

**Marian Virtues and Margery Kempe:**  
**The Influence of Carmelite Devotion to the Virgin**

**1. Margery's Devotion to the Virgin**

Medieval devotion to the Virgin Mary is one of the most disseminated, dynamic and popular aspects of late medieval spirituality.<sup>1</sup> Margery Kempe's devotion to the Virgin is grounded in this widespread Marian devotion, and it permeates the *Book of Margery Kempe*.<sup>2</sup> References to the Virgin in the *Book* are roughly categorized into three aspects of the Virgin: the Virgin as the Mother of Christ; the Virgin as the Bride of Christ;<sup>3</sup> and the Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse<sup>4</sup> – all of which are established in the late medieval culture of Marian devotion and elucidate the virtues that the Virgin embodies.

Although Margery's Marian devotion is not remarkable in the context of late medieval piety, the relationship between the Virgin and Margery is uniquely intimate. It is first mentioned in her talk with Richard of Caister (d.1420), the Vicar of St Stephen's, during her visits to the religious in Norwich. Margery confides to him that the Virgin and the saints visit her in her meditations.<sup>5</sup> She also recounts that, at Christ's request to tell Margery of the greatness of his love, his Mother, the Queen of Mercy,<sup>6</sup> makes various aspects of their close relationship available to Margery: "My derworthy dowtyr, I bryng þe sekyr tydyngys, wytnessyng my swet Sone Ihesu wyth alle awngelys ... Dowtyr, I am thy modyr, þi lady, | and thy maystres for to teche þe in al wyse how þu schalt plese God best" (chap. 21, p. 50, lines 6-11). When the Virgin appears to Margery, she comes to comfort and strengthen her and at times she gives instructions.<sup>7</sup>

Their relationship precipitates the inner dynamic of Margery's spiritual development as she strives to acquire the Marian virtues. By meditating on the life of the Virgin, Margery deepens her understanding of the humility and patience revealed in the Incarnation and aspires to follow the Virgin, who stands as a model for the beatific salvation that awaits the devout after the sorrow of the

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<sup>1</sup> See further Yrjö Hirn, *The Sacred Shrine: A Study of the Poetry and Art of the Catholic Church* (London: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 171-480; Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage, 1983); Emile Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Late Middle Ages: A Study of Medieval Iconography and Its Sources* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), esp. chap. 4, pp. 136-210. *The New Catholic Encyclopedia* (to be abbreviated NCE), 18 vols (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 'Devotion to Blessed Virgin Mary', IX, 364.

<sup>2</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. by Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, vol. 1, EETS OS 212 (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1940; repr. 1961), hereafter the *Book* in the text and BMK in footnotes. All citations to Margery Kempe are from this edition and will be followed by chapter, page and line number.

<sup>3</sup> In the late Middle Ages the Virgin's identity as the Bride of Christ became increasingly popular through the mystical interpretation of the Song of Songs. For the exegetical tradition, see E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); and Anne W. Astell, *The Song of Songs in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990).

<sup>4</sup> See Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982), 'The Woman in Revelation XII', pp. 375-77. See NCE, 'Blessed Virgin Mary, I', IX, 342.

<sup>5</sup> BMK, chap. 17.

<sup>6</sup> For the Queen of Mercy, see p. 19 below.

<sup>7</sup> The popular representation of St Anne in which she is teaching the young Virgin probably stimulated Margery's image of the Virgin teaching Margery as a spiritual daughter. For discussion of this iconography, see Wendy Scase, 'St Anne and the Education of the Virgin: Literary and Artistic Traditions and their Implications', in *England in the Fourteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1991 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by Nicholas Rogers, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, III (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1993), pp. 81-96.

Crucifixion. The *Book* shows how Margery makes spiritual progress by meditating on the Virgin.<sup>8</sup>

Margery acquires her knowledge of all that the Virgin represents from various sources. But the spiritual thrust would have been reinforced especially by Alan of Lynn, a Carmelite. Alan, who remained a spiritual adviser and faithful friend throughout Margery's life, may have had a tremendous influence on Margery's spirituality.<sup>9</sup> Although the *Book* does not state that Margery was definitely familiar with the Carmelite Marian devotion and liturgy, her long association with Alan may have deepened her understanding of the Marian virtues expounded in the Carmelite theological writings and led her to ponder on the events of the Virgin's life as they are celebrated in the Carmelite liturgy.<sup>10</sup>

The influence of mendicant spirituality on Margery, especially that of the Franciscans, has been discussed by scholars: Clarissa W. Atkinson places Margery's religious sensibilities in a Franciscan devotional tradition; and Denise Despres explores the influence of Franciscan spirituality on her meditative experience.<sup>11</sup> But the influence of the Carmelite spirituality on her has not been fully explored. In this paper, I first trace Margery's association with her contemporary Carmelites. Then, focusing on Marian virtues latent in Margery's meditations on the early life of the Virgin and infant Christ, I will show how the Carmelite devotion to the Virgin illuminates her meditations. Lastly I will argue that the Marian virtues which nurture Carmelite spirituality illuminate the path Margery pursues as the bride of Christ.

## 2. The Carmelites' Presence in Margery's Life

Having its origins in a group of contemplative hermits living on Mount Carmel, the Carmelite Order was admitted among the ranks of the mendicants in Europe by the thirteenth century. With this change, the Carmelite Marian devotion in Europe underwent rapid development and became a characteristic of the Order, as it dedicated its new churches to the Virgin and established Marian confraternities. The Order's assertion and defence of its Marian title had been the focus of Carmelite treatises since the Order's foundation; the constitutions of 1294 declared that the Order was to be identified by its official name, *Fratres Beatæ Mariæ de Monte Carmeli*.<sup>12</sup> Although the nature of medieval popular devotion is profoundly Marian, the Carmelites had their own specific focus which was well-established in their lifestyle and worship by the close of the fourteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The life of the Virgin is meditated in the contexts of the Passion (chapters 78-81) and the Purification (chapter 82).

<sup>9</sup> Allen identifies Alan as one of Margery's principal confessors. See BMK, p. 259, n.6/9. But Margery does not specifically mention this in the *Book*. Janette Dillon argues that, despite not being her confessor, Alan seems to stand in the analogous role of spiritual director, which may or may not include hearing confession. See 'Holy Women and their Confessors or Confessors and their Holy Women? Margery Kempe and Continental Tradition', in *Prophets Abroad: The Reception of Continental Holy Women in Late-Medieval England*, ed. by Rosalynn Voaden (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996), pp. 115-40, (p. 127, n.38).

<sup>10</sup> Valerie Edden confirms that there are possibilities that Margery knew the Carmelite liturgy through her contact with Alan of Lynn. I would like to thank Dr. Edden for sharing her knowledge with me.

<sup>11</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983); Denise Despres, *Ghostly Sights: Visual Meditation in Late-Medieval Literature* (Norman, OK: Pilgrim Books, 1989).

<sup>12</sup> See NCE, 'Carmelites', III, 118. For the Carmelites in general, see Joachim Smet, *The Carmelites: A History of the Brothers of Our Lady of Mount Carmel*, vol.1, *Ca. 1200 A.D. until the Council of Trent* (Rome: Carmelite Institute, 1975).

