion to a promoter of Constance's spiritual authority enabled Raymond to voice likely hesitations the audience would have regarding Constance, and then refute them with clear evidence of her legitimacy (her role as intercessor for his healing).

Convinced of Constance's status as a holy woman, Raymond assures readers that she is virtuous, and her visions are true and should be heeded. After Raymond outlines the necessary virtues of a holy woman, he then states that they are all "visible in the things she has seen and in the quality of this person, that is, in this spouse of Christ, the blessed Constance from the place called Rabastens in the county of Toulouse."<sup>20</sup> He continues, saying that, though "it would be suitable to recount her life in order to demonstrate the truth of all the above-mentioned points, for her reputation would thus be manifest in all the world", he lacks the skills to do so and the extent of her noble deeds would take too long to recount. However, the "marvelous visions contained in this book which our Lord God has revealed to her will clearly tell of and demonstrate her virtues."<sup>21</sup> Raymond also refers to a future time when Constance's *vita* may need to be written, which suggests that he thought her canonisation might be promoted. Raymond's decision not to record her life is in line with Gerson's later warning not to praise visionaries as it would bolster their pride. Through his preface, Raymond strongly aligns Constance with other holy female visionaries and emphasises her virtue and legitimacy.

Thus, Raymond reveals his belief in the divine authority given to Constance by God. However, regardless of Raymond's attempts at proving Constance's authenticity, this could not be accepted by the very Avignon papacy whose authority Constance repeatedly denied in her visions. Though Raymond followed the method of discernment, Constance did not fit into the mould of the perfect visionary. Thus, had Raymond had any hopes of promoting his charge as a holy woman, she could not be considered orthodox in a region that supported the Avignon papacy.

### **The Avignon Papacy**

Given her support of the Roman papacy, Constance's relationship with the Avignon papacy was not positive. Constance's stance on the Avignon papacy is certainly not hidden in her

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

revelations. In one vision, she saw “a temple filled with smoke and darkness, and the Avignon pope was inside. And above him there was an angel holding a naked and bloody sword as if he wanted to kill the pope.”<sup>22</sup> Not all of Constance's visions against the pope were this direct, but those that were not were explained to her by the Voice, firmly denouncing Pope Clement VII. In another vision, Constance saw a leprous lord who distributed treasures throughout the earth. Those who accepted his treasures became as leprous as the lord. God explained to Constance that “the lord you saw stands for the Avignon pope; leprosy signifies simony; the leprous people stand for those who accept benefices through simony, and those who give them are just as leprous as those who accept them.”<sup>23</sup> Leprosy was seen as a moral disease of the soul in the Middle Ages, so it is significant that Clement is presented as a leprous man in Constance's vision.<sup>24</sup> Simony is the act of securing ecclesiastical positions, and thus spiritual authority, through payment.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in this one vision, Clement was clearly denounced by God as a morally corrupt leader who was infecting the Church. According to Constance, such a man could not be God’s appointed pope. Unlike Marie, Constance was not a promoter of the Avignon papacy, and therefore she could not gain authority by serving Clement’s agenda.

### **The Avignon Prelates**

As well as the pope, Constance's revelations denounced the prelates of the Avignon papacy. Clement VII spreads his leprosy and simony to the cardinals who support him, and the Voice tells Constance that “those who give them [benefices] are just as leprous as those who accept them.”<sup>26</sup> In vision sixty-one, Constance is in a big church with many men and women when the crucified Christ comes down from the cross and becomes a man. Christ says that he will “behave like a rich lord or a man who is furious”, and then starts to beat the women with whips until they fall down in a heap. He then tells the men to put him back on the cross.<sup>27</sup> In the following vision, the Voice explains that the women represent “those people who fornicated and still fornicate with the women and have drunk the wine of indignity.”<sup>28</sup> This second crucifixion, the Voice says, is a greater offense than the one Pilate committed when he sent Christ to his death.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 2.48, 59.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 2.51, 60.

<sup>24</sup> See Saul Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 60.

<sup>26</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.51, 60.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2.61, 64.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel 5:23

The men represent those who “did not want to adhere to the true pope I had created but created another one. And all the cardinals were there, but the true election was that of the other one, that is, the first one.”<sup>29</sup> Of the sixteen cardinals who elected Pope Urban VI in April 1378, thirteen were present at the election of Clement VII in September.<sup>30</sup> The cardinals are represented as women in this vision, giving into the temptations of the flesh with sexual immorality and indignity. Given the medieval belief in women's weakness due to their connection with the flesh and the original sin, the gravity of the cardinals' sin of electing Clement is amplified by portraying them as women. The Voice explains their behaviour as even worse than Pilate's offense when he handed Christ over to be crucified. Hence, Constance's prophecies blame the split in the Church on the Avignon cardinals. The Voice reminds Constance that no one can deceive God; the Avignon cardinals know well that the election for the Avignon pope was made against His will and was falsified. He warns that the cardinals “will be measured by the measure they have used.”<sup>31</sup>

Despite her very clear condemnation of the Avignon cardinals, Constance still begs God to forgive them, appealing to His merciful side and offering herself to take their punishment. Though Christ says he will behave like “a man who is furious”, Constance reminds Him that he is not like “a vengeful man. Rather, you will do good like the Lord full of mercy that you are. For your mercy is greater, Lord, than are their faults. Lord, I am the one who wants to bear their pains, provided they are not eternal.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, despite their support for the antipope, and their leading the Church astray, Constance still hopes for their salvation and is willing to sacrifice herself to make it happen. The Voice commands Constance to write to the college of cardinals in Avignon, and should they believe her and repent, God will forgive them. However, if not, He will give them their punishments.<sup>33</sup> God accuses them of just pretending to be part of his Church, and that they are really “infidels against the Church of God of Rome. They will perish just like the ship that signifies them, which perished and sank to the bottom” in another vision.<sup>34</sup> The Voice commands Constance to write to the bishop of Albi and the archbishop of Toulouse to warn the cardinals to renounce their sinful ways, because God does not want their vengeance, only their repentance.<sup>35</sup> Evidently, they do not repent. Constance's portrayal of the

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<sup>29</sup> Matthew 25:41, de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.62, 64-65.

<sup>30</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 65.

<sup>31</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.42, 55-56.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew 25:41, *ibid.*, 2.62, 64-65.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 25:41, *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.2, 66.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.42 and 2.55, 56, 61-61.

Avignon cardinals in her revelations reveals their utter failure to guide God's Church in her eyes. Constance's prophecies against the "Antichrist's disciples" would not have won her support from the ecclesiastical elite whom she needed to validate her experiences.<sup>36</sup>

Constance goes further than the generalised condemnation of all cardinals to attack one in particular. Pierre de la Barrière (d.1383), Cardinal of Autun, was known for being one of the good clerics of Christianity by Avignon supporters, and testimonies from canons and the new bishop of Autun revealed him to be "*grans clers, sages et prudens hors*" that "*tousjours estudioit et ne s'en pouvoit saouler*."<sup>37</sup> However, the Voice commanded Constance to write to the inquisitor of Toulouse to share her vision of how after the election of Urban VI, Pierre spread "fallacious errors" that caused the cardinals to abandon Urban and remove peace in the kingdom of France. The Voice also warned Constance that Flanders was being destroyed and the cardinals were preparing to move against the king of France.<sup>38</sup> This is the first indication in the visions of Constance's political mission to support the legitimacy of Urban's papacy. Pierre, then bishop of Autun, had refused an appointment as cardinal from Urban in 1378 but accepted one from Clement VII a few months later. In 1379 he had written a treatise for King Charles V in favour of Clement VII, refuting Giovanni de Legnano's pro-Urban *De fletu Ecclesiae* (*On the Tears of the Church*).<sup>39</sup>

In Constance's fourth letter to the inquisitor, she regales him with numerous visions condemning Pierre. Not long after his death, Constance saw three cardinals in great torment in Hell. One, identified by the Voice as Pierre, was even more tormented than the others. However, Constance's confessor Raymond denied the truth of this vision because he believed Pierre to be a good person. Constance had the same vision again and the Voice claimed that it was true, no matter what Raymond said. Constance must:

'know that his first name is really Pierre and that he can be compared to a stone,<sup>40</sup> that is, the stone that brought the worst destruction to the path, and the stone on which the good seed fell but could not flourish.<sup>41</sup> He preached lies and false errors before the king. He is not content with his own damnation but wants to pull others into damnation with

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.3, 69.

<sup>37</sup> Noted in parliament, 5 July 1381, during a trial between the canons and the new bishop of Autun, in Archives nationale, Xla 1471, fol 495 v., qtd. in Pagès and Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384–86)," 245-46.

<sup>38</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.23, 46.

<sup>39</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 46.

<sup>40</sup> "*Pierre*" is French for stone.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew 13.

him. He is called la Barrière because he established a barrier between me and himself.’ He showed me a great valley that had a high mountain on each side. He told me: ‘Just as these two mountains cannot approach each other, he can never approach me.’<sup>42</sup>

This is the most condemnatory statement we see from the Voice in Constance’s revelations. Though the other cardinals can repent and be forgiven, Pierre cannot approach God and presumably, therefore, cannot be forgiven. This eternal condemnation for Pierre seems to be confirmed in another vision, in which Pierre was “all black like coal.”<sup>43</sup> He is also seen in a red cardinal hat that was all aflame. Different colours symbolised different kinds of martyrdom, and red martyrdom is that of torment and death.<sup>44</sup> The Voice explains that Pierre “has sown discord so much so that it has taken root. But the time has come for him to be torn out and thrown into Hell.”<sup>45</sup> Having such controversial revelations against someone who was held up as a good Christian amongst Avignon supporters would not have won Constance followers, as seen by Raymond’s initial dismissal of the revelations. However, for Constance, it was further proof of the Avignon papacy’s own illegitimacy.

### **The Inquisitor of Toulouse**

Constance’s troubled relationships with clerics extended to the inquisitor of Toulouse. Thanks to her six letters, we get a glimpse into Constance's interactions with an ecclesiastical authority who was definitely aware of, and not entirely happy with, her existence.<sup>46</sup> Hugues de Verdun was the Dominican inquisitor attached to the archbishopric of Toulouse at the time, as both prosecutor and chief justice. Hugues was a Master of Theology and was the inquisitor from 1372 to 1386. Hugues was not favourable towards visionaries, as evidenced by his treatment of Jean de Lisle, a clerk from Cahors who claimed to have visions in 1377. Though initially deemed to have received divine revelations by doctors of the Church, Jean was condemned by Hugues as following the devil’s impulses. Hugues then excommunicated Jean.<sup>47</sup> Constance voluntarily went to Toulouse in January 1384 to seek counsel on her visions. Hugues

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<sup>42</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 4.4, 70.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 70.

<sup>45</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 4.4, 70-71.

<sup>46</sup> As noted earlier, the title in the manuscript is *Revelationes Constantiae de Rabastens quae vivebat anno MCCCLXXXIV cum aliquot litteris ejusdem ad Inquisitorem fidei* (the Revelations of Constance de Rabastens who lived in 1384 with some of her letters to the inquisitor of the faith). Hence, it is plausible that the letters included in the manuscript are not all those she sent to the inquisitor, and we also do not have the inquisitor’s replies, so we can only see some aspects of their relationship.

<sup>47</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 116-17.

subsequently put Constance on trial. We know from Constance's visions that there were a number of witnesses against her, and that Hugues brought Constance before himself many times to interrogate her. The revelations explain that Hugues called a "general council and other more specialised ones concerning these things that had been disseminated in the town and in other places."<sup>48</sup> On 31 January 1384, William de Luc, a master of the archbishop of Toulouse's entourage, wrote a letter prohibiting the recording or revealing of Constance's visions. This was a turning point for Constance; her visionary activities were now known and banned by ecclesiastical authorities, and though she had yet to have her most explicitly political visions, she was already considered a threat.

Initially, at least, Constance greatly respected the inquisitor's status, which is why she sought his advice regarding her visions. Constance's revelations themselves detail her wanting to keep her visions secret until she had asked Hugues and her confessor whether they were divine or demonic. Constance only wanted to reveal them if "she had their permission and that of the holy council of the Church and of the clergy."<sup>49</sup> Constance showed here her desire to be obedient and submissive to ecclesiastical authority. We learn from Constance's first letter to Hugues that she had tried to disregard the revelations, and that Raymond had refused to record anything other than this letter, as ordered. After introductory comments about Hugues's wisdom, to which Constance commends herself "humbly to your grace",<sup>50</sup> she tells Hugues that God has commanded her to write to him, to tell Hugues that because he has not believed that God had sent His message through Constance, God will "inflict persecutions on the city of Toulouse" because Hugues is the caretaker of souls.<sup>51</sup> Constance responds that Hugues will not believe her, and the Voice commands her to tell him three times, so he will have no excuses, reassuring her that "you are not the one who is speaking, but it is the Holy Spirit that speaks in you."<sup>52</sup> In warning Hugues, Constance's tone is still respectful; she urges him to convoke a council and do what is right because she fears that "God will avenge himself on you as well as on those who have meddled in this" if he does not.<sup>53</sup> She finishes her letter requesting that Raymond be allowed to record her revelations, and stating that "as much as I can I want to act according to your counsel."<sup>54</sup> Hence, we can see initially that Constance is very respectful of

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<sup>48</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.20, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "*humilment me recoman a la vostra Gracia*"

<sup>51</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 4.1, 67.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4.1, 68.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

Hugues and his position as inquisitor, seeking his approval and wishing to be obedient to his demands.

However, the tone of the letters rapidly deteriorates. Constance clearly does not receive a reply, or at least not a favourable one. In the second letter to Hugues, she tells him that even more things have been revealed to her, but Raymond will not record them because when she sought Hugues' permission, he "took it badly".<sup>55</sup> She warns Hugues that before long, he will be interrogated. Constance's "trial did not take place for nothing," and Hugues should "watch that the record corresponds to what was said at the trial" because he will have to render an account of the trial and record to God.<sup>56</sup> Constance's tone in this letter has moved from wishing to obey Hugues, to exasperation at his continuing to deny her someone to record her revelations. She calls into question his pastoral abilities and warns Hugues that he himself will be interrogated and should not fear death. The warning that the record of her trial should be an accurate and true account suggests that Constance was losing her faith in Hugues to uphold the faith and be honest. She also tells Hugues what he should preach, with her third letter outlining that he should preach the misfortunes that are prepared for evil ones, and that the "days of trembling are approaching."<sup>57</sup> It is ultimately his responsibility that, if the people of God are deceived out of ignorance, they will receive their punishment. Constance finishes the letter by again imploring Hugues to convoke a council about the disciples of the Antichrist who are persecuting the people of God, and warns him to pray and order processions.<sup>58</sup>

By the fourth letter, Constance is even more frustrated at Hugues' lack of response. She warns him that "from now on I cannot refrain from crying out, for you should believe that these things have been revealed to me more than a hundred times, and I was always told to cry out for I owe more to God than to the world." The Voice warns Constance to rise up for the Last Judgement, and therefore Constance begs Hugues to believe her.<sup>59</sup> Constance ends the letter with "but answer me", clearly demonstrating that she is exasperated and unlikely to remain obedient for much longer. In the following letter, she again tells Hugues that she has had even more visions than before, and that even though he has ordered her not to share them with anyone

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 4.2, 68.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 4.2, 68-69.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 4.3, 69.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 4.4, 71.

other than him and her confessor, “I have written to you many times without getting any answer.”<sup>60</sup> She has obeyed so far:

but now I receive many revelations that concern the damnation or the salvation of the community. The kingdom of France is in great peril because of some grave treason and activities undertaken secretly under the pretext of peace; therefore, may it not displease you that I reveal them. For if they are true there will be great damnation, and you and I will be the cause of it, and it seems to me that I should not hide these things nor should anyone else. So please send me some secretaries to whom I can dictate the abovementioned revelations. For I have been ordered to tell them, to shout them and to trumpet them over the high mountains.<sup>61</sup>

Constance's patience with Hugues has run out. Constance will obey God and God is telling her to share her revelations, regardless of the inquisitor's prohibition.

Aside from her letters, we also see the inquisitor appearing in Constance's visions. In a later vision, Hugues is called a “deceiver of the faith who does not want to know the truth” by the Voice.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, just as with the Avignon pope, Constance has a vision in which she sees Hugues with an angel holding a drawn and bloody sword above him. The Voice warns Constance that if Hugues “does not do the things I ask him to do through you and that I tell him about in my messages, an angel will come who will turn everything topsy-turvy, for the time has come for the Son of Man to show his power.”<sup>63</sup> Here, God is showing Constance that Hugues is facing the same fate as the antipope. Her respect for the inquisitor is gone. This is her last vision recorded by Raymond, the others being dictated to her son. The fact that nothing more is heard from Constance is not surprising, given how easy it was at the time to silence or make disappear poor people who were too vocal, and Constance had many detractors. It is worth noting though, that this last vision was recorded in August 1386, while Constance's letters to the inquisitor were written in 1384. While clearly, given this final vision, Constance's relationship with Hugues had not improved since the letters, it does suggest that either Raymond kept her visions secret from the inquisitor, or Hugues for whatever reason allowed Constance to record them up to this point. Constance conceivably managed to reassure Hugues of her faith when she was interrogated in 1384. Perhaps this final vision was the last straw for him.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 4.5, 72.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 2.58, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 2.63, 65.

Hiver-Bérenquier suggests that because Constance's actions did not deserve death or prison, she was likely put in a convent and forgotten about for the rest of her life.<sup>64</sup> However, there is no evidence of this. Jeay hypothesises that the sudden end to Constance's visions could suggest she was killed, or it may indicate the defection of her confessor Raymond.<sup>65</sup> Constance seems to have had no family or institutional support except for her son and Raymond. This may explain the decision of the prelates in Toulouse to silence her while showing relative indulgence. Pagès and Valois query whether Constance's imprisonment was applied as the execution of a regular judgement, or if it was a preventative measure intended to cut short Constance's visionary activity and recording of such.<sup>66</sup> Ultimately, though, we do not know what Constance's fate was; however, it is clear from her letters and visions that her relationships with the inquisitor and the Council of Toulouse were strained and deteriorated between her letters of 1384 and the final vision in 1386. Yet, from these letters we get a clearer picture of Constance's own agency. She fought to have her visions recorded, she fought to have them recognised as God's words, and she fought to have the inquisitor believe her. It would have been much easier for Constance to accept Raymond's refusal to record her visions, but she chose to go against clerical authorities to do what she felt God was calling her to do.

### **Local Nobility**

It was not only Schism politics in which Constance's visions prompted her to become involved. Constance's visions also show her as a strong supporter of Gaston Fébus, the count of Foix-Béarn. In the Languedoc, Jean the duke of Berry and Gaston were competing for the government of the region, both having been appointed by Charles V at different times. The duke of Berry was very unpopular in the Languedoc because he had ferociously repressed the insurrection of the Languedoc in 1379, taking gold and silver from all sides and raising taxes, to the point that he was dismissed from his office, which was then entrusted to Gaston.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, Gaston was a great knight, who was known for winning all his battles against the English. To his supporters, Gaston embodied the mythical medieval hero: brave, intelligent, clever, and wealthy. Some claimed that he had divine revelations and prophetic dreams. Gaston's detractors claimed that he sold his shadow to the devil in exchange for information on

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<sup>64</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 123.

<sup>65</sup> Jeay, "Marie Robine et Constance de Rabastens: Humbles femmes du peuple, guides de princes et de papes," par. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Pagès and Valois, "Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d'Occident (1384-86)," 248.

<sup>67</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 36.

everything happening in the world.<sup>68</sup> Froissart noted that Gaston was either a diviner or had special messengers who “ride the night winds.”<sup>69</sup> Gaston’s popularity in the Midi Pyrenees was at its greatest around 1380-81. His troops defeated the duke of Berry’s army at the Battle of Rabastens (14-21 July 1381), Constance’s hometown.<sup>70</sup> Constance’s visions supported Gaston’s strong reputation in the area. Although officially the Languedoc embraced the Avignon papacy, Gaston was hesitant to choose and kept a stance of neutrality (although he did collect a tithe in favour of the Avignon pope).<sup>71</sup>

Gaston’s reputation as a mighty warrior and defender of the people comes across strongly in Constance's visions. Constance believed that the salvation of the Church would come through Gaston. In one prophecy, the Voice tells Constance that the count of Foix-Béarn, the “crane with the vermilion head”, will lift up the Roman pope and put him on his rightful throne. Not only that, but Gaston will also destroy the count of Armagnac and dominate the realm. There will be “such a great union between the king of France and the count of Foix that the king will obey the count in many things. And after that the count will accept the command of the Holy Passage [crusade] in order to avenge my death, I who am the true God.”<sup>72</sup> This prediction of Gaston’s rise to power reveals Constance’s envisioning of Gaston as France’s saviour, fulfilling prophecies of princes taking up the cross. Cranes were believed to represent Christian foresight and wisdom, and, by extension, wise rulers in the Middle Ages. The crane was a symbol of vigilance because of the many precautions it took to hide its nest and to escape its enemies.<sup>73</sup> The colour red may be linked to Gaston’s association with Apollo and the sun – Fébus was a name Gaston gave himself due to his admiration of Phoebus, one of the names of the sun god.<sup>74</sup> This vision is in a way the epitome of late-medieval French revelations; in apocalyptic fashion, it concerns war, the Schism, and a crusade to reconquer the Holy Land.

In this vision, Constance prophesies that Charles VI will appoint Gaston as minister, and Gaston will dominate France and be obeyed by the king. It will be Gaston who will replace the true pope in Rome and take command of the next crusade. Though Constance does not repeatedly promote crusading to the Holy Land, like Marie she includes a few crusading

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 37-39.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Darmesteter, *Froissart, Les grands écrivains français*, (Paris: Librairie Hachette Etc., 1894), 97.

<sup>70</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 44.

<sup>71</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 10. For more on Gaston Fébus, see Pierre Tucoc-Chala, *Gaston Fébus: Un grand prince d'Occident au XIVe siècle* (Paris: Marrimpouey Jeune, 1983).

<sup>72</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.62, 47-48.

<sup>73</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 101.

<sup>74</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 48.

references which were common amongst visionaries in the medieval period, including referring to the “militant Church”.<sup>75</sup> Gaston embodies, for Constance, the saviour of France of whom the divine Voice spoke. Because he had saved Rabastens three years before at the Battle of Rabastens, in Constance’s eyes Gaston could save France, the papacy, and Christianity. Constance also shared this prophecy with the inquisitor in her final letter to him.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, however, this prophecy did not come true and Gaston did not save France. He did actually have an interview with Charles VI in 1390; however, this was for Gaston to make a treaty giving his estates to the Crown, as he had no direct heir.<sup>77</sup> This incorrect prophecy would not have aided Constance’s claims to authority, but it does reveal Constance’s passionate belief in Gaston’s ability to save France. Hiver-Bérenquier suggests that Gaston had enough power and influence in Toulouse to neutralise the archbishop, judge, and Grand Inquisitor, and that his influence may have saved Constance from further imprisonment or death.<sup>78</sup> However, there is no evidence to support this; in fact, there is no solid evidence suggesting that Gaston was even aware of Constance’s existence. Despite her passionate prophecies promoting this important local nobleman, the absence of clear support from Gaston for Constance meant that this was another failed social network for her; his position did not lend Constance any authority.

Just as passionately as she supported Gaston, so Constance warned against the count of Armagnac, Jean II. The count favoured the English, particularly the Albigeois. Initially, though, Constance doubted what the Voice was telling her about the count. Constance had a vision regarding his treacherous attempted alliance with the English and was commanded to transmit this information immediately to Paris.<sup>79</sup> She doubted the vision and prayed to the Lord to protect her from illusion so that no one should be deceived by her. She was enraptured, and the Voice told her not to doubt, because “the count of Armagnac can be compared to Pontius Pilate who, when he was governor of Jerusalem, did not recognise me, his true God, although he was right there in Jerusalem.” However, Constance rejected this vision.<sup>80</sup> This was the first, but not the only, vision to be explicitly rejected by Constance because of the content; yet we do not know why. Inclusion of such rejections in recorded revelations enabled the visionary to display their

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<sup>75</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.55, 62.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.6, 72.

<sup>77</sup> Hiver-Bérenquier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 153-54.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>79</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.24, 47.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.25, 47.

own internal discernment of the spirits as a legitimisation tool, as will be discussed further below. We also saw this in the previous chapter in Marie's visions about Clement VII.

However, the more Constance saw the count's treachery in her revelations, the more readily she spoke out about him. The Voice warns Constance that the count can be compared to Pilate, who did not recognise Christ. As the count rises to power, the Voice warns Constance that he will not recognise God nor the king of France, and that he will destroy the French kingdom "and more if he can."<sup>81</sup> Constance's warnings against the count must have generated significant attention, as she is told by the Voice that:

... at this moment some of the people that interrogated you are assembling, for they want to know who are the ones who committed treason. Do not be afraid to cry out loud and denounce the treachery, for you should know that Bernard of Armagnac and his brother have renounced me and my power and have taken the devil as their lord and that they will give all the support and help they can to the king of England against the young tree<sup>82</sup> and the king of England will do the same for them.<sup>83</sup>

Constance here was not only exposing the count of Armagnac, but also his two sons Bernard and Jean III; the Voice claimed that they had taken the devil as their lord and contracted a disastrous alliance with the English king Richard II. Constance took her prophecies against the count to the Council of Rabastens, and her warnings about the count were taken seriously enough to lead to further investigation.<sup>84</sup> The count played the villain to Gaston Fébus' hero in Constance's revelations. While the count would bring the downfall of France, Gaston would save the kingdom.<sup>85</sup> By spreading these accusations against the count of Armagnac, Constance was stepping into the politics of the Hundred Years War, not just the Schism. The count was eventually summoned to court for his alleged alliance with England but died before a trial took place. However, it shows that Constance's prophecies were relevant to current events.

### **The Wider Community**

The above discussion has shown Constance's attitudes towards different groups in society; but aside from her confessor, most of these relationships were one-sided or predominantly negative

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 2.62, 47-48.

<sup>82</sup> The king of France.

<sup>83</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.28, 49.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 2.20, 45.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 2.27, 48.

and would not have developed Constance's social authority. However, we do know that Constance's visions were "disseminated in the town and in other places," and that there were a number of false witnesses spreading rumours about her, suggesting that Constance was relatively well-known.<sup>86</sup> Despite her detractors, Constance likely held a general level of influence in her community due to her piety and apparent special relationship with the divine. The manuscript's title and Raymond's preface refer to Constance as "*Benaventurada Constaça*" (Blessed Constance), perhaps suggesting local veneration. Many lords came to her to ask her to pray for them so that the Lord would teach them how to govern themselves. She warned them to correct their behaviour, detailing the "various ways in which they had committed great sins."<sup>87</sup> The influence Constance held amongst lords in her region would have made her support of Gaston Fébus helpful to her claims to authority. Furthermore, a priest asked Constance about the end of the world, and Constance prophesied that because the entire world was disturbed, "the time is near when the Son of Man will judge them from the highest heavens."<sup>88</sup> Such examples reveal that Constance's reputation as a holy woman and prophetic gift were acknowledged by some important people in her community.

There is also evidence in the revelations of numerous official queries addressed to Constance, which is proof of her growing presence in the public arena. In revelation forty-five, a clerk sent Constance a formal inquiry on whether the situation of the Church was advantageous and whether the duke of Anjou was dead. The divine Voice confirmed that the duke of Anjou, "who carried the sign of the beast," was dead. As for the Church, it was the time of the "evil beast" of whom John spoke in the Book of Revelation.<sup>89</sup> Louis, duke of Anjou (1339-84), was brother of the French king Charles V and regent during the minority of Charles VI (1368-1422). He had hoped to obtain the kingdom of Naples with the help of Clement VII.<sup>90</sup> A clerk reaching out to Constance for her opinion on such political matters demonstrates the strength of her reputation as a visionary and the notoriety of her political views. Constance's views on the state of the Church were also clearly deemed important, as people searched for answers outside of the traditional positions of authority. Constance was also consulted by a baron from the Bordelais region regarding a group of Saracens who had asked for his help. The

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 2.20, 45; *ibid.*, 2.53, 61.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 2.29, 49. The Catalan text says *capellans*, and Blumenfeld-Kosinski notes it is probably as a synonym for priest. Churches are called chapels in the text for the most part. Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 49.

<sup>88</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.47, 58.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 2.45, 57.

<sup>90</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 57.

baron asked Constance to pray to God to find out what to do. The Voice told Constance that “the Saracens are Antichrist’s disciples and that they want to... conquer God’s people.”<sup>91</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, “Saracen” was a crusading term, often used in the medieval period for Muslims. The view that the Saracens were the disciples of the Antichrist was widespread in the Middle Ages amongst Christian populations. These accounts reveal that Constance's direct access to God as a prophet was acknowledged and her opinion was sought for political situations, suggesting a level of authority or, at the very least, respect.

Moreover, people further afield must have appreciated Constance’s authority, given that the surviving contemporary manuscript is in Catalan. Constance would have dictated her visions in a Languedoc dialect, meaning that this translation suggests a wider audience and greater influence than just those within her region. Political context reveals how significant this translation is. The Iberian kingdoms of Aragon, Castile, Navarre, and Portugal were initially neutral in the Schism. The kings of Aragon and Castile instituted enquires into the outbreak of the Schism from 1379-1386, sending ambassadors to Avignon and Rome to interview witnesses to the papal elections. The Iberian peninsula was clearly seeking information to decide which papal candidate to support.<sup>92</sup> It was in this environment that Constance’s visions were being recorded. Given this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that it is a Catalan manuscript, the language of the kingdom of Aragon, that preserves the remains of Constance’s revelations, rather than one in a Languedoc dialect, the language of a region that supported Clement VII. Pagès and Valois suggest that Raymond was likely from the region of Foix or Quercy, and therefore it is unlikely that he recorded the revelations in Catalan.<sup>93</sup> However, it is not implausible that Raymond was multilingual and chose to write this translation for a Catalan audience who were searching for answers to the Schism, or that Raymond sought out a translator. Given his belief in Constance as God’s messenger, Raymond likely saw the value in her visions as propaganda for the Roman papacy to sway the allegiance of Aragon. Fr. Pedro of Aragon (d.1381), uncle of the king of Aragon, also had revelations supporting the Roman pope and tried to influence his nephew to acknowledge Urban VI’s legitimacy.<sup>94</sup> However, Aragon ultimately ended up supporting the Avignon papacy. Whether Raymond himself wrote the Catalan translation of Constance’s visions or they were written by a contemporary

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<sup>91</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.31, 50-51.

<sup>92</sup> Patrick Zutshi, “Adam Easton and the Great Schism,” in *Cardinal Adam Easton (c. 1330-1397), Monk, Scholar, Theologian, Diplomat*, ed. Miriam Wendling (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 31.

<sup>93</sup> Pagès and Valois, “Les révélations de Constance de Rabastens et le schisme d’Occident (1384–86),” 243.

<sup>94</sup> Zutshi, “Adam Easton and the Great Schism,” 34.

translator, their survival as the only version suggests Constance's significance in Aragon. This kind of interest in Constance is a clear example of the possibilities for visionary women that the Schism afforded.

