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Reform Networks and Community among Dominican Nuns in Late Medieval Germany

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Abstract

One of the pressing concerns of the fifteenth century was monastic reform, and reformers of the Observant movement rose to meet the challenge by attempting to return monastic houses to stricter observance of their earliest rules and governing documents. In this dissertation, I examine how Dominican nuns in German-speaking parts of Europe in the fifteenth century envisioned reform as an ongoing communal and intellectual process, contrary to the assumption by both late-medieval male reformers and some modern historians that convent reform for women was as simple as building walls and locking gates. Moreover, as male reformers sought to curtail nuns' contact with the outside world through stricter enclosure, nuns increasingly needed to marshal support from their families and sympathetic city councilors in order to ensure their convent's economic longevity. Women also exchanged information and advice through letters and reform-related manuscripts, and at times traveled themselves in the service of reform, moving from one convent to another to instruct newly reformed nuns, conveying knowledge that could not be communicated in manuscript form. Therefore, the Observant movement for Dominican nuns sits at the nexus of religious, intellectual, social, and economic currents.

In order to explore how these facets of reform related to each other and how women benefitted from or were disadvantaged by the reform, I proceed through a series of thematic chapters that encompass different aspects of the Dominican community. I argue that considering not only the religious motivations for the reform but the broader societal context, religious and secular alike, help us understand that Dominican nuns perceived the reform as an ongoing process, one to be carefully maintained over the years and decades after its introduction. I use a wide range of sources, from chronicles and letters to prescriptive documents and prayerbooks. This mixture of sources allows for an examination of reform within a variety of contexts. The

first of these is the context of an individual convent. The second is within the setting of a broader urban society during a period when municipal power was shifting from the old nobility to newly wealthy merchant families. The final context is the Dominican province of Teutonia, where manuscript networks and reform parties of nuns experienced in the Observant way of life transmitted knowledge.

Acknowledgements

I have been looking forward to the process of writing these acknowledgements from the moment I defended my dissertation proposal in the summer of 2018. It took a village—or maybe a medium-sized town—to write this dissertation, and I did not want to miss the chance to thank profusely anyone and everyone who helped me along the way. These acknowledgments feel somehow all the keener given that this dissertation was written almost entirely during the Covid-19 pandemic: writing about enclosed nuns turns out to "hit different," as my students might say, when you, too, are more thoroughly cloistered inside your home than you had previously imagined you might be. I have more respect for the long-dead fifteenth-century women who fill this dissertation's pages than ever.

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I could not have written this dissertation without my committee and other faculty members whose guidance kept me from straying too far. But I also could not have written this dissertation without the support of graduate student colleagues, many of whom are also dear friends. In particular, the "lady medievalists" of Northwestern—Kathleen Noll-Syrigos, Lily Stewart, Zoe Senecal, and Savoy Curry—have kept me going, answered countless questions (some quite dumb), read drafts that were very rough indeed, and talked through thorny issues. I'm also grateful to my History Department cohort, which is full of brilliant historians whom I am glad to know: I'm a better historian because of you all. Special thanks to Gideon Cohn-Postar, Katya Maslakowski, Caity Monroe, and Rachel Wallner, along with Alex Larrave and Matt Herrera. Finally, I am endlessly grateful to the members of my Graduate Writing Center interdisciplinary writing group. Fearlessly led by Laura Ferdinand, the current iteration of the group—Maryam Athari, Heather Grimm, Caity Monroe, and Danielle Ross—has asked incisive questions, prompted me to clarify elements of my writing, reminded me to start paragraphs with topic sentences, and generally been fearless about wading into my dissertation topic, which is topically and temporally so far from their own research areas.

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Thanks to my undergraduate mentors at the George Washington University who inspired and supported me. Professor Elise Friedland was the first to tell me that I should consider pursuing a PhD, which I know is a suggestion she does not hand out lightly. I didn't get a degree in classical philology or ancient history after all, but her encouragement meant the world to me. Professor Suzanne Miller introduced me to the world of the Middle Ages and to the medieval women whose lives I study. I would not have become a medievalist had I not been assigned Suzanne as my departmental advisor and had she not nurtured my curiosity. Professors Denver Brunsman and Tom Long also encouraged me in ways large and small, and Professor Linda Levy Peck's Stuart England course helped me realize I had a knack for historical thinking. My commitment to teaching and interest in research were shaped because I had such wonderful teachers and mentors during my own undergraduate years.

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List of Abbreviations

AFP	*Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*
BdRP	Johannes Meyer. *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.* Edited by Benedict Maria Reichert. 2 vols. Leipzig: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1908-1909.
Berlin StaaB	Berlin Staatsbibliothek
BNF	Bibliothèque nationale de France
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina.* Edited by J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris: Garnier Fratres and J.-P. Migne, 1841-1864.
StAF	Stadtarchiv, Freiburg im Breisgau
StAN	Stadtarchiv, Nuremberg
UBFr	Universitätsbibliothek, Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, Freiburg im Breisgau
VL(2)	*Die deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters: Verfasserlexicon.* Edited by Kurt Ruh et al. 2d. rev. ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1978–.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In November 1397, the convent of Schönensteinbach accepted the Observant Reform. The day officially marking the occasion attracted a substantial crowd of local laity from different social strata, Dominican friars, and priests, along with Catherine, daughter of Philip the Bold, Duke of Burgundy, and wife of Duke Leopold IV of Austria.[1] A solemn but celebratory procession joined the nuns as they entered the convent's church; the crowd that marked this auspicious occasion was so big that not everyone could fit into the church for Mass, which was said by Father Conrad of Prussia, a Dominican preacher who was responsible for initiating the reform of Schönensteinbach.[2] The convent's sisters donned their simple white habits, took communion, and listened with the rest of the crowd as papal bulls, episcopal letters, and other documents regarding the Observance were read.[3] Claranna of Hohenburg, from a local noble family, was chosen as the convent's first prioress of the reform, and each sister was given a small devotional image of Christ's Passion to commemorate the occasion. Then, gathering up their crucifixes, the nuns made a gesture of blessing towards Father Conrad, Duchess Catherine, and the rest of the crowd before entering the convent. Having "taken their leave of the world and everything in it," they "went willingly into the cloister. Then Father Conrad locked the gate with

[1] On Catherine, see Richard Vaughan, *Philip the Good: The Apogee of Burgundy* (London: Longmans, 1970), 31, 64.
[2] *BdRP* I-III, II.2, 27-28.
[3] Although Dominican nuns had always been supposed to wear white habits, some evidence suggests that, by the late fourteenth century, some Dominicans were wearing habits that were tailored or that had decorative slashing. James D. Mixson, "The Poor Monk and the Proprietors: Observant Reform of Community as Conflict," *Saeculum* 66, no. 1 (2016), 94. See also Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 225-226.