<sup>13</sup> Valerie Edden argues that in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, there were two strands in Carmelite

Connections between Margery and her contemporary Carmelites have been pointed out by scholars.<sup>14</sup> Margery's contact with the Carmelites is apparent from the references to the friars in her *Book*: those who appear are Alan of Lynn, William of Southfield, who is mentioned as a White Friar in Norwich, and Thomas Netter of Walden. William expressed an interest in Margery's spiritual experiences when she visited him for guidance. Margery was probably attracted by William's reputation for both devotion to the Virgin and mystical experience.<sup>15</sup>

Alan of Lynn seems to have been the greatest influence on Margery. Alan, a native of Lynn, was born in c.1348 and became a doctor of divinity at Cambridge. Back in Lynn he was known as a reader in divinity at the community of St Mary Magdalen on the Gaywood Causeway in Lynn.<sup>16</sup> Alan was learned in the Latin and Greek fathers and was an industrious compiler of indexes,<sup>17</sup> among which he is recorded as having made indexes of the revelations and prophecies of St Bridget of Sweden and of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Stimulus Amoris*.<sup>18</sup>

The *Book* shows that he befriended, encouraged and supported Margery and believed in her revelations.<sup>19</sup> His interest in her spirituality lends credibility to the authenticity and veracity of her religious experiences. He comforts and encourages her and testifies to the truth of her revelations. In the Proem, Margery recalls that a white friar,<sup>20</sup> presumably Alan, was keen to write down her spiritual experience for her: 'þis creatur had greet cownsel for to don wryten hir tribulacyons & hir felingys, and a Whyte Frer proferyd hir to wryten frely yf sche wold. And sche was warnyd in hyr spyrit þat sche xuld not wryte so sone' (Proem, p. 6, lines 7-11). Another episode tells us that Alan was scrupulous in judging the authenticity of her experience. When hearing mass in the church of St Margaret, Margery was struck by a stone and a piece of wood fallen from the vault but was miraculously preserved. Alan investigated the episode in detail, regarded it as a great miracle and wanted God to be glorified.<sup>21</sup>

Alan's and Margery's friendship is challenged by the events of her life in which she is an outcast in her community for her eccentric behaviour. Margery recounts in chapter 61 that William Melton,

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spirituality: their reflection on their origins with Elijah on Mount Carmel as hermits dedicated to the contemplation of heavenly matters and their claim that Mary was their patron. These two strands were intricately linked in their writings. See 'The Mantle of Elijah: Carmelite Spirituality in England in the Fourteenth Century', in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition: England, Ireland, and Wales*, Exeter Symposium VI, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1999), pp. 67-83 (p. 68).

<sup>14</sup> See J.P.H. Clark, 'Late Fourteenth-Century Cambridge Theology and the English Contemplative Tradition', in the *Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, Exeter Symposium V, ed. by Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992), pp. 1-16; esp. pp. 13-14 for Alan of Lynn.

<sup>15</sup> Bale recounts in *Anglorum Heliades* that William Southfield was given to supernatural visitations by the Virgin, in which she participated in his Hours. See Allen, BMK, p. 278, n.41/2-3 and Appendix III, VIII, pp. 374-75.

<sup>16</sup> See Margaret Gallyon, *Margery Kempe of Lynn and Medieval England* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1995), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> See *A Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500*, ed. by A. B. Emden (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 381-82 for the list of his works credited by John Bale.

<sup>18</sup> His knowledge of St Bridget is significant for Margery's veneration of the Swedish saint. For the influence of Bridget on Margery, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Book of Margery Kempe: A Study of Meditations in the Context of Liturgy, Devotional Literature and Iconography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2001), section II, chap. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Alan was on her side during the period of the heresy trial: On her way to London to obtain a letter and seal of the Archbishop of Canterbury in the final stage of the heresy trial, she came to West Lynn and sent to Lynn for her husband, for Master Robert Spryngolde and for Master Aleyn and told them in part of her tribulations. See BMK, chap. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Allen first identified 'a Whyte Frer' as Alan of Lynn, see BMK, p. 259, n.6/9.

<sup>21</sup> See BMK, chap. 9, p. 22, lines 11-22.

a distinguished Franciscan friar, moved to Lynn and turned against her crying at his preaching, blaming it on ‘a cardiakyl er sum oper sekenesse’ (chap. 61 p. 151, lines 8-9). Margery specifically notes that a worthy doctor of divinity, a White Friar, who had known her many years and believed that God’s grace was at work in her, took with him a bachelor of law,<sup>22</sup> went to Melton and tried in vain to persuade him that her crying was a gift of God.<sup>23</sup> In chapter 69, she recounts that Melton preached openly against her crying, but she presents herself as supported by Alan and Robert:

So owr Lord of hys mercy ... prouydy[d] for hir, steryng þe spiritys of tweyn good clerkys þe wech longe & many gerys had knowyn hir conuersacyon and al hir perfeccyon, made hem mythy & bolde to spekyn for hys party in excusyng þe seyde creatur, | bothyn in þe pulpit & be-syden wher þei herd any-thing meuyd a-gen hir, strengthyng her skyllys be auctoriteys of Holy Scriptur sufficiently, of wech clerkys on was a White Frer, a doctowr of diuinite. Þe oper clerk was a bachelor of lawe canon, a wel labowrd man in Scriptur. (chap. 69, pp. 167-68, lines 30-37/1-4)

An encounter with Netter, however, has adverse consequences for Margery. Netter, a Prior Provincial of the Carmelite Order, was a vigorous opponent of Lollards, and he was cautious of the laity taking too much interest in the study of Scripture.<sup>24</sup> Netter imposed a ban on Master Alan, forbidding him to speak with Margery or to answer any inquiries she might have relating to Scriptures, for Alan was ‘to conuersawnt wyth þe sayde creatur, for-as-mech as he supportyd hir in hir wepyng & in hir crying & also enformyd hir in qwestyons of Scriptur whan sche wolde any askyn hym’ (chap. 69, p. 168, lines 6-9).<sup>25</sup> Margery writes that she deeply deplores the ban: it deprives her of access to the scriptures and of spiritual comfort from Alan. Yet, the ban imposed by Netter paradoxically reveals that Alan was a vehicle for Margery’s scriptural education and that the nature of their relationship is one of those between a spiritual mentor and a student.

A change in the Carmelites’ life style gives a convincing context to Margery’s close connection with the friars. The Carmelites maintained the preeminence of contemplation at the root of their spirituality,<sup>26</sup> but when they moved to Europe they underwent a change influenced by the evangelical movement that was promoted by the thirteenth century mendicants. They established themselves in urban areas<sup>27</sup> and became involved in pastoral duties as confessors or spiritual

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<sup>22</sup> Presumably, he is Robert Spryngolde, parish priest of St Margaret’s Church and her confessor. His early response to her spiritual experience was one of scepticism. At times his reaction to her religious fervour is sharp and he directs her towards quiet meditation. See BMK, chap. 88, pp. 217-18. Yet Margery tells the Mother of Mercy that she prefers him as her companion in heaven and prays that he should be rewarded in heaven. See BMK, chap. 8, p. 20.

<sup>23</sup> See BMK, chap. 61, p. 150.

<sup>24</sup> On Netter, see Margaret Aston, *Lollards and Reformers: Images and Literacy in Late Medieval Religion* (London: Hambledon, 1984), pp. 65-68.

<sup>25</sup> Although his name is not mentioned, he is identified with the Provincial who visited Lynn for the Chapter held there as Margery records in her *Book*. The ban was lifted shortly after Alan of Lynn recovered from great sickness. See chap. 69.

<sup>26</sup> The rule written between 1206 and 1214 by Albert of Vercelli, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, shows the Carmelites leading an eremitical life, and practising perpetual abstinence, fasts and silence. It stresses collective and individual solitude which helps the religious pursue union with God through continuous prayers. See NCE, ‘Carmelite Spirituality’, III, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Innocent IV, by the apostolic letter *Quae honorem Conditoris* of Oct. 1, 1247, introduced a change in the Carmelites’

advisers. John XXII, by the bull *Sacer ordo vester* (1316), allowed them the following activities: teaching, preaching, spiritual direction, and the parochial apostolate.<sup>28</sup> Thus a shift away from an eremitic lifestyle towards a mendicant one brought about a more binding contact between the friars and the laity.