This is not to say that everyone trusted Constance's political opinions or believed in her role as God's messenger. Constance was also consulted by an unknown great lord who wanted to know who the true pope was, and whether the Schism and Hundred Years War would last much longer. Her vague response was that she did not meddle in such things "nor did she care about them."<sup>95</sup> She was later told by the Voice that the letter was sent by the archbishop of Narbonne, a liar who was trying to deceive her, but that he would ultimately be deceived. As for how long the Schism would last, the Voice told Constance that no one was authorised to know except for God; "for the bad it will last not long enough, and for the good it will last too long." As for the Hundred Years War, "the kingdom of France will not be free from tribulations until the bad weeds that are planted in the fields have been torn out and thrown away."<sup>96</sup> Constance's initial response cleverly avoided the trap set for her by the archbishop, who was attempting to get her to express compromising or heretical views. She was then at liberty to respond obscurely to the archbishop's questions.

As well as the archbishop trying to trick Constance into saying something heretical, we know from her visions that some people believed she was possessed by a demon. It is worth noting that Rabastens had sheltered a number of heretics, including Cathars; only one generation before Constance, the Cathar heretic William Belibaste was from Rabastens.<sup>97</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that in Constance's revelations she reveals that "some highly placed people called her crazy", and she is warned by the Voice that she will be abandoned by every human just as the Virgin Mary was abandoned at the moment of Christ's Passion.<sup>98</sup> Moreover, when the Voice commands Constance to write and warn the archbishops of the revelations revealed to her, she responds that "no one wants to believe me; rather, they say that I have a demon in my body."<sup>99</sup> Christ reassures Constance that He too was accused of having a demon in His body. It is Constance's job to spread her prophecies, and that "he who has ears will hear."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.46, 58.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.46, 57-58.

<sup>97</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 115.

<sup>98</sup> John 19:25; de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.44, 57.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.50, 59-60.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

Through these negative attacks on Constance, we can determine that she was relatively well-known. However, this notoriety did not always bring social recognition of her authority.

Thus, Constance had very limited support from strong social networks that could lend her any authority. Her relationship with her confessor proved the most important, though this relationship was not without tension and disagreements. Raymond's promotion of Constance as "*Benaventurada Constaça*" and his firm belief in her sanctity would have reassured some people that her revelations were divine. Certainly, as we have seen, some people did seek her wisdom and prophecies to answer their own queries. Notably, the fact that it is the Catalan manuscript that survives of Constance's revelations suggests the greater importance with which Constance's revelations were held in Aragon than in France. However, the overwhelming majority of Constance's interactions with key social networks, including the Avignon papacy, the inquisitor of Toulouse, and the Avignon prelates, were negative and often one-sided. There is also no evidence to suggest any relationship with the Roman papacy that she supported. Hence, unlike visionaries such as Catherine of Siena or even Marie Robine to an extent, Constance was not able to create a strong social network to promote her authority and affirm her legitimacy, which significantly impacted her claims to authority as a holy woman. The next section will consider how Constance still attempted to prove her sanctity as God's divine messenger despite this lack of social support, and perhaps explain why those who did support her acknowledged her authority.

## **Constance as a "Holy Woman"**

### **Divine Authority**

In the prologue to the revelations, Raymond is very careful to establish Constance's divine authority within the process of the discernment of spirits. Raymond calls Constance a spouse of Christ, suggesting a mystical spiritual marriage;<sup>101</sup> this follows the tradition of bridal mysticism common in hagiographies of other mystics such as Catherine of Siena, something that is missing for Marie Robine. However, Constance never refers to such a marriage herself. Raymond also notes the importance of the "Holy Fathers and Doctors of Holy Church" establishing if the visionary was awake or asleep at the time of the vision, whether the vision

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 1, 37.

was corporeal, imaginative, or spiritual, or by chance an intellectual supernatural vision. It was important to distinguish if the visionary was in the “new mental ravishment called ecstasy, that is an elevation of her thoughts, she has seen or felt things that come from divine love or not”, whether she had seen any spiritual mysteries, or whether they “feel an illumination or the enlightenment of supernatural intelligence and a manifestation of divine truth.”<sup>102</sup> Though at times Raymond stops recording Constance's visions, his eventual continuation with his role and the compilation of the visions along with this prologue are evidence that he believes Constance meets the criteria of being divinely inspired rather than demonically possessed. Her visions pass the process of the discernment of spirits. Hence, Raymond testifies to Constance’s authenticity as one with divine authority.

Claiming divine authority and its privileged access to God is what made Constance, like many other holy women, a threat to authorities. She was a woman claiming to be mandated by God to dictate to bishops and princes the appropriate conduct to save the Church and the Kingdom of France. There were several ways in which this claim is validated in Constance’s visions. One example is that the divine Voice only speaks to Constance when she is enraptured. In vision twenty-three, Constance was hearing Mass when “after the elevation of the host she was enraptured” and the Voice spoke to her.<sup>103</sup> The Catalan word for “enraptured” used here is *raubida*, which indicates a kind of spiritual “ravishment” where the body becomes unimportant.<sup>104</sup> This is significant for separating Constance's female body from her spiritual authority and mission. Constance's states of ecstasy mostly appear shorter than Marie’s, judging by the lengths of the recorded visions.

In the visions, Christ encourages Constance to interpret scripture and to spread the messages he gives her. In the first and third visions, Constance first hears the celestial Voice in her sleep or during her pious meditations.<sup>105</sup> Constance's most political communications from Christ are of an auditory nature. The auditory Voice eliminates the potentially complicated or even ambiguous nature of visual revelations. In these auditory visions, the Voice provides a script for Constance’s public speeches or letters, so Constance is always speaking God's words and not her own. Raymond clearly believes this, with the title before her letters reading “What follows are the letters that Lady Constance transmitted to the inquisitor at God’s command.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 1, 36.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 2.23, 46.

<sup>104</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 46.

<sup>105</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.1, 38; 2.3, 38.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 4, 67.

Constance's conversations with God are direct with no intercessor, no saint or angel, to interpret them or speak on her behalf. Notably, the Virgin Mary is not heavily featured in her visions, despite the fact that this period is known for its cult celebrating the Virgin. Hence, Constance's claim to receiving messages from a divine voice gives her access to the authority that comes from being God's messenger; an authority that supersedes gender and official status.

The divine Voice tells Constance that she has been specifically chosen to transmit these important messages to the public.<sup>107</sup> Constance is commanded by the divine Voice to "write the things I reveal to you, for it is necessary to the people that you should write... for in no time was there as much evil as there will be presently."<sup>108</sup> The Voice also dictates to Constance when she should make her visions public, and in so doing gives Constance the divine authority to do so.<sup>109</sup> Llewellyn Barstow interprets this as Constance being urged to preach by the Voice.<sup>110</sup> While it is not clear that Constance did publicly preach, as noted above we do know that her revelations and their messages had been spread through her region.<sup>111</sup> Preaching and spiritual counsel had an impact on the ways in which women appropriated religious culture, and despite the prohibitions on them preaching, some still managed to exercise pastoral activity and spiritual counselling that was not limited to the convent, such as we saw with Catherine of Siena in chapter two.<sup>112</sup> It is not clear from the *Revelationes* whether it was Constance herself who disseminated her visions, nor whether it was done through preaching, but it is a possibility. Either way, her visions were made public, as commanded by the Voice.

Alongside the divine command to go public with her visions, Constance is also warned by the Voice that she "will be led to the interrogation but do not be afraid for you will have the heart of a lion. You are confirmed in divine knowledge."<sup>113</sup> Constance is aware of the controversial nature of her visions, and that she needs to be aware of the interrogations to come. Yet, again, the Voice affirms Constance's divine knowledge and authority. Furthermore, God tells Constance that just as a king sends messages in letters sealed with his seal to prove their authenticity, so God is sending Constance with His seal. Constance's role is to prepare people to receive God, because He is coming soon and they will be judged by the measures they use

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 2.26, 47-48.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 2.22, 45-46.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 2.38, 54.

<sup>110</sup> Anne Llewellyn Barstow, "Mystical Experience as a Feminist Weapon: Joan of Arc," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1985), 27.

<sup>111</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.20, 45.

<sup>112</sup> Jeay, "La transmission du savoir théologique," 237.

<sup>113</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.54, 61.

to judge others.<sup>114</sup> God again confirms Constance's role as His messenger, carrying His words to those around her. This also reassures her audience that it is in fact God's words, and not Constance's own, that are being shared.

Constance's fear of being deceived by demonic illusions is evident throughout her visions, showing an awareness from Constance of the need for the discernment of spirits. She asks for signs from God that these messages are from Him, and also rejects visions if she does not believe they are. In vision twenty-six, we see Constance praying to God that she will not be deceived by the devil, weeping. She is enraptured, and the Voice tells her not to doubt, because "I am the true God and wherever you go I will be with you... Do not have any doubts but persevere, for before the world was created I had chosen you to reveal these things."<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, the Voice tells Constance not to be afraid to transmit the messages from God to the Council of Toulouse, because her obedience will lead people to praise God the Father. Constance breathes deeply and rejects this vision, but the Voice tells her not to doubt the visions, because "the destroyer of faith wants to destroy those who are commanded to my service."<sup>116</sup> It is through Constance's obedience (discussed further below) to God that His glory will be revealed to those on Earth. Though Constance rejects many of her visions, the Voice repeatedly assures Constance that "I am not a demon, but the true God who has redeemed his people."<sup>117</sup> The Voice is clear that Constance has been appointed with a divine authority. Constance rejecting visions and questioning their origin demonstrate to the reader Constance's awareness of the need for discerning her visions, and her desire not to be deceived by the devil.

### **Humility and Obedience**

As we saw with Marie, the hagiographical topos of humility, with a focus on obedience, was key to a holy woman being recognised in her society. Raymond focuses on Constance's humility and obedience in his preface, placing Constance firmly within orthodoxy. Raymond highlights the contemporary concerns with the discernment of spirits and reassures readers that he has examined Constance with all the necessary steps in order to avoid "*perillosa error*".<sup>118</sup> Raymond reminds the audience that a visionary must submit all temptations and visions with humility to her spiritual father, "all the while afraid of being led astray or deceived," and must

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 3.4, 67.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 2.26, 47.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 2.35, 53.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 4.3, 69.

<sup>118</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 36v.

not have “arrogated to herself some vanity or vainglory; or... [show] disdain toward others.”<sup>119</sup> This will show whether the visionary “is a spiritual person or whether she is worldly or secular.”<sup>120</sup> Raymond continues that it must be examined if this person follows their visions with “true and virtuous acts of obedience, humility, charity, and steadfastness, or rather by acts of concern for her reputation, of boasting, and of arrogance, of display and a growing appetite for human praise, a neglect of prayers or a desire for honours and dignities.”<sup>121</sup> It is also important to consider this person’s reputation, and whether they are considered to be a true Catholic, faithful and obedient, and whether “she has persevered with humility in having visions for a long time.”<sup>122</sup> She also must have a good and true natural and spiritual understanding, discreet judgement in reason and spirit, and not flighty judgement with too much imagination or fantasy. This person must be examined “concerning the merit and circumstances of her visions by knowledgeable, literate, spiritual, and experienced men or not.”<sup>123</sup> According to Raymond, Constance meets these criteria. Through his preface, Raymond establishes the authenticity and orthodoxy of Constance’s revelations, not only supporting Constance’s claims but also protecting himself as her confessor and the recorder of the visions.

Raymond is not the only one who demonstrates Constance’s humility. Constance herself reveals this trait through the revelations and letters. In her visions, Jesus himself reminds Constance that she is “*une fembra peccadora*”, a sinful woman, something with which Constance readily agrees.<sup>124</sup> She calls herself a “vile sinner full of shame and vileness.”<sup>125</sup> From her earliest revelations, Constance reflects on “her life which she thought she had spent badly as far as God was concerned.”<sup>126</sup> In one vision, Constance had a great desire to see the Lord, but she realised that she was not “‘worthy of thinking about you nor of seeing you.’ She felt great pain and sadness over her failings and in this sadness she fell asleep and saw the heavens open.”<sup>127</sup> It was often in these moments of her greatest awareness of her unworthiness, and thus the moments of her greatest humility, that Constance received her revelations. Even though Constance was reassured multiple times of her role as God's chosen messenger, she doubted and questioned the divine authority given to her. Her repeated demonstration of humility and

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<sup>119</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 1, 35.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 2.63, 65; MS. Latin 5055, 53v.

<sup>125</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.26, 47-48.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 2.2, 38.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 2.16, 42.

unworthiness to receive the visions would have reassured her audience that she was not seeking these gifts, but that they were freely given. Constance's awareness of her unworthiness to receive revelations does not appear to just be adherence to a topos. Constance's anxiety at receiving these special graces is convincing enough that she genuinely believed in her unworthiness, and that it was not just a rhetorical subterfuge. It was likely stated emphatically so many times to provide as strong evidence as possible for her humility, given the exacting criteria demanded by the discernment of spirits.

Constance not only struggles with the fact that she is a sinner being given these visions, but that she is a woman. Constance does not even believe she is worthy to kiss Jesus' feet in one revelation, yet Jesus takes her by the hand, and Constance kisses His hand.<sup>128</sup> In another vision, when God reveals the meaning of the seven seals from the Book of Revelations, stating that, of the seven seals, "the fifth will be opened by a woman; the sixth is that you will be this woman."<sup>129</sup> Constance responds that she is not worthy to receive these visions, and no one will believe her. But again, the Voice reassures her that "the Holy Scriptures will bear witness to you and you will bear witness to me and the deeds that I have done."<sup>130</sup> Constance had this vision five times that night, and then it continually returned for two years. However, she did not want to record it because she did not understand it. In another vision, a young man shows Constance "a coffer filled with great splendours but which was rotten, old, and worn on the outside." The man explains to Constance that "your body is just like this; outside it is ugly and worn out from penances but on the inside it is filled with great virtues." Constance does not dare to believe this vision.<sup>131</sup> Constance engages with the discernment of spirits here because her humility makes her doubt the vision and appeal for God's guidance. However, the vision separates Constance's external appearance (her female body) from the internal (her spirit); though Constance is physically a woman, and therefore full of sin, her spirit is beautiful and full of virtue, justifying God's use of her as His vessel.

Moreover, God reminds Constance that:

By the woman is signified the man... I tell you that all this can only be accomplished through a miracle, and it is a great miracle that such a sinful woman as you should explain the Holy Scriptures to them, for you have never learned anything about them.

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 2.61, 64.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 2.33, 52.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 2.9, 40.

And you have explained to them the Holy Trinity, the Holy Incarnation, and the Holy Sacrament of the Altar, all the things that are hidden from the demon, and he would never dare or be able to confess them.<sup>132</sup>

In this vision, it is confirmed that it is no accident that God has chosen a woman, sinful and weak, as His vessel on Earth. Despite struggling with understanding why God would reveal his secrets to a woman, Constance does not try to adopt masculine traits. God reaffirms that it is precisely because Constance is a woman that He has chosen her. God tells Constance that “the time has come for the Son of Man to show his power, and it will be shown in you, for you are a woman and through woman the faith was preserved, and through woman it will be revealed: and you are this woman.”<sup>133</sup> Thus, as a sinful woman with a humble spirit revealing God’s word, God’s power can be revealed through Constance.

Constance's humility and recognition of her unworthiness are supported by her willingness to be obedient to her calling and to God. She serves God’s Church, not particular prelates. However, given her struggles with feelings of unworthiness in receiving divine favour, it is not surprising that initially Constance wants to be obedient to local clerical authorities. As Raymond notes in his preface, Constance would have been aware that “we are admonished to obey the pure, spiritual persons... and our superior prelates.”<sup>134</sup> We learn in one vision that “once she meditated for two days and two nights, almost against her will, on the Holy Trinity and prayed to God while weeping copiously, motivated by the fear of meditating too much.”<sup>135</sup> This could suggest that Raymond had cautioned Constance about excesses in lay piety, in line with Jean Gerson’s later writings. It also shows that Constance wants to be obedient to the counsel of her spiritual advisor.

Constance is also clear that she wanted to keep her revelations secret until she had been advised by the inquisitor and her confessor whether they were from God or a demon. Constance “did not want to reveal them unless she had their permission and that of the holy council of the Church and of the clergy.”<sup>136</sup> Constance’s underlying willingness to obey the orders of the inquisitor is further revealed by her desire to seek his counsel in a letter, asking that he would “send me some response, for as much as I can I want to act according to your counsel.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 2.63, 65-66.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 2.53, 61.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 1, 37.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 2.19, 44.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 2.20, 44-45.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 4.1, 67-68.

However, as we saw above, when the visions continue and the Voice urges Constance to keep recording them, she realises that she cannot obey both God and the inquisitor. Constance realises that she can only take counsel from God, not from humans.<sup>138</sup> Even when Raymond urges her to reject the visions, she does not. It is because of this obstinacy and change in her obedience that Constance became more of a threat to the Church.

Despite her lack of obedience towards the Church, Constance shows her (sometimes reluctant) obedience to God throughout her visions. For Constance, the divine Voice became her spiritual advisor above Raymond. During one mass, the Voice orders Constance to kiss her hand which is holding her rosary to remember that she is dust and will return to dust, and Constance “did as she was told.”<sup>139</sup> This short vision clearly reveals Constance’s humility (coming from dust) and her obedience (she did as she was told). However, Constance is not always immediately obedient to the Voice. In vision thirty-seven, Constance is ordered to write to the royal council in Toulouse regarding their support of the Avignon papacy.<sup>140</sup> Yet, we learn that she has the vision more than twenty times before she obeys. She is repeatedly commanded to write to the council in visions fifty-eight, fifty-nine, and sixty. The Voice commands Constance to “send this request, as I have already told you.”<sup>141</sup> Thus, Constance is not always immediately obedient to the Voice; hence, there are limitations to the extent to which she can claim the topos of obedience to the Church expected in holy women. Constance’s reluctance also demonstrates her humble concern that her visions would undermine clerical authority.

We also see Raymond’s struggle with obedience for the same concern of undermining clerical authority. When Raymond refused to record her revelations, Constance employed her son as scribe to ensure her letters and visions were still documented. We also find examples of Constance’s visions being recorded well after the fact, with vision thirty-two explaining that “every time [she received these visions] the Voice told her that she should write down these things, but they were only written down on the next to last day of September because her confessor did not want to write them down.”<sup>142</sup> As we have seen, Raymond came to believe in the authenticity of Constance’s visions. However, Raymond did not want to record them because “he was afraid of offending God and his superior unless God should give him some sign or miracle.” The source of Raymond’s severe illnesses was his obedience to his superiors,

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 2.32, 51.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 2.12, 41.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 2.37, 54.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 2.60, 64.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 2.32, 51-52.

but God warned Raymond through Constance that he “should be more obedient to me who is the true God than to the world.”<sup>143</sup> Only by being obedient to God, and recording Constance’s revelations again, was Raymond healed. The inclusion of these revelations would have protected Raymond himself from accusations of disobedience to his superiors; he was obedient until God revealed the truth.

### **Illiteracy and Building a Vernacular Theology**

Female visionaries often claimed illiteracy and ignorance to highlight the divine knowledge in their revelations, something we saw with Marie in the previous chapter. Constance continues this trope. Constance does not indicate any evidence of particular reading and claims ignorance of letters, and any literacy is shown as being of miraculous origin. Constance is dependent on the divine to understand and interpret scripture, and it is not clear whether she can read when the Voice is absent. He explains to her the writings she sees. In multiple visions the Lord presents Constance with a book closed with seven seals. The Voice explains the meaning of the seals to her, but once the book is open Constance says that she does not understand the letters. The Voice then explains to Constance what she sees.<sup>144</sup> The Voice also explains the meaning of other visions and scriptures, with the Voice affirming Constance’s lack of theological knowledge as the reason why it is a great miracle that she should explain the Holy Scriptures to learned Church men.<sup>145</sup> Any literacy or learnedness in the *Revelationes* is credited as coming from the divine Voice, placing Constance firmly within the hagiographical topos.

Yet, as with Marie, Constance formed her own vernacular theology. By the time Constance’s visions started, the Schism had been tearing the Church apart for six years. The worries about who was the true pope, the distrust of the prelates, the fear of the faithful being led in error, and the judgement on the king and princes who had pushed France down a fatal path are all represented in Constance's visions. Due to the lack of information outside of Constance’s visions, it is not possible to ascertain her actual literacy, though her gender excluded her from formal theological education. However, there do seem to be three main channels through which Constance could have gained political and theological knowledge: through her pastoral care from the mendicant orders, from the reading (either reading herself or

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 2.22, 45-46.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 2.35, 53.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 2.63, 65.

having it read to her) of the Book of Revelation, and from the imagery in her church Notre-Dame du Bourg de Rabastens.

The first channel is Constance's pastoral care through the mendicant orders. Constance's revelations testify to the active presence of mendicant orders in her community, and we know that she frequented the convent of the Friars Minor. She also attended mass said by one of them at the home of a family known to her.<sup>146</sup> There are clear links between the Franciscans and the commentaries on the Apocalypse inspired by Joachim de Fiore. There were likely preaching and discussion groups for the laity in Rabastens, as was common in other areas of France at the time. It is probable that the copy of Revelation that Constance read was an illuminated copy produced for laypeople, where the images rather than the text played the central role.<sup>147</sup> The illustrations of the Apocalypse which accompanied the text, particularly in France at the time, were extremely educational and useful for assisting the non-literate in understanding the message. The visions Constance describes seem to have been modified from the illustrations of the Apocalypse or its commentaries, the variations likely due to the vagaries of her memory and comprehension.<sup>148</sup> It is also worth noting that Constance's son was a monk at the Benedictine priory of Daurade in Toulouse and she witnessed him take mass. The book of seven seals in Constance's visions raises doubt over her claims to unlearnedness, because it inscribes her into a long religious tradition. In *The Mirror* by Marguerite d'Oingt (d.1310), there is a similar passage where Christ presents Marguerite with a book, opens it, and explains the meaning of the clasps and other details. For Marguerite, the white letters in the book denote the life of Christ, the black letters are the evil done to Christ, and the red letters are His blood. Jean Gerson, in his *Moralité de la Passion* in 1403, uses such a book as an example to encourage simple people to meditation. Christ's crucifixion is such a book, and thus unlearned people can no longer claim that because they cannot read, they cannot aspire to paradise.<sup>149</sup> Constance's connections to the Friars Minor and her son would have aided her theological knowledge and also perhaps exposed her to the politics of the Church and Schism. Even so, Constance's distance from Avignon would have meant less exposure than Marie had to Schism politics.

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 2.30, 49-50.

<sup>147</sup> Jeay, "Marie Robine et Constance de Rabastens: Humbles femmes du peuple, guides de princes et de papes," par. 23.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., par. 24.

<sup>149</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "Constance de Rabastens: Politics and Visionary Experience in the Time of the Great Schism," 157.

Another channel through which Constance developed her own theology is her reading of the Book of Revelation. When the Voice commands Constance to read it, she claims to have never heard of the book's existence. The wording that the Voice uses, "*hages lo libre des revelacions, e veges que dira*" ("take the Book of Revelation and see what it says") in vision eighteen, evokes that of a preacher talking to the uneducated laity.<sup>150</sup> However, it carries an expectation that she can read and interpret the text. When Constance asked her confessor if the book existed, he gave it to her, "and he had her read it but the words that she heard astonished and frightened her greatly."<sup>151</sup> While this vision shows Constance's seeming lack of education in not knowing there was a Book of Revelation, given her connection to the Friars Minor and their focus on Apocalypse teaching it seems unlikely that this would actually have been the case. Like with Marie, Constance's performance of ignorance in her visions could be a literary tactic to ingratiate herself with her audience. This vision also shows a miraculous level of literacy for Constance being able to read the text. Whether or not she read it herself is unclear, as the Catalan text reads "*e feu los legir*" which could also mean that Raymond read it to her.<sup>152</sup> Regardless of how Constance came to gain this knowledge, the influence of the Book of Revelation is certainly clear in the imagery of her visions. Raymond tells us that Constance's forty-ninth vision is such an exact replica of Revelation 16 that it would take too long to record, and it is unnecessary because it is almost all contained in the Book of Revelation. Throughout the visions, the Voice repeatedly refers to the visions of John in the Book of Revelation, ordering Constance to write them down as well. Biblical intertexts become much more numerous as Constance's visions become more threatening to the ecclesiastical authorities, reinforcing her legitimacy and orthodoxy.

Finally, Constance's vernacular theology was also influenced by the paintings that covered the church of Notre-Dame du Bourg in Rabastens. The church was rebuilt in the late thirteenth century after being destroyed in the Albigensian crusade, using funds from the confiscating of goods from the Cathars.<sup>153</sup> Paintings cover the walls and ceiling and date from 1320, so would have been visible to Constance when she visited the church. There is a long scarlet frieze strewn with flowers halfway up the vaults, which recounts the life of the Virgin Mary and the childhood of Christ.<sup>154</sup> The Tree of Life, at around four metres tall, covers the

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<sup>150</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 40v; Jeay, "La transmission du savoir théologique," 228.

<sup>151</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.18, 43-44.

<sup>152</sup> MS. Latin 5055, 40v; de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," fn. 14, 44.

<sup>153</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 71.

<sup>154</sup> "Visiter Notre Dame du Bourg à Rabastens," 2022, accessed 26 July 2022, <https://www.la-toscane-occitane.com/notre-dame-bourg-rabastens>.

east wall in the Chapel of Saint Martin. It is covered with heart-shaped fruit, and Christ is crucified on the trunk, following the analogy of Saint Bonaventure.<sup>155</sup> The chapel of Saint Martin is next to those of Saints John and James, in which Constance had five and six revelations respectively, so she would have seen this mural many times. The confusion between the Tree of Life and the tree of the cross was maintained throughout the fourteenth century by a pamphlet written in 1305 by Ubertain de Casale: *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jésus*.<sup>156</sup> This confusion is evident in Constance's sixteenth vision, likely influenced by the painting she saw in her local church.<sup>157</sup> Having such vibrant imagery of key parts of theology in her local church would no doubt have educated and influenced Constance. Viewing these images would have been accompanied by teaching by those who had access to books with illuminations as well as preachers who used the paintings to support their sermons. Thus, while Constance claims ignorance as a literary trope, like Marie there were various avenues in which she would have developed a vernacular theology, suggesting that her theological knowledge was not solely gifted from the divine. However, Constance's adherence to the topos of illiteracy shows her awareness of the expectations of holy women, and her desire to prove her authenticity.

### **Prophecy**

As we have already seen, Constance made several claims to prophetic knowledge throughout her visions. The examples of Catherine of Siena and Birgitta of Sweden reveal that some female visionary voices were acknowledged by the ecclesiastical hierarchy during the turbulent period of the Avignon papacy and the early days of the Schism. Many of Constance's prophecies concern herself as God's messenger or are about the interrogations she will face because of her visions. She is warned that a great misfortune is coming, and that when it comes everyone will want to know the truth of the things she says. The Voice warns Constance that she "will be interrogated, and the dragon will come to devour you. But you will be given wings and you will be transported into the desert, and after the desolation of the Church, Antichrist will arrive."<sup>158</sup> Here we see a reference to the Book of Revelation; Constance will be protected from the apocalyptic dragon like the woman clothed in the sun. Though the dragon will chase her, she

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<sup>155</sup> Tarn Tourisme, *La chapelle de Saint Martin*, 2020. Photo of the artwork in the chapel of Saint Martin.

<sup>156</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 89; for a further discussion on the significance of the Tree of Life in medieval iconography, see Pippa Saloni, "The Tree of Life in Medieval Iconography," in *The Tree of Life*, ed. Douglas Estes (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

<sup>157</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.16, 42-43.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.41, 55.

will be saved by the wings of a great eagle.<sup>159</sup> Though Constance is called to a prophetic mission, she is still dogged by rumours against her. This theme is again referred to in another vision, in which the Voice tells Constance that she “will be led to the interrogation but do not be afraid for you will have the heart of a lion... You will be given wings and transported into the desert.”<sup>160</sup> This dragon could be referring to the inquisitor of Toulouse, who did indeed interrogate her on her revelations and her faith. As we have seen above, her confidence in her letters to him does suggest she had the “heart of a lion”; certainly, she was bold and courageous in her warnings to him. The lack of records also suggests that she was not condemned by these interrogations; although we do not know what happened to her other than that she was imprisoned, it is plausible that she was protected from the inquisitorial dragon like the winged woman of Revelations.

Constance also had vivid prophecies concerning the Schism and the state of the Church which were explained to her by the Voice. The Voice warns Constance that “the time of the evil beast has arrived of whom John had spoken in his Book of Revelation where he saw a red beast, that is, the Roman pope. And the evil beast will not be so well hidden in the close that it cannot be found.”<sup>161</sup> It is odd that in this vision, Constance’s beloved Roman pope is equated with John’s red beast of Revelation 12, because John explicitly identifies the red dragon as the “Devil and Satan”.<sup>162</sup> The identification is again mentioned in vision forty-two, where Constance prophesies that against the Avignon cardinals “the red beast will rise up, that is, the Roman pope of whom John had spoken in his Book of Revelation, and red signifies the fire of justice with which he will destroy them.”<sup>163</sup> This mixed symbolism is perhaps an example of Constance’s illiteracy, given her strong support of the Roman papacy.

These were not the only prophecies Constance had regarding the state of the Church. Constance saw the Church as ships in multiple visions. In one vision, she saw two ships;

...in one of them there were many people, but there was no one to guide it and it was sinking. In the other one there was just herself and two other people, and the ship was skirting danger but a voice said not to be afraid, and it arrived in the harbour and was safe.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Revelation 12:14.

<sup>160</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.54, 61.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.45, 57.

<sup>162</sup> Revelation 12:9

<sup>163</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.42, 56.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.8, 39.

The first ship represented the Church in France, who was without a true guide; the support for the Avignon papacy had left the Church failing and leading the faithful to their deaths. Their lack of a guide could reference the fact that churchmen were not heeding the voices of visionaries such as Constance who were warning them of their error in supporting the Avignon papacy. Certainly, the fact that it was only Constance and two others in one ship which manages to skirt danger, suggests that despite the threat of Constance speaking out against the popular papacy for her region, she would be protected by God. It is not clear who the other two people were in the ship with Constance; perhaps they symbolised Raymond and her son Amangau, and the danger that came with their roles in aiding Constance to have her voice recorded.

Furthermore, Constance's visions revealed that Pope Clement VII would try to destroy the Church. In vision fifty-two, Constance saw three ships. Two of the ships were well equipped with fortifications and towers but had no one to steer them and were in deep waters. On the shore, there was a great multitude of people, and Constance screamed loudly not to board the ships because they were full of demons. Constance was on the third ship, which was not equipped like the others, and she saw a limping man who left the other men and boarded this ship. The ship immediately sank to the bottom of the sea with him, and the water seemed to be boiling at this spot. It is not clear what happens to Constance, or if she sinks with the ship. However, the next day the Voice explained the vision to her, telling her that the two well-equipped ships symbolised the world, which was proud of its vainglory, but no one steered it. The ship that arrived on the shore was the Church which cried for pity, and "the limping man who boarded it is the Avignon pope and he will have no pity on the Church but will destroy it if he can."<sup>165</sup> Though the Church would pass through great dangers, it would not perish. However, the Avignon pope would be "thrown into Hell."<sup>166</sup> Clement limped in real life, but there are also symbolic aspects to this handicap. Birgitta of Sweden, for example, saw Pope Gregory XI as a paralysed man whose lack of willpower prevented him from returning to Rome.<sup>167</sup> Clement's leprosy in the earlier vision, and his limping in this one, demonstrate the moral failings of a man who has unlawfully claimed to be God's elected pope.