the most secure lock with which a cloister can be closed in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, the Virgin Mary, St Dominic, and St Bridgit."[4]

This account of the reform of Schönensteinbach, the first Dominican convent reformed according to the conservative Observant Reform in the German-speaking region of Europe, comes to us from an account of the reform written by one of the movement's greatest proponents, Johannes Meyer (d. 1485), in the 1460s. Even if Meyer embellished the account to promote the reformist cause, his account clarifies the major steps required before a convent would be considered to be reformed. There were liturgical elements, official confirmations, and, crucially, the strict enclosure of the convent. Such enclosure often required the rebuilding of walls, the barring of windows, and the filling-in of doors. Furthermore, special grilles were installed that permitted a person inside the enclosure to speak to someone outside without seeing them, along with turns that enabled objects to be passed into or out of the enclosure, again without allowing people on opposite sides to see each other.[5] This process of ensuring strict enclosure and introducing a revised liturgy had a fixed endpoint: once all willing convents had had their walls built and implemented the updated liturgy, reform was complete. Indeed, the scholar Eugen Hillenbrand declared 1475, the year that the Observant candidate, Jakob Fabri of Stubach, was elected prior provincial of Teutonia, the official completion date of the reform.[6]

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[4] *BdRP* I-III, II.8-9, 34-36

[5] Heike Uffmann discusses the practicalities of enclosure in reformed convents of the late fifteenth century. Heike Uffmann, "Inside and Outside the Convent Walls: The Norm and Practice of Enclosure in the Reformed Nunneries of Late Medieval Germany," *The Medieval History Journal* 4, no. 1 (2001), 83-108, esp. at 92ff. See also Sylvie Duval, *"Mulieres Religiosae* and *Sorores Clausae:* The Dominican Observant Movement and the Diffusion of Strict Enclosure in Italy from the Thirteenth to the Sixteenth Century," in *Mulieres Religiosae: Shaping Female Spiritual Authority in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods,* ed. Veerle Fraeters and Imke de Gier (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 193-218.

[6] Eugen Hillenbrand, "Die Observantenbewegung in der deutschen Ordensprovinz der Dominikaner," in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen,* ed. Kaspar Elm (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 234. Of course, more recently, scholars have problematized this "end date" and

In this study, I endeavor to propose a different way of viewing the Dominican Observant reform for nuns, one that argues that nuns viewed reform as an ongoing process requiring careful maintenance over time rather than an open-and-shut case. This approach also centers the community of nuns within the enclosure. Strict enclosure, one of the undeniable hallmarks of the reform, required Observant Dominican nuns to adjust religiously, socially, and financially to new constraints. Convents that were reformed after Schönensteinbach generally welcomed a "reform party," a group of nuns from a reformed convent who would aid the newly reformed convent's sisters in learning the revised liturgy and who would take on the convent's highest offices, including prioress and subprioress. Strict enclosure also limited convents financially, ironically requiring them to be more enmeshed in their local communities for financial support even as the nuns were supposed to keep separate from that community. In other words, this dissertation examines how nuns envisioned and understood reform as a communal process requiring careful maintenance to ensure its longevity while navigating the shifting ground of their own autonomy. I hope to change the perception of reform from a thing that was accomplished to an ongoing process, centering on the community at a variety of levels. This community-centric approach to reform sheds a different light on the sources, whether they are new or familiar.

This introduction is divided into four sections, each blending historiographical and contextual backgrounds in order to set the stage for the chapters to come. The first section provides a selective overview of the "long" fifteenth century (c. 1370-1517). It presents the sociopolitical and geographical context for what I am calling "German-speaking Europe," as

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suggested that the reform was never really completed. See, e.g., Anne Huijbers, "'Observance' as Paradigm in Mendicant and Monastic Order Chronicles," in *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond,* ed. James Mixson and Bert Roest (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 111-112. I agree with these assessments.

well as an overarching religious context, marked by the Great Schism (1378-1417) and the conciliar movement. The second section turns specifically to the Dominican Observant Reform, presenting a broad overview of the shape it took in German-speaking Europe alongside historiographical considerations that highlight the unique perspective that this dissertation offers. The third section presents a definition of "community" and argues for why we cannot and should not take the idea of a religious community at face value. The fourth and final section lays out the argument of the dissertation and provides a brief outline of each of its chapters.

Tension and Possibility: The Long Fifteenth Century

One of the central contentions of this dissertation is that convents must be understood within a range of contexts: not only in terms of their order and religious and reform-related developments, but the local context as well. This dissertation concerns the German-speaking parts of Switzerland, modern-day Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, and the Alsace region that is now in France and their *sui generis* approach to fifteenth-century church reform.[7] The interaction of the local with reform emerges in telling ways throughout the dissertation. Regions that were home to convents of Observant Dominican nuns were often disrupted by warfare. Battles came perilously close to convent walls, forcing nuns to flee to other convents or even private homes

[7] I have chosen at least for now to use "German-speaking Europe" to attempt to describe the geographical area which my dissertation encompasses. The Holy Roman Empire is unsuitable, because Switzerland was not part of it. Furthermore, the *Eidgenossenschaft* or Swiss confederacy itself underwent substantial expansion throughout the late Middle Ages. Germany is also not suitable: a nation of Germany did not exist until the 1870s. German-speaking Europe is not perfectly satisfactory, since this dissertation does not address what is now northern Germany, but it is decent shorthand.

that were far enough away from the fighting.[8] The beauty and righteousness of the city were asserted through the reformation of convents, but reform was also a response to disruption, violence, and fear. These tensions and possibilities are characteristic of the fifteenth century.[9]

Fifteenth-century German chroniclers praised the generosity, piety, beauty, cleanliness, industriousness, learnedness, and good governance of their cities. Each city touted its own encomium. Writing about Nuremberg in the late Middle Ages, the humanist Johannes Cochlaeus observed that the citizens' "love of God as well as of their neighbors is overwhelming, for the great part of the populace attends Mass frequently… Donations to churches are very frequent."[10] In praising the city of Ulm, Dominican friar and pilgrim Felix Fabri celebrated the good governance of his native city.[11] City chroniclers identified for their readers the possibilities and comforts that their cities had to offer, and presented a vivid picture of the vibrancy of fifteenth-century urban life. Such panegyric was, of course, not written by impartial witnesses, but even Machiavelli observed that German cities were strong and independent, obeying the emperor when it was convenient, and so well-stocked, well-fortified, and efficient at meeting the needs of the lower classes that "everyone thinks their capture would be a tedious and difficult affair."[12] But late medieval Germany also suffered from problems that extended beyond a single city, including ongoing political instability, periodic conflict, and disease. The coexistence of such

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[8] *BdRP* I-III, II.14-24, 40-52 details five times that the sisters of Schönensteinbach were forced to flee their convent because of warfare.