Margery gives us a glimpse into their evangelical activity in England. Chapter 89 of the *Book* mentions her concern about the success of the sermon prepared by Master Alan for Advent.<sup>29</sup> In their pursuit of active and contemplative lives, the Carmelites, now the urban friars, were responsible for pastoral care, such as public preaching. The Order's apostolic activity, as well as the public recitation of the Office by clerics, had an influence on the laity. The message conveyed by the friars' activities was transmitted to devout and enthusiastic lay people like Margery, who pursued a life that may well be termed a mixed life.<sup>30</sup>

### 3. Margery's Infancy Meditation

The sequence of meditation on the early life of the Virgin and infant Christ (chapters 6 and 7) is dedicated to the Virgin, whose obedience ushers in the Incarnation of Christ. The virtues of the Virgin illuminate the moral dimension of this meditation: her obedience to the will of God in her assent at the Annunciation, and her humility, poverty, and chastity are particularly stressed in Margery's meditation.

The sequence concentrates on the Virgin's role as the Mother of God. It begins with her nativity—an event interpreted as a preparation for the mission entrusted to her by God. The Virgin belongs to a group of children whose special birth is effected by the intervention of God.<sup>31</sup> Margery also meditates on the Visitation and the birth of St John the Baptist,<sup>32</sup> unfolding a special significance of the births effected by the power of God to prepare for the birth of Christ in the redemptive scheme.

Margery's meditation on the early life of the Virgin draws on apocryphal texts such as the *Protevangelium Jacobi*, the *Evangelium de Nativitate Mariae*, and the *Evangelium de Nativitate Mariae et Infantia Salvatoris* or the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*.<sup>33</sup> The apocryphal legend in general emphasises Mary's perpetual virginity: it introduces Joachim and Anna, a pious couple who grieve

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life style. See NCE, 'Carmelite Spirituality', III, 114.

<sup>28</sup> *Bullarium carmelitanum*, ed. by Eliseo Monsignani and José Alberto Ximénez, 4 vols (Rome, 1715-1768), I, 57. The influence on lay piety of the Carmelites from the English universities is discussed by Bruce P. Flood. See 'The Carmelite Friars in Medieval English Universities and Society, 1299-1430', *Recherches de Théologie ancienne et médiévale*, 55 (1988), 154-83 (pp. 168-70).

<sup>29</sup> See BMK, chap. 89, p. 219. Christ revealed to her that Alan would preach a holy sermon and so he did.

<sup>30</sup> The *Book* shows that Margery pursues the mixed life towards the end of her life. See my doctoral thesis, section V.

<sup>31</sup> The pattern of special birth is seen in the birth of Isaac to Abraham and that of St John the Baptist to Elizabeth and Zachary.

<sup>32</sup> See BMK, chap. 6, p. 19, lines 1-4.

<sup>33</sup> See *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, ed. by J.K. Elliott (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), pp. 46-99; Hirn, pp. 194-213. Emile Mâle notes that Vincent of Beauvais and Jacobus de Voragine took the apocryphal events from the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew. See *The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century*, trans. by Dora Nussey (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 238-39. See also Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, 3 vols (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1957), II, Part 2, 175-76. The popularity of the life of the Virgin is attested by a proliferation of visual representations. Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel, Padua, which represent the narrative details in parallel with the early life of Christ, provide a fine example.

over their childlessness but finally receive the promise of a holy child through messenger angels. The Virgin's parents are often represented as too old for procreation to buttress belief in God's intervention in her conception.

The ascetic idea of purity is prominent in portrayals of Mary's early life. When the child is three years old her parents dedicate her to the temple: she then begins service to the Lord until she is twelve. While in the temple she lives in a purified room and receives food from the hand of an angel, so that she is not defiled by any earthly food.<sup>34</sup> During the infancy meditation Margery participates in Anne's care for Mary until the Mother of God is twelve. The white clothing and kerchiefs, which Margery, as a handmaiden, procures for the Virgin parallel the idea of purity stressed in the apocrypha.

Margery's meditation on the infancy of Christ follows basically the narrative sequence of Luke's gospel. But the presence of the Virgin at John's birth suggests the influence of the *Golden Legend* on Margery. Voragine narrates that the Virgin's visit to Elizabeth was prolonged so that she might be present at the birth of the Forerunner.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, Margery specifically meditates that the Virgin lifts the newborn child from the earth, acting as a nursemaid. *The Golden Legend* points out this gesture as one of nine special and singular privileges that the Forerunner of Christ enjoyed at his birth: 'the mother of the Lord lifted him from the earth'.<sup>36</sup> It enhances the significance of John's birth in the story of the Incarnation. More importantly, the humility of the Virgin shown in this gesture probably incites Margery's eagerness to imitate the Virgin's humility in her imaginative role as the Virgin's handmaid at the Nativity.<sup>37</sup> In the meditation Margery busily acts as the Virgin's handmaid, making arrangements for the lodging and getting 'fayr whyte clothys & kerchys' (chap. 6, p. 19, lines 13-14) to swaddle the infant Christ.

The infancy meditation fully reveals the Virgin's identity as the Mother of God. Yet the motifs of the Virgin as the Bride and as the Woman of the Apocalypse, though to a lesser extent, are also present in this meditation. Margery meditates on the bliss of heaven,<sup>38</sup> which is often symbolised by the Coronation of the Virgin as the bride of Christ. The flow of her meditation from the Nativity to the bliss of heaven elucidates the theme of mystical espousal, for the Annunciation is traditionally understood as marking the first espousal between Christ and the Virgin. The infancy of Christ projects the culminating union between Christ and the Virgin in the bliss of heaven.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See the *Protevangelium of James* in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>35</sup> Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. by William Granger Ryan, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), I, 330. Voragine assembled the readings of the official saints within the framework of the liturgical calendar – Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter, and the time after Pentecost and it was produced primarily as a manual for preachers. Margery's eagerness to hear sermons and her veneration of saints suggest that she probably knew about this popular work. That Margery's spiritual progress is stimulated by the seasons of the liturgical year also suggests the influence of Voragine on her.

<sup>36</sup> Voragine, I, 330.

<sup>37</sup> BMK, chap. 6, p. 19, lines 10-16.

<sup>38</sup> See BMK, chap. 7, p. 20.

<sup>39</sup> Bonaventure's fourth sermon on the Annunciation speaks of the creator reposing in the tabernacle of the virginal womb and making there a nuptial chamber for himself. See Bonaventure, *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae*, Sermo IV, *Opera Omnia*, edita studio et cura PP Collegii a S Bonaventurae, 10 vols (Quaracchi, 1883-1902), IX (1901), 672: 'Requievit igitur omnium Creator in tabernaculo uteri virginalis, quoniam in eo statuit sibi cubiculum nuptiale, ut fieret noster frater'. [The Creator of all, therefore, rests in the tabernacle of the virginal womb, for the Creator set up a nuptial chamber in the tabernacle to become our brother.] All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own. Valerie Edden

The Virgin's immaculate virginity at the Incarnation is enhanced by the moral perfection of the Woman of the Apocalypse, who was thought to symbolise the Virgin's victory over the Devil and over the sin brought into the world by the Devil's temptation of Eve.<sup>40</sup> As we shall see, the virtues embodied in these aspects of the Virgin are the key to Margery's spiritual progress.

#### 4. Carmelite Liturgy and Margery's Infancy Meditation

Margery's infancy meditation could readily be stimulated by the liturgical cycle of Advent and the Nativity, as the season's liturgy inspires its verbal and visual iconography.<sup>41</sup> At the same time her association with the Carmelite friars suggests that her meditation is illuminated by the Carmelite liturgy, which emphatically celebrates the life of the Virgin.