Clement VII's lack of morality is repeated in the following vision, in which the Voice tells Constance not to worry about the rumours of false witnesses against her,

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 2.52, 60-61.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 2.52, 61.

<sup>167</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 61.

... for the betrayer of the faith who compares himself to me and who wants to be lord of the entire world, that is, the Avignon pope, will perish in one instant. For just as the ship which he boarded perished the moment he entered it, he will immediately perish in Hell.<sup>168</sup>

Not only is Clement infecting the Church, but he also desires to be lord of the entire world, comparative to God. This implies that Clement is like Lucifer, who wished to be like God in Heaven, but who was banished from Heaven to Hell.<sup>169</sup> Through these visions, Constance's views of the illegitimacy and immorality of the Avignon pope are clear and uncompromising. Interestingly, the mechanism of vision followed by divine interpretation is reminiscent of Hildegard of Bingen and Marie Robine. By having the divine Voice explain the visions, there was less opportunity for misinterpretation, which was important for building a holy woman's credibility as a prophet.

Constance's prophecies repeatedly reinforce a sense that Clement VII is not the true pope and that supporting him will have dire consequences for the kingdom of France. The Voice prophesies in vision twenty-three that because of the "fallacious errors" of Pierre de la Barrière and the other cardinals by electing Clement, "there will be no peace in the kingdom of France" until these errors are eradicated. Also, "Flanders is being destroyed and they prepare to move against the young tree."<sup>170</sup> The young tree in Constance's vision refers to Charles VI, and here we see warnings of how the French Church's support of the Avignon papacy will lead to wider political destruction. In a later revelation, the Voice warns Constance that the world will last only another seven years, and that "in seven years the kingdom of France will suffer a great blow and will be laid low, for it supports the pope of Avignon. And transmit this message to the royal council in Toulouse so that they will transmit it to Paris."<sup>171</sup> Constance receives this vision more than twenty times. This prediction was later interpreted by historians as announcing the madness of the French king Charles VI, which began in 1392.<sup>172</sup> France was devastated by this, and the remaining years of Charles' reign were consumed with troubles, betrayals, defeats, and inter-family politics. It was thought at the time that Charles VI's madness was a punishment

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<sup>168</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.53, 61.

<sup>169</sup> Isaiah 14:12-17.

<sup>170</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.23, 46.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.37, 54.

<sup>172</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 71; Hiver-Bérenghier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 106.

from God, and Constance's prophecy warned that the suffering of France would be due to their support of the Avignon papacy.

As well as promoting her own prophetic gift, Constance denounces the Avignon cardinals as false prophets. She is ordered by the Voice to tell the archbishop of Toulouse that the words of Daniel and Jesus' prophecies have been fulfilled:

“When you see in a holy place the establishment of desolation and abomination, let him who reads it understand it, for we are close to misfortune.”<sup>173</sup> And this is what is happening in the heart of the college [of cardinals] in Avignon, for this is the temple where I should dwell but the words have been fulfilled: “False prophets will rise up.”<sup>174</sup> These are the cardinals of Avignon who compare themselves to me and claim to incarnate the truth, but they have sown false errors throughout the world.<sup>175</sup>

Constance is also commanded to warn the Council of Rabastens that if they repent of their support for Avignon, God will revoke their sentence on them. The Voice promises that “if they convert and do the things I want them to do, for your sake I will surround them with moats, and these moats will be my angels, and the artillery will be the Holy Spirit that will defend them.”<sup>176</sup> It is revealed in a later vision that Constance had already “denounced in seven cathedral churches the false errors and the false betrayals that were sown in my name.”<sup>177</sup> This suggests that Constance publicly shared her prophecies and warnings across the region. Perhaps it is this mention that led some historians to suggest Constance preached in public. Constance is shown the same vision repeatedly, and the Voice tells her to “write down the things you have seen and cry out to the archbishops and prelates about the humiliation that is prepared for the unfortunate ones.”<sup>178</sup> Thus, God warns the ecclesiastical elite through his female prophet Constance. Finally, God reinforces the role of prophets by commanding Constance to “tell the prelates and priests who have the spirit of prophecy that these things must be revealed.”<sup>179</sup> Constance's prophecies condemn the prelates of the Avignon papacy while affirming her own prophetic gift.

As well as prophecies about the state of the Church, Constance had prophecies regarding other political scenarios including the Hundred Years War. Her first vision in fact was a

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<sup>173</sup> Daniel 9:21-27.

<sup>174</sup> Matthew 24:11.

<sup>175</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.32, 51-52.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.30, 49-50.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.48, 59.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.50, 59.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.50, 59-60.

prophecy that there would be a great mortality.<sup>180</sup> Most historians read this idea of mortality in the context of her husband's death, which occurred not long after. However, Hiver-Bérenguier suggests it was likely referring to the battle of Rabastens, during which around three thousand men were killed.<sup>181</sup> Certainly, given Constance lived in Rabastens, she would have witnessed this tragic mortality and seen her own prophecy confirmed. Another revelation warned Constance that she would see great signs, and "the next year there appeared great penury, mortality, and famine."<sup>182</sup> Constance's prophecies became more specific as time went on. She was told by the Voice that the count of Armagnac and his brother had renounced God, had taken the devil as their lord, and that they were helping the king of England against the French king.<sup>183</sup> This vision was repeated three times. Constance took this prophecy to the Council of Rabastens, urging them not to conclude a treaty with the count for this very reason. She again warned them in March 1384 to "take care to note when someone tells you that a truce was declared between the kings of France and England, for you should know that this will be treachery."<sup>184</sup> Raymond notes that "she said many other things that were not written down, but they did not pay attention and great tribulations followed until finally they recognised that she spoke the truth."<sup>185</sup> Constance also shared this prophecy with the inquisitor in a letter, warning him that a great prince of the realm of France sent two important men to England to make a league. This prince would support the English king against the French king.<sup>186</sup> Constance was eventually acknowledged as having spoken the truth by the council. This would have aided her claims to authority by having her prophetic gift recognised by those in positions of influence.

### **Conquering the Physical Body**

The final hagiographical topoi that Constance utilised was the need to overcome the physical body. The clearest example of Constance conquering her female body is by her overcoming sexual temptation, to which women were believed particularly prone due to their innate weaknesses and association with the flesh. Constance was widowed and had two children. Though virginity was highest in the holiness a woman could aspire to, widowhood was next best. Vauchez convincingly argues that it was in fact Birgitta of Sweden's canonisation and the

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 2.1, 38.

<sup>181</sup> Hiver-Bérenguier, *Constance de Rabastens: Mystique de Dieu ou de Gaston Fébus*, 44.

<sup>182</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.17, 43.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 2.28, 49.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 2.29, 49.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 4.6, 72-73.

recognition of her sanctity despite her married and maternal status which broke the “sexual taboo” in matters of female sanctity.<sup>187</sup> Margery Kempe, too, renounced the marital bed in favour of chastity.<sup>188</sup> Thus, no longer was sanctity limited to virgins. In this new era of female mysticism, Constance was able to prove her holiness by her new dedication to chastity in widowhood.

The tenth vision is somewhat of a turning point for Constance in this regard. We learn that Constance went to the Friars Minor convent, and one friar “who was afraid of her, since he had taken a vow of chastity” told her that “she had acted badly and that perhaps this time she would err but not recognise it.” Constance was very distressed, and when praying to God and crying copiously, she asked God to protect her by His mercy. After she fell asleep, she received a vision of six paupers, who told her that they were angels sent to comfort her, and to not be afraid because she would never err. We are told that Constance had “endured great torments of sexual feelings for thirteen months, but after this moment she did not feel them any more than if she were dead.”<sup>189</sup> This encounter with the Franciscan friar and the subsequent vision seem to signal the death of Constance's sexual self, and her full commitment to chastity. In this vision we also see an example of Constance's abundant weeping. Such weeping was a sign of piety after a precedent was set by Marie d'Oignies (1177-1213).<sup>190</sup> We see Constance “crying copiously” while praying or meditating across nine of her revelations. Significantly, it is from this point on that Constance's visions widen in scope; by conquering her body, Constance can be trusted with greater messages from God.

Furthermore, as noted above, the Catalan word for “enraptured” used in Constance's visions indicates a spiritual ravishment, which might also suggest an extreme embodied sensuality or a giving over of the body to religious ecstasy. As we saw in chapter two, some medieval visionaries, both religious and lay, male and female, saw themselves as the spouse of Christ, using bridal imagery to describe their relationship with the divine and describing sexual experiences which occurred in their visions. Catherine of Siena, for example, tells us of receiving Christ's foreskin at her espousal to him.<sup>191</sup> Bernard of Clairvaux (d.1153), too,

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<sup>187</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 246.

<sup>188</sup> Tara Williams, “Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*,” *Modern Philology* 107, no. 4 (2010), 537.

<sup>189</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.10, 40-41.

<sup>190</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Venarde, *Two Women of the Great Schism*, 40.

<sup>191</sup> Letter T371 to Raymond of Capua, 15 February 1380. Catherine of Siena, *Letters*, 4, 362. For more on Catherine of Siena's portrayal of her espousal to Christ, see Suzanne Noffke, “The Physical in the Mystical Writings of Catherine of Siena,” *Annali d'Italianistica* 13 (1995).

describes the mystical marriage that occurs between the contemplative soul and Christ.<sup>192</sup> However, though Raymond refers to Constance as a bride of Christ, Constance does not. In fact, there are very few visions which actually deal with her body at all. Unlike many female visionaries in this period, Constance does not have any maternal-themed visions such as breastfeeding Christ like the thirteenth-century béguine Tiedala of Nivelles, nor does there seem to be a strong influence of Songs of Solomon or a sexual nature to her visions such as Mechthild of Magdeburg.<sup>193</sup> Other than Constance conquering her sexual desires as demonstrated in vision ten, Constance's body and thus her gender does not play a significant role in her visions once God has justified using a woman as his vessel. This is reinforced by her "spiritual ravishment" separating her from her physical body, divorcing her gender from her role as divine vessel in an attempt to gain spiritual authority. Thus, through her visions, Constance demonstrates that she has dedicated herself to a life of honouring God, and has conquered her weak, female body to the point where it is irrelevant.

Aside from gendered aspects of conquering the body, Constance struggled with the fight between the flesh and spirit. In vision fifteen, we learn that she was very ill, and while praying her body "began a great debate with her soul." The body claimed it could not bear so much suffering, but her soul replied that the body must obey the soul, "for if you do this a great crown will be your reward."<sup>194</sup> Here we see Constance wrestling with her physical body. Though her body claims it cannot bear the suffering, Constance shows her holiness by her soul rebuking the body and ordering it to obey the soul. A holy woman's soul was believed to be divinely possessed. For Constance, this was not only an inward battle; her body shook and trembled while it battled with the soul. Christ was in Constance's heart, so the soul won. The Voice reassured Constance that her penance had made the interior, her heart, beautiful.<sup>195</sup>

Notably, very few of Constance's visions take on a physical aspect of suffering: only four out of seventy-five. Even so, these four visions do show that Constance adhered somewhat to the traditional topos of physical suffering through her visions. In Constance's third vision, Raymond recounts that when Constance meditated on the Passion of Jesus Christ, she desired to feel the "pains that he had borne for us in her body and suddenly she felt a great pain in her

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<sup>192</sup> For more on Bernard of Clairvaux's usage of bridal mysticism, see Shawn M. Krahmer, "The Virile Bride of Bernard of Clairvaux," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (2000).

<sup>193</sup> For more on Tiedala of Nivelles, see Ernest W. McDonnell, *The Beguines and Beghards in Medieval Culture, with Special Emphasis on the Belgian Scene* (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), 328-29. For more on Mechthild of Magdeburg, see Hollywood, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*.

<sup>194</sup> de Sabanac, "The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens," 2.15, 42.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.9, 40.

left arm. She fell asleep and a voice told her: ‘Do not fear, you will be healed.’”<sup>196</sup> Constance here is showing how she aligns with the medieval holy woman's desire to join Christ in his suffering, particularly meditating on the Passion. In Constance’s fourth vision, again we see her in prayer when she suddenly felt someone pulling her right arm. She felt such great pain that she could not sleep or find relief all day and night. After she suffered for a while, she fell asleep, and when the Voice asked what she wished for, Constance asked for relief and the salvation of her soul. She felt her arm being stretched, and when she woke up, she was greatly relieved from the pain.<sup>197</sup> In both these instances, Constance shows that she undergoes suffering for her faith; yet she is quickly healed from both pains at her request. Interestingly, episodes of pain sometimes signalled the start of Constance’s revelations, as in vision forty-six when she received a sudden headache before becoming enraptured.<sup>198</sup>

As noted with Marie in chapter three, the desire to be martyred for one's faith was another sign of sanctity in holy women. We see this to a lesser extent with Constance, but it is still evident. In vision thirty-two, Constance pleads for mercy for the cardinals of Avignon, and that God would instead give their punishments to her, provided they are not eternal.<sup>199</sup> In vision thirty-eight, the Voice tells Constance that she will “suffer tribulations for the whole world,” but that through those tribulations, God’s power will be shown.<sup>200</sup> In vision forty-two, Constance again asks to take the punishments of those who support the Avignon papacy.<sup>201</sup> After this vision, Raymond reproaches Constance, saying that when she asked to be deleted from the book of life on behalf of the Avignon cardinals it was contrary to her offer to only suffer pains for them that were not eternal; being deleted from the book of life would mean eternal damnation.<sup>202</sup> However, the Voice reassures Constance that her prayer was just. The Voice compares Constance to Moses who had prayed the same prayer, and yet Constance's prayer was stronger; Moses had only prayed for those he led, but Constance was praying for the entire world. Through Constance’s request and willingness to sacrifice herself, God agrees to forgive the cardinals, though it is not because of her merits but because of His mercy. It does appear that Constance takes Raymond's warning on board, though. In a later vision when she is again praying for the forgiveness of the Avignon cardinals, she claims that she is “the one who

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 2.3, 38.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 2.4, 38.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 2.46, 58.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 2.32, 51.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 2.38, 54.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 2.42, 55-56. “*Placiet que tum rahes del libre de vida, ho los vulles perdonar*” in MS. Latin 5055, 47v.

<sup>202</sup> de Sabanac, “The Revelations of Constance de Rabastens,” 2.42, 56.

wants to bear their pains, provided they are not eternal.”<sup>203</sup> Thus, she still offers herself as a sacrifice, but is careful not to cross into unorthodox requests.

## **Conclusion**

Constance de Rabastens was another remarkable lay visionary who, during the Great Schism, attempted to intervene in local and ecclesiastical politics. However, unlike Marie Robine, Constance was unable to gain any real recognition of her spiritual authority and for the most part was unable to influence those in positions of power around her. Constance’s support network was a lot more limited than Marie’s was; there was no mandate from the papacy ensuring her financial support or making her a messenger for the pope’s agenda, clerics attempted to catch Constance giving heretical advice, and the inquisitor of Toulouse was closely monitoring and limiting the spreading of her revelations. Constance was arguably never going to attain any real authority or convince the inquisitor of Toulouse of her legitimacy, given that the ecclesiastical elite around her who were needed to endorse her authority fundamentally disagreed with her views on the Avignon papacy. To endorse Constance’s authority would be to deny their own political and religious agendas. Even the conversion of her confessor to her cause was not enough.

Yet Constance’s life shows us an example of a holy woman who may not have had significant political influence, but whose opinions were still sought after by churchmen and lay contemporaries who recognised her as having a special relationship with the divine. This is very telling about the context of the Schism; the vacuum of authority caused by the division in the Church gave women the opportunity to be heard. Even Constance, who denounced the Church hierarchy around her, was listened to by many; it was likely those who already agreed with her stance on the Avignon papacy or had not made up their own minds yet. Constance’s prophetic gift was acknowledged by contemporaries of various status, and her promotion of herself as aligning with the expectations of holy women gave her some credibility, however short-lived it was.

It is Constance’s own agency that stands out most clearly in her case study. Despite all the restrictions placed on her and despite her minimal official support, Constance pushed to have her revelations recorded and shared and to influence Schism and local politics with God’s

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 2.62, 65.

messages. When Marie faced opposition, she gave up. Had Constance simply accepted the prohibition on her visions being recorded, we would not have this example of a laywoman exercising what agency and authority she did have to try to influence the political situation of her day. Both Constance and Marie strongly emphasised the topos of divine authority to legitimise themselves, and both used their prophetic voice as justification for speaking out. However, while Marie focused on more official channels such as the papacy and royal court for spreading her prophecies, Constance was recognised far more widely in her region for her prophetic gift. This built Constance's social authority more solidly than Marie's, giving Constance continued influence even when the Church disagreed with her revelations. Unlike Marie's focus on physical suffering and martyrdom to conquer her female body, Constance focused instead on overcoming sexual temptation as evidence of her holiness, and emphasised the separation of her female body from her genderless soul that was the vessel for God's word. Through these two women we see two overlapping strategies for establishing their authority but also some key differences, which influenced the ways they were received by their communities.

Having now examined two laywomen who chose to actively involve themselves in Schism politics based on their visions, in the following chapter we will consider Ermine de Reims, a visionary who did not want any recognition for her revelations and wished to keep them hidden. It was instead her confessor who sought recognition for his holy woman, despite Ermine's wish to remain anonymous. While Ermine's visions are not primarily prophetic or directly concerned with the Schism, the sense of tension and uncertainty present in France in this period significantly influenced her experiences. Ermine's lack of agency in failing to keep her visions secret will be an interesting comparison to both Marie and Constance's determination to be heard. The following chapter will examine whether the different approach to promoting Ermine led by her confessor ultimately had a different result in how much authority Ermine could claim.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Case Study: Ermine de Reims (d.1396)**

Our final visionary provides a contrast in many ways to Marie Robine and Constance de Rabastens. Ermine de Reims (d.1396) was also a laywoman who received visionary experiences. However, while her visions were influenced by contemporary politics, Ermine was not eager to use them to involve herself in the politics and crisis of the Schism. She did not receive multiple prophecies regarding the state of the Church or the Hundred Years War, and her ecstatic experiences remained largely personal to her own faith journey. Marie and Constance received mostly (if not all) divine visions; Ermine received predominantly demonic visitations and torments. Marie and Constance wanted to have their voices heard; Ermine did not. Ermine wanted to stay anonymous, but her agency was stripped from her by her confessor Jean le Graveur who recorded her visions, sought outside opinions, and tried to shape her into a holy woman for his order. Ermine did not challenge clerical authority in the way that Marie and Constance did. Yet, Ermine's example is still relevant for the purposes of this thesis. She was not untouched by the politics of the Schism and, as will be shown, her visions were affected by the crisis of authority taking place in the Church. Hence, Ermine is an interesting comparison to Marie and Constance as a laywoman who heard from God and had her agency taken from her, not because she was trying to influence the Church like Marie and Constance were, but because she was *not* trying to do so. Ermine's confessor forced her story into the attentions of important ecclesiastics.

Ermine was born around 1347 in Lucheux, a village in the diocese of Arras, then part of the ecclesiastical province of Reims under the French crown since 1361.<sup>1</sup> Reims had a population of 16-18,000 inhabitants in 1328. It contained eleven parish churches, as well as abbeys, priories, several chapels, oratories and two béguinages. The Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians had all established convents in the city in the thirteenth century,

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<sup>1</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 13.

while the Poor Clares had also been present since 1230.<sup>2</sup> The Regular Canons of the Val-des-Écoliers were authorised to establish a priory in 1249 by the archbishop of Reims. Hence there was a strong mendicant presence in Reims.<sup>3</sup> When Reims' ramparts were finished in 1358, the city was well defended, and they were not attacked by the English armies during the Hundred Years War, though the English marched past the city multiple times.<sup>4</sup>

In 1384, Ermine and her husband Regnault moved to Reims, settling near the Augustinian priory of Saint-Paul du Val-des-Écoliers. During Ermine's period in the city, Jean le Graveur was the subprior of the priory under Hugues de Nizy (d.1414) and he became Ermine and Regnault's confessor. Jean describes Ermine and her husband as "simple people of good reputation but with few possessions in this world."<sup>5</sup> Regnault was sixty-three at the time they moved and unable to work the land as he had previously. Ermine provided for their household by collecting herbs and other plants from outside the city and selling them at markets. Regnault died in 1393 when Ermine was forty-six, and her friends tried to persuade her to return to the countryside, saying they would take care of her. However, Jean encouraged Ermine to stay in Reims and orientate her life to the service of God. Ermine agreed to stay and began receiving visions in the final ten months of her life. Ermine increased seeing Jean from once a week to daily to report these experiences. Ermine did not want her visions spread or recorded. However, starting from All Saints Day in 1395, Jean wrote down the "*aventures merveilleuse*" that Ermine reported to him each day. Ermine was plagued by torments from demons, as well as occasionally visited by heavenly hosts. The visions most often happened when she was alone in her room, usually in the evenings while she was praying. Ermine's experiences are in some ways similar to the controversial revelations of Margery Kempe (1373-c.1436).<sup>6</sup>

In 1396, Ermine assisted in burying a woman who had suffered from the plague during an outbreak in Reims, and Ermine succumbed herself to the disease on 25 August. Ermine received the last rites and communion on 22 August and was buried according to her wishes in

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<sup>2</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski suggests that this abundance of religious institutions in Reims may have contributed to Le Graveur's desire to heighten the profile of his priory with a holy woman. See Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims (c.1347-1396): A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints," *Speculum* 85, no. 2 (2010), 323.

<sup>3</sup> For more information on Reims, see Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> "Et estoient ledit Regnault et ladite Ermine simples gens de bonne renommee et povres de l'avoir de ce monde." Jean le Graveur, *Les visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396). Transcription from BnF, fr. 25213*, ed. and trans. Claude Arnaud-Gillet (Florence: Sismel, 1997), 50.

<sup>6</sup> For a comparison between the two, see Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 29-30. For more recent scholarship on Margery Kempe, see *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, vol. 33, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, Routledge Library Editions: The Medieval World, (London: Routledge, 2020); Laura Kalas-Williams, *Margery Kempe's Spiritual Medicine: Suffering, Transformation and the Life-course* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020).

the church of Val-des-Écoliers. On 25 January 1397, Jean le Graveur encountered a distressed grandmother whose granddaughter Isabelle had died. The grandmother told Jean that Isabelle had seen Ermine dressed in white, accompanied by many beautiful ladies, and had taken Isabelle to paradise. Jean interpreted this as proof that Ermine was in Heaven, and therefore her piety and the divine approval of her experiences were confirmed.<sup>7</sup> With this confirmation, Jean le Graveur compiled the notes he had taken of Ermine's experiences into a manuscript, and Jean Morel, the prior of the abbey of Saint-Denis de Reims, submitted it to Jean Gerson for approval.

Five manuscripts containing Ermine's visions survive: BnF, fr. 25213 (original, in French); BnF, fr. 25552 (in French, bound with works of Gerson); BnF, lat. 13782 (Latin, with illustration); Vienna, Ö.N., Ser. Nov. 12708 (Latin); and Freiburg. i. Br., Universitaatsbib. MS. 129 (Latin). They are spread across the National Library of France, the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, and the National Library of Vienna. BnF, fr. 25213 at the National Library of France contains only Ermine's story and was the manuscript Jean Morel sent to Gerson.<sup>8</sup> Gerson's guarded approval of Ermine's visions is included at the end in Latin (fols. 78v-79v). The fact that the visions were written in the vernacular shows that it was a preliminary document, a redacted transcription of Ermine's reports, and not an official entry in a planned canonisation proceeding.<sup>9</sup> The manuscript was compiled within a few years of Ermine's death, and was written in a dialogue style rather than being structured like a typical saint's *vita*. Jean le Graveur affirms that this style most closely reflects Ermine's own language.<sup>10</sup> This is different to the contemporary genre of written revelations, such as we have for Constance and Marie, which has the visionary as the central figure and is told in third person by the confessor. Like Constance's revelations, though, Ermine's manuscript starts with a prologue by Jean le Graveur in which he explains why he is recording Ermine's visionary experiences. He notes that the coming of the Antichrist is near and that Ermine's experience should serve all Christians to make them aware of, and able to defend themselves against, the attacks of demons. Jean also notes that he repeatedly took the advice of other Masters of Theology in Reims, including the prior of the Abbey of Saint-Denis, who confirmed the validity of Ermine's experiences.<sup>11</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 35.

<sup>8</sup> Jean le Graveur, BnF, fr. 25213, 14th century, Bibliothèque Nationale de France; Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 326.

<sup>9</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 326. It is also worth noting that there is an overlapping of dates for the month of January 1396, further evidence of it being a preliminary document and that Jean wrote it well after Ermine had reported her visions to him. The last quoted date that we are absolutely sure is correct is Saturday 13 January. Then there are inconsistencies with the following dates which overlap. For more detail and a hypothesis on why, see Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

prologue is a justification of Ermine's piety and argues the truth of the coming experiences. It also demonstrates Jean's respect for ecclesiastical authority and proves that he has followed the correct course in writing this manuscript.

As with the previous two case studies, this chapter will consider Ermine's social networks and visions. This chapter will also examine how the issues of discernment and wider contemporary concerns about female voices are reflected in Ermine's visionary experiences and Jean's promotion of them. In terms of previous scholarship on Ermine, Claude Arnaud-Gillet provided a commentary and transcribed Ermine's visions in 1997.<sup>12</sup> His book provided some good background context for Ermine but did not really consider the tensions of authority between Ermine and Jean. The most significant recent study of Ermine was undertaken by Blumenfeld-Kosinski in *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims: A Medieval Woman Between Demons and Saints*.<sup>13</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski's work explores how and why Jean and his superiors adopted a largely positive stance towards Ermine and her experiences. Blumenfeld-Kosinski considers the world that Ermine lived in, the relationship between Ermine and her confessor, her devotional and ascetic practices, and two different types of demonic apparitions and their effect on Ermine. Blumenfeld-Kosinski's work is invaluable on Ermine's visions, but it has less to say on the tensions Ermine experienced navigating her own authority. The purpose of this chapter is not to repeat Blumenfeld-Kosinski's research, but to explore more in-depth the reception of Ermine amongst her contemporaries and her relationship with her own authority and agency. In particular, this chapter will consider Ermine and Jean's relationship as it relates to Ermine building her authority, and the tensions between Jean's agenda and Ermine's desire for privacy. It will also look at how Ermine compares to Constance and Marie in terms of the hagiographical topoi employed to prove her legitimacy.

## **Building Authority: Ermine's Social Connections**

### **Her Confessor, Jean le Graveur**

As we have seen with Marie and Constance, the relationships holy women established with clerics influenced the level of authority they were able to claim. For Ermine, as for many holy women, the strongest of these relationships is with her confessor. The mutually beneficial relationship between confessor and holy woman in authorising one another is clearer in this

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*.

instance than with Constance or Marie. Ermine's relationship with her confessor Jean is repeatedly brought into focus in the manuscript. Not only did Jean provide spiritual support, but his order must have supported Ermine financially, as there is no further mention of her working after her husband's death. This seems to be confirmed by one vision in which a demon urged Ermine to provide for herself for the winter because the subprior was going to fail her and she was going to fall into poverty.<sup>14</sup> On multiple occasions, Jean questioned Ermine on the veracity of what she shared with him, and every time she swore she would not lie to him and that it was true. He seems to have accepted that she was too simple and pious to be able to make up such stories. Jean taught Ermine some basic knowledge including the Pater Noster and Credo, working with her on pronunciation. After her husband's death, Ermine lived in a small room overlooking the Augustinian house, where Jean advised her to watch the practices of the canons and attend nightly matins from her window.

Jean was aware of the dangers associated with personalised spiritual guidance for visionary women and acknowledged that there was a risk that he might be misled or carried away by his enthusiasm for Ermine's experiences. Hence, Jean was careful to demonstrate the orthodoxy of his relationship with Ermine. The involvement of Jean in Ermine's adventures included demons impersonating him and questioning the genuineness of their relationship. The principal focus of the demons was to remove Ermine from Jean's influence. Ermine and Jean's relationship is, in fact, the subject of her first recorded encounter with demons, where the demons impersonated Jean's voice. In another encounter, a demon impersonating Saint Paul the Simple tried to convince Ermine that Jean will ask her to have sex with him ("*te requerra de ribaudie*"). Ermine fiercely rejected this accusation and cast the demon out of her room.<sup>15</sup> The close relationship between Ermine and her confessor could have elicited suspicion; however, by including such an emphatic rejection of this suggestion, Jean assured the reader that there was no sexual attraction between the two.

Throughout the manuscript, Jean leaves evidence of his active involvement and hints of his agenda in recording Ermine's revelations. Unlike Constance and Marie, Ermine did not want her visions recorded or shared at all. She did not receive the "call to write", nor did she want to share her visions with the ecclesiastical elite. This unwillingness could have been part of a literary strategy to emphasise her passivity in receiving visions, discussed further below. However, by including Ermine's reluctance to have her visions recorded, Jean's decision to

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<sup>14</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims* (d.1396), 140.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

write the manuscript strips Ermine of her own agency in controlling the dissemination (or concealing) of her own visionary experiences. Jean's agency is further made clear when he notes that he is not going to continue recording Ermine's Eucharistic visions after 22 June 1396 unless they include some new imagery.<sup>16</sup> This clearly shows that Jean was actively selecting what to include in the manuscript and what to exclude, similar to Raymond with Constance's revelations. Though Jean justified his reasoning by wanting to avoid being repetitive, his agency in deciding what visions were recorded clearly demonstrates Ermine's own lack of control in what was shared about her experiences. Jean positioned himself not just as Ermine's scribe, but an active interpreter and protagonist in the story in his own right.

However, Jean's relationship with Ermine was not only one of spiritual director to one of his flock. Because Jean acknowledged Ermine's special relationship with the divine, occasionally he sought her discernment instead of the other way around. At Ermine's death, Jean asked Ermine to let him know what it is like after death.<sup>17</sup> Jean argued with Ermine that she would end up in Heaven while she believed she would end up in Hell. Jean asked Ermine to come back "*sagement*" or as a good, recognisable spirit, so that they would not be deceived by Satan appearing as her.<sup>18</sup> Here, Ermine seems to have gone from being the student to being the expert in discernment, and Jean is concerned that he will not be able to tell demons from saints. In a way, Ermine regained some of her own agency through Jean's recognition of his own limitations on the discernment of spirits.