[9] Johan Huizinga, *The Autumn of the Middle Ages,* trans. Rodney J. Payton and Ulrich Mammitzsch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); John Van Engen, "Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church," *Church History* 77, no. 2 (2008), 257-284.

[10] Johannes Cochlaeus, *Brevis Germaniae descriptio tum a rebus gestis moribusque populorum […],* ed. Karl Langosch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1969), 88.

[11] Felix Fabri, *Fratris Felicis Fabri Tractatus de civitate ulmensi, de eius origine, ordine, regimine, de civibus eius et statu,* ed. Gustav Veezenmeyer (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1889), 59ff.

[12] Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince,* in *The Portable Macchiavelli,* ed. and trans. Peter Bondanella and Mark Musa (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 111-112.

difficulties as well as the possibilities presented by such an environment characterized the fifteenth century and its inhabitants' unique efforts to resolve the problems they faced.

The political decentralization and difference that Machiavelli captured when he noted that the free imperial cities *(Reichsstädte)* followed the emperor only when convenient becomes clear with a glance at any map of the fragmented Holy Roman Empire. Imperial power, which fluctuated over the centuries, had waned somewhat following the death of Charles IV in 1378. Territories controlled by dukes and margraves abutted and surrounded the free imperial cities such as Nuremberg, Frankfurt, and Augsburg, which were nominally subject only to the Holy Roman Emperor; other cities were controlled by territorial lords or prince-bishops. Dukes left many cities to their own devices, allowing city councils to make practical, day-to-day decisions of governance that affected citizens; in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, these councils by and large transitioned from control by minor regional nobility to being run by an increasingly wealthy and powerful urban merchant class, the burghers.[13] Practically, this decentralization affected the lives of those outside of the region's interconnecting spheres of power the most when conflict broke out, regional power changed hands, or access to positions in local government changed. This growing political regionalism also meant that local political forces were able to control elements of society that had, in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, been subjected to greater centralization. New universities founded with the patronage of territorial rulers sprang up in places like Freiburg and Tübingen. Religious life, too, became less

[13] Many dismissive descriptions of the late medieval Holy Roman Empire and its political situation exist. See, for example, Gerald Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Wiley, 1966), 1-2, or Daniel Philip Waley, *Later Medieval Europe: From Saint Louis to Luther,* rev. ed. (London: Longman, 1975), 260ff. A recent attempt to make some sense of this fragmentation by describing a common "associative political culture" can be found in Duncan Hardy, *Associative Political Culture in the Holy Roman Empire: Upper Germany, 1346-1521* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

centralized as local parishes grew in importance and communities took control over their parishes through selecting their own parish priest or maintaining the fabric of the church.[14]

Like elsewhere in late-medieval Europe, the German-speaking regions were affected by occasional civil unrest, regional warfare, and outbreaks of disease.[15] Political rivalries left the Upper Rhine region on "permanent alert" throughout the fifteenth century, as the duke of Austria, the region's ruler, left it alone to focus on his territories farther to the east even as military campaigns continued in the Upper Rhine.[16] Peasant revolts periodically stirred up regions of the empire as peasants attempted to gain, and often succeeded in gaining, concessions and rights from city councils. In particular, the Bundschuh rebellions, named for peasants' laced boots, protested the ongoing military turmoil that disrupted their farmland, pushing back against the power wielded by their overlords.[17] As a result of these disruptions, cities throughout the region attempted to reinforce peace in their borders, especially in the closing decades of the century. They required each citizen to play their part in establishing peace and justice through the institution of new codes of urban law and peace ordinances. Although we should not read too much into these idealized statements, repeated efforts to (re-)establish urban peace to some degree reflect civil dis-ease and the need to establish clear norms.[18]

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[14] Van Engen, "Multiple Options," 263-264; Dietrich Kurze, *Pfarrerwahlen im Mittelalter: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Gemeinde und des Niederkirchenwesens* (Cologne and Graz: Böhlau Verlag, 1966).
[15] Disease outbreaks included the plague. See Thomas Wetzstein, "Die Pest im Freiburg des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts: Eine kritische Revision," *Schau-ins-Land* 115 (1996), 11-17.
[16] Tom Scott, *Freiburg and the Breisgau: Town-Country Relations in the Age of Reformation and Peasants' War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 165ff.
[17] Scott, *Freiburg and the Breisgau,* 166-167; Tom Scott, "Liberty and Community in Medieval Switzerland," *German History* 13, no. 1 (1995), 113.
[18] Hans-Christoph Rublack, "Political and Social Norms in Urban Communities in the Holy Roman Empire," in *Religion, Politics, and Social Protest: Three Studies on Early Modern Germany,* ed. Kaspar von Greyerz (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), 24-60, esp. 26-30.

Atop the local and regional issues facing the German-speaking regions of Europe, political and ecclesiastical leaders throughout Latin Christendom were consumed with a major problem: the papal schism, which lasted from 1378 to 1417, and whose repercussions reverberated through the rest of the fifteenth century. After Pope Gregory XI returned the papacy from Avignon to Rome only a year before his death in 1378, a contested papal election resulted in two rival claimants to the See of Peter, one based in Avignon and the other in Rome. Various attempts were made to end the schism, including force of arms, arbitration, and attempts to get both claimants to renounce their claim, making way for a newly elected pope with widespread support. Ultimately, church authorities realized that they were confronting the defining crisis of their era that called for urgent action. They settled on calling a general council which would gather together cardinals, archbishops, and bishops to resolve the crisis.

The schism brought to a head the need for thoroughgoing church reform, a theme that had sounded like a somber bass throughout the Middle Ages. Beginning with Paul's exhortation to the Romans—"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing *(in renovatione)* of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God"—reform was integral to medieval Christianity (Rom. 12:2). For Paul, reform and renewal were directed toward the individual, but his call was quickly taken up by the church fathers and adapted to encompass issues of institutional reform as well.[19] Initially, reformers focused on monastic institutions, but by the time of the Gregorian Reform in the eleventh century, the idea of reform

[19] Reform functioned both teleologically and cyclically. This cyclical reform time is reflected in the language of gardens, greening, and warming that often accompanied the language of *renovatio* and *reformatio* that borrowed from Paul. See Gerald Strauss, "Ideas of *Reformatio* and *Renovatio* from the Middle Ages to the Reformation," in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance, and Reformation. Vol. 2: Visions, Programs, and Outcomes,* ed. Thomas A. Brady, Jr., Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 4-5.