The Marian character of the Carmelite liturgy is established in the standardized liturgy for universal observance in the Order compiled by Sibert de Beka in his *Ordinale*:<sup>42</sup> the liturgy was promulgated in the General Chapter of London in 1312 for use in the entire Order.<sup>43</sup> The *Ordinale* enjoins the Little Office of Our Lady in addition to the office of the day and commemorates the events of her life, from her miraculous conception to her assumption into heaven, thus showing a heightened awareness of devotion to the Virgin:<sup>44</sup> Purification of the Blessed Virgin (2 February); Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin (25 March); Assumption of the Blessed Virgin (15 August);<sup>45</sup>

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states that '[the Virgin's] womb was at once the place where Christ was conceived and brought to full humanity but also the marriage bed in her mystical union with him'. See 'Marian Devotion in a Carmelite Sermon Collection of the Late Middle Ages', *Mediaeval Studies*, 57 (1995), 101-29 (p. 113). See also Carol J. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982), p. 37. James Snyder argues that the 'Annunciation' panel executed by Jan van Eyck (c.1435-37: National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C.) depicts the Holy Ghost overshadowing the Virgin and the Child conceived in her womb: the function of this illumination is thought to signal the moment of 'the consummation of her marriage to God'. See *Northern Renaissance Art: Painting, Sculpture, the Graphic Arts from 1350 to 1575* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall; New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1985), p. 104. This relationship is the symbol of mystical union between Christ and his Church and ultimately between Christ and the human soul.

<sup>40</sup> See Nigel Morgan, 'Texts and Images of Marian Devotion in Thirteenth-Century England', in *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1989 Harlaxton Symposium*, ed. by W. M. Ormrod, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, I (Stamford: Paul Watkins, 1991), pp. 86-92.

<sup>41</sup> For the influence of the Sarum liturgy on Margery, see my doctoral thesis, section I, chapters 1 and 2.

<sup>42</sup> It is included in London, The Library of Lambeth Palace, MS. 193. See Montague Rhodes James, *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Manuscripts in the Library of Lambeth Palace: The Medieval Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1932), pp. 302-04. For the entire contents of the *Ordinale*, see *Ordinaire de l'Ordre de Notre-Dame du Mont-Carmel par Sibert de Beka*, ed. by Benedict Zimmerman (Paris: Alphonse Picard et Fils, 1910).

<sup>43</sup> The Carmelite liturgy develops from Albert's Rule of the Order which was given to the original hermits between 1206 and 1214 primarily to be recited on an individual basis. But the Carmelites' life and liturgy underwent a series of changes as they migrated from the Holy Land to western Europe and gradually took on a mendicant life style. For details of the development, see James Boyce, 'The Liturgy of the Carmelites', *Carmelus*, 42 (1995), 5-41 (pp. 15-16). For the early historical and liturgical development, see James John Boyce, '“Cantica Carmelitana”: The Chants of the Carmelite Office', 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, New York University, 1984), I, chap. 1.

<sup>44</sup> An Ordinal in the Middle Ages designates the feast to be observed on a given day and stipulates the incipit of each antiphon, psalm, responsory, chant or prayer to be used for each feast or ferial day. An Ordinal could offer detailed information concerning liturgical celebrations. A votive mass of Our Lady was said each Saturday and compline concluded each day with the singing of the *Salve Regina*. See Kevin J. Alban, 'Popular Marian Devotion and the Medieval English Carmelites' (unpublished essay for the Postgraduate Certificate in Marian Studies, Marian Study Centre, Durham, 1998), p. 9. Cf. Paschalis Kallenberg, *Fontes Liturgiae Carmelitanae* (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1962), pp. 104-05 for a description of the *Ordinale Ordinis Carmelitarum* preserved as Dublin, Trinity College, MS. 194. Boyce argues that the feasts celebrated in it include those derived from the rite of the Holy Sepulchre along with distinctive Marian feasts and those generally observed by the Roman Church. See Boyce (1995), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> The feast of the Assumption was the annual feast par excellence of the Order before the adoption of Our Lady of

Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (8 September); Conception of the Blessed Virgin (8 December) were observed with great solemnity.<sup>46</sup>

The feast of the Conception of the Virgin is prominent in the Carmelite liturgy. The general chapter at Toulouse directed the Conception to be observed as a solemn feast in 1306, and the *Ordinale* of Beka promulgated six years later says: *In Conceptione vel potius Veneratione sanctificationis beatae Virginis, sicut totum duplex.*<sup>47</sup> The feast reflects the Carmelite role in establishing this doctrine as well as its strong lexis of devotion to the Virgin. The influence of the Carmelite scholastic John Baconthorpe (d.1348) was considerable. Elected to Provincial from 1327 to 1333, he was known as a vigorous proponent of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception.<sup>48</sup>

More feasts of the Virgin were introduced in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> In 1369 octaves were added to the Carmelite calendar for the feasts of the Purification, the Annunciation and the Immaculate Conception.<sup>50</sup> The acceptance of the feasts of the Presentation and the Visitation of the Virgin by the General Chapter of Frankfurt in 1393 ‘solidified the Marian devotional aspect of the Carmelite rite as well as its endorsement of new feasts, especially ones in honor of Mary’.<sup>51</sup>

Relevant to the early life of the Virgin is the popularity of the cult of St. Anne in the late Middle Ages.<sup>52</sup> The Carmelites were keen to celebrate the mother of Mary, whose miraculous conception enhances the purity of the Virgin. The feast of St Anne was a double rite in the *Ordinale* of Beka, and in 1375 the General Chapter prescribed a commemoration of St Anne to be held after that of the Blessed Virgin.<sup>53</sup>

We learn about the Marian feasts celebrated in England from the English Carmelite Missal (London, British Library, MS. Additional 29704-5).<sup>54</sup> The *Sanctorale* commemorates Mary’s life

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Mount Carmel. See Archdale King, *Liturgies of the Religious Orders* (London: Longmans, Green, 1955), p. 275.

<sup>46</sup> See King, pp. 271-77. Edden notices that the Carmelite liturgy celebrates Mary’s life as a parallel to Christ’s life, particularly his infancy. See Edden (1999), p. 78.

<sup>47</sup> Zimmerman, p. 267. John Baconthorpe speaks of Pope John XXII (1316-34) celebrating the feast with his cardinals in the church of the Carmelites at Avignon, when a sermon was preached before the Sovereign Pontiff and his court. See King, pp. 276-77.

<sup>48</sup> The Carmelites enforce this doctrine because the tradition maintains that Elias foresaw, in the type of the little cloud ascending from the sea towards Mount Carmel, her who would be born free of sin, even of original sin and that at that moment he founded the Order in honour of the Virgin, who would be born without sin. See Augustine M. Forcadell, ‘The Feast of the Immaculate Conception in the Carmelite Liturgy’, *Sword*, 17 (1954), 184-93 (p.191).

<sup>49</sup> The Solemn Commemoration of the Virgin, sometimes known as the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel (16/17 July) and the Feast of the Three Maries (25 May) are distinctively Carmelite celebrations. See Edden (1999), p. 77 for the detail.

<sup>50</sup> See the 1369 Constitutions in *Constitutions des Grands Carmes*, ed. by Patrick de St Joseph and Marie-Joseph du Sacré Coeur, *Etudes carmelitaines*, 6 (1921), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Boyce (1995), p. 22.

<sup>52</sup> For the cult of St Anne, see *Interpreting Cultural Symbols: Saint Anne in Late Medieval Society*, ed. by Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1990), esp. ‘Introduction’, pp. 1-68.

<sup>53</sup> King, p. 280.

<sup>54</sup> See Margaret Rickert, *The Reconstructed Carmelite Missal: An English Manuscript of the late XIV Century in the British Museum (Additional 29704-5, 44892)* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952). According to Rickert, the description ‘would now read that the Missal was probably written at Whitefriars, London before 1391, and illuminated before 1398 by several hands (p. 23)’. Rickert, examining further the textual contents regarding the introduction of the Solemn Commemoration of the Virgin into the English Carmelite rite, concludes that the writing of the Missal was finished in or before 1391. See p. 44. See also Kathleen L. Scott, *Later Gothic Manuscripts: 1390-1490*, Part I & II, A Survey of Manuscripts Illuminated in the British Isles (London: Harvey Miller, 1996), Part II, p. 24.

from the Conception, Nativity, and Annunciation to the Assumption. The Nativity of the Virgin and that of St John the Baptist are observed with great solemnity,<sup>55</sup> suggesting the Carmelites' emphasis on the miraculous births which precede the Incarnation.