It was through Jean that Ermine was introduced to several other ecclesiastics. By housing Ermine near the priory, Jean positioned her in a place where other religious could witness some of her tribulations. Jean also made Ermine known to the Archbishop of Reims, Jean Morel (canon and future prior of Saint-Denis in Reims), and to no less a figure than Jean Gerson, seeking their expertise on how to deal with such an extraordinary case. Though Jean le Graveur does not explicitly state that he hoped to use Ermine's experiences to enhance the reputation of his order, his involvement of highly placed churchmen in the case suggests that this hope did factor into his decisions. Jean's prologue clearly explains the reasons why the brother of Val-des-Écoliers compiled the manuscript, though the response from Gerson took a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 167.

long time.<sup>19</sup> The fact that Jean le Graveur wrote Ermine's visions in the vernacular and did not write a traditional *vita* suggests that he did not envisage an immediate canonisation for Ermine, but that his work could be later used as the basis for a more standard or inspirational work were she to be approved by ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>20</sup> When the visions were integrated into Jean Gielemans' *Novale sanctorum* (after 1485), the text was renamed *Vita venerabilis Ermine Vidue*.<sup>21</sup>

### **Jean Gerson**

One of the reasons Ermine's case is remarkable is that we have Jean Gerson's approval and then retraction of support for her experiences. After Jean le Graveur compiled the manuscript, Jean Morel sent it to Gerson, whose reputation as a reliable assessor was already established by this time (c.1401/1402). The manuscript was examined by Gerson, three main University faculties (theology, ordinance, and medicine), the grand master of the college of Navarre, as well as many other theologians.<sup>22</sup> Gerson and those he requested to review the manuscript agreed that the visions revealed an orthodox faith and confirmed Ermine's piety. Gerson's analysis was grouped into three conclusions. Firstly, there was nothing contrary to the Catholic faith in the visions, they were all possible and permitted under divine law, and similar events were mentioned in the lives of the Fathers of the Church.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, that it was "rash and crude" to attack experiences such as Ermine's as untrue, when "no falsity or clear breach of truth is apparent."<sup>24</sup> Just because some miracles could be naturally explained did not disqualify them as miracles. Gerson also noted that Ermine's repeated and serious attestations to the truth of the contents of the book, even in the face of death, meant that "the faith is rather corroborated and honoured. Also, a pious belief in the book's contents does not seem to give rise to any danger

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<sup>19</sup> The start of his response reads: "*Pridem ac pluries, nunc litteris nunc viva voce postulasti ut librum unum... editum visitarem.*" Arnaud-Gillet provides clear reasoning that P. Glorieux's dating of this reply to 1408 is incorrect; it was more likely to be around 1401 or 1402. See Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 21-23.

<sup>20</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 325.

<sup>21</sup> Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS. series nova 12708. See Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>23</sup> Original Latin, in *ibid.*, 171; Trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 183.

<sup>24</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 171-72; Trans. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 183.

in morals.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that “it was an uneducated countrywoman who knew how to express all that is described in this book” did not prevent the possibility of the miracles seen in the text.<sup>26</sup>

However, Gerson's third and final conclusion was that:

... both because of the limited learning of many people in scripture and sacred history and because of the obstinate incredulity of some people, whose minds are hardened, it is not appropriate now to make this book available to the general public without restriction, but only to make it known to those who will likely be edified by it.<sup>27</sup>

This was out of respect for the book's contents. The majority of people would not understand the book and therefore reject the events as false, discrediting God's work through Ermine. However, for those who were stable in their faith and concerned with their own salvation, Ermine was a “model for penance, austerity, and tears... this woman, being poor, old, uneducated, seems to be given to us to provide a powerful example of the apostolic truth that God has chosen what is weak in the world to overcome what is powerful. (1 Cor. 1:27)”<sup>28</sup> Against the “powerful” demons, Ermine was fortified by her profound humility, which stimulated “a most passionate and conscientious awareness of her own weakness and imperfection”; her unwavering faith and the ultimate safety it provided in life, and her prudent but unlearned simplicity, commended as “an untaught wisdom, which does not depend on its own prudence but does all things with counsel (Proverbs 13:10)”.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Ermine was truly ignorant, but she knew and admitted it by seeking counsel. Obedient and faithful, she could do no harm. To Gerson, the “admirable life of this devout and pious woman” was acceptable.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to note that to Gerson, Ermine represented a pious laywoman who was not concerned with reform in the Church nor with strong demands regarding the Schism, and she submitted with humility and obedience to the directives of the ecclesiastical hierarchy

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<sup>25</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 172; Trans. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 183.

<sup>26</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 172; Trans. in Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 184.

<sup>27</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 172-73; Trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 172; Trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 184.

<sup>29</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 173; Trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 185; Dyan Elliott, “Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc,” *The American Historical Review* 107, no. 1 (2002), 39.

<sup>30</sup> Original Latin, in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 173; Trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 186.

without trying to publicise her visionary experiences.<sup>31</sup> This is a key area where she deviated from the approaches we have seen from Marie and Constance. However, the frequency of demonic visions brought concern that Ermine's example would be misinterpreted by those with little knowledge in spiritual matters.<sup>32</sup> Gerson's particular interest in pastoral reform combined with anxieties around personal spirituality as a result of the Schism would have increased Gerson's reservations on allowing Ermine's text to be disseminated widely to laity. After Jean Morel received Gerson's response, Ermine's visions were translated into Latin by his sub-prior Jean de Balay for use by clerics. As far as we know the text was only shared outside of its immediate environment through the Latin translation.<sup>33</sup> This would have limited the audience to educated clerics and some religious women. This limitation to the circulation of Ermine's story meant that Jean le Graveur's hope of widely advertising this holy woman who was connected to his order was disappointed.

However, the tone of Gerson's approval letter was one of an even-handed assessor rather than enthusiastic supporter, enabling his withdrawal of support in the future.<sup>34</sup> Gerson's opinion of Ermine and female visionaries in general had already started to change in 1415 when he wrote *De probatione spirituum*. He advised those engaged in spiritual discernment and advice to avoid pandering to visionaries and refrain from encouraging them in their sense of holiness:

... and in particular and above all he should consider whereby this person has been moved to reveal her secret... and be especially cautious lest you applaud such a person, so that by praising her you may not suggest that she is someone saintly and worthy by reason of her revelations and miracles.<sup>35</sup>

Though Gerson acknowledged that those outside of religious orders could strive in their faith, and that simple people like Ermine could possess an erudition of the heart suffused by scripture, Gerson seemed to be torn over the issue of lay participation in their faith.<sup>36</sup>

Twenty years after Gerson's initial approval of Ermine, he officially reversed his opinion and spoke of his "near seduction" by Ermine's case in *De examinatione doctrinarum* (*On the*

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<sup>31</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 24.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," 40.

<sup>35</sup> "*Praesertim in principio consideret acriter quare movetur haec persona secretum suum pandere, super quo fiet ista consideratio? Cave praeterea ... ut non applaudas tall personae, non obinde laudes eam, non mireris quasi sanctam dignamque revelationibus atque miraculis*", Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 448; Rubin, "Europe Remade: Purity and Danger in Late Medieval Europe," 105.

<sup>36</sup> Rubin, "Europe Remade: Purity and Danger in Late Medieval Europe," 107.

*Examination of Doctrine*) in 1423. Gerson cautioned crediting those who used their purported revelations for usurping the right to teach and promoting their own claims to sanctity, particularly amongst laywomen.<sup>37</sup> He divided visionaries into three categories in ascending order of severity. The first two were those suffering illusions due to brain damage (*ex fantasia capitis perturbati*) and those who were genuinely deceived but did not wish to deceive others, and these two categories were relatively innocuous. Ermine, however, was introduced in the third, and most lethal, category:

There are many others who do not wish themselves to be deceived, but nevertheless wish to deceive others by fashioning marvellous things and those things that they know to be false... Blessed God preserved me many times from seduction from the mockery and contempt of such ones. I confess that earlier I was near seduction over a certain Ermine of Reims through the relations of some men possessed of great reputations – if I had not, with God willing, tempered the manner of my response.<sup>38</sup>

Arnaud-Gillet notes that by the time of this reversal of opinion by Gerson, all of Ermine's key supporters had likely passed away.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the Schism was over, and institutional authority under one pope had been re-established. There was no longer a gap in authority that visionary women could fill. Gerson emphasised that it was God who ensured he tempered his response and so he was not entirely deceived by Ermine; his measured method of discernment received divine ratification. Though we do not know what specifically led to his reversal of opinion on Ermine, Gerson's initial caution and then reversal seem to be motivated by his fear of being duped by a fake holy woman, which he compared to being a spiritual moneychanger or merchant, who had to determine the difference between an authentic coin and counterfeits.<sup>40</sup> This concern was especially poignant during the Schism, when both sides of the papal divide were arguing for their legitimacy. Thus, Gerson's change of view on visionaries as a whole led him to use Ermine as an example of one who should not be trusted. Though Gerson had temporarily lent Ermine posthumous authority by his approval of her revelations, this authority was later withdrawn.

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<sup>37</sup> Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," 40.

<sup>38</sup> *De examinatione doctrinarum*, in Gerson, *Oeuvres complètes*, 474.

<sup>39</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 26-27.

<sup>40</sup> Elliott, "Seeing Double: John Gerson, the Discernment of Spirits, and Joan of Arc," 40-41.

## Jean de Varennes

Another cleric with whom Ermine was linked is Jean de Varennes. Jean, as noted in chapter two, was a former papal official and then canon of Notre-Dame de Reims from 1386 until he retired to Saint-Lié in 1393. His preaching and holy life attracted crowds to him who called him the “*saint homme de Saint-Lié*”; however, his passionate preaching and lack of support for Benedict XIII’s papacy provoked his arrest on 30 May 1396 under the orders of Charles VI.<sup>41</sup> Ermine’s visions were occurring at the same time that Jean de Varennes turned against the pope of Avignon and preached publicly against him. Jean appeared multiple times in Ermine’s visions. Ermine first became interested in Jean in January 1396, when she asked the voice sent by God about Jean’s behaviour. However, the voice evaded answering. On 23 February 1396, Ermine was transported to Nantueil by demons, and on her way back to Reims stumbled across a mass being led by Jean. The demons told Ermine that Jean would end the Schism, bring peace to the Church, and become the pope; they claimed that “there will only be peace in the Church because of him, and he will be pope.”<sup>42</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski argues that Ermine’s interest in Jean shows that she was aware of the ecclesiastical politics of the outside world and the crisis of faith caused by the Schism.<sup>43</sup> Though Ermine did not make explicit political pronouncements on the Schism, her visions convey the sense of imminent danger from devils closing in.

Jean’s presence in Ermine’s visions also reveals the tension felt about him by the clergy as to whether he was preaching the truth or deceiving people. From Jean le Graveur’s perspective, though he had initially supported Jean de Varennes, Jean de Varennes had since led many people astray and Ermine’s demonic visions of him proved that.<sup>44</sup> Jean le Graveur convinced Ermine that her vision claiming that Jean de Varennes would become pope and heal the Schism was false. Jean le Graveur noted that Jean de Varennes had many supporters who would not have liked Ermine’s negative visions regarding the prophet. It is likely that the opinion that Jean de Varennes would become pope was a popular sentiment and by this suggestion appearing from the mouth of a demon, Jean le Graveur successfully denounced it. The demons tried to persuade Ermine to leave her confessor because of his views on Jean de Varennes. This reflects the tension many laypeople experienced between the two sides of the Schism: the contentious claim for the papal throne, fierce loyalties, and the political wrangling

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<sup>41</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 19.

<sup>42</sup> “...ne ne seras pas paix en l’Eglise se ce n’est par lui et sera pape.” le Graveur, *Les Visions d’Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 116.

<sup>43</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “The strange case of Ermine de Reims,” 324.

<sup>44</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *Poets, Saints, and Visionaries of the Great Schism, 1378-1417*, 90.

between the French king and the Avignon pope, caused widespread uncertainty about which papacy was truly legitimate. Jean de Varennes denounced Benedict XIII but the French king still hoped to negotiate with Benedict, and so Jean de Varennes' position became untenable in this pro-Avignon region.<sup>45</sup> On 16 August 1396, Ermine had another vision in which the diabolical voice told her that Jean was preaching in Paris and had converted the king, queen, and a large number of others, including at the University of Paris.<sup>46</sup> However, it is likely that Jean was already dead by this point.<sup>47</sup> Notably, in his seventeenth-century commentary on Ermine's visions, Jacques de Foigny included a sentence that is missing from BnF, fr. 25213 but is present in the three Latin manuscripts.<sup>48</sup> It claimed that Jean de Varennes favoured Pierre de la Lune, the "so-called" pope.<sup>49</sup> This must have been added by the Latin translators. It does not seem like a logical addition, given Jean le Graveur had denounced Jean de Varennes, and his supporters in Ermine's visions had only been demons. Why the Latin manuscripts would mention this controversial figure's supposed preference for the "true" Avignon pope is unclear, as it did nothing to build the legitimacy of either side.

Jean le Graveur persuaded Ermine to adopt a more critical view of Jean de Varennes, condemning her initial admiration. It is also probable that Ermine's actual knowledge of and interest in Jean de Varennes was downplayed by Jean le Graveur. Though Jean de Varennes preached against obedience to both popes and considered the sacraments administered by unworthy priests invalid, Jean le Graveur stressed that Ermine's first Eucharistic vision took place following the 1396 *Corpus Christi* procession, in which the archbishop whom Jean de Varennes attacked in his sermons had carried the holy sacrament.<sup>50</sup> This suggests that God, via Ermine, confirmed the archbishop's legitimacy and disproved Jean de Varennes' claims. Furthermore, many of Ermine's visions occurred during masses celebrated by priests ordained by Clement VII (Benedict's predecessor), suggesting that the true pope was in Avignon as the archbishop promoted, not Rome.<sup>51</sup> Despite Jean le Graveur using Ermine's visions as a way to discredit Jean de Varennes, in his *Responsiones* Jean de Varennes called on the testimonies of the sub-prior of Val-des-Écoliers, none other than Ermine's confessor Jean le Graveur, and the prior of Saint-Denis of Reims, Henri de Mareuil (who was also one of Ermine's confessors).

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>46</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 162.

<sup>47</sup> Vauchez, "Un réformateur religieux," 1117.

<sup>48</sup> BnF, lat. 13782; Vienna, Ö.N., Ser. Nov. 12708; Freiburg i. Br., Universitaatsbib, MS. 129.

<sup>49</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 41-42.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>51</sup> Fabián Alejandro Campagne, "Demonology at a Crossroads: The Visions of Ermine de Reims and the Image of the Devil on the Eve of the Great European Witch-Hunt," *Church History* 80, no. 3 (2011), 470.

This suggests that at least initially Jean de Varennes had supporters amongst the clergy, including Jean le Graveur, and the University of Paris. It is likely that Jean de Varennes' public change of stance on Benedict XIII was what caused the change of heart in his religious supporters.<sup>52</sup> It also likely that Jean le Graveur used Ermine's visions to discredit Jean de Varennes in order to prove his own obedience to the Avignon papacy after initially supporting Jean de Varennes, as well as to confirm Ermine as a holy woman who proved Jean de Varennes' guilt. In the process of presenting Ermine's interest in Jean de Varennes, we see how the politics of the Schism impacted both Ermine herself as well as the way her visions were recorded by Jean le Graveur.

Jean le Graveur himself had a great debate of conscience regarding whether he should report the adventures Ermine had in relation to Jean de Varennes in the book or if he should omit them. Jean le Graveur noted that there were a great number of ill-informed people who believed that Jean de Varennes said and did everything in line with what was reported about him. Jean le Graveur was concerned that these ill-informed people would despise the good things in Ermine's book because they did not like what was written about Jean de Varennes. However, Jean le Graveur consulted many good people, and they all believed that the events should not be hidden, as what happened was a work of God, not man; therefore, this work would make known the truth to those who had lost their way because of Jean de Varennes.<sup>53</sup> Jean le Graveur intertwines the story of his own changing belief in Jean de Varennes' mission to reform and unify the Church with Ermine's story. There are more than a dozen instances where the demonic voices support Jean de Varennes and in the same breath urge Ermine to leave her confessor who no longer supported the hermit. However, the way Jean le Graveur framed these adventures showed that Ermine's trust in and obedience to her confessor could not be shaken.<sup>54</sup> Jean le Graveur used Ermine's curiosity in Jean de Varennes to bring further legitimisation of her true piety. Jean le Graveur clearly wanted to minimise and defend Ermine's interest in Jean de Varennes, hoping that Ermine would become a model for the faithful to emulate.<sup>55</sup> Certainly, by choosing to believe her confessor over the demons, Ermine showed her desire to conform to the views of the Church during this period of crisis. The way that Jean le Graveur influenced and censored Ermine's interest in Jean de Varennes also reveals the extent to which his agenda controlled Ermine's story and limited Ermine's exercise of her own agency.

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<sup>52</sup> Vauchez, "Un réformateur religieux," 1118.

<sup>53</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 115-16.

<sup>54</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 334.

<sup>55</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 20.

## Other Ecclesiastics

As well as the specific ecclesiastics named above, Ermine and her visionary experiences were known by several religious in her community. The religious of Val-des-Écoliers, as well as those from the Abbey of Saint-Denis, were interested in Ermine's visions and in how they could anchor her experience in approved ecclesiastical waters. Ermine also desired to be anchored in her faith as well, so it was a mutually beneficial relationship. As well as Jean le Graveur, the prior of Saint-Denis and Jean Morel interrogated Ermine many times on the content of her visions until they were satisfied with their origins.<sup>56</sup> This is clear by their efforts after Ermine's death to have her visions published and approved by Gerson. The choice of French rather than Latin for the manuscript sent to Gerson suggests that, at least initially, the religious in Reims believed the visions would be useful for the laity.<sup>57</sup> However, after Gerson's judgement on Ermine, the reputations of those associated with her were cast in doubt. Gerson's condemnation of Ermine's text names Jean Morel in particular as being gullible in believing Ermine.<sup>58</sup>

Ermine saw the host transformed into Christ and other things related to the Passion at many masses held by various priests, which supported their legitimacy. Jean le Graveur noted a few of these priests as having been ordained by bishops who had received their bishoprics from Pope Clement VII.<sup>59</sup> In an indirect way, Ermine's visions, as they were presented by Jean, showed divine support for the Avignon papacy during the Schism. Moreover, Guy de Roye, archbishop of Reims from 1390-1409, appeared in one vision. He was carrying the host in the Corpus Christi procession of the Blessed Sacrament on 1 June 1396, when Ermine saw the baby Jesus in the host.<sup>60</sup> On the surface, this would seem to suggest that de Roye and the other religious were endorsed by God. However, Ermine also saw Christ in the host in masses said by both priests who lived with women and priests who led "honest" lives.<sup>61</sup> Thus, though Jean attempted to use Ermine as a papal endorsement, there were limitations to using Ermine's visions as divine support for the Avignon papacy.

Despite the limited circulation of Ermine's visions and Gerson's condemnation of them, Ermine was not completely forgotten after her death either. Ermine's visions were translated

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> De examinatione doctrinarum, in Jean Gerson, *Opera omnia*, ed. L.E. Du Pin (Zurich: Olms, 1987), 100.

<sup>59</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 138.

<sup>60</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 138.

and copied into multiple manuscripts that were shared. Jacques de Foigny, Doctor in Theology and the final subprior of the Val-des-Écoliers of Reims, stated in the seventeenth century that the French text was copied by many brothers at the Val-des-Écoliers before being sent to Gerson.<sup>62</sup> The manuscript was also copied by clerks in Paris while being examined by Gerson. However, none of these copies has survived.<sup>63</sup> Once Gerson initially approved Ermine's visions in 1401-1402, Jean de Balay, the subprior of Saint-Denis in Reims, translated the original French account by Jean le Graveur into Latin. In his prologue, Jean de Balay noted that while the French version was more accessible to simple laity, Latin was more noble, more suited to study, and more universal than French. Therefore, the Latin text could be translated into other vernacular languages should it be necessary.<sup>64</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski argues that this almost simultaneous translation into Latin suggests that Jean le Graveur had ambitious plans for the text.<sup>65</sup> The Latin translations<sup>66</sup> were circulated primarily amongst clerical circles. Given the connection to Val-des-Écoliers, the text was likely sent to the various other Val-des-Écoliers priories in France and the Netherlands. It may have been at the priory in Malines that Jean Gielemans, subprior of the Augustinian priory Rouge-Cloître near Brussels, found the Latin translation and included it in his first volume of *Novale Sanctorum* (c.1485). He also referred to it in the prologue of the second volume of the life of Pétronille Hergods (d.1472), a recluse of the third order of the Franciscans of Malines.<sup>67</sup> The Abbey of Saint-Victor of Paris possessed the two manuscripts in French<sup>68</sup> which are now at the National Library in France. One was given to the abbey by Catherine of Bavaria (d.1462). Thus, a variety of religious and some nobility read and were aware of Ermine's visions.

Furthermore, at the beginning of the sixteenth century, a theologian from Freiburg im Breisgau, Johann Sutter, was staying in France to translate a number of Gerson's sermons from French into Latin. He bought a copy of Ermine's visions from the brothers of the Val-des-Écoliers of Reims which he carefully annotated;<sup>69</sup> this was perhaps so that he could draw from them while preaching or teaching the young clerics at the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, of which he was appointed rector in 1504, and later taught theology from 1520.<sup>70</sup> In 1648,

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<sup>62</sup> Jacques de Foigny, *Les merveilles de la vie, des combats et victoires d'Ermine, citoyenne de Reims* (Reims, 1648).

<sup>63</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 326.

<sup>66</sup> BnF, lat. 13782; Vienna, Ö.N., Ser. Nov. 12708; Freiburg i. Br., Universitaatsbib, MS. 129.

<sup>67</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 24.

<sup>68</sup> BnF, fr. 25213 and BnF, fr. 25552

<sup>69</sup> Freiburg i. Br., Universitaatsbib, MS. 129.

<sup>70</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 28.

Jacques de Foigny wrote a commentary of the life and visions of Ermine, called *Les Merveilles de la vie, des combats et victoires d'Ermine, citoyenne de Reims*. The book was dedicated to the abbess of Saint-Étienne of Reims, who lived with the religious at the priory of Val-des-Écoliers.<sup>71</sup> Jacques praised Ermine as an example of the weak being stronger than the powerful, and for demonstrating how good people could triumph over the powers of Hell.<sup>72</sup> He mentions that the manuscript of her visions from which he was working, a Latin copy borrowed from the Abbey of Saint-Victor of Paris, contained pictures of Ermine's visions and apparitions, although many had been cut out.<sup>73</sup> That manuscript has not survived. The surviving Latin copy at the National Library in Paris comes from the Abbey of Saint-Denis of Reims.<sup>74</sup>

A couple of decades after Jacques' book, Dominican Guillaume Marlot (d.1667), grand prior of the Abbey of Saint-Nicaise of Reims, dedicated a chapter of his *Histoire de la ville de Reims* to Ermine's visions (volume IV, chapter 31) entitled: *Des apparitions qu'eut une simple femme nommée Ermine, et ce que Gerson en a escrit sur le dessein qu'on avoit de les publier*.<sup>75</sup> Marlot noted that it was Gerson's wise judgement that prevented Ermine's name from being more widely known and left her visions "hidden in a corner of the library."<sup>76</sup> He also added that the history of Ermine in Jacques' book was an authorised edition. Agreeing with Gerson's judgement on the visions, Marlot wrote that it was now appropriate for them to be read as the people of their century were less ignorant and much more educated than those in Ermine's own time.<sup>77</sup> This was an obvious justification to publish Ermine's story against the arguments Gerson put forward to explain the limited dissemination of Ermine's visions.

As noted, there are also many mentions of manuscripts in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries that have not survived today, including an illuminated French manuscript, suggesting

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

<sup>72</sup> "Vous admirerez une femelle, foible, pauvre et ignorante, plus forte que celui qui se vante de renverser tout le monde, et s'est effectivement rendu victorieux des plus puissants; plus sçavante que ceux qui ont esté du rang des chérubins; et plus généreuse que les premiers athlètes de l'univers. Vous vous resjouyrez de voir que toutes les machines d'enfer ne sont que des cordelettes d'estoupe contre les gens de bien, que ce géant, qui semble si espouventable, n'est qu'une fourmy accaré aux justes, et qu'il ne faut qu'estre vertueux pour triompher de tous les efforts enragez de ces bandes noires qui marchent sous les drapeaux du roy des abyemes." Quoted in *ibid.*, 40.

<sup>73</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 151.

<sup>74</sup> BnF, lat. 13782; Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 28.

<sup>75</sup> Guillaume Marlot, *Histoire de la ville de Reims*, vol. 4 (Reims: Jacquet, 1843), 131-35. Originally published in Latin in 1666-1679.

<sup>76</sup> "Cette sage et judicieuse approbation [de Gerson] retint le prieur Jean Morel de mettre au jour l'histoire d'Ermine, laquelle est demeurée inconnue jusqu'à nous et cachée en un coin de bibliothèque." *Ibid.*; quoted in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 29.

<sup>77</sup> "ce me semble, tant de péril à présent qu'il y avoit alors notre siècle estant moins ignorant, et le nombre de personne lettrées surpassant de beaucoup celui des libertins, qui, seuls ont coutume de rejeter ce qu'ils n'entendent pas." Marlot, *Histoire de la ville de Reims*, 4; quoted in Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 29.

that Ermine's story was more widespread than initially thought. Based on the spread of the manuscripts, it is probable that Ermine was known extensively amongst contemporary ecclesiastics in Reims, Paris, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Brussels. It is not possible to know how well-known she was amongst the laity, aside from the fact that Catherine of Bavaria possessed a copy of the French manuscript.<sup>78</sup> However, this array of manuscripts is far more than for Marie or Constance, suggesting that though Ermine's revelations were controversial, they were perhaps more well-known within her own time. This is likely because Ermine's revelations were not specific to the Schism but were used as justification for the need for discernment of spirits by theologians who were concerned about women's voices. This context outlived the divide in the Church and became more prominent with the rising fears of witchcraft, explaining the multiple later manuscripts that are recorded.

### **Discernment of Spirits and Rising Fears of Witchcraft**

As noted in the first chapter, the procedure of discerning spirits began to be codified during this period and did not change substantially over the next few centuries. Blumenfeld-Kosinski argues that in some ways Jean le Graveur intended the book on Ermine's visions to be a guide on the discernment of spirits, and the book was his contribution to the debate.<sup>79</sup> While there was the expectation that holy women would submit themselves to their confessor or another religious who was capable of discerning the origins of their visions, Ermine's case is a fascinating example of a confessor teaching his protégée how to discern her own experiences, and the manuscript shows her as a living example of this process. Both Ermine's successes and failures at discerning her visions are documented. Her ability to discern between the two, guided by Jean, is used as authorisation of her piety and proof that Ermine was chosen by God. Jean dramatises Ermine's discernment by narrating her experiences as 'acting out' discernment. He also does not generally use the stereotypical language for presenting visions such as "it seemed to her" or "she saw"; instead, he uses direct verbs such as "she heard" a voice or someone "came into her room." Most of Ermine's experiences occurred while she was awake and they could, therefore, perhaps be more accurately described as apparitions rather than visions. Ermine was

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<sup>78</sup> Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 43; for a more detailed description of the surviving manuscripts, see *ibid.*, 35-39.

<sup>79</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 342.

always suspicious of the experiences, but her level of fear was generally how she gauged whether they were satanic or not.<sup>80</sup>

Jean argued that the experiences Ermine had were given to her by the permission of the Lord for everyone's benefit. Her behaviour and the faithful way she persevered to the end made her a true example to teach others how to keep themselves from perfidy and deceptions of the Antichrist and his ministers.<sup>81</sup> The great lengths to which Jean went to emphasise Ermine's submission to him as her confessor, to prove her orthodoxy, and to authenticate her visions, reflects a recognition that the issue of the discernment of spirits, though still being developed at this time, was already a concern. The anxieties around ecclesiastical authority during the Schism increased the scrutiny into the provenance of female visions, and while she was alive Ermine was able to satisfy the concerns about her experiences. It was not until after the deaths of her supporters, and the end of the Schism, that the origins of her experiences were reclassified as demonic.

Jean set Ermine on the path to discernment for herself very early on, and she was very quickly able to discern the most skilful demonic apparitions. The first auditory experience Jean reports was of a voice exactly like his own that spoke to Ermine on the eve of All Saints' Day, 1395. When Ermine told him about it, Jean told her that the voice was demonic. Ermine's ability to discern demons from saints was then demonstrated by a number of incidents, including visions of demons in the form of Mary Magdalene, seraphim, Saint Paul the Simple, and Saint Nicholas, to name a few. Ermine successfully rebuked the demons and saw through their lies on almost all occasions. This was confirmed either by the demons revealing themselves in the vision itself, or by a divine vision confirming that the previous one was false, often involving the very saint or divine figure the demons had imitated. On 20 May 1396, Ermine was walking through the garden when she commended herself to Mary Magdalene. A woman in white appeared to Ermine in the garden holding a box before suddenly leaving when two men appeared.<sup>82</sup> Two days later, she reappeared in Ermine's room and explained that she was the Magdalene, and along with two seraphim, they tried to persuade her to leave her confessor. This command to leave her confessor was what revealed that they were demons. Ermine refused, and five days later Saint Paul the Simple appeared to her and told her that the Magdalene and

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 339.

<sup>81</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 54-55; Arnaud-Gillet, *Entre Dieu et Satan*, 49.

<sup>82</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 121.

seraphim were demons. Therefore, Ermine's discernment was displayed by her refusal to leave her confessor.

On another occasion, Saint Nicholas appeared to Ermine accompanied by three young clerics and three young women in white, as per his legend. Despite his claim that "*je suis saint Nicolas*", Ermine immediately accused him of being "*sathenas*". Saint Paul the Simple then descended from the ceiling and confirmed her judgement. Another demon, again in the form of Mary Magdalene, appeared to Ermine in her room, but Ermine answered her extension of comfort by calling her a "stinking demon, you are filled with deception," causing the demon to change into a horrible shape with horns, before beating Ermine badly all night.<sup>83</sup> The more Jean repeated occurrences of Ermine discerning demons in her visions, the more her holiness and legitimacy was revealed. Jean used Ermine's daily experiences with demons to prove her as a holy woman by her resistance to their aggression. This was before the development of systematised forms of exorcism, which generally started developing in the fifteenth century, explaining why Jean never attempted to intervene with an exorcism to free Ermine from her torments and instead used them as examples of her divine authority.<sup>84</sup>

It is also worth noting that the manuscripts being made and distributed of Ermine's visions were written during a period where traditional expectations of what witchcraft looked like were shifting, and new accusations were emerging in works such as *Formicarius* by Johannes Nider (d.1438) and *Hammer of Witches* (1486-87) by Dominican inquisitors Heinrich Krämer and Jakob Sprenger.<sup>85</sup> Demons were increasingly being associated with the idea of *maleficia* and witchcraft, rather than as agents of evil testing the strength and purity of humans' faith as previously. The fear that the devil was loose in the world was heightened by the crisis of the Schism and is reflected in Ermine's visions. Ermine provides a fascinating example of a woman whose aerial journeys and demonic temptations took place near the start of this fundamental shift in the perception of witchcraft, before there was a methodical stereotype against which to condemn those who were believed to be involved in demonic worship and magic. Thus, her torments and misadventures are a trial that Ermine endures, rather than activities that she was seen to be actively engaged in.<sup>86</sup> Ermine's aerial kidnapping to Nantueil and then Saint-Lié was simultaneously used by her supporters as evidence of demons subjecting a holy woman to torments to test her faith, and by her detractors as gossip of her support of the

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 124-25.