encompassed the entirety of Latin Christendom. In the wake of the Gregorian Reform, calls to reform the church "in head and in members" *(in capite et in membris)* were ongoing. The crisis of the contested papal election prompted a re-evaluation of papal powers. Like essentially all previous reform efforts, the key players in the fifteenth-century conciliar movement aimed to bring the church back to an imagined, pristine past—and to a real, recent past where a single pontiff sat in Rome. But in the process, they sought to expand the role of the general council in innovative ways.[20]

The fifteenth century therefore became an age of conciliarism, where churchmen from across Latin Christendom gathered in ecumenical councils to discuss any and every important issue of the day. The idea of holding a general church council to pass binding decrees about matters of faith was not new in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. After all, ecumenical councils beginning with Nicaea I in 325 CE were an important feature of the early Church. But the increase in papal power occasioned by the Gregorian Reform and subsequent centuries meant that, on the eve of the papal schism in 1378, the prevailing theory of church governance was that the pope was answerable to no earthly authority, only to God. But thinkers such as Conrad of Gelnhausen (d. 1390), Henry of Langenstein (d. 1397), Pierre d'Ailly (d. 1420), and above all

[20] The key text on reform in the early church remains Gerhard B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959). Discussions of the ideas of *reformatio* and *renovatio* in the high Middle Ages can be found in Giles Constable, *"Reformatio,"* in *Ecumenical Dialogue at Harvard: The Roman Catholic-Protestant Colloquium,* ed. Samuel H. Miller and G. Ernest Wright (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 330-343; Constable, "Renewal and Reform in Religious Life: Concepts and Realities," in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century,* ed. Robert L. Benson, Giles Constable, and Carol D. Lanham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 37-67; Bernard McGinn, "Apocalypticism and Church Reform: 1100-1500," in *The Continuum History of the Apocalypse,* ed. Bernard McGinn, John J. Collins, and Stephen Stein (New York: Continuum, 2003), 273-298; Brett Edward Whalen, *Dominion of God: Christendom and Apocalypse in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, University Press, 2009). Specifically on the Gregorian Reform and its effect on the relationship between papal and monarchical power, see, e.g., Uta-Renate Blumenthal, *The Investiture Controversy: Church and Monarchy from the Ninth to the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

Jean Gerson (d. 1429) advanced an interrelated collection of ideas that separated the Roman church, including the pope, from Christ's universal, infallible church, consisting of the entire congregation of the faithful *(congregatio fidelium).* This would mean that the general council, as representative of the congregation of the faithful, had power over any individual pope.[21] And, as Brian Tierney has argued, these fourteenth- and fifteenth-century authors did not rely on writing by heretics like William of Ockham to develop this theory but rather on the unimpeachably orthodox source of canon law and its interpreters.[22] On such a foundation, the possibility of real progress on important reforming issues grew.

The Council of Pisa, held in 1409, not only failed to resolve the schism but led to a third rival claimant to the papacy. The council did, however, set the stage for the Council of Constance (1414-1418). At Constance, with the support of Holy Roman Emperor-elect Sigismund (d. 1437) and the participation of the corporate body of the church, the schism was brought to an end with the election of Martin V (d. 1431) as pope. But as would prove important for subsequent events, the Council had additional goals, which included suppressing heresy, addressing matters pertaining to the faith, and advancing a general reformist cause. It concluded with the issuance of a decree, *Frequens,* which mandated ongoing general councils: one to be held in five years' time, followed by another seven years later, and every decade thereafter unless events required a council to be called sooner.[23] The Council of Constance also drew a vast number of participants, ranging from the expected ecclesiastical luminaries to university masters,

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[21] Brian Tierney, *Foundations of the Conciliar Theory: The Contribution of the Medieval Canonists from Gratian to the Great Schism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), 1-6.
[22] Ibid., 11; Francis Oakley, *The Conciliarist Tradition: Constitutionalism in the Catholic Church, 1300-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 105ff.
[23] Oakley, *Conciliarist Tradition,* 42.

monks and friars, and nobility from across Europe into one smallish town. Ideas and text were exchanged, not least among them the writings of Jean Gerson, whose sermons and ideas were key to stirring confidence in the validity of conciliarism.[24]

His sermon *Ambulate dum lucem habetis* ("Walk while you have the light," taken from John 12:35), preached in 1415, was especially effective in this regard. Facing pressure from the gathered council for his resignation, the Antipope in Pisa, John XXIII (d. 1419), decided to take the desperate course of action and fled. The gathered council panicked, but between Holy Roman Emperor-elect Sigismund's swift action in pursuing and apprehending the fugitive pontiff and Gerson's sermon, the attendees remained firm in their conviction that their actions as a council had the power to effect change. Gerson opened his sermon by exhorting his audience to behave as a "council of saints and men of justice, whom God placed in the world to be so many true lights."[25] In other words, Gerson reminded his listeners that they were the change in the Church they had been waiting for.

After this inspiring and broadly based opening, Gerson turned to more practical matters: the goals of the council and how they ought to be achieved. As Gerson saw it, the council's goals were threefold. Most pressing was to settle the issue of the church's peace by resolving the papal situation promptly. The second goal was directed at issues of faith, and the third dealt with issues about the church's character. Each of these goals was purposefully broad. With impeccable

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[24] Daniel Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity Before Print: Jean Gerson and the Transformation of Late Medieval Learning* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 193ff; Oakley, *Conciliarist Tradition,* 21ff.

[25] Jean Gerson, *Oeuvres completes,* ed. Palémon Glorieux, vol. 5, *L'oeuvre oratoire* (Paris: Desclée, 1963), 39-45. *Tales vos esse convenit, orthodoxi et Deo amabiles patres ac domini, ut Concilium sitis sanctorum et justorum quos posuit Deus in mundo quasi vera totidem luminaria; vos, inquit, estis lux mundi.* An English translation is available in C. M. D. Crowder, *Unity, Heresy, and Reform, 1378-1460: The Conciliar Response to the Great Schism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 76-82.