The iconography of the *Sanctorale* explicitly honours the life of the Virgin: 'all the six-line historiated initials are used for the feasts of the B[lessed] V[irgin] M[ary]: the Purification, the Annunciation, the Death and Assumption, the Birth of the Virgin, her Coronation among All Saints, and her Conception'.<sup>56</sup> The textual contents and iconography of the Missal show the Order's great veneration of the Virgin and their celebration of the virtues she embodies.

Two of the miniatures depicting the early life of the Virgin are relevant to Margery's infancy meditation.<sup>57</sup> The Birth of the Virgin is rendered with the homely details of Anna's bed chamber: a handmaid who swaddles the infant Mary with white cloths evokes the humility Margery cultivates in her meditation.<sup>58</sup> The Annunciation to the Virgin is illustrated in a simple standard manner, but the way the Virgin crosses her hands conveys her obedience and humility in the Incarnation – the virtues vital to Margery's spiritual progress.

## 5. Marian Virtues and Infancy Meditation

Although the Marian virtues celebrated by the Carmelites are shared commonplaces of the later medieval period,<sup>59</sup> her virtues expounded in the Carmelite treatises illuminate the moral dimension of Margery's infancy meditation. The writings of Baconthorpe, who actively promoted devotion to the Virgin, extol the Marian virtues and show the Carmelites' privileged relationship with the Virgin.

*Tractatus Super Regulam Ordinis Carmelitanum* is Baconthorpe's commentary on the Rule of St Albert, which prescribes an eremitic life of silence, solitude, poverty and obedience. The Albertine Rule does not mention the Virgin, but Baconthorpe illustrates how the virtues set out in the Rule are drawn from the life of the Virgin and thus attempts to vindicate the Marian title of the Order. Baconthorpe equates various virtues of the Rule with those of the Virgin, citing obedience, poverty, chastity, contemplation, silence, and discretion. He sets her up as a model to be imitated<sup>60</sup> and shows that their rule is a mirror of the Virgin's life and that he who follows the virtues subsumed in

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<sup>55</sup> See Rickert, p. 31 and p. 33.

<sup>56</sup> Rickert, p. 45. The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin (2 July) was not promulgated when this Missal was created. The prominence of the Feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel which is distinctively Carmelite is tenuous: the text for the Mass of the Commemoration is in half size lettering and there are only small decorative initials, while the texts for the Assumption are in full size lettering, with large illuminated initials and ornately decorated. This treatment suggests the importance the Carmelites give to the events of the life of the Virgin. See Rickert, pp. 39-40.

<sup>57</sup> For the detailed descriptions of the miniatures, see Rickert, pp. 103-14.

<sup>58</sup> See p. 7 above.

<sup>59</sup> For the Bridgettines' Marian devotion, see *The Myroure of oure Ladye*, ed. by John Henry Blunt, EETS ES 19 (London: N. Trübner, 1873; repr. Milwood, NY: Kraus, 1981); for that of the Franciscans, see John V Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977).

<sup>60</sup> Edden argues that a cycle of sermons in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Auct. F. inf. 1.3, does not extol the Virgin as an accessible role model. Possibly written by a Carmelite scribe for the Worcester priory, this cycle reflects the Carmelite devotion to the Virgin. But a recurrent image in the sermons is that of the Queen of Heaven and her power and strength are stressed in them. Baconthorpe, on the other hand, emphasises the humanity of Christ rather than abstract, cosmic and hierarchic aspects of God, and thus depicts the Virgin as an accessible mother to be imitated. See Edden (1995).

the Rule is eventually imitating the Virgin.<sup>61</sup>

The virtues of obedience, humility, poverty and chastity, which in the *Tractatus* are argued to be vital to the Virgin's exemplary qualities, provide Margery's infancy meditation with a moral framework. Baconthorpe argues that the Virgin demonstrates obedience in her submission to the divine command '*Ecce ancilla Domini*': '*In primis constat eam perfecte obedientem fuisse. Angelo enim nuntianti respondit: "Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum"*'. [It is particularly certain that she (the Virgin) is perfectly obedient, because she responds to the announcing Angel: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word'.]<sup>62</sup> As the supreme model of human obedience to the will of God, the Virgin at the Annunciation reveals profound humility dramatised in the mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>63</sup>

Her identity as '*ancilla*' further enhances her humility shown in the Visitation:

*Humilitatem servavit ad Deum, dicens: 'Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae', etc. Sic in regula debent subditi ad praelatum; unde ibi: 'Vos quoque ceteri fratres, priorem vestrum honorate humiliter'. Humilitatem tenuit ad minorem; cum enim esset mater Dei, tribus mensibus ministravit matri sui praeconis. Unde in regula instruuntur priores de humilitate sic: 'Illud semper habeatis in mente, quod Dominus ait in Evangelio: Quicumque inter vos voluerit maior esse, erit minister vester'.*

[The handmaid preserved her humility before God, saying because God has regarded the humility of his handmaid. So in the rule must subjects to their prelate; whence it is said there: 'You, brothers, honour your prelate with humility'. The Virgin was humble toward her inferior, for, although she was the mother of God, she administered for three months to the mother of His precursor. Thus in the rule, the superiors are instructed to have humility: 'Have mind that, as the Lord says in the gospel, whoever wants to be greater, must be your servant'.]<sup>64</sup>

Similarly Margery meditates on the Visitation with an emphasis on the Virgin's humility in her service to Elizabeth,<sup>65</sup> and it is the virtue of humility that gives Margery the impetus to cast herself in the role of '*ancilla*': she serves St Anne, looks after the Virgin at her birth, and continues the service until the Virgin goes away, probably, to the temple.<sup>66</sup> Margery is only too anxious to take on

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<sup>61</sup> See Flood, p. 169. See *Tractatus Super Regulam Ordinis Carmelitanum*, in *Medieval Carmelite Heritage: Early Reflections on the Nature of the Order*, ed. by Adrianus Staring (Rome: Institutum Carmelitanum, 1989), pp. 193-99. Baconthorpe's commentary on the Rule is edited by Joachim Smet. See 'Mary Mirrored in Our Rule', *Sword*, 7 (1943), 6-11.

<sup>62</sup> *Tractatus*, Staring, pp. 193-94.

<sup>63</sup> In emulating her obedience, the Carmelite Rule declares obedience to the Prior: "'*Priori obedientiam promittat quilibet aliorum, et promissam studeat operis veritate servare*". [All the other brothers should keep promise of obedience to the Prior and keep that promised obedience through true work.] See *ibid.*, p. 194. Arguably, Margery's own endeavour to follow Baconthorpe's commentary is seen in her obedience to religious authority, which Margery unflinchingly demonstrates throughout her life.

<sup>64</sup> *Tractatus*, Staring, p. 198.

<sup>65</sup> See p. 7 above.

<sup>66</sup> Margery's wish to stay in service to the Virgin is emphasised at certain points of the Virgin's life. In anticipating the

the role to busy herself for the three holy mothers and their children with the notion that she, too, with humility, is participating in the work of the Incarnation.

Chastity is another Marian virtue especially extolled in the *Tractatus*. Baconthorpe was firmly convinced that the Virgin fulfills the prophecy ‘*Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium*’ (Isaiah 7.14) by faithfully observing chastity<sup>67</sup> and thus ushers in the Incarnation. Margery’s concentration on the chaste conception and birth of the holy infants highlights this virtue, while the repetition of the white cloths enhances the virginal conception of Christ.<sup>68</sup>

Marian virtues are also explored in *Laus Religionis Carmelitarum*. Baconthorpe emphasises virginal conception, enumerating the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty – all of which are again relevant to the infancy meditation:

*In hoc ergo monte Carmeli secundum praedicta Maria noscitur **oboedientiam** exhibuisse, implendo quae dixit angelus, ut praemissum est; **castitatem** promississe, se sponsam Dei faciens; **paupertatem** elegisse, a mundanis ascendens. In salutatione angelica haec tria monstravit. **Oboedientiam** videlicet factis impleri volens quae dicebantur ei: ‘Fiat, inquit, mihi’, etc. **Continentiam** ostendit: ‘Virum, inquires, non cognosco’. **Paupertatem** manifestat sub ancillae nomine.*

[According to the fore-said account on Mount Carmel, we learn that Mary exhibited **obedience** to fulfill what the angel said (to conceive a divine child); she promised **chastity** as the bride of God; she chose **poverty**, transcending worldly things. She showed three things at the angel’s salutation. In hoping that what was told her would be fulfilled, she showed **obedience** by saying ‘Let it be’; **chastity** by saying ‘I do not know a man’; **poverty** by the name of a handmaid.]<sup>69</sup>

## 6. Marian Virtues as a Guide for Spiritual Progress

Marian virtues are useful as a guide for the Carmelites’ spiritual progress. Importantly, the Virgin’s virginity<sup>70</sup> is conceived by the Carmelites as the source of obedience, humility and chastity. Virginity illuminates the path the Carmelites pursue. As we shall see, it also gives an impetus to the inner dynamic of Margery’s spiritual maturity.