<sup>84</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 343.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 328.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 348.

controversial Jean de Varennes and proof of her heresy. During this period many women believed to be demonically possessed received harsh treatment and were tortured, tied up and interrogated.<sup>87</sup> Yet, surprisingly, this did not happen to Ermine; at least, only the demons abused her. There must have been enough support for her during her lifetime, and evidence of her piety and genuineness, that she was not condemned as a demon-possessed woman.

Notably, Ermine's visions appear in BnF, fr. 25552 among French works by Gerson scribed by Pierre Duduit and André Hausselet. In the latter part of the fifteenth century, folios 313-315 containing the "confession" of sorcerer Jean de Bar, were removed from another Gerson manuscript (BNF français 24841) and bound into this one. Jean de Bar was burnt at the stake in Champagne in 1398, two years after Ermine's death.<sup>88</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski suggests that Jean de Bar's confession was later included with Gerson's works as a comparison to Ermine's experiences, demonstrating Gerson's expertise in this area and how his redaction of the university's condemnation of magic in 1398 led to Jean de Bar's execution. However, Blumenfeld-Kosinski also posits that Jean de Bar's case may have been used as a clear contrast between the traditional practices of sorcery and Ermine's strange, but not unorthodox, experiences, which could be negatively interpreted as early manifestations of witchcraft in the later fifteenth century.<sup>89</sup> The word *sorcière* is used in the *Visions* in a passage where a demonic impersonator of the hermit Paul the Simple warns Ermine that she could be accused of being a *sorcière*, and that she might be imprisoned and tortured to make her confess (exactly what happened to Jean de Bar). In Middle French, *sorcière* could mean "ugly and malicious woman", but it also had magical connotations. Its usage in Ermine's visions with the mention of prison and torture indicates that being a *sorcière* was something dangerous and forbidden.<sup>90</sup>

Thus, Ermine's visionary adventures were being recorded at a significant time when orthodoxy, demonology, and witchcraft were all being redefined. Marie and Constance had to ensure they were presented as holy women so that their warnings to the ecclesiastical elite would be heeded and the Schism healed. For Ermine, the divine origin of her experiences and her sanctity had to be emphasised to protect her life. For Jean le Graveur, Ermine's piety had to be proven so that she could be presented as a holy woman attached to his order. To achieve

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<sup>87</sup> For more on this topic, see Caciola, "Mystics, Demoniacs, and the Physiology of Spirit Possession in Medieval Europe."

<sup>88</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, "The strange case of Ermine de Reims," 327.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 327-28.

these goals, Ermine and her confessor employed hagiographical topoi to place Ermine in the tradition of holy women. Having established Ermine's social networks and the contemporary issues she faced around the changing views of orthodoxy, we will now consider what literary tropes Ermine and Jean utilised in the recording of the revelations.

## **Hagiographical Topoi**

### **Divine Authority**

As with Marie and Constance, God's involvement in Ermine's experiences and the manuscript are outlined from the beginning. However, it is important to note that unlike Marie and Constance, God did not command Ermine to record her visions or to share them publicly. In fact, the majority of the ecstatic experiences were demonic torments rather than divine encounters. It is Jean, more than Ermine herself, that emphasises her divine authority. The prologue includes the disclaimer that these extraordinary things happened to this simple and humble creature by God's permission.<sup>91</sup> Jean continues that Ermine's experiences are a remarkable endorsement of the Christian faith because all the schemes of the enemy against this simple and ignorant woman failed due to the virtue of her faith and the help of God. She vanquished all her enemies, and many pains of Hell were described by her, as well as the joys of Heaven revealed. Ermine was, in truth, a humble woman who lived a good life, but this credit did not belong to her alone but came from God.<sup>92</sup> This reinforces the idea that Ermine was passive in receiving these experiences; just like Marie and Constance, Ermine did not strive for visionary experiences, as some women were accused of, but she was the unexpected recipient. The manuscript was not written for Ermine's benefit, Jean notes, but for the honour, glory, and praise of Jesus, Lord of Heaven and Earth, and to the shame and confusion of the enemy. Jean states that the enemy's schemes were brought with God's permission in order to deceive poor sinners, but Ermine successfully rebuffed them. As confirmation, Ermine told Jean that she believed and knew with certainty that in all the adventures that were recounted, God kept her spirit and her body safe, and each time it was a miracle, for she was so fearful that a cat or mouse or any noise she heard scared her to death.<sup>93</sup> At no point does Ermine boast of her own abilities to discern the demons; however, it is through God and Jean's guidance that she does so. According to Jean, one could find remarkable affirmation of one's faith "by considering that

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<sup>91</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 47.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-50.

all the power, the knowledge, force, and cleverness of the infernal enemies were marshalled against this poor, simple, and ignorant woman, but that she by virtue of her faith and through God's help was, after some time, victorious against them."<sup>94</sup> Jean very clearly establishes that it was not Ermine herself but God through her that enabled her to discern the demonic visions.

Furthermore, the repeated instances where Ermine witnessed the host during mass as various forms of Christ himself were seen at the time as divine evidence of her special relationship with God. Witnessing Christ in the host, particularly when he was covered in blood from the Passion, at times reduced Ermine to a sobbing and distressed state, though such a reaction was not regularly recorded.<sup>95</sup> The example of copious weeping is similar to some of Constance's experiences and was also demonstrated by other holy women such as Margery Kempe and Marie d'Oignies. As mentioned earlier, too, the interaction Jean had with Isabelle's grandmother after Ermine's death reconfirmed for him that Ermine was chosen by God, that what she had experienced was true, and that she was now in Heaven as a reward for her obedience.<sup>96</sup> Jean also made a note in the manuscript to future copyists and translators, urging them to remain faithful to the original so that they would not be accused of treason by God for altering the truth.<sup>97</sup> Hence, Jean advocated strongly for Ermine's divine authority. However, without the 'call to write' or the repeated direct commands from God to share His messages like Marie and Constance received, Ermine's claims to divine authority are less convincing.

## Humility

The focus on Ermine's humility is central in the manuscript. In fact, it is made clear that Ermine did not want her visions recorded or shared at all, and it was Jean who took it upon himself to record the experiences. This reluctance to share her visions could be a literary trope to emphasise Ermine's humility and passivity and allows Jean to make a stronger case for the authenticity of Ermine's visions. This reluctance is a lot stronger than that of Constance and Marie who both overcame their hesitancy to share their visions confidently. In the prologue, Jean reaffirms the Church's stance that one should not wish or strive to see or hear visions but

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<sup>94</sup> "*Car on y peut trouver une tres notable aprobacion de nostre foy en ce que toute la puissance, science, force et soutiveté des ennemis d'enfer c'est efforcié et monstrée contre une povre femme, simple et ygnorant; mais en la vertu de la foy et l'aide de Dieu, elle a eu vitoire dew tous ses ennemis apres un peu.*" Ibid., 48; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 158.

<sup>95</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 174-75.

<sup>96</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 167-69.

<sup>97</sup> "*et qu'ilz ne soyent reprins de faulseté a l'estroit jugement de Dieu et condampnez de sa sainte bouche ou feu d'enfer comme faulsaires.*" Ibid., 50.

should live a good life following the advice of good people whose morals and knowledge have been known and approved for a long time. He adds that one should not put one's faith in dreams and visions or believe that one is worthy to be shown them. One should also follow the doctrine approved by the Holy Church and put all of one's faith in the Lord, without boasting of the grace one receives. Jean affirmed that Ermine was such a woman, who was pious and well established in a true and profound humility, who followed the Church's doctrine, who would never pay homage to any of the spirits that she had seen no matter what was done to her. She felt she was not worthy of seeing or hearing anything good or receiving this special treatment from God.<sup>98</sup> Ermine's humility was so great, we are told, that when someone asked her to pray for them, she was ashamed. She sometimes told Jean that there was no benefit in her praying for anyone because what could she do for these people, when she was "*une des pires femmes qui soit au mond*"? When she looked at her sins and the courtesies that God had given her, she was overwhelmed, and it seemed to her that she was not worthy to live.<sup>99</sup>

Though Ermine was silent on her divine authority, she repeatedly emphasised her sinfulness, and asked Jean:

... is it not a very great shame for me that because of the evils that are in me it is not enough for God to make me do penance after my death, but that during my very life I must be beaten by demons? If it was known in the city, they would howl at me like at a wolf and say: "Here she is, the woman whom the devils beat every night!"<sup>100</sup>

Ermine believed that the torments she suffered at the hands of demons were a result and evidence of her inherent sinfulness. Even when the visions were divine in origin, Ermine was never entirely certain that they were not demonic.<sup>101</sup> When thinking over her life, Ermine told God that she had never done well, and she was terrified beyond measure. The divine voice soothed Ermine by reminding her that God had forgiven all her sins and remembered them no more.<sup>102</sup> This belief in her sins being forgiven was challenged by a demon who tried to stop

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>99</sup> "*bonnement quant je regarde bien mes pechiez et les courtoisies que Dieu me fait, je suis toute esbahie, et me semble que je ne suis mie digne de vivre.*" Ibid., 53.

<sup>100</sup> "*et n'esse mie ma tres grant honte que, pour les maux qui sont en moy, il ne souffist mie a Dieu que apres ma mort je en aye affaire, mais a ma propre vie j'en suis batue d'ennemis. Qui le sauroit aval la ville, on huroit apres moy ainsi comme apres un leu, et diroit on: 'veez la, la femme que les deables batent toutes les nuis.'*" Ibid., 54.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 72.

Ermine from taking communion, saying that she was not worthy of receiving it. Ermine replied that she received communion like the poor and unworthy sinner that she was.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, when Ermine received special graces from God in her visions, she refused to believe that it was not demons deceiving her, for she was unworthy. For instance, in January 1396, a number of supposed angels and saints (it is ambiguous if this was a demonic or divine vision) came to Ermine's room playing beautiful music and carrying sweet incense and candles. To Ermine it seemed like paradise, but she accused them of being demons because she was “not worthy to receive such grace from Our Lord as you want me to believe.”<sup>104</sup> Then Saint Peter came to her claiming to also have been sent by God, but Ermine accused him of being “Saint Peter from Hell.”<sup>105</sup> She continued that she was “one of the more pitiful sinners in the world, and you want me to believe that God would send me his angels and Saint Peter?” She stated that they were all demons, and that she would not obey their commands unless Jean advised her to do what they said.<sup>106</sup> What makes this vision seem more likely to be divine than demonic, based on the other experiences, is that Saint Peter and the other angels present did not try to persuade Ermine to leave her confessor. In fact, they told her it was good for her to tell him all that had happened in this vision. Furthermore, after they left, a beautiful odour remained in the room until the next morning. After Ermine's demonic encounters, there was often a putrid stench left in the room. This does seem to suggest that this was a divine encounter; though the premise that Ermine did not consider herself worthy of such graces from God is valid either way and reflects her adherence to the humility topos.

Furthermore, Ermine's humility is endorsed by Gerson in his letter of approval of the original manuscript. He refers to Ermine as a “certain plain and pious woman”, and states that she is:

... a model for penance, austerity, and tears. It is the gospel truth that the kingdom of Heaven is given to those who do penance (Mt. 3:2). Therefore, this woman, being poor, old, uneducated, seems to be given to us to provide a powerful example of the apostolic truth that God has chosen what is weak in the world to overcome what is powerful (1

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 145-46.

<sup>104</sup> “*je ne suis mie digne que je aye telle grace de Nostre Seigneur que vous me dittes.*” Ibid., 76.

<sup>105</sup> “*saint Pierre d'enfer.*” Ibid., 77.

<sup>106</sup> “*C'est grant merveille que tu cuides que je soye si sote; je suis une des plus povres pecheresses qui soit ou monde et je creroie que Dieu m'envoyast ses anges et saint Pierre? Vous estes trestous sathenas, et briesment je ne feray riens de chose que vous me dies, que par le conseil du souprieur, et lui diray demain au plus matin que je pourray lever trestout quanque vous m'avez dit.*” Ibid.; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 167.

Cor. 1:27). Are not the demons strong, of whose prince the Bible says that there is no power on earth that can be compared to his? But what greater confusion could be made for the strong, or what finer trick could be played on the dragon who was made for deception than that he be conquered so often and so basely by an insignificant woman, and such a woman? Clearly it seems to me that I see them, being outraged, frothing at the mouth and gnashing their teeth and being consumed with envy when she overcame the desire to sin.<sup>107</sup>

Gerson goes on to refer to Ermine as poor in spirit but rich in faith, whose virtues included:

... a profound and true humility by which she judged herself to be unworthy of all good and deserving all evil. This she expressed not only with her mouth, as many do, but interiorly, with all her heart. This conviction came of a most passionate and conscientious awareness of her own weakness and imperfection with respect to divine power and goodness. Such humility is that which avoids the snares that have been set out everywhere, according to the oracle given by God to Saint Anthony.<sup>108</sup>

As well as her humility, Ermine also has to her credit her firm faith that trusts in God, so that without His consent, will, and providence, no adverse power can harm a person.<sup>109</sup> Such a strong endorsement of Ermine's humility from the Chancellor of the University of Paris would have greatly reassured the readers of the truth of the manuscript. By aligning herself with the topos of humility, and other clerics endorsing it, Ermine's authority would have increased amongst her readers.

Like Raymond with Constance, Jean not only emphasises his visionary's humility, but also his own unworthiness at recording such events. Jean calls himself a "*povre et indingne pecheur*", who is recording the events that occurred to Ermine to reveal the tricks of the enemy.<sup>110</sup> It is:

... in order to uncover his [the devil's] cleverness and deception [that] I, poor and unworthy sinner... have written here about some marvellous adventures which feature all the shapes I described above, and which I heard from the mouth of a simple little

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<sup>107</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 171-72; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 184.

<sup>108</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 173; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 185.

<sup>109</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 173.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

woman of good will, who confessed herself to me for several years and told them to me as the truth, and which in my simplicity I have written down with God's help as best I could, just as she told them to me every day.<sup>111</sup>

Jean emphasises his own simplicity to prevent accusations that he had fabricated these events himself. Moreover, if the reader is benefitted by the book, Jean urges them to praise the Lord and pray for him, a poor sinner. He has not intended to scandalise people by what he has recorded, but Jean has written as truthfully as possible of what God has done through this humble woman for the benefit of all believers.<sup>112</sup> Jean positions himself as an instrument used by God, almost but not quite as reluctant as Ermine, whose humility and simplicity verify the truth of the manuscript.

### **Obedience**

Closely linked to the hagiographical topos of humility was that of obedience, particularly to the Church. Ermine's confessor links her much more strongly to obedience to the Church than Constance or Marie's confessors did. Jean uses the prologue to remind the reader of the importance of following the doctrine of the Church and uses Ermine as an example of a pious believer who ardently desired that God's will would be done by following doctrine. Ermine was "so steeped in true and profound humility and so confirmed in the ancient and secure doctrine of the blessed saints" that she did not pay homage to any spirits shown to her nor believed what they said.<sup>113</sup> Ermine's obedience to the Church, being "steeped in the secure doctrine," was key in her gaining credibility. So, too, was the fact that she was not directly challenging the Church or ecclesiastical leadership, as Marie and Constance had. Jean acknowledged that what Ermine told him was very difficult to believe, and Ermine responded that she had not lied and was ready to swear under oath, claiming that she would rather have her head cut off than knowingly perjure

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<sup>111</sup> "et pour ce pour descouvrir la soutuité et le barat de luy, je, povre et indigne pecheur, suprieur de l'église Saint Pol de Rains, de l'ordre du Val des Escoliers, ay escript cy dedens aucunes aventures merueilleusez et y sont contenues toutez les formes dessus dittes, lesquelles je ay oyez de la bouche d'une femmelette simple et de bonne volenté, qui se'est plusieurs annees confessee a moy et les m'a racontees en sa conscience veritablez et lesquelles a l'aide de Dieu, j'ay escriptes en ma simplesse au plus pres que j'ay peu, selon ce qu'elle les m'a dittes chascun jour." Ibid.; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 157-58.

<sup>112</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 49-50.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 49; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 159.

herself before God.<sup>114</sup> Ermine confessed daily and received communion regularly, obedient to the expectations of the Church.

In line with the expectations of holy women, Ermine obeyed her confessor's orders. As noted by Gerson in his approval letter of Ermine's story, Ermine had an "untaught wisdom that does not depend on its own prudence but does all things with counsel."<sup>115</sup> When Ermine's husband died, she went to Jean le Graveur for advice on what she should do, as her friends were trying to persuade her to go back to the countryside where she was from. Jean told her that she should stay in Reims as she had begun to serve God, and she needed to continue to trust in God as he would never fail her. Ermine believed Jean and stayed in Reims.<sup>116</sup> Jean made Ermine live in a little room near his priory, with a window that overlooked the courtyard of the Church of Val-des-Écoliers from which she could hear their masses. This was far more enclosed than Constance's living situation but might have been similar to Marie's arrangements with the Celestines. Jean told Ermine to get up every night to hear matins, and Ermine responded that she would do so gladly, "and not just that but anything I might advise her to do for her salvation, because she wanted to obey all my commands for the love of God, and she did so until her death, for she always asked my permission as a monk would ask his abbot."<sup>117</sup> Ermine's daily life is detailed in the revelations, revealing her piety and active prayer life.<sup>118</sup> Jean repeatedly emphasises Ermine's obedience as evidence of her piety. Moreover, Jean ordered Ermine to repeat everything from the previous night's visions when she came to confession each day so that he could advise her. She responded that she would gladly do so.<sup>119</sup> We can see by the extensive manuscript of experiences that Ermine obeyed Jean and reported the adventures to him faithfully.

Ermine's obedience and faithfulness to her confessor was one of the key areas in which the demons attacked her. The manuscript is full of visions in which the demons try to convince Ermine that Jean is causing her to sin and that she must leave his influence. The demons tended to focus on the fact that Jean had initially approved of Jean de Varennes but had then changed his mind. In one vision, when the demon claimed Jean de Varennes would become the new

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<sup>114</sup> "Tenes sire que, par le Sauveur que je vueil tantost recevoir, je ne vous ay menti de mot, ne n'est serment que je n'en feisse et aymeroye mieulx que on me coupast la teste que je parjuraisse Dieu a essient." le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 47.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 160.

<sup>118</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 51.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

pope and end the Schism, Ermine thought she had been told the truth. That night and the next day, Ermine was strongly tempted to leave her confessor and go begging for food. The demon suggested that she lived too comfortably and did nothing for the love of God. However, she went to Jean le Graveur and told him of her adventure. Jean taught Ermine what God had taught him, and she recognised the temptation of the enemy, confessed, and promised to repair her mistake.<sup>120</sup> Other demons appeared as saints or holy creatures who promised to protect and take care of Ermine, if she would just leave Jean. Ermine resisted them and would respond that God had showered her with blessings, and that she put herself “body and soul, in the custody of God and I will obey all my life his vicar, the sub-prior, my confessor.”<sup>121</sup> Ermine repeatedly told the demons that no matter what they said she would not leave her confessor.<sup>122</sup> By the end of the manuscript, we are reassured that Ermine remained faithful and obedient to her confessor. Jean tells us that “through God’s help the demons have been vanquished, for she died in her room and she never left me; she always had strong faith in Jesus Christ and never believed in the demons.”<sup>123</sup> Hence, Ermine's obedience to Jean, despite the many attacks and attempts at forcing her to leave him, reinforced her holiness.

It is also important to recognise that Jean's own obedience to his superiors and to God would have had a positive impact on Ermine's own claims to holiness. Like Raymond, Jean explained that he wrote the manuscript not out of bad judgement but for God's honour and the welfare of his fellow man,

... without trying to do any harm to any living being by writing the truth of my conscience as much as I could according to what she told me, or in any case the gist of it, and I would not have written anything at all if I had believed it to be a sin. But several good people told me that these were the deeds of God and that I would do a bad thing if I hid them, and also my conscience judged me. And I wrote these things in my name, may it not displease you, for truly I am not happy about it. But I could not do otherwise because I knew the facts better than anyone and what happened involved me as well.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> “*Et quant ce vint au matin, elle me dist son adventure bien envis. Adoncques je lui dis ce que Dieu me enseigna, et lors elle congneust la temptacion de l’ennemy, se confessa et promist amendement.*” Ibid., 116.

<sup>121</sup> “*Je me mets et rens mon ame et mon corps en la garde de Dieu et obeiray a son vicquaire, le souprieur mon confesseur, toute ma vie.*” Ibid., 117.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 166; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 179.

<sup>124</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d’Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 166; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 179.

Jean consulted several ecclesiastics, including masters in theology, for advice on Ermine's case. The clerics told Jean that God did not allow these things to happen only for this woman, but for the benefit of many creatures who would live after her, and that it would be good to write a memoir intended to be revealed after her death. Thus, Jean obeyed the advice of these good people, and transcribed Ermine's visions. Jean presents the visions "*par la permission de Dieu auquel soit gloire et honneur.*"<sup>125</sup> Hence, the recording of the manuscript was an act of obedience by Jean, in consultation with other ecclesiastics and God. Unlike for Raymond, the Church wanted Jean's protégées visions to be recorded. Jean's obedience as well as Ermine's obedience to him aligns Ermine with this obedience topos expected of a holy woman.

### **Physical Asceticism**

Ermine also adhered more strongly to the topos of physical asceticism than Marie or Constance. The desire to imitate Christ's sufferings through mortification and penance was a key part of personal devotion and spirituality in the late fourteenth century, and Ermine's devotional practices fitted the established tradition of asceticism and self-mortification expected of holy women. It is of course not possible to know whether Jean edited or fabricated the information he provided around Ermine's asceticism to make it orthodox. Certainly, Jean encouraged Ermine to have moderation in ascetic practices and depicted excessive mortification as a demonic suggestion. Ermine told Jean that she hated her "entire body for the sins it committed against God and if I could do so without sin I would stick a sturdy knife in my heart."<sup>126</sup> Ermine wanted to do great physical penance to appease God for all her sins. However, Jean reminded her that "penance is a very good thing, but you have to do it with discretion." Doing penance alone was not sufficient, "but you must try to guard against sin, and show great contrition for your sins, and love God with all your heart."<sup>127</sup> Jean reined in Ermine's enthusiasm for extreme penance, reminding her that it should be done in moderation. This was in line with common Church doctrine at the time; many ecclesiastics had a negative view of the over-zealous asceticism of many holy women. Jean notes that from then on, Ermine loved and thought of God with such ardour that when Jean heard her speak, it did him great good.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 54-55.

<sup>126</sup> "*Je hay tout mon corps pour les pechez que il a fait contre Dieu que, se c'estoit que/je puisse faire sans pechié, je me endurroye bien a ferir d'un bon coustel au cuer.*" Ibid., 53; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 162.

<sup>127</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 52-53; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 161.

<sup>128</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 52-53.

Despite Jean's cautioning of Ermine's desire for extreme asceticism, she did inflict physical suffering on herself as a form of penance. She slept on a little bed of straw, wore a shirt made of horsehair, and tied a horsehair rope belt around her waist. Jean describes how after the belt got wet once, it tightened, and Ermine was no longer able to remove it. The belt entered into her flesh and in some places her skin grew over it. Jean ordered Ermine to remove the belt, but she begged that he would let her keep it on until it rotted and fell apart itself because she did not know how to remove it. However, Jean repeated that it needed to be removed, and that just as she had suffered while wearing it, she would also suffer while removing it as penance for her sins. Ermine responded that she would gladly obey him whatever the pain, and that she could not have too much pain.<sup>129</sup> Removing the belt left several scars on Ermine's body. Marie d'Aubenton, a woman of good will who cared for Ermine during her final days, testified to Jean that she saw scars on Ermine's body in several places, as well as freshly healed wounds as if Ermine had beaten herself.<sup>130</sup> This suffering was willingly endured by Ermine, as she believed it purified her from her sinfulness. She had such a strong desire to suffer for God's sake, that when she returned to her room at night she lay prostrate on the ground and would say "my very sweet Sire, I surrender to You, here is your poor servant, do with me whatever You want and do not spare my miserable body, I am all yours, for in truth I cannot have too many troubles."<sup>131</sup> Hence, Ermine very clearly positioned herself within the tradition of asceticism and physical suffering expected of holy women to purify her body.

Ermine not only suffered physical abuse from herself, but also from demons during her visionary adventures. This abuse was much more frequent than Marie or Constance experienced in their visions. The abuse included the demons suffocating Ermine by lying on top of her for hours, throwing a pot of holy water at her, and being thrown to the floor and slapped and kicked violently.<sup>132</sup> On one occasion, a demon pulled Ermine's arm so violently that she suffered greatly afterwards for a long time, and Marie d'Aubenton had to come help Ermine dress. The demon promised Ermine that if she followed him, she would no longer suffer, and he kept pulling her arm. His hand burned like fire on her skin, and her arms were left burnt where he touched her. Ermine's arm turned black, and the demon's black fingers were visible for two days, and many people saw the marks.<sup>133</sup> The noises caused by the abuse Ermine suffered at

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<sup>129</sup> "*Je obeiray volontiers, quelque payne que j'en aye, je ne puis avoir trop de maux.*" Ibid., 51-52.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> "*Mon très doux Sire, je me rends à vous, vecy vostre povre baiselle, faites de moy quanque vous voulez et ne espargniez mie la charongne, je suis toute vostre, car en verité je ne puis avoir trop de maux.*" Ibid., 53.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 117, 58, 62, 64-65.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 158-59.

the hands of the demons were also heard by those who slept in the rooms near hers, and the scars on Ermine's body were evidence of the various beatings she had suffered. Jean and the friars in the house where Ermine lived had seen for themselves the injuries around her face as well as a black puncture mark. Many witnesses testified to the truth in Ermine's claims to being subject to physical abuse at the hands of the demons.<sup>134</sup> Though Ermine's visions were extraordinary, Jean believed that no one, however difficult to convince, would not believe the experiences to be true had they seen the traces of beatings Ermine had on her body, her behaviour, her piety, her fear of dying every night, how she trembled, and how her body bristled with fear when she returned to her room at night.

It was also a common trope for holy women to refuse to eat or to survive miraculously only on the Eucharist, as noted in the second chapter, and both Jean and Ermine would have been conscious of this. We learn from Jean that Ermine fasted on the days dictated by the Church, as well as Wednesdays and Saturdays, and ate what God gave her. Fridays she fasted on bread and water. One Friday evening, she set her table with bread and water, then knelt down to commend herself to God. After praying for a long time, she was so caught up in thinking of God that she forgot to eat dinner and went to bed. A little before midnight, she woke up and realised she had not eaten dinner. She had a little bread and water to obey Jean, who had ordered her not to pass a single day without eating. Ermine asked Jean several times for permission to fast every day, but Jean refused because she lived very modestly and because he was concerned about the bad treatment inflicted on her by the demons.<sup>135</sup> These fasting patterns and desires were similar to those of Catherine of Siena, who claimed to be sustained solely by the Eucharist near the end of her life. However, Catherine was also criticised by contemporaries as going beyond Christ's counsel or being deluded by Satan.<sup>136</sup> By recording Ermine's fasting habits, as well as Jean's caution to not be overzealous, Ermine's holiness and obedience was emphasised. Hence, through Ermine's physical suffering and asceticism, her holiness was legitimised.

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 51. The relationship between holy women and fasting has been thoroughly explored in Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*.

<sup>136</sup> Letter T92 to a religious person in Florence, July 1375-1376, Catherine of Siena, *The Letters of Catherine of Siena*, trans. Suzanna Noffke, vol. 1 (Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2000), 160-61.

## Overcoming Sexual Temptation

Closely linked to the topos of asceticism and self-mortification was the trope of holy women dying to sexual temptation, as we saw with Constance in the previous chapter. Overcoming sexual temptation required dying to one's own desires and conquering the sinful flesh. Ermine, as a widow like Constance, had to demonstrate how she had recommitted herself to chastity as a symbol of her holiness. One evening, Ermine was praying in her room when she experienced "such horrible and strong bodily temptations that she could not think of anything to say in her prayers." Ermine condemned her body for wanting to lead her to Hell, and warned her body that she would treat it in such a way that "you will no longer want to amuse yourself." She stripped herself naked and beat her body with a scourge made of horsehair until she was bleeding and had several wounds. She put a horsehair shirt on over her wounds and suffered intensely. But the pain that she felt made her forget her "bodily temptations."<sup>137</sup> This experience is used to demonstrate that Ermine has overcome the weakness of her flesh and her sexual temptations. Even when a demon impersonates her husband and climbs into bed with her, she recognises that it is a demon and sends him away, refusing to sleep with him.<sup>138</sup>

In medieval society, women were deemed to be more susceptible to sexual sin than men, and Jean recorded an event where Ermine was accused publicly of promiscuity. Ermine was walking to the Saint-Maur chapel when she:

... encountered a man, or a demon who had taken on the form of a man, she did not know. He grabbed her rudely by the chest and said, "Where you going, you whore? Are you going whoring?" Terribly scared, she answered sweetly, "Not at all, sir, on the contrary, I'm on my way to Saint-Maur." "By God's blood, you are lying," he said. "You are going whoring, you only live from whoring, you dirty evil whore. By God's death, I may just kill you." He held her by the chest for quite a long time while telling her all this. She was very ashamed, for bystanders heard his insults that were given without any reason. Then he let her go without beating her.<sup>139</sup>

Such a public confrontation and challenge of Ermine's chastity threatened Ermine's claims to piety. However, it also gave her confessor the opportunity to denounce such false accusations. Jean positioned Ermine very clearly as innocent, saying that she answered the claims "*moult*

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<sup>137</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 144; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 176.

<sup>138</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 62.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 167-68.

*doucement*” and that these insults were “*sans cause*”. Ermine was also let go without being beaten, further suggesting her innocence. As noted above, on another occasion, a demon impersonating Saint Paul the Simple claimed that Jean would ask to have sex with Ermine. Ermine violently rejected this claim, recognised that it was a demon, and threw him out of her room.<sup>140</sup> The closeness of their relationship could have elicited rumours of there being an inappropriate physical relationship. As noted earlier, Jean and his order were both spiritually and financially supporting Ermine.<sup>141</sup> However, by acknowledging the close relationship and denying potential rumours, any suspicion of a sexual attraction between Jean and Ermine was negated.

Ermine is the clearest example among the three case studies of demons exploiting her perceived susceptibility to sexual temptation as a woman to torment her. We only have one mention of sexual temptation for Constance, and none for Marie, who was presumably a virgin. However, for Ermine the demons appeared nightly, performing sexual acts in front of her or attempting to involve her in them. Demonic seduction had long been used as tests for holy people's virtue and steadfastness. In the later Middle Ages, demons were presented as frightening and seductive, representing human desires that they dared not acknowledge.<sup>142</sup> Walter Stephens observes that because of women's illiteracy, their sexuality “was the only trait that literate men could imagine bringing them into contact with demons.”<sup>143</sup> Over a series of nights beginning on 23 November 1395, Ermine was woken by demons who tried to kiss her or make her watch a handsome young couple have sex in her room. The reader is told that the devil did all this in front of her because he wanted her to take evil pleasure in fleshly sin. The young man then taunted Ermine saying that despite denying her fleshly desires, she would go to Hell anyway, so she might as well enjoy her body. Otherwise, she would live one Hell on earth and one after death.<sup>144</sup> This couple argued that Ermine might as well indulge her sexual temptations as she was already a sinner and physical penance would not save her anyway. On another occasion, Ermine was kissed by a demon who then stretched out next to her in bed, but did not molest her, and vanished in the morning.<sup>145</sup> A few days later, Ermine had a “*songe moult laid*” (very ugly dream), a term denoting a sexual dream.<sup>146</sup> When she awoke, annoyed,

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<sup>140</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 149.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>142</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “The strange case of Ermine de Reims,” 350.