Aristotelian logic, Gerson analyzed the causes of the council. Using the metaphor of the mystical body for the Church, with Christ at its head, and following the Creed of the Church as "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic," Gerson then laid out a twelve-part argument for the supremacy of a general council representing the church over a pope, the "secondary head" of the Church. Christ and the Church may not divorce, but the ties between the Church and the pope were not so secure. Therefore, the pope is bound by all rules and laws that a general council issues in the name of the Church. Two weeks after Gerson's sermon, on April 6, 1415, the council issued a decree, *Haec sancta* (sometimes known as *Sacrosancta),* which stated in the strongest terms the authority that a council had over even the pope. Inspired by Gerson's sermon on the doctrinal support for the ability of a general council to issue binding decrees and bolstered by the force of *Haec sancta,* the attendees of the Council of Constance took on the task of pursuing systemic reform. The subsequent Council of Basel (1431-1449) built upon the success of Constance, addressing the issues of the Hussite and Wycliffite heresies as well as strenuously advancing the cause of thoroughgoing reform and the primacy of conciliarism.[26] Like the Council of Constance, the Council of Basel also served as a hub of intellectual exchange, with nearly anyone who was anyone in the church passing through during its course.[27]

An important component of late medieval religious was the flourishing of female spirituality. Indeed, the celebrated female mystics and eventual saints Bridget of Sweden (d. 1373) and her successor Catherine of Siena (d. 1380) used their visionary gifts and their

[26] Joachim W. Stieber, *Pope Eugenius IV, the Council of Basel, and the Secular and Ecclesiastical Authorities in the Empire: The Conflict over Supreme Authority and Power in the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 117-118.
[27] A useful overview of the events of the councils of Pisa, Constance, and Basel can be found in Steven Ozment, *The Age of Reform, 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval and Reformation Europe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 155-179.

networks to initiate the return of the popes from Avignon.[28] The association between the return of the papacy to Rome and the outbreak of the schism prompted Jean Gerson, a stern critic of female mysticism, to blame the two women who had encouraged Gregory XI's return, clearly referring to Bridge of Sweden and Catherine of Siena.[29] Catherine herself had been a Dominican tertiary and, after her death, the Dominican Raymond of Capua (d. 1399), her confessor, collaborator, and correspondent, deployed Catherine, who had allegedly received the stigmata, as a foil for Francis—the most famous recipient of the stigmata and the founder of the Franciscan Order. Raymond also promoted the Observant Reform among Dominicans in his capacity as the Master General of the Order.[30] Observant ideology circulated widely at the Councils of Constance and Basel. In fact, the councils provided something of a shot in the arm for the Dominican Observance after a period of stagnation following Raymond's death.[31] The Observant movement came to encompass a number of monastic orders, particularly the mendicants, where it flourished especially among Dominican nuns in the southern German-speaking regions of Europe.

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[28] André Vauchez, "Saint Brigitte de Suède et Sainte Catherine de Sienne: La mystique et l'église aux derniers siècles du Moyen Age," in *Temi e problem nella mistica femminile trecentesca: 14-17 ottobre 1979* (Todi: Presso l'Accademia Tudertina, 1983), 229-248, and F. Thomas Luongo, *The Saintly Politics of Catherine of Siena* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

[29] See Dyan Elliott, *Proving Woman: Female Spirituality and Inquisitional Culture in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 284. Also note that Gerson's treatise *On the proving of spirits* (1415), presented to the fathers of Constance, explicitly challenged the recent canonization of Bridget (Ibid., 268). Nancy Caciola described the role of the Councils of Constance and Basel for the spread of suspicion about mystical women. Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 315-319.

[30] On the tensions between the Franciscans and Dominicans over the representation of Catherine's stigmata, see Carolyn Muessig, "The Stigmata Debate in Theology and Art in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Authority of the Word: Reflecting on Image and Text in Northern Europe, 1400-1700,* ed. Celeste Brusati, Karl A. E. Enenkel, and Walter S. Melion (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 481-504, esp. 496ff.

[31] James Mixson has traced how the councils provided a place for reformers to condemn property ownership within the monastic context. Mixson, *Poverty's Proprietors: Ownership and Mortal Sin at the Origins of the Observant Movement* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

The Dominican Observant Reform for Nuns in Teutonia

In his chronicle of the history of the Dominican Observant Reform, Johannes Meyer described the Dominican Observance as a blossoming, fruit-bearing tree growing from the sturdy rootstock of the convent of Schönensteinbach, noting that "through the fruit of these subsequently described convents, one may know the goodness of the origin and root."[32] The tree's branches spread over the course of the fifteenth century across the southern German-speaking regions that now encompass Bavaria, Baden-Württemberg, Alsace, and Switzerland, which made up the Dominican province of Teutonia.[33] The region was home to a proportionally impressive number of Dominican convents: their numbers had risen from approximately fifty in 1303 to well over one hundred by the end of the fifteenth century. Roughly forty of these convents eventually invited, accepted, or were forced to accede to the dictates of the Observance.

On the surface, the reformers' goals were straightforward and reflect an exceptionally conservative reform even by medieval criteria. They aimed to return newly Observant communities to the strict standards that had been in place in the Order's earliest years.[34] From

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[32] *BdRP* IV-V, V.1, 44-45. Meyer opened the chapter by quoting from Matt. 7:16, *a fructibus eorum cognoscentis,* "by their fruits you shall know them." *…da by den selben früchten diser nach geschribnen swöster clöster mag man die güte des ursprunges und der wurtzel bekenen.*

[33] The Observant Reform was not limited to this geographic area. The first Observant Dominican convent of nuns was founded in Venice. See Bartolomea Riccoboni, *Life and Death in a Venetian Convent: The Chronicle and Necrology of Corpus Domini, 1393-1436,* ed. and trans. Daniel Bornstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). For a study of Italian Dominican nuns and the Observant Reform, see Sylvie Duval, *Comme des anges sur terre: Les moniales dominicaines et les débuts de la réforme observante, 1385-1461* (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2015).

[34] For a good short introduction to the Observant Reform across orders, see Bert Roest, "Observant Reform in Religious Orders," in *The Cambridge History of Christianity,* vol. 4, *Christianity in Western Europe, c. 1100-c. 1500,* ed. Miri Rubin and Walter Simons (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 446-457.

the advent of the Observant Reform, historians of the Dominican Order have identified the medieval trajectory of the order as one of an initial high point in the decades after the order's foundation, through a supposed spiritual nadir in the fourteenth century, to renewed piety initiated by the Observance in the fifteenth.[35] For nuns, the shape of the reform typically involved strict active and passive enclosure, meaning both that nuns remained within the convent walls and that external visitors, such as relatives, were largely forbidden.[36] As far as male reformers were concerned, enclosure was the visible hallmark of a reformed women's convent. But as Claire Taylor Jones has recently argued, the reform of the liturgy was an equally important spiritual goal that male reformers had for reformed nuns. Dominicans, whose order had been founded by Dominic de Guzmán (d. 1221) as a preaching order in rapidly growing and commercializing urban areas, had long viewed the singing of the liturgy as the primary role of

[35] This narrative, is, of course, overly simplified and requires an unusually high amount of trust in statements by the reformers, who had an obvious stake in the matter. This narrative is the one presented by Johannes Meyer already in the middle of the fifteenth century and is reflected in works on the Dominican Order such as William A. Hinnebusch, *The History of the Dominican Order,* 2 vols. (New York: Alba House, 1966-1974), and William R. Bonniwell, *A History of the Dominican Liturgy* (New York: Joseph F. Wagner, 1944). In fact, Hinnebusch hardly discussed the Observant Reform at all. Recent scholarship has challenged elements of this straightforward narrative, including questioning how steep the fourteenth-century decline actually was. Kaspar Elm initiated the call to challenge these old narratives in the 1970s. See the important edited volume: Kaspar Elm, ed., *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989). Religious movements among laypeople also gained popularity during this period, including the *Devotio moderna.* See John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The* Devotio Moderna *and the World of the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