As a spiritual guide, the *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum* [*The Book of the First*

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conception of the Virgin, Margery says: ‘“I pray ȝow, Lady, ȝyf þat grace falle ȝow, forsake not my seruyse”’ (chap. 6, p. 18, lines 25-26); she even begs Elizabeth to pray for her: ‘þe creatur fel down on kneys to Seynt Elyȝabeth & preyd hir sche wold prey for hir to owyr Lady þat sche mygth do hir seruyse & plesawns’ (chap. 6, p. 19, lines 6-8).

<sup>67</sup> See *Tractatus*, Staring, p. 194: ‘*Constat eam castitatem fideliter servasse, de qua scriptum est: “Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium”*’. [It is certain that she faithfully remained chaste because it is written: ‘Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son’.]

<sup>68</sup> See pp. 6-7 above.

<sup>69</sup> *Laus*, Book 1, chap.vi, Staring, p. 222. Emphases are mine.

<sup>70</sup> For the medieval theology of virginity, see Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Brewer, 2001), pp. 16-40.

*Monks*] is considered another most significant work on early Carmelite spirituality.<sup>71</sup> ‘It situates the founding charism of the Order with Elijah and (to a lesser extent) Mary’<sup>72</sup> and came to be the principal book for spiritual reading for all Carmelites.

The *Institutio* explores the mystical itinerary for spiritual perfection into which the Carmelite Marian devotion is woven. As their pastoral duties increased in the later Middle Ages, the Carmelites faced the problem of sustaining an effective harmony between the contemplative life and apostolic activity. In this spiritual crisis, the *Institutio* was anxiously read and consulted.<sup>73</sup>

The book expounds a twofold aim in life: ‘to offer to God a heart holy and pure from all stain of sin [the purification of the heart]’; and ‘to taste in our hearts and experience in our minds, not only after death but even in this life, something of the power of the divine presence and the bliss of heavenly glory [the experience of God]’.<sup>74</sup> It further shows the path to perfection via the stages of purification: first, departure from this world and the renunciation of worldly matters, which allows openness to the word of God; second, going eastward, away from sin and self-will; third, seclusion in solitude and celibacy; fourth, separation from sin by charity and by growing in love. The four steps are a key to the dynamic of this life: they correspond to the Marian virtues of poverty, obedience, chastity and integration respectively.<sup>75</sup>

The purpose of discipline is to achieve perfect union with God. But the contemplative experience is only a glimpse of God in this life, and it is transitory. Therefore, perseverance, humility and ongoing conversion are required.<sup>76</sup> The itinerary of purification is thus meant to sum up the whole meaning of the religious life, and it also shows the process by which the religious come to spiritual maturity.

This process of purification could also lead the person to the highest virtue of the Virgin. Book 6 of the *Institutio* explores the Virgin’s relationship to the Carmelites and emphasises her virginity and

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<sup>71</sup> The *Liber de institutione primorum monachorum* (to be abbreviated the *Institutio*) is part of a collection of Carmelite works assembled by Felip Ribot (d.1391), Prior provincial of Catalonia, and known as *Decem libri de institutione et peculiaribus gestis religiosorum carmelitarum* (Ten Books about the Institution and Notable Deeds of the Carmelite Religious). Ten manuscripts are known today of Felip Ribot’s *Decem libri*. The most recent edition is that of Daniel of the Virgin Mary in the *Speculum Carmelitanum, sive historia Eliani Ordinis fratrum Beatissimae Virginis Mariae de Monte Carmelo*, 4 parts in 2 vols (Antwerp: Knobbari, 1680). The *Decem libri* was translated into English by Thomas Bradley Scrope (1390/1400 –1490) about the year 1434. This manuscript is found in London, The Lambeth Palace Library, MS. 192. Scrope’s translation in Lambeth MS. is edited by Philip Kenny, ‘An Edition of Bishop Thomas Scrope’s Fifteenth Century English Translation of *The Book of the Institution and Proper Deeds of Religious Carmelites* (Book 1)’ (unpublished master’s thesis, St Bonaventure University, 1965). Benedict Zimmerman maintains that the work was not known in England until after 1420. See Zimmerman, ‘Carmelites’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, ed. by Charles G. Herbermann and others, 16 vols (New York: Encyclopedia Press, 1907-14), III (1913), 354. In his young age, Scrope was preaching in Norwich; in 1425 he was a member of the Norwich Carmelite house; it is known that Thomas Netter sharply rebuked him for his eccentric piety. For the various evaluation of Scrope, see Kenny, pp. 19-22.

<sup>72</sup> *The Book of the First Monks: A Workbook*, prepared by Paul Chandler (Rome: private circulation for the Carmelites, 1992), p. 3. I would like to thank the Library of the Carmelite Friary Aylesford for allowing me to consult this workbook. See NCE, ‘Carmelite Spirituality’, III, 115; Paul Chandler, ‘Philippe Ribot’ in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire*, 17 vols (Paris: Beauchesne, 1937-1995), XIII (1988), 537-39.

<sup>73</sup> The popularity of the *Institutio* is attested by the fact that it was translated into French, Spanish and Middle English.

<sup>74</sup> *The Book of the First Monks*, ‘Summary and Commentary’, p. 9. For translation by Chandler, see pp. 36-37. See also NCE, ‘Carmelite Spirituality’, III, 115.

<sup>75</sup> See *The Book of the First Monks*, ‘Summary and Commentary’, pp. 10-14; translation, pp. 37-42.

<sup>76</sup> See *The Book of the First Monks*, ‘Summary and Commentary’, pp. 14-15; translation, pp. 42-46.

freedom from sin. It argues that her virginity allows her total openness to God's word. The Carmelites venerate the Virgin because she is *Virgo purissima*, the one in whom there are no obstacles to the working of God's grace.<sup>77</sup> The Virgin plays a crucial role in the fundamental dynamism of Carmelite life, which operates 'within the complex of intimately-related transforming values which are symbolised in virginity: love, purity of heart, readiness for the Word, total openness to God, service in the church'.<sup>78</sup>

Significantly, virginity is a major thematic concern for the entirety of Margery's meditational experience. Her obsessive desire for physical purity reflects a spiritual and moral strain of the late Middle Ages that evolved in the milieu in which 'discussions of sexual behavior in marriage ... centered upon the moral dangers inherent in marital intercourse, save for reproduction'.<sup>79</sup> Chastity was a virtue specially valued in the wake of Lateran IV, convened by Innocent III in 1215 to enforce the Church's moral reform.

Margery's desire to become a virgin causes her much pain: she takes vows of chastity with her husband for their souls' sake;<sup>80</sup> she boldly wears white, a colour symbolic of purity and chastity;<sup>81</sup> but it is literally an impossible ambition after twenty years of marriage and the birth of fourteen children. The post-conversion Margery was constantly struggling with the essential 'incompatibility of sexual activity and sacred power'.<sup>82</sup> Christ's colloquy with Margery on her pregnancy shows what great pain and distress Margery felt for this activity. Although Christ commends procreation: "Perfor is it no synne to þe, dowtyr, for it is to þe raþar mede & meryte, & þow xalt haue neuyr þe lesse grace, for I wyl þat þow bryng me forth mor frwte" (chap. 21, p. 48, lines 31-34), she is obsessed with the idea that wives are inferior to holy maidens who are exempt from sexual activities.