<sup>143</sup> Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 53.

<sup>144</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 58-59.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

Ermine found three male demons in her room who tried to tempt her into sexual pleasures and expose themselves to her. She hid her face so as not to see their naked bodies, but they hung her from the ceiling upside down so that her dress fell over her head. Again, they did not molest her, they returned her to the floor; but they threatened to return when she was not “*si bien armee comme tu es maintenant*”, suggesting that her piety protected her in this instance.<sup>147</sup>

The idea of women voluntarily copulating with demons became prominent in later-fifteenth-century texts such as the *Malleus maleficarum* (1486) by Dominicans Krämer and Sprenger. Yet, Stephens has shown that the shift between women being pestered by demons against their will and women searching out demons for copulation was identified by Krämer as taking place around the year 1400, right around the time Ermine's manuscript was being written. Though this would not have been realised at the time, this retrospective view could not have emerged except through earlier assumptions about the susceptibility of women to demons, which Ermine had to fight so hard to overcome. Male visionaries were not expected to be tormented as much in this way. For Krämer, “carnal lust” was the root of all witchcraft, and while women were believed to be more carnal than men, women were perceived as being passive in receiving the sexual actions of a man or an embodied spirit, in other words a demon. Sex with a demon proved a female witch's physical submission to the demon; her “weaker mind” was also more ready to receive the influence of a demon than a man's would be.<sup>148</sup> Female witches' carnal relations with demons were believed to be how they gained knowledge of the supernatural world.<sup>149</sup> This is similar to the theory of bridal mysticism giving mystics intimate knowledge of the divine, often through carnal intimacy. Writing around this time, Jean is careful to position Ermine's experiences as part of the older pattern of unwanted demonic encounters in which Ermine's holiness is proven by her strong refusal to ever engage in such activities.<sup>150</sup> The frequency of demonic sexual temptations is considerable, even for a holy woman, but the sheer number of accounts show that Ermine repeatedly rejects temptation and has control over her flesh.

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<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 88-89.

<sup>148</sup> Stephens, *Demon Lovers: Witchcraft, Sex, and the Crisis of Belief*, 54-55.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 16-17.

<sup>150</sup> Blumenfeld-Kosinski, “The strange case of Ermine de Reims,” 354.

### Missing Hagiographical Topoi

There are a number of key hagiographical topoi that we saw utilised in the cases of Marie and Constance but which are missing from Ermine's case. In contrast with the first two, Ermine's illiteracy is not particularly focused on. It is possible to ascertain some aspects of her religious education, though. It was at best rudimentary considering she mispronounced the Paternoster and missed four articles from the Creed, which Jean suggested she relearn.<sup>151</sup> Ermine called two seraphim Saracens, because she was unfamiliar with the latter word.<sup>152</sup> However, she does remain steadfast in key aspects of the faith, including the existence of the soul, Heaven, and Hell, as well as the importance of the Resurrection of Christ and the need for penance.<sup>153</sup> It is likely that Jean ensured the recordings of Ermine's beliefs remained orthodox. We also learn that some of the adventures that happened to Ermine during Lent reflected aspects of the Gospels that were customarily read on the Sundays of Lent. However, they did not happen on the proper Sundays; some were experienced the week before or after, with only a few on the very Sunday when the text was read.<sup>154</sup> Ermine does not seem to be aware of the correlation between her adventures and the scriptures, but Jean attempts to tie them together to add to her legitimacy. Ermine's voice is more obviously mediated by her educated scribe and confessor than Marie's or Constance's voices were. Ermine's simplicity and ignorance are used as evidence that she could not make up the marvellous adventures that she experienced, and so therefore they must be true. Yet, because so much of Ermine's legitimacy depended on the fact that she did not have the theological knowledge or literacy to invent these visions, it is surprising that more emphasis was not made on her illiteracy by Jean. Perhaps because Ermine's humility and obedience were so strongly emphasised by Jean, he took for granted that the audience would know that she was illiterate like the majority of women at the time; or perhaps Jean did not see the importance of this hagiographical topoi for Ermine's case, as he himself ensured the manuscript remained orthodox and he showed himself correcting Ermine's misunderstandings.

Notably, the main difference in Ermine's visions to the other case studies is the lack of any substantial prophecies about the Church or the outcome of the Schism. As we saw with Constance and Marie, it was their prophetic gifts in particular that led to their promotion by the clergy. For Ermine, there were no direct commands or words from God that she was called to

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<sup>151</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 71-72.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 90, 141, 02, 75.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

share with ecclesiastical or political authorities. At a time when the Church was looking for answers to the crisis at hand, and when traditional forms of institutional authority were being undermined and questioned, the Church was more open to visionary women and their prophecies. Ermine's lack of prophecies about the state of the Church, with her one prophecy that Jean de Varennes would become pope and end the Schism dismissed as demonic delusion, meant that she could not fill that visionary role. So, while Marie and Constance perhaps better embody what it meant to be a holy woman during the Schism period, Ermine better represents the more traditional hagiographical topoi of holy women from before the Schism period whose visions focused on personal spiritual formation. Before the Church was so drastically divided, there was less of a call for female prophetic voices. After the Schism, institutional authority was much more secure and the focus in the Church shifted from internal issues highlighted by the Schism to the external rise in concern with heresy and witchcraft linked to demonic illusions. Women were more associated with both of these issues than men, making their voices more suspect and less influential than during the Schism. Hence, the type of visions Ermine received and the timing in which she received them contributed to Ermine having a much smaller impact than Marie or Constance. While Jean promoted Ermine as a holy woman – and she did gain some recognition of her piety – without the prophetic voice and drive to be heard that we saw in the other case studies, Ermine did not influence politics or those in power around her in the same way Marie or Constance attempted to.

## **Conclusion**

Against Ermine's wishes and through the story of her *aventures merveilleusez*, Jean le Graveur attempted to fashion Ermine into an exemplary holy woman. Jean used Ermine's visionary experiences to demonstrate how she embodied many of the hagiographical topoi expected of such women to gain spiritual authority. Ermine's visions demonstrated her divine authority, and her piety was emphasised through her humility, obedience, and physical asceticism. Her repeated overcoming of sexual temptations to be committed to chastity proved that she had conquered her female body and could be used by God. While Ermine's visions were influenced by the historical context around her, their primary focus was not on the political or religious crises occurring in France in this period. Her experiences were much more centred around personal salvation and piety, rather than as a message that needed to be shared publicly. There was no focus on prophecies, and very minimal consideration of Ermine's literacy. There were also not many attempts to interpret scripture or use biblical imagery. Ermine did not actively

try to have her voice heard or claim to have a message from God; in fact, she desperately did not want those in her city to know about the nightly torments she experienced. Only those closest to her were witness to the suffering she went through. At a time when the Church was looking for answers and more open to strong prophetic voices, the focus on private spirituality in Ermine's visions and her reservations to share them did not meet the needs of the Church and limited her influence.

Though her experiences differed from Constance and Marie, Ermine was still shaped by the world around her. The Schism caused anxiety concerning ecclesiastical authority, but also revealed fears around being deceived in spiritual matters. These fears increased the scrutiny on women's visions and reinforced the importance for the discernment of spirits for the origins of visionary experiences. The referral of Ermine's story to Gerson for approval reveals the continued interest in holy women's experiences outside of prophecies, and that communities still valued the lessons they could learn about personal spirituality from holy women. Jean le Graveur's Ermine was a role model for those who wanted to overcome their own troubles and remain strong in their faith. Yet, during the Schism, the traditional focus of personal salvation from earlier mystics was no longer central to female visionaries being listened to by the ecclesiastical hierarchy. As we saw with Constance and Marie, solutions to the Schism were being sought after from prophetic voices. Yet, Ermine was unable to capitalise on this new environment for holy women and could even be said to have become a victim to it after Gerson denounced her visions. Once the Schism was over and ecclesiastical authority was re-established, there was no longer a gap in authority for visionary women to fill. The demonic presence in most of Ermine's visions was deemed suspect at a time when fears of witchcraft and demonic worship were increasing. While Jean qualified Ermine as an unwilling recipient of demonic torments, the focus on carnal relations with demons in witchcraft interrogations in the fifteenth century would have increased suspicions of Ermine's visions. The removal of Gerson's approval after Ermine's supporters had died reflects the growing concern with heresy and the discernment of spirits, and relegated Ermine from a pious holy woman to a woman deceived by the devil.

## **Chapter Six:**

### **Conclusion**

The Great Western Schism raised fundamental questions about the nature of institutional authority and challenged assumptions not only about who could hold authority but also who could legitimise it. With religious and political powers divided between the two rival papacies, there was a deep chasm in the medieval Church. Christendom resounded with the clamour of popes, princes, preachers, and prophets, calling in vain to end the division. They were joined by the voices of female visionaries who tried to succeed where men had failed. The Schism provided an opportunity for women to share the words God had given them to bring unity and reform to the Church, but it also presented them with dangers. It was an opportunity because traditional institutional paths of authority had failed to save the Church and so there was a space for women's voices to be heard. It was dangerous because the process of the codification of the discernment of spirits and the fear of heresy and witchcraft made it risky to be that woman sharing her visions.

While there have been innumerable studies on the Schism and its politics, this thesis has been more concerned with the tensions between gender, authority, and agency that the Schism generated. It has focused on three case studies to understand how the Schism affected the experiences of laywomen who received visions, and the way these women were received and treated by their communities. There has been significant historiography on the experiences of noble and religious women, as we saw in the second chapter; this has provided a valuable framework to assess the experiences of lesser-known laywomen. This thesis has explored how a wider group of laywomen used gendered role models to achieve their own recognition and influence. Previous scholarship also gave more attention to the imagery in women's visions, but the focus here has been on the language these women used to present themselves, in order to show how their words and actions demonstrate their agency in having their voices heard. Constance, in particular, is an interesting example of a laywoman challenging ecclesiastical commands that she disagreed with and successfully having them reversed. Constance's agency,

displayed in the tensions between herself and the inquisitor, is a clear example of a laywoman influencing the Church during the Schism – though, of course, Constance argued that it was for God’s will that she fought to have His prophecies shared.

The relative lack of lay female-authored sources from this period has made research into experiences of female visionaries problematic. However, the sources that do survive provide a significant contribution towards understanding lived experiences of laywomen during the Schism. Marie, Constance, and Ermine also cover a range of circumstances. The three women were each based in different regions of France which were affected by varying political issues and were influenced by the French monarchy to varying degrees. Furthermore, Marie supported the Avignon papacy, Constance supported the Roman papacy, and Ermine did not strongly declare her obedience to either side. These women were all navigating paths to authority during this period of unstable institutional power, and this process raised issues relating to their social status and gender. By examining the gendered strategies these women adopted and adapted to gain authority, a clearer picture of their own agency has been revealed.

As these three women show, the definition of a holy woman changed during the Schism. In terms of the visions experienced, there was a definite shift away from the earlier mystical, personal salvation-type revelations that resulted in mystical treatises such as those of Mechthild of Magdeburg (d.c.1282), Marguerite Porete (d.1310), or even Catherine of Siena (d.1380). The focus of their revelations on strengthening one’s personal faith journey and their strong use of bridal mysticism and somatic intimacy with Christ was missing from the visions of all three holy women discussed in this thesis. The only reference to such themes comes from Constance’s confessor, who briefly refers to Constance as Christ’s bride in his prologue to her visions, no doubt an authorising tactic attempting to connect Constance to the established and accepted mystical tradition. Instead, female visionaries during the Schism were more concerned than their predecessors to enter political arenas and demand a public audience beyond their immediate context. This resulted in part from the need of churchmen to seek divine support for their own causes. The number of both male and female canonisations rose after the start of the Schism as both the Roman and Avignon popes elected saints who were close to their cause or their political allies. The number of canonisations during this period is a direct reflection of the weakened authority of the Church and its need for support.<sup>1</sup> Reform in the Church was important for visionaries before the Schism, but it became more urgent and fundamental during

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<sup>1</sup> Vauchez, *Sainthood in the Later Middle Ages*, 274.

this period of division. Interestingly, reform in the Church led to significantly fewer female saints post-Schism.<sup>2</sup> In the late fourteenth century, though, the focus in Christendom was on ending the split in the Church. Due to the power vacuum created by the Schism, strong female voices claiming to speak on behalf of God were able to have more impact (whether positive or negative), as we saw particularly with Marie and Constance. The context of the Schism was also important to the way Ermine's visions were received, although their themes were more personal than political.

Despite the expectation that medieval women would remain apolitical, Marie and Constance did want to engage with politics and managed to have some form of social influence. Constance was strongly political and keen to influence the key people in her region to support the Roman papacy. However, this was never going to be successful in a region that pledged obedience to Avignon, and so her strong voice needed to be silenced by her critics. As noted in chapter four, the fact that her visions only survive in the Catalan translation supports the theory that her visions were used to try to win over the Spanish kingdoms to the Roman papacy. Marie was both vocal and on the right side of the papacy in her region. As we saw in chapter three, this enabled Marie to be used by the Avignon pope as a pawn in his political games with the French king. Even the queen attempted to use Marie for her own agenda to get the pope to resign. While the papacy clearly believed in Marie's sanctity, as evidenced by the financial and public support they gave her, she was only given the privileged position as papal messenger until she was no longer useful. When she proved unsuccessful in even gaining an interview with the king, the pope also refused to see her on her return to Avignon. She wound up disillusioned with the papacy and the entire situation. Thus, even when women supported the right people and could be used as propaganda, they were only given positions of influence for as long as they were useful to the ecclesiastical men above them. Their use in this way shows recognition for the potential authority of women's voices. Whether their influence was used by those around them or not, their potential influence was often also feared. They represented a special relationship with the divine that removed the need for clerical mediation. However, their claims to divine authority were only confirmed (or dismissed) by the recognition of the clergy, and, beginning in this period, that involved a more formalised process of discernment of spirits.

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<sup>2</sup> Dyan Elliott, "Laywomen as Leaders," in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, and John Van Engen (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 340.

## **Changing Hagiographical Topoi**

As noted in chapter two, where we considered the medieval model of female sanctity, various key hagiographical topoi were used by medieval women to prove their holiness, and by the hagiographers or confessors who supported them. These expectations for holy women changed during the Schism. The three chapters on Marie, Constance, and Ermine have shown how laywomen during the Schism both adhered to and changed various topoi to suit their agendas, something that this thesis has highlighted more so than previous scholarship. The politics of the Schism created a vacuum of authority in which those in positions of ecclesiastical and political power were searching for resolutions to the division in the Church. Hence, for late fourteenth-century visionaries the hagiographical topos of prophecy was central to their authorisation, particularly when their prophecies involved the papacy and reuniting the Church. Marie's strong support of the Avignon papacy as God's anointed leader early on was utilised by Benedict XIII as propaganda in the hopes of winning the continued obedience of the French crown. In one of her visions, Marie's prophetic ability and divine authority equated her with key Biblical prophets such as saints Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, and Moses, increasing her spiritual authority by association. Constance, too, was motivated by the prophecies she received to try to stop the Church in France from supporting the "wrong" pope.

However, the context of the Schism and the codification of the discernment of spirits (which became more of an issue due to the Schism) also created difficulties for women claiming divine prophetic knowledge. Constance's vocal condemnation of the Avignon papacy through her prophecies and passion for the legitimacy of the Roman papacy made her a threat to the ecclesiastical authorities who supported Avignon. Her prophecies of Clement VII as a limping man who was going to sink the ship representing the Church might have been celebrated in Rome but made her a target in France. When the prophecies of holy women did not support the agenda of the ecclesiastical or political hierarchy around them, the already tenuous institutional authority could not allow further challenges to discredit the Church. This fear shows that the authority female visionaries claimed was recognised as potentially influential.

Though prophecy was less of a focus for Ermine, she did have at least one prophecy that attempted to give the answer to the Schism. Ermine prophesied that Jean de Varennes would become pope and end the Schism, but this vision was discredited by her confessor. By this point in time, Jean de Varennes had already lost the favour of the Church. So, while supporters of the holy man from Saint-Lié would have used such a prophecy as propaganda for

ending the Schism, Ermine's prophetic gift (or demonic trickery, depending on who was asked) was devalued and unable to give her legitimacy in the politics of the Schism – not that she was eager to participate in them. The process of the discernment of spirits was used to discredit Ermine's prophetic gift. Thus, the path of prophecy was not guaranteed to give a woman authority or influence, but it did garner her attention. However, attention was not always positive, as we saw with Constance being interrogated and imprisoned. Hence, holy women's gift of prophecy was utilised or hidden by the men around them for their own agendas, again demonstrating a tacit admission of its power. Sometimes this aligned with the women's own objectives – as with Marie's early visions and support for the Avignon papacy; other times it was more reason for them to be silenced as it did not align with the beliefs of those around them – as was the case with Constance and Ermine, and even Marie's later, disillusioned visions.

Proving one's divine authority continued to be an important hagiographical topos for holy women during the Schism. Marie and Constance both emphasised their divine authority and their call to share their visions publicly, which was supported by their confessors. Both women had multiple visions where the divine voice urged them to share their prophecies and warnings with both secular and religious authorities, and were affirmed as being specially chosen by God to do so. We have seen their own agency in recording and sharing their visions, in contrast to Ermine's reluctance. While God specifically told Marie and Constance to record and share the messages He was giving them, Ermine did not receive a call to write nor was she commanded by God to share her experiences. It was Ermine's confessor who insisted that her visions be recorded and who emphasised her divine authority. A key sign of divine authority both before and during the Schism was women receiving their visions while in states of ecstasy or in prayer, and this was generally the case for all three women. However, bridal mysticism, which was significant in the visions of earlier mystics, was virtually non-existent for Marie, Constance, and Ermine. Constance's confessor was the only one to try to align his visionary with this traditional topos calling Constance a bride of Christ. Constance herself, and the other two women, do not refer to themselves as Christ's spouse or frame their intimacy with God through that lens.

Demonstrating one's humility was another strategy that the women in this study used to varying extents to prove their holiness. All three emphasised their unworthiness to receive God's messages and questioned the veracity and source of their visions. Marie describes herself as an unworthy servant, a sinner who is not worthy of even kissing Jesus' feet, let alone sitting

among the saints around the throne of God. Constance describes herself as a vile sinner full of shame and vileness, and laments how poorly she has spent her life. Ermine's humility is central in her visions, with her unwillingness to have any attention brought on her because of her visions, and her belief that the torments she suffered were punishment for her great sinfulness. Showcasing humility was necessary to prove that a holy woman was not seeking out visions to bring herself fame, and all three women embraced this strategy in their visions. Ermine's confessor, in particular, highlights this trait above many others in the manuscript of her revelations as a strategy to prove her sanctity.

The outward appearances of divine spiritual possession were increasingly being identified with demonic possession in the late medieval period; traditional physical signs of divine authority no longer carried as clear a legitimisation as they used to. Hence, there was less of a focus on physical asceticism as a sign of holiness for Marie and Constance, though it was still very important for Ermine. All three women suffered physical torments through their visions, Ermine in particular receiving scars that were visible after the visions ended. Constance was perhaps the least focused on physical suffering; for Constance, conquering her body's temptations was the main emphasis in her visions which dealt with her body. As a widow and mother, Constance made sure to show herself overcoming sexual temptations and gaining control of her flesh. Ermine, a widow as well, also proved her sanctity by denying sexual temptations. Marie, a virgin, does not address these concerns, instead showing her desire to be martyred for her faith.

It was not only physical asceticism and bridal mysticism that became less important as a sign of a woman's holiness during the Schism. Illiteracy and proving divine knowledge were also less crucial. Though laywomen were still unable to undertake official theological education in this period, and their theological knowledge was generally credited as given directly by God, it is clear that Marie, Constance, and to a lesser degree Ermine created their own vernacular theology by forming their own political and theological knowledge through other means. They did not live in the relative isolation from society experienced by nuns or other religious women, and so they were more exposed to the religious politics both in their regions but also in the wider kingdom of France. Like many other visionaries, they desired not just unification in the Church but also a wider reform to eliminate what they saw as the moral corruption of the clergy. The timing of Marie's call to write to the king and visit the council in Paris was not coincidental; the fact that the king of France was considering removing obedience to the Avignon papacy at

this time was not unknown to Marie, and the urgency of warning the king before he made this decision is evident in her visions. Not only that, but Marie also provided her own suggestions for how to properly reform the Church. Constance, too, was heavily invested in both the politics of the Schism and those of the Hundred Years War. She shared many warnings of what would happen if the Church were not reformed and reunited, including the downfall of France. It is not surprising that the only surviving manuscript of Constance's visions is in Catalan, from a time when rulers in the Iberian Peninsula were deciding which side of the Schism to support. Ermine, for her part, knew enough of Jean de Varennes and his uncertain standing within the Church to question her revelations about him.

Moreover, the scriptural imagery present in many of Marie, Constance, and Ermine's visions can be traced back to the paintings present in their local churches and the types of sermons they would have heard on specific feast days. So, while there are certainly instances where God directly gave these women a miraculous knowledge or ability to understand their visions or writing, their illiteracy is not nearly as emphasised as it was for earlier female visionaries. Referencing their illiteracy is used by these three women more as a strategy to align themselves with the stereotype for holy women, rather than as an actual representation of their education. This strategy is used much less by Ermine and her confessor. The actual illiteracy of these women could not be as emphasised as previously due to the sources of knowledge they clearly had. However, the decrease in emphasis of this topos does not seem to have negatively impacted the reception of these women directly.

In the second chapter, we saw how prophecy and other hagiographical topoi were not as important for contemporary male visionaries. For Marie and Constance, their prophecies and visions called them *into* the politics of the Schism. For Jean de Varennes and Vincent Ferrer, their visionary experiences were the motivation for them to leave their official roles of influence. Prophecy and the divine authority given through visions were not as important for men to prove their validity as it was for the female case studies. While women needed the legitimacy that came with prophetic visions to have any kind of influence, their male counterparts relied much more on their theological education and institutional roles for authority. However, though Vincent Ferrer continued to travel and preach in support of Benedict XIII initially, he left his official role for the Avignon papacy to be a missionary spreading the Gospel around Western Europe. Jean de Varennes, as we saw, lost his clerical authority when he left the papal court in Avignon, a move that eventually cost him his life. The

path to authority for holy men, then, was also not without dangers in this period. While being within the confines of the clergy they were relatively safe, even when calling for reform in the Church. Once they left the safety of their institutional roles, the ways they could assert their authority shifted, and their political views became more potentially threatening to the Church which no longer held as much control over them. A full exploration of the paths to authority open to men who left their institutional roles is outside the scope of this thesis, but the initial differences provide a significant point of contrast to the women considered here.

The visionary laywomen in this study both embraced and challenged the various hagiographical topoi that shaped how holy women were presented in this period. As we can see, the expectations of holy laywomen during the Schism were slightly different to those that faced their earlier peers. This shift in expectations has not been fully explored in previous studies. Instead, there are often generalised stereotypes for holy women that are credited for multiple centuries, failing to take into account the shifting political and ecclesiastical climates that could shift these expectations within decades. Political prophecies took precedence during the Schism, and, once confirmed as divinely given, were key to a laywoman gaining any form of influence or attention. The focus on personal salvation was not as fundamental to the experiences of holy women who desired to engage in Schism politics as it had been for female mystics before the Schism. Though Marie, Constance, and Ermine still emphasised their divine authority, humility, and illiteracy, they no longer depended on bridal mysticism or physical asceticism to the same degree. In fact, humility, illiteracy, and even physical asceticism are more clearly used as strategies in the manuscripts rather than necessarily reflecting the reality of the visionary's feelings. This reflects the agency with which Marie and Constance in particular influenced the recording of their visions. They adopted the topoi to support their claims to authority but adapted them to suit their agendas better. This level of agency from laywomen has not been recognised fully by earlier studies. Ermine's revelations correlate more closely to earlier mystical experiences, and this is likely due to the much more substantial influence her confessor had over the recording of her visions than for the other two women.

### **Discernment of Spirits**

Proving that one's visions were from a divine source and not demonic inspiration was of paramount importance for the women studied here. Though this had always been an important part of holy women establishing their authority, as we have seen it became more urgent in the

late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries when the codification of the process of the discernment of spirits was being established. The loss of credibility in institutional authority during the Schism increased the fear of heresy and demonic possession. The fear of witchcraft was also growing in this period. It was only later in the fifteenth century that full descriptions of diabolic witchcraft emerged; yet, these echo earlier and growing ecclesiastical suspicions towards the supernatural experiences of female visionaries, and towards the true source of women's visions. There was a fear at the beginning of the fifteenth century that such supernatural experiences, though claimed as divinely inspired, were masking the work of diabolic witchcraft and demonic possession. This thesis did not aim to contribute to the wider scholarship on the discernment of spirits or the studies on witchcraft and heresy; however, it was important to consider the effects that these issues had on the society in which the women studied here lived.

We saw the concern with demonic experiences most clearly in Ermine's chapter. Though this thesis has focused on the themes in Ermine's visions more closely related to the Schism and the language used to authorise her holiness, there are a significant number of visions that deal with subjects that would later be reflected in witchcraft trials, such as pressure to fornicate with demons and night flying. Hence, Ermine's confessor had to emphasise her reception of divine authority more strongly; not to try influence the religious politics of the Schism as with Marie or Constance, but to prove her to be an example of a strong woman of Christian faith who withstood the attacks of the enemy because of her virtue and the help of God. Ermine wanted to keep her experiences private as a sign of her humility; they were recorded against her wishes by her confessor for the glory of God, who gave permission for her to receive the diabolic torments and the divine revelations. As a simple and ignorant woman, Ermine was presented by her confessor as an inspiration of the kind of faith laywomen could achieve in the face of adversity. This was certainly Jean Gerson's initial interpretation of her adventures. However, his change of heart regarding Ermine later in his career reflects a wider shift, especially among churchmen, in perceptions of holy women's experiences and the growing fear of women being deceived by the devil or being willing participants in witchcraft.

## **Confessors**

Previous scholarship has shown the role that the male confessor and scribe played in the ways holy women accessed authority. What this thesis has shown is that the role confessors played

varied considerably depending on the agency of the visionary. Ermine's example has shown that not every lay female visionary during the Schism wanted to actively engage with the politics that came with it. Ermine, and likely many other visionaries whose names have not left such a mark on history, desired to keep her experiences private as she was embarrassed by them. She certainly did not seek to influence religious officials in high places like Marie and Constance. Ermine sought advice and guidance from her confessor and permitted him to share the experiences with other religious for their assistance, not for her own fame but out of fear for her salvation. She was desperate not to err, and to remain orthodox in her faith. Interestingly, it is with Ermine, the least eager of the three case studies to share her revelations, that the confessor plays the largest role. Jean le Graveur is an active participant in the recordings of Ermine's experiences, and his role in promoting her visions to key figures such as Gerson at the University of Paris is well-documented. It seems that it was Jean le Graveur, not Ermine, who saw her as a holy woman, and Jean wanted to utilise Ermine's relationship with the divine for his own agenda. As has been suggested by other historians, it is plausible that Jean envisaged Ermine as someone who could bring good repute to his order and promote him and his peers in their city. The prestige that holy women could give to an order was well-established by this period, and as noted, they possessed a special relationship with the divine that was missing for many male clerics. Ermine's relationship with her confessor, and the role he played in sharing her visions, is a clear example of the benefits of promotion that could come to women who fostered a strong relationship of obedience to the Church. However, it also reveals the skewed balance of power that the relationship between visionary and confessor could have, and the lack of power women had to completely control their own experiences. Ermine did not want her visions shared, and yet Jean did just that for his own agenda.

In contrast, for Marie and Constance who were keen to have their voices heard, their confessors played a more background role. Constance had to fight her confessor to record her visions, with him resisting due to the orders of those above him. Unlike Ermine, Constance did want to share her visions and influence both local and ecclesiastical politics. Her desire to do so led her to challenge the inquisitor of Toulouse and present herself to the Council of Rabastens. Raymond de Sabanac is largely visible in Constance's visions and letters as a confessor reluctant to accept the legitimacy of the visions. However, his prologue shows that he was eventually convinced of her sanctity and special relationship with the divine. The miraculous healings that he receives as a sign of Constance's divine authority are also recorded as evidence in her favour. The relationship between Constance and Raymond, and Constance

and the inquisitor, reveal most clearly out of the three case studies a holy woman's own agency in fighting to have her voice heard. While Raymond is present in Constance's visions, he did not play as active a role in trying to spread her visions or gain her approval from religious authorities as Jean did for Ermine. However, Constance still needed support from her confessor, given her promotion of the opposing pope.

Raymond, though not as active as Jean le Graveur, was more prominent than Marie's confessor, who is only mentioned by name once. Jean (only his first name is given) was appointed as Marie's confessor by papal bull and seems to have done minimal editing to Marie's visions, leaving them in chronological order rather than rearranging them thematically, and not inserting his own personal commentary. He seems not to have played an important role at all in Marie's path to authority. There is the possibility that he added the prophecy of the Antichrist in the eleventh vision, though this is not certain. By the time Jean came into Marie's life, she had already been noticed and approved by the pope himself, so Jean's own role in promoting Marie as a holy woman was not as necessary as it was for Constance or Ermine. Marie's legitimacy was given to her by the pope. Hence, Jean played only a small part in Marie's journey with authority. There is not even a prologue espousing Marie's holiness and special relationship with the divine. For the most part, aside from a brief three-line introduction attached to the first vision, Jean lets the visions speak for themselves. With Marie's clear directive and her pre-approval from the papacy, there was less of a need for her to rely on her confessor to borrow his authority.

Thus, each woman's confessor played a lesser or greater role depending on the level of support their holy woman needed. Previously, scholarship has emphasised the special relationship between confessor and holy woman, and the importance the confessor played in making his visionary known to a wider audience. As we saw in the second chapter, scholarship has explored the differences between holy women's voices and those of their male collaborators. Through those differences, attempts have been made to distinguish the distinctly female voice and female concepts of gendered stereotypes. However, the activeness of the confessor has not been fully considered alongside the drive of their holy woman. As we saw in this thesis, the greater the agency of the holy woman, the lesser role the confessor had to play. This challenges the idea in scholarship that the confessor held a lot of the power when it came to authorising their visionary. This may have been so in Ermine's case, but Constance's confessor was yet another person she had to convince of her sanctity so that her visions would

be recorded. Marie's confessor was essentially just a scribe for her visionary activity. Hence, this thesis adds a layer of complexity to the scholarly debate about the role of confessors in steering (or being steered) by their female protégées.