[36] On the topic of enclosure, see Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, "Strict Active Enclosure and Its Effects on the Female Monastic Experience," in *Medieval Religious Women: Peaceweavers,* ed. John A. Nichols and Lillian Thomas Shank (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1984), 51-86; Julie Ann Smith, *"Clausura Districta:* Conceiving Space and Community for Dominican Nuns in the Thirteenth Century," *Parergon* 27, no. 2 (2010), 13-36; and Francesca Medioli, "An Unequal Law: The Enforcement of *Clausura* Before and After the Council of Trent," in *Women in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe,* ed. Christine Meek (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 136-152. Pope Boniface VIII (d. 1303) promulgated the papal decretal *Periculoso* in 1298, which was intended to ensure strict enclosure for nuns across orders. Its implementation was extremely uneven and canon lawyers, nuns, and reformers discussed its ramifications well into the fifteenth century. It was only with the counter-Reformation Council of Trent (1545-1563) that the decretal gained teeth: the threat of excommunication for violation. Elizabeth Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women:* Periculoso *and Its Commentators, 1298-1545* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

nuns since they were not permitted to preach publicly. As a result, one of the central projects of the Observant Reform for Dominican nuns and friars alike was to produce and circulate revised, accurate liturgical manuscripts.[37]

The Observant Reform in Germany has long been divided into several general phases.[38] Raymond of Capua, then Master General of the Dominican Order, initiated the first phase at the 1388 Dominican General Chapter in Vienna. It encompassed the initial efforts of reforming the friaries of Colmar and Nuremberg and the refoundation of the convent of Schönensteinbach in the town of Wittenheim in Alsace.[39] All three of these communities were destined to become leading centers of the Observance, but, as mentioned above, the initial stimulus for the spread of reform fizzled out after Raymond of Capua's death. The stimulus provided by the Councils of Constance and Basel produced a new generation of leadership: Johannes Nider (d. 1438), Barthélemy Texier (d. 1449), and Nikolaus Notel (fl. 1426–46). When council participants returned to their local communities, they brought the drive for reform back with them with the result that, from 1419 to 1450, at least ten female Dominican convents and thirteen friaries were reformed. Among the former was St Katharina in Nuremberg, which was reformed in 1428 and became second only to Schönensteinbach as a leading center of reform. St Katharina was also notable for its extensive library, including an extremely detailed catalogue and description of table readings for the whole liturgical year; much of the library survives today. The third generation of reform, perhaps best epitomized by the reformer Johannes Meyer, saw the rapid

[37] Claire Taylor Jones, *Ruling the Spirit: Women, Liturgy, and Dominican Reform in Late Medieval Germany* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).
[38] Eugen Hillenbrand proposed this division in the 1970s. Hillenbrand, "Die Observantenbewegung," 219-271.
[39] Jean Charles Winnlen, *Schönensteinbach: Une communauté religieuse féminine, 1138-1792* (Altkirch: Société d'Histoire Sundgauvienne, 1993).

efflorescence of the reform throughout Teutonia. During the period covered by Meyer's chronicle of the reform, the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens* (Book of the Reform of the Dominican Order), that overlapped with Meyer's own tenure as a reformer, thirteen convents were reformed as well as fourteen friaries.[40] Although stretching beyond Johannes Meyer's own life and the strict definition of a generation, the final decades of the fifteenth century rightly belong under the umbrella of the third reform generation. Much like the period from 1450-1470, the closing decades of the century featured the reform of numerous female houses, but without the type of leadership shown by the women of Schönensteinbach and St Katharina in Nuremberg in propagating the reform. 1480 also saw the reform's most notable and well-documented failure: the attempted reform of Klingental in Basel.[41]

Although this dissertation will not extend into the sixteenth century in any substantial way, the looming specter of the Reformation, initiated by Martin Luther, a friar who had been spiritually shaped in the crucible of Erfurt's Observant Augustinian friary, bears mention. The Observant Reform brought about several developments that reveal a vibrant fifteenth-century Catholicism that responded to people's needs: friars wrote texts about and actively engaged in pastoral care.[42] City residents continued to donate to their local Observant communities in their wills in the form of money, books, and property. And, despite the efforts of reformers to enforce

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[40] Several of the friaries and the convents of St Agnes in Strasbourg and Klingental in Basel had either "fallen from the ranks of the Observants" or no longer existed by 1500. Claire Taylor Jones, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation: Johannes Meyer's Chronicle of the Dominican Observance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2019), 280-281.

[41] Renée Weis-Müller, *Die Reform des Klosters Klingental und ihr Personenkreis* (Basel: Verlag von Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1956). See also Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 148-151. This failure will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

[42] Bert Roest, "The Observance and the Confrontation with Early Protestantism," in *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond,* ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 285-288.

strict enclosure, Observant communities often remained extremely closely interconnected with their city environment, as we will see in Chapter Three. Ultimately, such connections, even more so than appeals to the order's prior provincial or the local bishop, helped nuns resist efforts by city councils that were newly controlled by Protestants to disband them.[43]

Historiographically speaking, scholarship on the Observant Reform among Dominicans has concentrated on male reformers. For example, William Hinnebusch's still-authoritative two-volume history of the Dominican Order from its foundation to 1500 emphasizes only the greatest male figures of the Observant Reform—predictably, men such as Raymond of Capua, Johannes Nider, and Johannes Meyer. Although the reform naturally accommodated female communities and women have since been revealed to play significant roles as reformers in their own right, they receive barely a mention in this capacity.[44] German scholarship on the Dominican Observance from the 1970s and 1980s similarly emphasized the role of prominent male reformers as the agents and female communities as recipients of reform.[45] Yet, more recently, scholars have emphasized that women were involved with the reform not simply as its passive recipients but as themselves important players in advocating for or resisting reform. The discourse addressing the *cura monialium,* or pastoral care of nuns, is one area that reflects women's active role. Jeffrey F. Hamburger has argued that friars responded purposefully to nuns' concerns in a symbiotic relationship by using metaphors and imagery that would have

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[43] Amy Leonard has examined these connections in Strasbourg. Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), esp. 8-10, 60-80, 147. See also Roest, "Observance and the Confrontation," 291; June L. Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Cultures, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014).

[44] Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* esp. 2.262-270, 370.