Nevertheless, Margery is also aware of a spiritual aspect of the Virgin's virginity, an aspect elucidated by the purity of heart expounded in the *Institutio*. Arguably Margery's spiritual progress can be explained by the itinerary of purification from the self-centred sinfulness to the ideal of contemplation<sup>83</sup> and action as she strives to acquire the virtue of spiritual purity and learns to govern herself, thus fulfilling her identity as what Christ termed 'a mayden in þi sowle' (chap. 22, p. 52, line 27). The maiden is synonymous with the bride of Christ, and a vow of virginity exemplified by the Virgin in Carmelite spiritual tradition provides a context for Margery's spiritual ambition.

In *Laus*, Baconthorpe elaborates the virtue of chastity and explains how the Virgin makes a vow

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<sup>77</sup> *The Book of the First Monks*, 'Summary and Commentary', p. 29.

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

<sup>79</sup> James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 503.

<sup>80</sup> See BMK, chap. 15, p. 34, lines 15-24. For the influence of female saints on Margery's decision to take a vow of chastity, see Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993), p. 207 and p. 264.

<sup>81</sup> See BMK, chap. 44, p. 104, lines 22-26.

<sup>82</sup> Clarissa W. Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1983), p. 176.

<sup>83</sup> Margery could have been influenced by the ideal of contemplative life based on this Carmelite text, but the manner of her own experience is idiosyncratic and does not conform to the contemplative life. Her style of devotion is grounded not on the aspiration towards the beatific vision attained through contemplative union but on the Franciscan meditation fuelled by highly visual imagination.

of virginity on Mount Carmel to become the bride of Christ:

*Legitur enim in quodam libello De Laude et Infantia Virginis ... quod Mariam puerulam sustulit angelus semel in montem Carmeli, cuius amoenitatem admirans puella quaesivit ab angelo, si paradisos esset. Cui angelus: 'Non sic, ait, sed pulchritudo montis huius data est tibi, ut sponsa Domini mei cum flore permanes virginitatis, et sic pacem reperiens homines transferat ad paradysum' ... In quo tempore caelestium mirifice se dedit contemplationi, atque se sponsam Dei cum voto virginitatis profitebatur de cetero permanere ... Et iterum angelus, quod conciperet, dicebat. Quapropter non incredula, sed maiori stabat admiratione, modum concipiendi quaerendo dicens: 'Quomodo fiet istud', etc.*

[In a book called Praise and Infancy of the Virgin ... (it is told that) an angel brought Mary as a little girl to the summit of Mount Carmel, and, admiring its beauty, she asked the angel if it were Paradise. The angel answered, 'No. But, you are endowed with the beauty of this mountain, so that you may remain, as the bride of my lord, with the flower of virginity and transfer people to paradise in peace' ... Then she dedicated herself to the contemplation of heavenly things wonderfully. And she confessed that she would stay a virgin as the bride of God with a vow of virginity ... Furthermore, the angel told her that she would conceive a child. Therefore, not being in any doubt, but remaining greatly surprised, and wondering how she should conceive (Christ), she said: 'How would it happen?', etc.]<sup>84</sup>

Though drawing on the imagery of the Song of Songs elsewhere in the *Laus*, Baconthorpe describes the Virgin's beauty in spiritual terms: he describes it as evoking 'asceticism and abstinence rather than sensual delight'.<sup>85</sup> In his commentary on 'I will go to the mountain of myrrh' (Song of Songs 4.6),<sup>86</sup> a popular reading for Marian feasts, Baconthorpe cites a passage of Gregory's homily, '*myrrha autem mortuorum corpora condiuntur* [The bodies of the dead are buried with myrrh]<sup>87</sup> and expounds: '*ad Mariam, de qua suscipiam carnem sepeliendam; quia 'myrrha ad Dominicam pertinet sepulturam', sicut dicit Gregorius super illud*' [I pray to Mary, I want to receive the flesh buried with Mary / myrrh, because Gregory says that myrrh is pertinent to the Lord's burial].<sup>88</sup> Given that Baconthorpe connected 'ad montem myrrhae' with '*ad Mariam*', his homily could be interpreted in the following way: 'since myrrh signifies burial, Mary / myrrh signifies the burial of the flesh'.<sup>89</sup> This interpretation leads him to conclude that devotion to Mary's virginal beauty provides the means of overcoming the temptations of the flesh.

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<sup>84</sup> *Laus*, book I, chap. iv, Staring, pp. 220-21.

<sup>85</sup> Edden (1999), p. 81.

<sup>86</sup> Vulgate: '*Vadam ad montem myrrhae*'.

<sup>87</sup> Gregory, *XL Homiliarum in Evangelia*, PL.76. 1112. Cf. Staring, p. 220, n.45-46.

<sup>88</sup> *Laus*, book I, chap. iii, Staring, p. 220.

<sup>89</sup> Edden (1999), p. 82.

The ascetic aspect of the Virgin's virginity fuels Margery's endeavour at making a vow of chastity in order to quench carnal desires and start a holy life as the bride of Christ. Augustine's well-established concept of chastity provides an account for Margery's conviction that virginity is the state most favourable to spiritual perfection: 'virtuous married women ... can be the bride of Christ, but unless they and their husbands agree to take a vow of chastity they are married to him not physically but spiritually'.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, the Carmelite treatise that considers virginity as the source of obedience elucidates Margery's renewed relationship with God that follows the vow of chastity. Margery's commitment to the will of God allows her to embrace the privilege as God's mouthpiece: she is empowered with the gift of spiritual instruction and prophecy: she answers to an unworthy monk about the salvation of his soul: "'ga, syr, yf ge wyl do aftyr my cownsel. Sorwyth for gowr synne, & I xal help gow to sorwyn; beth schrevyn þerof & forsake it wylfully. Leuyth þe offyce þat ge han wythowtynforth, & God schal geue gow grace for my lofe"' (chap. 12, p. 27, lines 4-8).

We learn from the accounts of her life that Margery is spiritually cleansed through tribulations and sufferings, through which her will becomes attuned with God's will.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, Margery receives much support from God in these crises. When she is slandered as a Lollard at Canterbury, she increases in ardour of love through a conversation with Christ in which he says:

'Derworthy dowtyr, lofe þow me wyth al þin hert, for I loue þe wyth al myn hert & wyth al þe mygth of my Godhed, for þow wer a chosyn sowle wyth-owt begynny[n]g in my syghte and a peler of Holy Cherch. My mercyful eyne arn euyr up-on þe. It wer vnpossibyl to þe to suffyr þe scornys & despytes þat þow schalt haue ne were only my grace supportyng þe'. (chap. 13, p. 29, lines 19-26)

Noticeably, Christ calls Margery 'a pillar of Holy Church'. A pillar is identified with a column in Christian iconography, and it traditionally signifies the Virgin, who as the Mother of the Christian community supports the Church like a pillar.<sup>92</sup> The transformation in Margery's perception of herself as being chosen and intimate with Christ leads her to present herself as capable of the charity expected of the Virgin. Her anchorite friend also 'seyd sche was Goddys owyn seruawnt and also he seyde sche was þe tabernakyl of God' (chap. 19, p. 46, lines 22-24) – both of which are traditional attributes of the Virgin.

Furthermore, Margery's relationship with the Virgin deepens to the point that she is visited by the Queen of Mercy who confirms the privileged nature of their relationship.<sup>93</sup> The Virgin's title as Queen of Mercy makes her intercession all the more efficacious because it signifies her double identity as the Mother of Mercy and the Queen of Heaven. Margery seems intentionally refer to this

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<sup>90</sup> *Holy Meidhad*, ed. by Bella Millet, EETS OS 284 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), p. xliii.