## **Social Networks**

Aside from their confessors, this thesis also considers the social networks female visionaries were able to form. Previous scholarship has shown how social networks were significant in strengthening a holy woman's claims to authority, while clerical office provided institutional authority for men. Women were more likely to be the focus of popular cults, and for a brief period of the fourteenth century the majority of canonisation processes were for women. Social support was crucial for the promotion of holy women, and while noble and religious women had an advantage due to their status in society, some laywomen were able to capitalise on the legitimacy that came through strong social networks. Saint Colette of Corbie (d.1447), a Franciscan abbess, had a significant support network amongst the nobility, despite being the daughter of an elderly carpenter. That support network gained her access to the pope and enabled her to take on a significant role reforming the Franciscan order. Similarly, Catherine of Siena's *famiglia* pushed for her canonisation and official recognition of her sanctity. This thesis has reinforced the scholarship on this topic by demonstrating that the lack of a strong social network was detrimental to laywomen claiming authority.

All three women in this thesis lacked the long-term social network of strong supporters that more influential visionaries had. Marie obviously, had the approval of the Avignon papacy and was used by the pope as his messenger to the king of France. Marie also had the support of Marie de Blois, queen of Sicily, and the queen was present for some of Marie's visions. It was Marie de Blois who took Marie Robine to Paris with a letter of recommendation for the king's wife, Isabeau of Bavaria. Without such a recommendation, Marie Robine would likely not have gained an audience with the queen of France. It seems that Marie de Blois genuinely believed in Marie Robine's holiness and role as God's messenger. Isabeau, on the other hand, saw the opportunity to use God's messenger to try to end the Schism with the king's preferred solution of the Avignon pope resigning. While both these queens were significant to the social network around Marie, they did not have lasting influence on Marie's impact in her community. For instance, they did not establish a popular cult or encourage her local veneration, either during

her life or after her death. Neither did the Celestines, with whom Marie was closely associated, though they did introduce her to a wider social network than Marie likely could have met alone.

Similarly, Ermine had some strong supporters within the Church. In addition to her confessor, the other clergy at the Val-des-Écoliers and the Abbey of Saint-Denis believed in the validity of her experiences. They copied the records of her visions and helped get them ready for distribution, including translating them into Latin. Jean Gerson too, at least initially, gave his approval of Ermine's visions and believed she was a pious laywoman. His later retraction of his support significantly minimised the spread of her revelations and any chance of her being promoted as a holy woman posthumously. However, even after Gerson's judgement there were religious and theologians who read Ermine's visions and saw her as an example of a strong woman of faith resisting the tortures and temptations of the devil. Despite Gerson's disapproval, there were several manuscripts made of her revelations and evidently many people did read them in Reims, Paris, Freiburg im Breisgau, and Brussels. Her popularity amongst religious meant that multiple copies of her revelations have survived, including BnF, fr. 25213 at the National Library of France in Paris which has some beautiful illumination on the first page. Nevertheless, the censure from Gerson meant that Ermine could not be celebrated as a holy woman through official channels.

In contrast, Constance had very little social support and made many enemies from her prophecies and visions. Though Constance had the backing of her son and her confessor, she had to fight with the Church to even have her visions recorded. Moreover, it was not only those within the Church whom she criticised. She denounced the count of Armagnac and his sons as the 'villains' to her 'hero' Gaston Fébus, blaming the count for bringing the downfall of France in the Hundred Years War. Moreover, Constance's visions reveal that many of her peers called her crazy or believed she was possessed by a demon. Yet, some high-placed people sought her advice, from across the south of France, and likely from further afield. She must have caught the attention of someone influential for there to be a near-contemporary Catalan translation of her visions at all. This shows that Constance's voice was heard by more than just the inquisitor and her confessor, and that she successfully presented herself as God's messenger to at least some influential people. Her support of Gaston Fébus, too, would have won her some popularity amongst locals who backed the count. That Constance's revelations were the only vernacular text in a Latin compilation manuscript from the seventeenth century, in the library of a French noble family, also shows that her visions remained relevant after her death. It is plausible that

this was more to do with her passionate support of the king of France and belief in the victory of France in the Hundred Years War than her visions of the Schism. Though some have questioned the contradictory nature of Constance's support for both France and the Roman papacy, her reasons for supporting them were different in each case: her support for the king of France and Gaston Fébus was a political decision, while her support of the Roman papacy was spiritual and theological. However, the tensions between these two stances did cause issues for Constance. Like Ermine, because Constance did not gain the official approval of the Church her lasting influence was limited; despite Raymond referring to her as "*Benaventurada Constaça*", Constance did not have a popular cult or enough local support to promote her cause as a holy woman. The examples of limited social networks for all three women emphasise the importance of community support for the veneration and influence of holy laywomen.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the effects of the Schism on holy laywomen, and the efforts of some of them to influence its outcome. Certainly, the three specific case studies cannot be taken as entirely representative of their social class. The paucity of surviving sources for laywomen makes generalising about their experiences difficult. Those of Marie, Constance, and Ermine were recorded because they were exceptional. There is nothing to suggest that most laywomen experienced regular divine visions or were inclined to participate in Church politics. However, through these seemingly 'extraordinary' women, we can see that the impacts of the Schism on the laity was not at all extraordinary; what was happening in the upper hierarchy of the Church affected the daily lives of those from even the lower social classes who lived in Christian France. There was a desire to see a resolution to the division of the Church, and some laywomen were eager to intervene with a divine solution where institutional (and male) authority had failed. It was not only noble and religious women, or men, who were involving themselves in the Schism.

This thesis builds on recent scholarship that has questioned assumptions that laywomen were silent, ignorant, or inactive when it came to matters of major ecclesiastical and political importance. Though women's involvement in these matters may not look the same as that of men, women were involved nonetheless. This thesis has touched on comparisons between holy laywomen and noble or religious women, and between holy women and men, and the paths each of these groups could take to develop their authority. The Schism changed how holy

laywomen could access spiritual authority and be recognised as holy, with less emphasis in their visions on physical asceticism, bridal mysticism, and illiteracy as potential signs of sanctity. Instead, there was more emphasis (at least in Marie's and Constance's cases) on prophecy. Not all women chose this path, as Ermine's example shows, but in choosing an active and public role, Marie and Constance are examples of holy women who were able to exercise greater influence. The gendered nature of this path to authority is made clear when compared to their male contemporaries who did not have to rely on prophecy or these other hagiographical topoi to the same degree. However, more could still be done to expand on these comparisons, particularly considering further the gendered ways in which men were able to access authority.

It would be a mistake to see the favour and influence that these women were able to gain during the Schism as changing the ongoing position and condition of women in general in the Church. These women were the last resort of a Church in crisis, whose theological systems and institutions were being shaken. The prestige and influence of these women was only momentarily reinforced.<sup>3</sup> Despite there being numerous canonisation proceedings initiated for holy women during the later Middle Ages, only Birgitta of Sweden and Catherine of Siena were canonised at the time – and still, this was not without difficulty. Birgitta was in fact canonised three times by three different popes (1391, 1415, and 1419) because of the repeated challenges to her sanctity.<sup>4</sup> Once the crisis of the Schism and the conciliar movement had passed, laywomen who believed they were authorised to speak on God's behalf were sent back to the obscurity from which they had come and left the positions of leadership to the learned who had only temporarily and unwillingly yielded them in the first place. It was only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the inspired word was readmitted into the Church.<sup>5</sup> However, this does not mean that the influence and agency of female visionaries was unimportant during the late medieval period, and especially during the Schism. As we have seen in this thesis, the agency of holy women in this period is a complex issue. Some laywomen were actively engaging in the politics of the Schism and often eager to have their voices heard and influence the politics of the Church. Thus, another potential area for expansion on the themes covered in this thesis would be to consider how the ending of the Schism and reunification of the Church changed women's ability to access authority, and whether the paths to authority were altered again. As we have seen, the expectations on holy women and their

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<sup>3</sup> Vauchez, *The Laity in The Middle Ages: Religious Beliefs and Devotional Practices*, 235-36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 252-53.

visions shifted from earlier hagiographical stereotypes to a more active, prophetic-driven visionary. But did the paths to authority for women return to pre-Schism hagiographical stereotypes with a focus on personal salvation? Were visionaries still concerned with the Antichrist and ecclesiastical reform? The drop in female canonisations after the Schism suggests that female influence shifted too.

This thesis has considered more than previous studies the language used by and about these laywomen as part of understanding how they accessed authority. The scribes describe their visionaries as blessed, pious, virtuous, and in Constance's example a spouse of Christ. These labels were important in establishing their sanctity, which in turn legitimised their special roles as divine messengers. John van Engen has noted how anti-clerical slurs seem to reflect clerical privilege and positions of power.<sup>6</sup> Analogously, does the misogynistic language about women in medieval sources reflect fear of the potential influence women could have, or does it indirectly acknowledge the influential roles women were playing in medieval ecclesiastical and secular politics? We catch glimpses of this with Ermine being called a "dirty evil whore," and the accusations that Constance was crazy or demon possessed.<sup>7</sup> The language used against these women shows the difficulties visionary women had in being accepted by their communities. Further attention could be given to the way visionary women were described by their communities and the relation to the wider change in attitudes to women from the early fifteenth century. For example, how does the treatment of Ermine fit into the wider development of the fear of devil-worshipping witches?

The power vacuum created by the Great Western Schism provided a climate where laywomen were able to access a level of influence and authority that had previously been unavailable to them. The ways in which holy women could access this authority also changed from the hagiographical expectations of previous generations; there were still key patterns of sanctity for laywomen during the Schism though they were more politically focused than the period before. Key aspects such as prophecy and divine authority became more important, due to the perceived failure of the Church and the concern with the discernment of spirits. The agency of these women, and how autonomous they could be, was also a complex issue. The role of confessors in steering or being steered by their female protégées was more nuanced than

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<sup>6</sup> John Van Engen, "Positioning Women in Medieval Society, Culture, and Religion," in *Women Intellectuals and Leaders in the Middle Ages*, ed. John Van Engen, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, and Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 401.

<sup>7</sup> le Graveur, *Les Visions d'Ermine de Reims (d.1396)*, 80-81; trans. by Blumenfeld-Kosinski, *The Strange Case of Ermine de Reims*, 167.

has been previously thought. Along with the confessors, the social networks of female visionaries were key in determining their overall influence and fate. This thesis has demonstrated how the Schism affected not just those in positions of institutional power or within the Church, but laypeople within their own communities who were concerned about the Antichrist, the end times, and the broken state of the Church and how it affected their salvation. Marie, Constance, and Ermine's examples have revealed the complexity around laywomen's agency and autonomy in a tumultuous environment, and demonstrate why more attention should be paid to non-religious and non-noble experiences during the Great Western Schism to understand better the relationship between gender, authority, and agency in the medieval period.

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## **Appendix:**

### **Translation of Marie Robine's Visions**

#### **The First Vision**

There follows a number of visions and revelations that came to Marie Robine, elsewhere known as from Vasconia, concerning what the Church, the pope, and the king of France have done. And first follows the letter sent through her to Charles, king of France, in the following form.

My most excellent and feared master, may it please you to record the things that I have narrated to you at another time. As I have told you at other times, indeed, namely the first Friday of Lent in the year of our Lord 1397, I, an unworthy servant, being in prayer and a burning desire over the salvation of your soul, saw a certain really wonderful vision. And I heard and understood a certain voice by divine virtue according to the will of God addressing me and speaking to me: "Go to the king of France and tell him on my behalf that I wish he will not forget me, since he has no reason for doing this, for I made him and exalted him over all the people of this world. I punish anyone when it pleases me, and when it seems good as a sweet father. And you are hindering the word that is in the sacred scripture; certainly, "cursed is the one who trusts in man and blessed is the one who trusts in God." Let him [the king] therefore have that love towards his people, which he wants me to have towards him. Let him make union in the Church. By that, I mean that he will unite the Church through those means I have commanded him through you at other times. Let him beware that he doesn't cause a loss of support for the pope, namely Benedict XIII, nor allow it to come to be. Not at all, let him prevent this with his whole power, since these three mortal sins, that is to say pride, envy, and greed, govern it and make it happen. Also, not all plans that are pleasing to man are acceptable to God, and let him make restoration in my Church concerning the condition which is to me displeasing and hateful. God has shown in the year of grace and the time of Christ's Passion, the conditions pleasing to Him which were supposed to be held by these prelates who act often contrarily to the Lord and to themselves. They cannot colour with words or deeds, nor can they cover over the things which they now ought to be grieving over, as much as they are pleased by them, in fact they themselves are delighted by them. Also, tell him that he should create in every diocese

three houses or guilds or even more or fewer, according to existing revenue; firstly, let one of them be devoted to the poor and homeless people, who are approved as poor and faithful, and also for the elderly who are unable to work. And the second, let it be given for poor scholars so that they may study and learn knowledge, however useful and approved and necessary for the establishing of human life, and for elevating the faith and teaching those who do not know the faith. Thirdly, let him set up and establish another house for defending churches from faithless people hostile to the Catholic faith; let a prelate live there with two servants in the administration of these same churches, having only one animal for riding if ever it befalls him to become weakened, or to become an old man to such an extent that he is not able to work in the negotiations of the Church by walking.” Then, some new thought came to me expressed in such words as this: “Oh Lord, God the Omnipotent Father, what reward will you give to him if he does what you want and say?” To which thought the aforementioned voice answered like this, saying: “No one knows, except God alone. For I will give to him everlasting life, nor will he feel the infernal punishments which are foul-smelling and corrupt; on the contrary, he will be punished concerning all the evils he has committed in this mortal life.<sup>1</sup> I will give to him also victory over all Christian men and one large section of the Saracens. However, if of those things which I command him he does the opposite, I will not help him in his deeds, nor will I likewise act against him, but I will send him away to go and carry out his desires, through which desires he will destroy himself by shortening the boundaries of his mortal life. Nevertheless, because of this he will not lose eternal life; nor, however, will he have victory over earthly men or his enemies. Furthermore, I say to you that if the king does this command and the other things I have commanded him in my law, he will be more fruitful in his deeds and he will advance more in the things to be done better than anyone else for the next one hundred years. And if he asks you on whose behalf you said this, answer him: God, the Lord of Lords.”

### **The Second Vision**

In the year of our Lord 1398, Friday the 26th of April, at approximately midday the aforementioned Marie was seized by two flaming or fiery spirits. She had such great fear that no one was able to comfort her, and she was displaying signs of such a fear to those present, including the lady queen of Sicily and her own confessor and many others. And while the fear lasted, she saw a certain miraculous vision which she afterwards recited to those present, those previously mentioned. The vision was this: first, from a place overlooking the earth, she saw

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<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the king suffering eternally in Hell.

one flaming or fiery wheel which appeared above the earth. There were 3450 sharpened swords fixed to the part overlooking the earth, of which five were much larger than the others, and three of those were much larger than the others, and one which was much larger than those three. Fixed on the same wheel there were sharp arrows more numerous than there are hairs on the human head. And the wheel encircled a certain pillar appearing to be made of stone, of which one end was touching the firmament right under the foot of the throne of God. And the wheel was always moving, and it appeared from its speed to move like lightning. And the distance of the wheel from the throne of God measuring from the top down was as if thousands of reeds end to end. And on the wheel were thirteen chains holding to the firmament and the wheel, which had thirteen flaming angels holding the chains and they were moving the wheel; they were holding in their left hands a sword lifted up for striking, and in their right hands they each held one of the chains, connecting the firmament and the wheel. And they were eager to strike the chains, as it appeared that they were only waiting on the command of the one sitting on the throne. And the one sitting on the throne was, as it were, in the middle of the wheel next to the pillar, in the manner of a bloodstained man who has been wounded with many kinds of wounds; and He was holding in His hand, which from our perspective we might say is His left hand, one glorious sword which was about 5 reeds in length and the same amount in width, and it was lifted up as if He wished to strike. And then the aforementioned Marie begged Him, saying "Holy Lord, Omnipotent Father, may it please you through the merits of your blessed passion, that you may have pity on us and not rebuke us in your anger." And, laughing, the voice of one of the nearer angels who held the chain and who was seated as if in the middle of the wheel said, "In God there is no anger." And then the previously mentioned Marie again pleaded, saying "Lord, give us time and place so that we may be able to correct our life and serve you." And the previously mentioned voice responded with what appeared as an angry expression, "You have had enough time and you have had enough teachers and preachers who have told you and have taught you, and still, you do not correct yourselves." And, again, the aforementioned Marie pleaded, saying "Lord, if your will is such, do so that your whole judgement falls on me, so that I alone will die, and all the others will live." And then He who appeared as a man in the middle of the wheel with an angry face responded, saying to her: "Why are you seeking something unjust? It will not be conceded to you. Why should I punish you? You are not the cause of all bad things." "Send me away to take the punishment of the people full of iniquity." "You have shown me a sign of great love and now you want to hinder my will." And then He showed her bronze bowls filled with horrible stinking excrement, so much so that she could scarcely endure smelling that stench, saying: "Behold this stench which day

and night those people who are full of iniquity give me.” And then praying, the aforementioned Marie said: “Holy Lord, Omnipotent Father God may your will be done. But what will your enemies say? Will they say that you have ruled yourself like a child who makes beautiful houses from the ground for their own pleasure, and then afterwards destroys them? Lord, remember your well-pleasing words that you said to Saint Peter. For you promised to him that ‘your faith would not perish.’” And then, the voice appearing as it were from the middle of the wheel responded to her, saying, “I remember well the words which I said to blessed Peter, and I will attend to that word and fulfil it for him. But my judgement will fall on those in whom faith is dead.” And then with the sword that He was holding He touched all His wounds, and afterwards He struck the pillar and the third part of it fell. And then a beautiful lady moved from the place where she stood with her knees bent. Her knees appeared to be bloody and skinned and filled with blood. She embraced Him, saying to Him “Son, remember your very bitter Passion, which you suffered with great punishment and I with great suffering and grief.” And then, appearing as it were from the middle of the wheel, He folded all the swords around the wheel, and the movement of the wheel which was like a flash of lightning ceased because of the folded swords. And while folding the aforementioned swords, He said to three angels and three saints: “If those people full of iniquity do not amend themselves, then you will descend down to the Earth with these swords, and the people will be handed over to whichever of their enemies who will use their swords to destroy them, as if they were my enemies and adversaries.” And the aforementioned Marie has seen or heard nothing else since that time which she is able to recite, as she has said.

### **The Third Vision**

Similarly, on the following day after receiving the body of the Lord at approximately the ninth hour, the aforementioned people named and many others were present, and the aforementioned Marie was seized through similar spirits as previously. And it seemed to her that they were carrying her in darkness or into darkness. And first she saw places in the underworld, the places of those upon whom the divine judgement will fall, those who will be punished according to the greater or lesser seriousness of their sins. And she was led through that place by the aforementioned two angel spirits who left her there. And then three demons took her up and led her before Lucifer, the prince of darkness; she was bound by a certain chain, and he [Lucifer] held her and made a horrible fire to be burned around her, and he made burning wheels in which he wanted to torture her be carried there. And he gave her the option of choosing one of two

choices, namely either that she swears an oath to him that she will hereafter never make any mention of the union of the Church, and that she would say nothing about the things which she'd seen, but that she would say that [*lacuna*] and that she would deny that she met him today, "or it is necessary for you to remain forever in these torments that have been prepared. But if you should want to do one of those choices, you will go back again, and you will do whatever you want, and you will have friendships with all your enemies." And then the aforementioned Marie responded to him, saying "Of all those things you ask of me, I will not do any of them. But if it pleases my Creator that I remain here, then let His will be done." And then Lucifer said to her "For a long time you have hindered me, but now you shall not evade my hands." And he bound her with a certain chain in a burning wheel that was either in the middle of the fire or in the surrounding fire, and it was as if there were an infinite number of demons revelling a lot and they were ready to torture her. And then Lucifer turned her three times in the wheel to which she was bound. And then she cried out in a high voice, saying: "Lord God, have mercy on me". And immediately one of those spirits who led her there came with their sword unsheathed; and he struck the chain with which she had been bound to the wheel, and then he freed her from those tortures. Afterwards she was led in front of the throne of God, and she observed the justice and judgement of those upon whom will fall the aforesaid and aforesaid swords; and they were separated from divine perfection. She saw Him sitting on the throne, the one who was showing her justice and judgement; He said: "I will separate the wicked from my perfection and from that perfection which I have given to my beloveds, which is always with me." And He showed her as it were one city enclosed with very high and thick walls, in which was all Christendom. And all around the outside of the city was a multitude of unfaithful, as if innumerable, who were trying to break down the walls of the city in four places as if they wanted to make four gates; and they had already almost made one gate. And the one sitting on the throne was dividing Christendom into four parts. And He divided three parts from the fourth. And the fourth part He was unifying with His sons by conferring graces on them in different ways according to different perfections. Then He said "Go, enemies of my father, to the infernal parts which have been prepared for you from the origin of this world,<sup>2</sup> in which you will endure horrible torments and grinding of teeth." Again, He said to the aforementioned Marie that the aforementioned people who curse other people in this world will die in different ways; some with fire, some in water, others by swords of iron, and others from sudden death, others by other ways, "about which before then I am not making any mention to you. And unless the people

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<sup>2</sup> Matt. 25:41

that are full of iniquity return to me because of all these things, I will let five lightning bolts fall on them, and all the ships that will be on the sea outside harbours will perish; and the lightning bolts will open the earth in five places, from which such a bad stench will come out, that no one will be able to live on the earth for seven years. And the people dividing themselves against me will make ships and they will live with great anguish upon the sea, and they will deserve all those tribulations.” And then He gave permission to Marie, saying to her, “Go and tell these things to the churches, and whoever shall have ears to hear let him hear,<sup>3</sup> and whoever shall have a spirit of understanding let him understand, and praise my name publicly amongst men, and may you not fear those who can do harm to you and not good, but fear him who can kill the body and the soul and throw them into the lower regions of Hell.”<sup>4</sup>

### **The Fourth Vision**

In the year of our Lord 1398, [on] the third [day] of the month of June, Marie Robine went early in the morning to the king’s palace to have an audience at the council of the prelates, to say to them the command which she had been warned to say. And she entered the council of the prelates but was rejected without an audience. And it was said to her that she should go to her own room until she was commanded, and then she did not wait any longer, but following their command she went to her own room. And while she prayed in her room at the hour approximately around the end of the day, and the beginning of the night, she heard a certain voice, but she did not see the person exclaiming. The voice spoke to her as follows: “I said to you that you should not fear<sup>5</sup> man more than me. I will speak briefly to you. Go to them whenever you know they are gathered together, until I tell you [to stop]. Hurry, therefore, and do your diligence, and thus you will be perfect in my presence.”

*In the margin:* The fourth vision. At that time the prelates in the kingdom of France were gathered together in Paris regarding the schism of the Church and at that time they made a withdrawal from Pope Benedict XIII’s collection of benefits and absolutions.

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<sup>3</sup> Matthew 11:15

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 10:28

<sup>5</sup> The Latin word here is *dubites*, but “doubt” does not make sense. Given the context, I have translated it as “fear.”

## The Fifth Vision

Then on the sixth day of the aforementioned month, the feast of the Eucharist of the Lord, while the mass was being celebrated, Marie, being in her oratory quite near the altar, was seized by two flaming or fiery spirits who carried her off before the throne of God. And there she saw divine processions and a great number of celestials, in a certain wonderful order; they proceeded thus in such a way encircling the throne of God. And she saw first a certain number of cherubim and seraphim going in front of all the others, holding five censers with which they were spreading incense, [and] from which such a great fragrance was coming out that it cannot be explained in human terms. Then after that followed the most blessed Peter carrying the Lord's [body] in his hands, in the form of a man around thirty-three years old; and with him were the other apostles immediately following in their own order. Afterwards came the martyred virgins, adorned in a certain wonderful way; for they were wearing seven crowns, as it seemed to her, and all seven on each one's head seemed as one. And they all, along with the others, went around the throne of God five times, singing a song that seemed new. Indeed, Marie did not understand that song, except when they were saying: "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and [to the Holy Spirit]." <sup>6</sup> And this they said while they were in front of the sacred and indivisible Trinity laying down the aforementioned crowns one at a time <sup>7</sup> and bowing their heads; and not only the virgins, but all the others right up to the feet of the Lord were worshipping the sacred and indivisible Trinity. And to the glorious Virgin Mary the mother of God, who was sitting as it were at the foot of the throne of God, they bowed their heads deeply. On their fifth time around, they picked up again their crowns and their sceptres that had been laid down. Then the martyrs followed in their own order; afterwards, the confessors in their own order. Then came the patriarchs and prophets; then followed a great number of virgins, widows, and female confessors. And after this procession, everyone surrounded the throne of God – she [Marie] did not know how; and she, quite hesitant, having been sent away by those who had been holding her there, saw herself as if [she was still] in the midst of them. And she saw a certain empty seat between Saint Paul and the blessed Katherine; she was desiring in her heart to be carried to it and to sit in it. And then Jesus Christ spoke to her, saying in this manner: "Do you love God?" Marie replied: "Yes, but not so much as I ought." A second time He asked her, saying: "How do you wish to please Him?" Marie responded: "To join His will to mine." <sup>8</sup> And then

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin here is *et cetera*, which I have interpreted as the Holy Spirit, given the context.

<sup>7</sup> The Latin includes *pro qualibet vice*, "in whatever order" here, but it seemed unnecessary in the translation.

<sup>8</sup> The Latin uses *meum*, but it should be *meam* to agree with *voluntatem*. This is also an interesting sentence, as theologically it would make more sense for Marie to wish to join her will to God's, not the other way around.

Jesus said: “What is hindering you, Marie?” “Nothing.” And then Jesus said to Marie: “Throw this sinful part of you out.” Marie responded: “I cannot.” “Be in awe of me.” “You know well why you made me.” And then Jesus said: “Marie, will you die for God?” She responded: “Yes, if it pleases you.” And then Jesus said to Marie: “You are being contradictory, because you offer death and yet the words of men are weighing you down.” And then He showed her a wreath of different coloured roses and said: “As far as you will draw near to this wreath, it will draw near to you; and as far as you will withdraw from it, it will be withdrawn from you.”<sup>9</sup> And never will you suffer for me as I have suffered for you. Therefore, expect and endure with love my injuries; spit out disgraceful and other similar things.” And then Jesus said to Marie: “I will show you my suffering.” And then He showed her His suffering and revealed it to her. And again He asked her, saying: “Have you had anything to eat or drink today?” Marie responded: “You know well that I have not.” He said again: “Do you believe that I can show you my secrets before and after eating?”<sup>10</sup> Marie responded: “You know well that I have never doubted.” And Jesus said to Marie: “More things<sup>11</sup> [I will show you], if you do not doubt.” And He said to her: “Are you intoxicated?” Marie responded: “No.” And then Jesus said to her: “I will send to you tomorrow a vision again, and [an explanation of the] punishment of the vision of the fear of torment which I have shown you at other times,<sup>12</sup> and on the day of the Sabbath there will be six weeks.” And then He showed to her the flaming or fiery wheel from the side looking back at the earth and other things just as in the second chapter all the way until the end.<sup>13</sup> Next, she was carried back again in front of the throne of God, and there she saw the judgement and justice and other things as previously. And there she was seeing many men moulded in the divine essence just like men who had lost the origins of all perfection. As she stood there, she saw three men<sup>14</sup> in the divine essence falling as if they were falling from one level to another, and they fell completely in such a way that she could not see in the divine essence anything of them except briefly their creation. And in many other ways she saw that very many were beginning to fall. Then He said to her similar words which He had said to her in the third chapter, [which were] as follows: “I will separate the people filled with iniquities from my perfection and from that which I gave to my beloved children; and I give it every day, and it is always with me.” And then He showed her the city which He had shown her at other times in

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<sup>9</sup> James 4:8

<sup>10</sup> Jesus here is showing Marie’s special relationship with the divine by seemingly suggesting that she does not need to fast in order to hear his secrets.

<sup>11</sup> Here I have interpreted *plura* for *plures*.

<sup>12</sup> Referring perhaps to the third vision.

<sup>13</sup> A reference to the second vision.

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear who these particular three men represent.

the third chapter. And sitting on the throne, He showed her how He had divided Christendom just as He had divided it in the third chapter. And those separated from the fourth part were beginning to be cut off in different ways in the divine essence. And He showed to the aforementioned Marie how He had united the fourth part of Christendom together with His beloved children according to the separate levels of perfection. And He said to those from the third part: “I shall say to you: cursed ones of my father, go to Hell, which is prepared for you from the beginning of the world until this point, in which you will suffer horrible torments and gnashing of teeth. And you will die with different kinds of death; some by fire, others by water, others pierced by swords, and others by sudden death, and you will die in many other ways which you will never foresee.” Then He showed her five flashes of lightning about which He had made mention to her in the third chapter, and an announcement of them. And certain other things about which she is not allowed to speak. And then He said to her: “Go, I wait for you [to be] in a more exalted state,<sup>15</sup> and receive me. And say to the churches that which you have seen. And if the wolves do not want to listen to you, tell this to everyone. And he who will have ears to hear let him hear, and let him hear also all the other things, right to the end of the third chapter.”

*In the margin:* The fifth vision; the divine procession.

### **The Sixth Vision**

In the year 1398, on the ninth day of the month of November, at about the ninth hour, Marie, being in prayer with a great sorrow of spirit, was thinking of the situation she was in that we are not able to have union and the other perfections necessary for us. And she was seized by two flaming or fiery spirits. And there was shown to her a very obscure vision, and so obscure that she did not dare to speak one word of this vision for that whole day, but her soul remained in great fear. But on the following day about in the middle of the sixth hour, God through His power showed to the aforementioned Marie explanations of her vision,<sup>16</sup> saying to her first: “Marie, I will make your soul nothing and then afterwards I will [re]create it.” And He did just as the aforementioned Marie asserts. And the explanation of the vision was this, she saw first the states of the whole Christian religion, not recognising any of them in detail. And she saw hearts of this kind in the form of houses, below which there were specific idols and images of

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<sup>15</sup> The interpretation of this term in Latin, *effero*, is not clear.

<sup>16</sup> Here we see an example of God explaining to Marie the meaning of her vision, showing that her special relationship with the divine means that she is not reliant on the mediation and knowledge of the clergy.

men and of women<sup>17</sup> of gold and silver, and of large animals. Of the foretold religion, she saw a bent over wall of men at a certain angle illuminated by the light of a star which she had seen at another time in another vision.<sup>18</sup> And the aforementioned people were going around this star weeping very bitterly as it seemed to her, pouring out tears made of gold. And next to each one of them there was an angel holding in its hand a vessel in the form of a shallow bowl of silver overlaid with gold; and by means of a great agreement<sup>19</sup> he was collecting all the tears in that bowl; and he was pouring them over their heads. Afterwards the angel recollected them, and so the process continued. And the Lord, who showed all of these things to the aforementioned Marie, spoke to her, saying: “There are several who have said and can say that visions or revelations are not necessary for them. I reveal to them through your mouth that Saint Peter has converted many more in a certain one of his sermons that he gave than there are faithful people in the Christian religion at the present time. I say to you that they are idolaters. And these things which you have heard and seen, say them to the Masters of Theology at the University of Paris.” And then the aforementioned Marie was thinking whether to say it to them in words or to send it to them in written documents. And He replied to her thought: “Command them in writings. And indicate to them from my part in your writing that if any of them are idolaters that they should destroy their idols, and afterwards they will be prepared and readily able to destroy other idols among other people; because an idolater is not capable of destroying other idols unless he first destroys his own. And tell them not to glorify themselves, because they produce mediocre fruit. And unless they destroy their own idols, I will impute to them their sin. I will give to them so many tribulations that they will begin their eternal punishments in this mortal life; and if they rebel against these things that I am commanding to them through you, they will rebel against themselves. And I will bind their feet and hands, and I will create smoke in the city of confusion,<sup>20</sup> and I will retain for myself the keys of my judgement. Whoever will pour on the ground and will sow seed, he will possess the land and in it he will receive his harvests; and whoever will be with me in Heaven, I will also be with him.”