[45] For example, Hillenbrand, "Die Observantenbewegung," and Werner Williams-Krapp, "Frauenmystik und Ordensreform im 15. Jahrhundert," in *Literarische Interessenbildung im Mittelalter: DFG-Symposion 1991,* ed. Joachim Heinzle (Stuttgart: Verlag J. B. Metzler, 1993), 301-313.

resonated with other works the nuns knew.[46] Similarly, scholars such as John W. Coakley, Fiona J. Griffiths, Sigrid Hirbodian, and others have reassessed the *cura monialium* as a two-way street with women speaking up to demand change when pastoral care was not maintained at an appropriate standard.[47] But pastoral care was only one dimension of convent life.

Scholars have also focused on women's writings as a route into their experience of the reform. Anne Winston-Allen has studied convent chronicles from the period of the Observant Reform across orders, and demonstrated that male reformers and female religious sometimes held different ideas of what constituted proper liturgical observance or the common life.[48] Although the study is hugely important and has called attention to the sheer number and variety of these convent chronicles written by women about their own experiences of reform, examining how the chronicles related to communal life after the reform or networks to which the reformers and nuns belonged is outside of Winston-Allen's purview. Elsewhere, she has examined local

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[46] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), esp. 383-417. See also Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[47] Fiona J. Griffiths, *Nuns' Priests' Tales: Men and Salvation in Medieval Women's Monastic Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Sigrid Hirbodian, "Pastors and Seducers: The Practice of the *Cura Monialium* in Mendicant Convents in Strasbourg," in *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500,* ed. Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 303-338; John W. Coakley, "Friars as Confidants of Holy Women in Medieval Dominican Hagiography," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe,* ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 222-246; and Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and Their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006). *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power* argues that male collaborators' idea of partnership was fundamental to female sanctity and that, over time, this partnership was increasingly tinged with suspicion and skepticism. By the fifteenth century, the emphasis was on sacramental confession rather than mystical experience or women's unmediated connection to the divine. Other scholars have also argued for this decline in women's spiritual capital in the fifteenth century. See, e.g., Caciola, *Discerning Spirits,* esp. 274ff; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), esp. 233ff. For a much earlier period, Fiona Griffiths has argued that Herrad of Hohenbourg's *Hortus deliciarum,* a twelfth-century manuscript, demonstrates active engagement in reform by learned, Latinate, theologically knowledgeable nuns. Griffiths, *The Garden of Delights: Reform and Renaissance for Women in the Twelfth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[48] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles.*

instances of networking across orders within the same city.[49] The resulting collaborations across orders are undoubtedly significant, particularly in a given local context, but present only one sliver of the picture: the networks and activities of a single order are also an important consideration. After all, only Dominican nuns could reform other Dominican convents, and these traveling nuns were crucial for examining the process of liturgical change and renewal at reformed convents. The study of manuscripts alone for evidence of change, however, is not in and of itself sufficient.[50]

Community as Paradigm

All too often, medieval monastic houses are discussed in terms of community, but the question of what type of community they are is never addressed. For instance, scholars can speak of the "convent community" or "monastic community" without necessarily having to pay specific attention to the distinct processes and circumstances through which the community was formed, even though these formative questions would invariably leave their imprint on a given community.[51] When we speak of the "foundation" of a community, we are considering the various reasons that it was established and the processes that went into its creation; yet

[49] Anne Winston-Allen, "Networking in Medieval Strasbourg: Cross-Order Collaboration in Book Illustration among Women's Reformed Convents," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 42, no. 2 (2016), 224-247.
[50] Gisela Muschiol, "Migrating Nuns—Migrating Liturgy: The Context of Reform in Female Convents of the Late Middle Ages," in *Liturgy in Migration: From the Upper Room to Cyberspace,* ed. Teresa Berger (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 87.
[51] An important exception that shaped my thinking, particularly here and in Chapter Two, is Brian Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience, 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1988), esp. 409. McGuire argues that friendship shaped community particularly among Cistercian monks, and that this community was not limited to an individual monastery. See also Miri Rubin, "Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages," in *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England,* ed. Jennifer Kermode (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishers, 1991).

"formation," like reformation, was an iterative process. Consequential decisions about the community's way of life—its rule, for example, or where to find necessary pastoral care—were addressed in the early stages of a convent's formation and had important consequences for the nuns and their future. But the community was also formed anew over the generations as women made their professions or died and questions about discipline and pastoral care were addressed in different ways. The earliest days of each of the convents addressed in this dissertation are outside of its scope in most cases, but the issue of ongoing formation is very relevant. New nuns from outside towns arrived with the reform parties. Pastoral care changed. The rule was observed with renewed stringency. Miri Rubin has highlighted the importance of examining the tensions and fracture lines when examining a community, because too often the word can "[whitewash] shades of tension, distance, difference" while obscuring "the diversity of experience, the complexity of context, the workings of power and ideology, the manipulation of language."[52]

In this dissertation, I present community as a series of ever-widening concentric circles. That is, an individual nun, even within the confines of strict enclosure, continued to belong to a number of communities: the convent community, her family, the urban community, and the community of the Dominican Order. The relative importance of each of these communities might ebb and flow over time. The individual convent community might take precedence at key moments, such as a nun's entrance into the convent as a novice, while family ties could prove important during moments of conflict or financial need.

Within this model, the convent community is perceived like the ripples in a pond emanating from a pebble tossed into the water. In the ripples closest to the pebble, the

[52] Miri Rubin, "Small Groups," 134.

community seems very immediate: the other nuns in the convent. Each community member has a face, and possibilities arise for interpersonal connections and tensions. The closest relationships of the inner ripple were defined by the daily dictates of particular monastic structures. These were the essential primary texts which shaped the daily life of the monastic community: the Rule and, in the case of Dominican nuns, the Constitutions that elaborated the rather succinct Augustinian Rule. These texts will be discussed at greater length in Chapter Two. A key element of the community was the work of living in common: that is, eschewing private property. This aspect was especially emphasized by fifteenth-century reformers, who sought to renew individual poverty and the owning of personal belongings.[53] Augustine's rule, which grew out of a letter to his sister when she entered a monastic community, emphasized living in harmony and following the Acts of the Apostles where everyone was supplied according to their needs (Acts 4:34-35). The opening chapter on the purpose of the common life urges monastic readers to live cordially and harmoniously *(unianimiter et concorditer vivite)* in order to honor God.[54] Obedience and chastity were also of course emphasized.