<sup>91</sup> Margery clusters the accounts of ordeals after her return from the Jerusalem pilgrimage.

<sup>92</sup> Jan van Eyck's 'Madonna in the Church' (c. 1437-38; Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin) evokes the Virgin-column similitude by the structural parallel between the large and column-like figure of the Virgin and the church building.

<sup>93</sup> See BMK, chap. 21, quoted on p. 1 above.

title to emphasise the special protection she enjoys from the Virgin.

Importantly, Margery invokes the Queen of Mercy<sup>94</sup> when Master Alan is critically ill during the time when Master Alan and Margery were banned from meeting by his Provincial and her confessor respectively.<sup>95</sup> Both of them, though reluctantly, accepted this embargo by virtue of obedience stressed in Carmelite Marian writings. Margery's prayer suggests that the Queen of Mercy derives from Alan's devotion to the Virgin, thus illuminating the particular influence of Alan:

'Gloriows Qwen of Mercy, haue mende what he was wont to seyn of þe in hys sermownys. He was wont to seyn, | Lady, þat he was wel blissyd þat had ȝow to hys frend, for, whan ȝe preyid, alle þe cumpany of Heuyn preyd wyth ȝow. Now for þe blisful lofe þat ȝe had to ȝowr Sone, late hym leuyn tyl þe tyme þat he hath leue to speke wyth me & I wyth hym, for now we arn put asundyr be obediens'. (chap. 70, pp. 169-70, lines 31-36/1-2)

The ordeal caused by the ban culminates in her reunion with Master Alan: they resumed their friendship at the dinner table of the lady who took a vow of chastity and was adorned with a mantle and a ring.<sup>96</sup> Margery could not speak for weeping and joy.<sup>97</sup> Master Alan too is presented as moved, for he gave her a pair of knives, in token that he would stand with her in God's cause, as he had done before.<sup>98</sup> The ceremony is symbolic of the path Margery pursues as the bride of Christ, inspired by the Carmelite emphasis on the Virgin's virginity. She also recounts that the dinner was 'sawcyd & sawryd wyth talys of Holy Scriptur' (chap. 70, p. 170, lines 22-23), an account which again reveals that Margery acquires sophisticated interpretations of the Scriptures through Alan.

Although Margery is most keen to emulate the Virgin as the bride of Christ, her association with the Carmelites could have stimulated her aspiration for purity symbolised in the image of the Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse. For, as the Carmelites actively advocated the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the Virgin's relationship with the Carmelites changed in the fifteenth century from that of patroness to that of the Virgin Immaculate and woman of the Apocalypse.<sup>99</sup>

The Apocalyptic woman is 'clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars' (Apocalypse 12.1)<sup>100</sup> but she is also suffering the pangs of childbirth and is

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<sup>94</sup> Although frequently invoked by Alan, this title is not distinctly Carmelite; I have found examples in the texts of an uncertain author. See *Patrologia Latina Database* published by Chadwyck-Healey, vol. 184, 1059D-1064D.

<sup>95</sup> For the details, see p. 5 above.

<sup>96</sup> See BMK, chap. 70 for the dinner with this anonymous lady.

<sup>97</sup> She also wept inasmuch as she found her feeling true and not deceptive.

<sup>98</sup> See BMK chap. 70, p. 170. For the knives, see Charity Scott Stokes, 'Margery Kempe: Her Life and the Early History of Her Book', *Mystics Quarterly*, 25:1/2 (1999), 9-67 (p. 38). Stokes speculates that it is possible that Alan was under instruction to sever his link with Margery, but she also gives instances of positive associations with gifts of knives in such medieval texts as the *Ancrene Wisse*, in which knives are recommended as suitable gifts for holy men.

<sup>99</sup> See Alban, pp. 12-13.

<sup>100</sup> It is tantalizing to see the attributes of the Apocalyptic Woman – the moon and the stars — surface in Margery's text. Margery recalls that when she was outcast from her community, her confessor, Master Robert, despairing of his powerlessness, came to her in a chapel of our Lady, called the Gesine, and uttered: ' "Margery, what xal ȝe now do ? Þer is no mor a-ȝen ȝow but þe mone & vij sterrys. An-ethe is þer any man þat heldith wyth ȝow but I a-lone" '(chap. 63, p. 155, lines 12-14). The confessor's word shows that as so many people in her community are against Margery, there are only the moon and stars left who are not against her. But the imagery of the moon and stars might allude to the Virgin as

confronted by the Dragon who is the Devil.<sup>101</sup> The radiance of the sun and the stars, in particular, parallels the Marian imagery in the *Flos Carmeli*, a popular Carmelite hymn to the Virgin. The whiteness associated with her is ‘not only that of *album*, “whiteness” but also that of *candor*, “radiance”’,<sup>102</sup> and the hymn ‘simultaneously praises Mary’s virginity, her fertility and her splendour (i.e. her brilliance and radiance)’.<sup>103</sup>

Indeed, the Virgin’s virginity does not merely mean her freedom from human sexuality: as the Virgin Mother of God she is literally fertile. The paradox of her fecund virginity is that it bears fruits of virtues not only in herself but in those who follow her through the process of purifying their hearts. Purity of heart ‘allows the word and grace of God to bear fruit in an authentic life’.<sup>104</sup>

The concept of the fruits of virtues illuminates one of the memorable events of Margery’s life. On one occasion, while being tried on suspicion of Lollard activity in York, Margery answers the clerk’s enquiry on the words: ‘*Crescite et multiplicamini*’:<sup>105</sup> “Ser, þes wordys ben not vndirstondyn only of begetyng of chyldren | bodily, but also be purchasyng of vertu, which is frute gostly, as be heryng of þe wordys of God, be good exampyl geuyng, be mekenes & paciens, charite & chastite, & swech oþer” (chap. 51, p. 121, lines 3-8). Margery enumerates the virtues that overlap with the Carmelite Marian virtues. She asserts that the person bears fruits of virtue in herself as well as being a fertile source of virtue in others. This interpretation of the Scriptures suggests that the Carmelite spiritual writings on the Virgin are submerged in Margery’s understanding of the Marian virtues.

Through her association with Alan of Lynn, Margery could absorb the Marian virtues of obedience, humility, chastity and charity symbolised in virginity. The nature of the virtues in the context of Carmelite Marian devotion examined above illuminates the way Margery pursues a spiritual vocation as the bride of Christ and cultivates the Marian virtues in herself.<sup>106</sup>

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the Woman of the Apocalypse. Despite the discrepancy that the Virgin as the Apocalyptic Woman is crowned with twelve, not seven, stars in the iconography, it is still tempting to see a connection between what the confessor meant by the symbols and the Virgin. Although not linking the phrase with the Virgin, Whiting refers to the *Book of the Duchess* as an example which involves the phrase. See Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases: From English Writings Mainly Before 1500* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 566; *The Book of the Duchess*, lines 821-26 in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1987), p. 340: ‘That as the someres sonne bryght / Ys fairer, clerer, and hath more lyght / Than any other planete in heven, / The moone or the sterres seven, / For al the world so hadde she / Surmounted hem alle of beaute’. In *The Riverside Chaucer* the note suggests the Pleiades for ‘sterres seven’, although the editors are still puzzled by the phrase. See p. 340, n.824. Master Robert’s enigmatic speech needs further investigation.

<sup>101</sup> See The Apocalypse 12. 2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Edden (1999), p. 80. Edden discusses further the culture which associated whiteness with light and radiance, symbols of virtue and spiritual worth.

<sup>103</sup> Edden (1999), p. 80. For the text of the *Flos Carmeli*, see *ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>104</sup> *The Book of the First Monks*, ‘Summary and Commentary’, p. 29.

<sup>105</sup> Genesis 1. 22. See Allen, BMK, p. 312, n.121/2-3.

<sup>106</sup> I am grateful to Marion Glasscoe for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and to Rebecca Selman for checking my English.