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<sup>17</sup> The Latin used in the transcription here is *ferrarum*, which could be a misreading of *feminarum*, “of women”, which makes more sense contextually than *ferrarum*, “wild animals”, given that large animals are also mentioned.

<sup>18</sup> It is unclear which vision she is referring to here, perhaps one that was not recorded.

<sup>19</sup> It is unclear what this phrase means.

<sup>20</sup> It is unclear what this statement means, whether it is making a smoke of confusion in the city, or whether the city is called “confusion”.

## The Seventh Vision

In the year of the Lord 1399, on the feast day of the blessed John the Evangelist before the Latin Gate, Marie, being in her oratory hearing Mass at the hour of the thirds,<sup>21</sup> she was seized by two flaming or fiery spirits. And she was carried to the dwelling place of the blessed John the Evangelist. And the blessed John instructed her that she should remain with him because he was full of admiration of all the things which he was seeing, which were those marvellous adornments that the seven angels were bringing, and they were carrying them to the house in which he was living. And when Marie saw that ceremony, she approached him, saying to him: “Father, remember the horrible tribulation of my mother Church.” And he responded to her totally astonished, saying: “Surely you have unity now?” Marie responded: “Father, no.” And then the blessed John said to Marie: “It is possible for you,<sup>22</sup> and it is necessary for some great failing against the faith to be tried. I will freely pray to God for the peace of the Church according to which He will give me grace.” And in that hour, our Lord Jesus Christ came and all the apostles in His company. And many other angels and saints whose names are too long [to mention]. And they made one large altar with these adornments and clothes similar to the brightest Heaven. And the Lord Jesus Christ adorned Himself, and those who were selected for the purpose of serving Him, namely the blessed Peter, Paul, Laurence, and Nicholas, were standing in high locations being adorned by Him. And then one seat was carried to the aforementioned John the Evangelist that seemed to be two, but because it was attached to one support, it seemed to be one. And that seat was arranged for two people, and they were holding five little *pomella*<sup>23</sup> in which was written the life and death of each of those two.<sup>24</sup> And one of those seats was higher than the other. But such was the arrangement that the lower could be made equal to the higher. Afterwards, the Lord Jesus celebrated His mass in its entirety as an elder, with this exception that He did not say the Confession (Confiteor) nor the whole Our Father just as others say it. But, instead, He said as follows: “And forgive them their debts, and do not lead them into temptation but deliver them from evil.” And also, when the Lord wanted to receive the holy sacrifice, He did not do anything except to kiss and embrace [it]. And then the holy sacrifice and the Lord himself were one and the same, and He drank His own blood which He saw enter into his veins. The blessed John the Evangelist began to say to the celebrant

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<sup>21</sup> Terce are prayers said at 9am, the “third” hour.

<sup>22</sup> The plural form of “you” is used here, referring to the Church.

<sup>23</sup> A suitable translation for this word could not be found.

<sup>24</sup> This sentence has been paraphrased for clarity. The Latin reads: *Et sedes illa erat disposita ad sedendas duas personas, in qua errant 5 pomella in quibus erat scripta vita cujuslibet illorum duotum qui sederent in illis et finis quem ipsi tenerent.*

of this mass with the greatest humility his confession, and the saintly Peter absolved him with great reverence, and he received his creator with great reverence and devotion. And then he approached the seat which he had never before dared to approach. And after he had completed this most worthy service, the Lord Jesus sat on the seat mentioned above, and took the blessed John by his hand which was always stretched toward the ground. And He said to him: “My sweetest son, rise up because I want to speak to you.” And then the blessed John raised only his head as far as the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with great reverence he heard His words which Marie did not pray to understand.<sup>25</sup> However, among other things she understood well when the glorious Blessed John commended our mother the Church to the Lord. And the Lord himself responded to him, saying: “My son, peace and war cannot exist at the same time. Bad sons want to place me and my enemy in a certain house at the same time. And this is something that cannot happen. You believe firmly that regarding what I have promised, I have never failed and nor will I ever fail. Moreover, I have promised them peace and will give it to them if they desire to remove war from themselves.” Saint John responded to Him with great fear, saying: “Lord, you have said that no one can come to you unless the Father should draw them to you.” Then the Lord replied to him: “My very sweet son, you speak the truth, that no one work, however good, can be accepted by man except as far as my Father wants to accept it. But a person can make his mental disposition in such a way that he follows the work of my Father.” And He said to him this parable: in the same way, the stonemason drags stones from the earth and makes only a layout<sup>26</sup> of a house and, because of this, the house is not holy: “wherefore I say to you that they cannot justify themselves.” And then He sweetly admonished him, saying: “My son, do not let it tire you, because shortly the time will come when you will be with me in eternal life, and henceforth you will not take any food which stands in its time upon the earth.” And then the Lord disappeared. And then, after the Lord withdrew, the blessed John completed his good and fervent prayer. And while he was praying thus, Marie saw three lights going away, one from the face of the blessed John, and the other two from his two ears which were continuously following the Lord who was ascending up to the heavens. And then the blessed John called to Marie after he rose from his prayer, saying to her: “Come to me, Marie.” And he spoke to her, saying: “I say to you that I am completely in wonder and astonishment because I have never seen such a mystery or anything like it. And I was thinking that the Lord would give to me a teaching to carry through the world as the testimony of the law of grace that would be

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<sup>25</sup> *Que non orare Maria intellexit*, literally “which Marie understood not to pray.”

<sup>26</sup> The Latin word used here (*dispositionem*) for layout is the same used in the previous sentence for disposition, enhancing the comparison between the two sentences.

judgement for the Pope; and the Antichrist had come who will end for me the mortal boundaries of my life. However, you have well understood what the Lord replied to my supplication. Therefore, say to them that they should have great fear for their life which they have not concluded worthily. And let them wonder that I am in such a state. Ponder, therefore, or consider loving and fearing your Creator to the best of your ability, because you are coming into our fellowship. And go, may God comfort you.” And then Marie withdrew, and John said nothing else to her which she is permitted to say.

### **The Eighth Vision**

Moreover, in the year described above, the Monday before the feast of Pentecost of the Lord, Pope Clement VII finally having died appeared to Marie at the hour of the thirds in her oratory, saying to her: “Marie, stand firm in the Lord and guard yourself from sin as much as you are able; because on the day of Pentecost of the Lord, certain things will be shown to you, some things that you have never seen, nor anything like them.” And then he disappeared. And he said nothing else to her. And in that vision, because of his failings which she herself had seen in his life, she doubted his words, thinking in her mind: “You have failed me in your life, and now you could fail me again.”

### **The Ninth Vision**

Again, the following Tuesday, the same pope with his angel appeared to Marie, in the hour as above, and his angel spoke, with Pope Clement saying nothing. He said to Marie thus: “Marie, do not doubt in that which Pope Clement has said to you. For that will be true. And in his life, he lied to you; only, presently he cannot lie to you.” Marie responded: “May the will of my Creator be done.” And then they both disappeared.

### **The Tenth Vision**

On the following Sunday, the feast of the Pentecost of the Lord, at around the hour of the thirds, with great fear Marie was seized by two fiery spirits at the beginning of the Mass. And she was carried to one valley which she herself identified was the valley of Jehoshaphat,<sup>27</sup> in which she saw coming the Lord Jesus Christ with the company of all the nations of the world. And the first ones entering with Him were the guardians of the churches, those who [were] with His

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<sup>27</sup> Joel 3, “The Nations Judged.”

flock which He had in His protection. Afterwards came the priors, the abbots, the bishops, the archbishops. And then the pope alone with twelve cardinals who were not named prelates but were accompanying the pope, who entered the valley last with the Lord. And they were all placed in a certain circuit for the fashion of receiving physical refreshment. And there according to the command from the Lord they were shod and clothed with wonderful clothing and shoes, each according to their rank. Afterwards there was prepared for them this physical refreshment from all kinds of foods created for the purpose of the refreshment of human nature. And after having received their physical refreshment, there was made for them a promise pledged by the Lord, saying: “And it will never fail them in their future necessities of life.”<sup>28</sup> And then a certain patriarch chosen by all of them to respond for everyone said: “Who are you, that in every necessity of life you are able to provide for us?” The Lord Jesus responded: “I am He who created and formed you. And I say to you that you will not bring anything else by which you might belong to me. Say the Our Father if you are satisfied or not concerning this thing which I am asking you.” And then the patriarch said the Our Father. And in two parts of it, Marie had such grief which she could not avoid, namely when he said: “May your will be done.” And then Marie said to him: “You’re lying, and all those who speak like you.” And the second one was when he said: “And forgive us, and so on.”<sup>29</sup> Then the Lord Jesus said to those who were near Him, namely Saint Peter, Paul, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist still living, Enoch, Elijah and Moses, Matthew, and Marie herself: “How will they forgive their enemies by means of my love, because they cannot forgive in a charitable way their friends who do not do harm to them?” And concerning all those words spoken up to now they were very well satisfied, those who heard them. Then the Lord began to examine them in the basics,<sup>30</sup> and subsequently the twelve articles of the faith. And they replied verbally that they well believed these things. But in their hearts, they displayed the complete opposite. And when the examination was completely finished and was of such a length that the aforesaid Marie was scarcely able to dictate it in its entirety, again the Lord spoke, saying: “You should reply truthfully if you are satisfied concerning the pledge and promise which I made to you, because if you are satisfied, I will give to you a clean heart and a new spirit, and I will fill again your souls with a spirit of wisdom and understanding, and the shadows will be removed from your eyes. And you will know me and that which is necessary in your flocks; and you shall fill again their souls with sound doctrines,

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<sup>28</sup> John 6, “Bread of Life.”

<sup>29</sup> In Latin, *et cetera*.

<sup>30</sup> It is unclear what is meant by this phrase, *postea dominus incepit eos examinere in suo alphabeto*, perhaps the basics of the faith.

and their bodies with physical food; you shall make perpetual unity in the Church, and you shall bear much fruit on the earth. You will be called my legitimate children; and at the end of your days, you shall unite with me in eternity.[”] To whom the patriarch replied out loud for everyone that they were well satisfied. And then over and above their ordination, the Lord ordained three chaplains in a certain private place which seemed to be alone there; and He sealed it with His seal, holding out to each of them his key and his basket; He instructed them that they should do the office of the alms for the remaining days of the aforesaid month. And He said that He was ascending to control or to hold His courts. Indeed, after He ascended, the aforementioned chaplains were willing to perform their offices. But the aforementioned prelates had clearly prevented them so that they would not perform that office. And then one of those more discerning replied to them: “Why are you preventing the office, which our Creator instructed us [to do]?” “I say to you that unless you beware you will be condemned.” And they replied thus: “Our fathers and their fathers thus crossed over; after them we ourselves will cross over well.” “Go to your country because you are doing nothing here.” And in that hour so great a number of people of every country of the world cried out for the alms of the two types of materials. For some were seeking physical alms, others spiritual, and others both. And the aforementioned chaplains stood sadly, and they took counsel from each other. And they determined in their conclusion that they themselves would go to their country, to which permission had been given to them to go. And so they did. And they did not rest until they were near their Creator who had committed their office to them. And when they began to speak to Him about the great injury that had been done to them in their office, a great shout came to the ears of God, [so loud] that one of them could not hear the other.<sup>31</sup> And this shouting was for the blood of those who passed away because of the failure of the aforesaid prelates. And they cried out, saying: “Lord God, let there be justice concerning the good things that you have given us, which were taken away from us, because of which we lost our life.” And they cried out continuously, saying: “Do justice for us concerning those who deprived us, and so on.” And then one of the Seraphim said to them that they should be quiet until a council had been held. And they did not give any appearance of seeing the Seraphim, nor were they quiet, but they cried out stronger until the Lord our Jesus Christ said to them: “Be quiet my most beloved children, you [will] have the justice you are seeking.” And then they were completely silent. And the Lord Jesus called all the orders, legions, and three hierarchies. And with them He held counsel, and He began from the least up to the greatest. And to each He said in the manner of

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<sup>31</sup> Revelations 6, “Cry of the Martyrs.”

an instruction: “Say your speech according to the perfection and reasoning which we gave to you. What sentence and what punishment shall we give to the most wicked children of the enemy?[""] They all replied as well-informed that which appeared to each according to their sacred and good will. “Make one out of five fall, one of course from the greater, and let him fall into the sea or onto the land or into one of the greater cities of the world, and there let him make a city which should be called the city of *ingratitude* and *ignorance*: the *ingratitude* indeed on account of the clerics, and the *ignorance* for the sake of warning to the laity.<sup>32</sup> And let that city be a vent of Hell, that is, almost all the punishments which are in Hell correspond there, and furthermore let there be one more punishment than in Hell. And shorten their life for them. And place them in that city of ingratitude and ignorance right up until the day of your universal appearing. And afterwards, do concerning them whatever is pleasing to you, nor should you make for them another judgement, nor let them have any fulfilment in anything that they might hear or see, nor let them be able to do anything good for themselves or for others, nor should any good that comes to pass on their behalf be able to benefit them. But whatever good things they themselves did or which happened for their benefit, if they themselves did your holy will, may you want to burden your most beloved children in order that they would fulfil the good things spoken of above; and concerning their salvation let them have more hope than those who are in the depths of Hell. And we pray, oh Lord, you would do quickly that which is pleasing to you.” And then the glorious Virgin Mary, on bended knees prayed to the Lord, saying: “Oh sweetest son of mine, I cannot contradict your decrees which are just and holy, nor can I seek anything against them. For you, the year of grace which will begin on the day of your holy nativity near approaching, I pray to you if it pleases you, that you would want to give them twenty months to look ahead and think, because from thenceforth my thinking shows me that I must not pray or intercede anymore.” And then Jesus responded to her (sic),<sup>33</sup> saying: “Mother, for five hundred years and more I have listened and heard you in your prayers; nor should you keep weakening me with your praying, send me away to give the sentence which has been designated to them for a long time; because the longer they stand in that state, so much the worse for them.” And again, the Blessed Virgin Mary Mother of God prayed further, saying that He should want to wait for them through the aforesaid time. [a] And then the Lord Jesus himself agreed with the petition of His mother, giving the aforementioned time and another forty days. And He instructed to His mother and to all the others that they should not make any

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<sup>32</sup> The word *laicis* is underlined in the manuscript.

<sup>33</sup> The Latin uses *eis* instead of *ie* here, but the singular “her” in reference to the Virgin Mary makes the most sense contextually.

more mention of those things. Then the Lord descended again to the Valley of Jehoshaphat with the prelates, and He recited completely the council which He had held above. And He rebuked [b] our master Pope Benedict because He had not followed through with His concession that was made clear in the case in which His enemy had been in agreement with this. And still more He said to them [the prelates]: “Sons of the enemy, you are excusing yourselves from the iniquities of your fathers and their fathers. And I reply to you that if they had been warned with less of a warning than you have, they would have never followed the path which you are now speaking concerning the present. And for that reason, I condemn you along with all of the excuses which you could make owed or not owed.<sup>34</sup> And I condemn you in your faith, and I confirm that you are robbers, murderers and filled with all evils.”<sup>35</sup> And they themselves heard Him, the disobedient and irreverent. And then the Lord said to Marie: “Say to my very sweet children that in whatever diocese they are in they should bring their law to their own prelate [c].” Afterwards He gave authority to Marie, saying: “Go to the Church, and speak to them and give [this message] in writing; and whoever has ears to hear let him hear, and whoever has a spirit of understanding let him understand. And if they do not want to believe you, do not fight much with them. And for three days before their deaths, I will show to them a clear truth. But if they do not believe previously, nothing will help them then, nor in those three days will they be heard by anyone; the children will never complain about such a long writing. But I gave it [to them] because of their weak understanding. And do not doubt, because, in all the arguments which will come about for you in this writing, Marie, I will give you responses which will be appropriate to answer them sufficiently.” And He said nothing else to the aforementioned Marie which for now she is permitted to speak about.

*In the margins:*

- a. God gives twenty months and forty days of penance for the messengers.
- b. Against Pope Benedict.<sup>36</sup>
- c. Note [it seems that this is a simple interjection, to bring the adjacent passage to the attention of the reader].

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<sup>34</sup> In Latin, *et ideo ego condampno vos cum omnibus excusationibus quas vos possetis facere debitas vel indebitas videre vestro*. The meaning of this section is unclear.

<sup>35</sup> This passage was reproduced in a letter written in 1445 to Charles VII by Jehan Dubois, a Parisian bourgeois.

<sup>36</sup> Benedict is misspelled in the Latin as *Benidictum*.

## The Eleventh Vision

The year of our Lord 1399, on the twelfth day of the month of October, Marie, hearing Mass, was seized by two flaming or fiery spirits. And she was carried to a vision of peace. And she saw there a star which she had seen at another time while the new and old testaments had been shown to her.<sup>37</sup> In the middle of this star, she saw a certain green tree decorated wonderfully. And through divine authority she saw angels and saints making a certain procession going around and around said tree. And while going around they were all taking leaves from that tree, and they were placing them to the side, saying: "Anyone will receive what they are lacking." And they seemed discontent because we were not making this special feast concerning our faith. And likewise, they were making a procession of this type for the feast of the Catholic faith because of our failure of making this singular feast of the faith. And Marie heard in that hour a secret counsel in the Holy Trinity, saying: [a] "I will never create a soul that would come for such confusion as the soul of the Antichrist would do. But thenceforth we shall pour into the body of a child who will be born from a female sinner. And he shall have all the wickedness which all the angels of Hell shall have, and he shall have all the evil thoughts and agreements through which or for the sake of which people have been condemned." And Marie hearing that plan was thinking in her heart as follows: "Lord God, this will be against the general resurrection in which each soul must rise again with its own heart." And Jesus Christ replied to her thought, saying: "It will not be against the resurrection that he will rule two bodies by that soul. And they shall be two similar ones [bodies]. And he shall be called the old serpent and the infernal confusion. And he shall give punishments to all those who make ruin. And our children will be well protected and will be able to save themselves from their wickedness. [b]. But they themselves are badly provided for, whoever is waiting for him in the present and in the future, let them advise themselves well, because there has never been a man or woman so holy in our society who has endured such great things as they will have for three years and six months during which this sentence will last. And whoever shall well take care about this warning shall anticipate it well, because on the fifth day of his birth the evil child will speak. And in those five days it will always thunder and rain in those parts in which the child of this type will be born. And therefore, he shall be so beautiful by nature, that through his beauty he shall make himself adored. And he shall again be baptised for the increase of his eternal punishment. And he shall gain through greed all those who are disposed, he shall find them by returning to the confusion in which his master has judged until death. [c] Furthermore, it was said that there he

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<sup>37</sup> This appears to be a reference to another unrecorded vision.

shall gain the king and twelve peers of France, and in particular one king who will be called Louis. And he [Louis] will not escape him [the evil child], and all the soldiers of France wanting the good of the kingdom of France [will not evade the child]. And this is understood, if the king of France and the others continue the manner in which they began, then 25,300 people will die for the sake of defending the Antichrist on the day in which he will make his second death. And the earth shall be cursed when he dies. And afterwards an error will follow, because on that earth will be born a beast which will seem to be God making himself adored. And he will last for only nine months. And finally, he will be destroyed by the true sons of God. And the cause of his destruction will be three Masters of Theology who will speak with one voice. Of which one will be called Stephen, another John, and another Matthew. And then Christendom will be freed from the worst demon, the French she-goat.<sup>38</sup> And Christendom will return to God the thanks and praises which should be brought to the celestial society.[”] Similarly, just as the aforesaid Marie said, that the abovementioned feast of the Catholic faith, which is celebrated in the Celestial Church, lasted for eight days. And Jeremiah and Isaiah and the others from the Old Testament were standing near just as those from the New Testament were doing, those who while going around the said tree were singing one wonderful song. But Isaiah and Jeremiah began the song alone which they all were singing. And all the others consequently were following them singing. And they began to sing at the first hour<sup>39</sup> and continued until midday. They began again at the ninth hour continuing until Compline.<sup>40</sup> Afterwards followed the great mystery of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> Indeed, as it appeared to Marie, they came, the unfaithful Gentiles that were armed through the middle of that beautiful gathering of festivities. And they tied all the leaves and branches of that tree with ropes or cords. And they took it [the tree] away from the place where it was, yet they did not carry it beyond the star. And there they beat it so much that a great amount of blood was coming out of said tree. And three angels collected said blood in vessels made in the manner of one chalice. Then the blood came out so that nothing remained inside. And at the top of the tree, they placed a wreath made

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<sup>38</sup> The phrase used here, *gallice crepis*, is difficult to translate. *Crepis* could perhaps be related to the word *crepa*, meaning female goat, which could be a symbol for the devil. Given that the sentence refers to “the worst demon”, this translation could make sense. *Crepis* could also be an abbreviation missed in the transcript, as the manuscript has a line potentially signalling an abbreviation under the word (usually the abbreviation lines are above the word). It could be an abbreviation for *crepitis*, though this is not a standard abbreviation. Therefore, it could mean rattling, cracking, or clattering. However, there is no clear meaning of the phrase *gallice crepis*, so I have selected the possible translation “French she-goat” with the proviso that the manuscript is unclear in its meaning.

<sup>39</sup> 6am

<sup>40</sup> The prayers that took place at the end of the day, usually around 7pm.

<sup>41</sup> What follows appears to be influenced by medieval mystery plays.

out of joined young martyrs. And the wreath was in a form of a helmet. And eventually from that place they made a pit in which they buried the tree; and the aforesaid tree was buried by the saints who were having the festival of God, not by the unfaithful ones. Afterwards the three aforementioned angels put back all the blood collected below the tree through one wound which was in its side. And from its power the aforementioned tree raised itself up or stood itself up according to its figure, then with one additional thing that it changed its colour and its leaves to the greatest beauty. And then that tree went to an eternal garden and there it stood as if standing in prayer and as if it was giving thanks to the Lord. And then it went away from that place and returned to the street from which it had been taken, and there it found none of those who celebrated the feast of the faith. And in their presence, it went up to Heaven by its great power, sitting at the righthand of God the Father, and the image of that tree remained always in the street in which it had been first taken. Afterwards, indeed, Marie was thinking in her heart what kind of feast this could be. And the response was given to her by the Blessed Paul the Apostle, saying: "This is the feast of the Catholic faith which we are celebrating because of the failure of the messengers of the Church, and for the purpose of placating the wrath of God which has been promised against those just as you will hear immediately. For John, your confessor, has asked you which liturgy we are saying in our celebration. To us, however, we are allowed to say all the liturgies which pertain to the Catholic faith, so that the chaplain messengers of the churches might be able to understand all the liturgies, and the laity might believe firmly, and that everyone might work steadfastly." But afterwards, the community which had celebrated the festival for eight days came before the throne of God, and they all placed themselves as if they were prostrate on the ground. And everyone at the same time cried out to God for mercy for the messengers. And God responded to them, saying: "Oh my most beloved children, we ourselves know your good gratitude about the service which you did for us because of the failure of the messengers who were made slaves to sin, and to sin they will be subjected. However, we commanded the king of France that he should renew the status of the militant Church, which is owed, and he wants to do nothing for us. [d] We shall depose them from their seats in the midst of their subjects and there will be some of them who will die in large rivers of blood, and our people will be true martyrs. And others will die in the blood of iniquity, and there will arise for them infernal punishments, and others will live as true confessors; and the trees will flourish and bear fruit, and when dry they will fall into the fire." And then Marie saw that the saints were gathering together the bones of many, and on them they were placing fire and they were burning the bones in this way; but the aforementioned saints were asking from God the end of

the hundred years before the sentence should be given.<sup>42</sup> The Lord replied to them that they will have no ending except as much as the messenger will endure in his mortal life by the method of placing his hand over his head only. And after his death they themselves will not know the day nor the hour when he will come. “And he will endure such a sentence of this type given through us right up until the Militant Church will be led back to the boundaries in which we sent him away, after which we sent to them the Holy Spirit. Afterwards our legitimate children, true confessors, who remain, will raise up the Church again more than it was raised before the ascension of Jesus Christ. And we will reveal to them exceedingly concerning our support. [e] Indeed, they should value the messengers because it has been more secure for them, or because they themselves may repair the Church, or because their subjects may repair it in their absence, and we will send our sentence over the land of religion amongst those who are called religious. And religion is not in them except by means of our love for them which permitted their own religion which it [love] promised to us to let it hold because of their failures;<sup>43</sup> we will send such a great famine over the land and so great that there will not be anyone either small nor great who is able to be satisfied. And we will punish the land because its growing fruits will be great. And because of this let the people who charge interest not rejoice because fruits of this kind will be useless, and none will be beneficial. And let them bind together the leaders who came well before them to such great wickedness against our will, and let them not sustain them in their unfairness because we have sent many tribulations to the world because of their sins or because of their failing of religion which is not seen among them. Let the king of France be warned, and his other leaders let them examine what kind of punishment they might receive from those who supported their enemies, we will carry out a similar one [punishment] concerning those who support them in their iniquities.”

*In the margins:*

[a] From the creation of the soul of the Antichrist

[b] Note how the Antichrist will be known while he is a child.

[c] Note well, from the Antichrist who will acquire the king of France and twelve peers of France.

[d] Note concerning the king of France to be set aside.

[e] Note for the restoration of the Church.

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<sup>42</sup> Perhaps referencing Revelation 6:10, when the martyrs ask God how long it will be before they are avenged.

<sup>43</sup> This sentence was unclear in the Latin. It reads: *et religio non est in eis nisi amore nostri qui licet religionem suam quam nobis promiserit tenere teneat propter defectum ipsorum.*

## **The Twelfth Vision**

In the year as above on the feast of All Saints,<sup>44</sup> at the hour of Mass, Marie saw a certain vision of the fiery sky around the throne of the Holy Trinity. Indeed, Christ was proceeding with the company of all the male and female saints of Paradise. And she saw Christ receiving from God the Father a multitude of swords, and he gave one to whichever saint he wanted. And they received them through a manner of great pain and sadness because they had never seen anything of a similar size. And everyone simultaneously laid down their swords in one part. And returning to circling the throne as before, they cried out to the Lord with [a] great pain, as it appeared, seeking two things: that it might be pleasing to shorten the time between us to six months so that Judgement Day may come quickly, so that they might have their bodies with them which they had for a long time desired to have. Second was that God would have pity on the messengers. And before then none was given back to them. And then the blessed John the Evangelist called Marie by her name and said to her: “Daughter Marie, come to me. I say to you that I am sad and stupefied about this, that the messengers are not correcting themselves in their lives nor do they fear God. I believe that you are able to understand sufficiently as much as we can that Judgement Day is approaching every day. And I am waiting to see what will come of my teaching of which I have spoken to you elsewhere.” Then Marie heard the same shout which was made by the male and female saints again in the evening, shouting to the Lord as they previously did in Mass. And then Marie begged the blessed John saying: “Father, speak to me if it pleases you, what is the meaning of this which you, saints of God, received today, namely, swords from our Lord Jesus Christ?” And then the blessed John responded, saying: “Daughter, it is not for me to clarify for you the teaching about this to you. But tomorrow you will come to that place, and you will hear as much as it pleases God.” Truly, the next day on the commemoration of the faithful souls<sup>45</sup> Marie saw first four angels carrying the altar of Heaven to Purgatory. And the blessed Martin was with those many other saints about whom for now no mention should be made. And there all punishments ceased from the evening of All Saints Day up to the next evening. And the blessed Martin was ordained there by the Lord to receive the souls existing in Purgatory of all the good people sent there by the messengers. And on that altar, there were various homes amongst which there was one special one that was by manner of protection in which the holy masses were received, transmitted there through these

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<sup>44</sup> 1 November 1399.

<sup>45</sup> All Souls Day, 2 November 1399.

messengers; and in the other homes different kinds of gifts were received in different ways. And in that hour no soul was considered. But they were all standing in prayer praying for the messengers, and in particular for those who were doing good things for them. Then again, Marie saw and heard just as she had previously heard and seen on the preceding day. Indeed, Marie heard God the Father speaking, saying to His Son: “Son, we have given to you judgement over the messengers; carry out your duty when it is pleasing to you.” The Son responded to His Father, saying: “Father, you have given to them some time and may it be pleasing to you to hold it and wait for it.” And then the Father said to the Son: “This is up to you; do what you want. I say to you that they are selling you more wickedly than Judas did; let them submit to you or be allowed less than what he did. And they are crucifying you much longer than the Jews did. And therefore, so that our most beloved children should not fail to realise the word, we will deliver it to them a little more clearly.” And thus, this is declared: “But if Judas, Pilate, and the Jewish people had been so honest in faith and had believed like even themselves, and if only they had believed also the passions of the holy martyrs and the confessions of the holy confessors, then they never would have crucified Christ as they did.” And then the Holy Spirit spoke, saying: “Two kind people, we yield to Jesus Christ the Son of God, who is the third person, that He does not want the death of a sinner, but that he [the sinner] might turn back and live.” And then the Son of God responded to Him: “Love, you do your duty the best, and you are the most criticised of us three by them. Therefore, let Him [the Holy Spirit] go and do His own duty of justice.” “You know well that we do not want the death of the sinner, because it is for a long time that we have warned them.” And then the Lord Jesus gave the instruction to all the saints mentioned above that is written on the sword, which each one had laid down his sword which he had received from Him: [b] “It will be said this was for Paris.” And just as Christ commanded, thus it was fulfilled. Afterwards at the hour of Vespers in the celebration of the souls she saw the blessed Martin with the company of those with whom he had been sent to Purgatory making offerings to God, saying: “Sweetest Omnipotent Father, may it please you to accept these good things, the masses or gifts to the poor, namely your captives in Purgatory, and distribute to them according to your holy will.” And then the Lord Jesus received those things according to the command of the Father Himself and distributed them according to His pleasure. And He considered those who had completed their punishments and He sent them to look for those same ones who were offering these good things to Him. And to those who were still remaining in their punishments, He sent a greeting and a blessing by sending to them a figure or a type of His precious body. When they all saw it, everyone was utterly amazed and most of all those who had been there for a thousand years and more, who had never previously

had such great joy. And there were those with great joy above who had been considered and led before the throne of God and had been received joyously by the saints of God with great glory, which may Christ Jesus grant to us, He who is blessed for all ages. Amen.

Therefore, all these things and all the other revelations which Marie related, she herself laid down for the correction of the Holy Mother the Church and of all those whom it concerns. And at the moment of her death, she held and asserted them to be true and revealed to her by God. And in that faith, she departed to the Lord on a Sunday, at the hour of Mass, eight days later than Saint Martin, in the year of our Lord 1399.<sup>46</sup>

*In the margins:*

[a] The saints asked for two things.

[b] Note against Paris.

End.

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<sup>46</sup> 16 November 1399.