The next ripples, receding outward, represents the members of the nun's family, whom she left behind when she joined the convent, and the convent's urban environs. One potential point of tension in the community had to do with nuns and laypeople disagreeing over the introduction of the reform. The Observant community was formed through this process: new

[53] In Chapter Four, I examine how books fell into a middle ground of "acceptable" private property given their role in supporting spiritual growth.
[54] Luc Verheijen, *La Règle de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1967), 417-420.

nuns arrived from outside and nuns unwilling to live under the reform's strictures left and became outsiders. Particularly at a moment of drastic change, these tensions might arise.[55]

As the ripples expand yet further outward, extending farther away from where the pebble hit the water, the community becomes something more akin to Brian Stock's idea of "textual communities" or Benedict Anderson's idea of "imagined communities": textual and conceptual notions of community which bind its members together.[56] This outermost ripple represents the entire Dominican Order, past, present, and future. As Chapters One and Two will demonstrate, both male and female reformers made selective use of history to cultivate a rarefied kind of community among reformed nuns. The community was thus both textual and imagined, relying upon writings about those who were long dead.

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My dissertation is intended as an intervention between several ways of approaching the Observant Reform for Dominican nuns. One recent approach has been to consider primarily the chronicles that the nuns wrote themselves. This approach is undoubtedly important: these texts were overlooked or dismissed for too long, and allow us to understand nuns' pro-reform

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[55] For a different period, see Alison I. Beach, *The Trauma of Monastic Reform: Community and Conflict in Twelfth-Century Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[56] Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), esp. 88-240; Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism,* rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2006). Medievalists have rightly critiqued Anderson's work, but the idea of an "imagined community," in which one imagines a "deep horizontal comradeship" with those of the same nationality (or, in the case of this dissertation, monastic order), even if one will never meet the vast majority of them still carries weight. Quotation and definition from Anderson, *Imagined Communities,* 6-7. For one example of a medievalist's engagement with Anderson, see Barbara H. Rosenwein, "Imagined Emotions for Imagined Communities," in *Imagined Communities on the Baltic Rim, from the Eleventh to the Fifteenth Centuries,* ed. Wojtek Jezierski and Lars Hermanson (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2016), 379-386.

attitudes. But they leave out the messier aspects of reform because they are from the perspective of the reform's winners. I try to bring back in these elements by considering a variety of other texts as well, such as city council records and copies of texts written by men that nuns copied for use in their convent. Other recent approaches have taken very local approaches, focusing on a single convent or a single city. Although I, too, am attuned to the particularities of the various cities and convents that appear in this dissertation's pages, my approach is a more comparative one. Finally, apart from these more local studies, recent studies that focus on the particularities of reform have paid insufficient attention to the years and decades after the introduction of the Observant Reform from the perspective of the reform. That is, once reform was instituted, unless there was some obvious sign that it had failed, little attention has been paid to how it was upheld. From the perspective of community formation, this question is of the utmost importance.

From a certain perspective, my lens is a wide one: I examine Dominican convents that range from Alsace to the Black Forest, from Bavaria to Switzerland, across the province of Teutonia. But on select occasions, I focus on specific comparative case studies, examining the local context in detail. Too often still, the religious aspects of the Observant reform are studied separately from the social, economic, and political effects. Balancing these concerns and levels of detail enables us to understand how the Observant Reform might have both uniquely empowered women who embraced or resisted it while simultaneously curtailing elements of nuns' access to authority within their own convents.

In the first chapter, "'As a model for our successors': Johannes Nider, Johannes Meyer, and Reform for Women," I compare the views of two important male Dominican reformers, Johannes Nider and Johannes Meyer. Nider and Meyer both wrote a number of critically important reform-related texts, and each was involved with the process of instituting the

Observance at different female houses. The chapter examines each of their approaches to the role of history and history-writing in the reform movement in turn. It then proceeds to a consideration of Meyer's deployment of Nider: how he adapted Nider's writing and portrayed Nider's life in his *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.* Meyer's *Buch* was one of the most important narrative sources for the Dominican Observant Reform and one that was written for a specifically female audience.

The second chapter, "Creating a Harmonious Community: Friendship and the Sisterbooks in the Observant Context," looks at relationships between women within convents. It argues that part of the value of the Sisterbooks to Observant audiences was the advice these texts provided on how to structure a harmonious community or deal with discord when it arose. It begins by considering classical, biblical, patristic, and medieval ideas of and warnings about friendship, before turning to the Sisterbooks in their original fourteenth-century milieu. It then delves into the Sisterbooks in the context of the Observant Reform. The final section discusses an overlooked manuscript of one particular Sisterbook, that from the convent of Adelhausen in Freiburg im Breisgau.

In Chapter Three, "Nuns, City Councils, and the Socioeconomics of Reform," I trace the process of reform in three different case studies to look at how convents and city councils interacted before, during, and after the introduction of the Observance. The case studies represent the second and third phases of the reform. The first case study is of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in Basel, which was reformed in 1423. St Mary Magdalene presents something of an anomaly in terms of composition: a convent that continued to draw a substantial portion of its nuns from noble families, even though most Observant Dominican convents had an increasing percentage of wealthy but non-noble nuns. The second case study is of St Katharina in

Nuremberg, reformed in 1428, which went on to become one of the leading lights of the reform. The final exemplum concerns the reform of three convents—Adelhausen, St Agnes, and St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen*—in the city of Freiburg in 1465. The chapter demonstrates the benefits of studying the Observant Reform at a medium scale of three cities rather than focusing on a single city or an entire region. It also highlights how sources produced by city councils may help reveal something of the debate within the convent that preceded the decision to adopt the reform.

The fourth and final chapter, "In Service of the Reform: Books, Instruction, and Modeling Reform," surveys the movement of nuns and books to spread useful knowledge about the reform. In contrast to the first chapter, this chapter relies on texts authored or produced by women themselves and investigates networks across the entire Dominican province of Teutonia. It begins with an overview of convent libraries and book loans. This section is followed by a consideration of other ways that nuns exchanged knowledge about books: particularly through letters, but also through inscriptions in manuscripts explaining the purpose of a given text. The chapter concludes with a discussion of knowledge about ritual behavior and how that was best modeled. Some aspects of the reform could be transmitted better in person than through any written mode.

This dissertation explores Dominican Observant reform from the perspective of the nuns. It looks at reform as a communal process in which the nuns sought to position themselves in local, order-wide, and historical communities of the Dominican Order. It is from these multiple positions that they both enlisted and inhabited real and imagined intellectual and social networks to achieve their aims. Yet their commitment to reform was not without anomalies. Sometimes the realpolitik of convent life required that they push back against the masculine ideal of strict active

enclosure to garner the secular support necessary to ensure the community's financial viability and the ultimate success of reform.

Chapter One

"As a model for our successors": Johannes Nider, Johannes Meyer, and Reform for Women[57]

Johannes Nider (d. 1438) and Johannes Meyer (d. 1485), two male reformers separated in their work by a generation, represent two distinct faces of the Observant Reform in general and of the reform of female Dominican convents in particular. Understanding their approaches and ideas is important for understanding how female reformers navigated the reform of their convents and produced their own ideas of what reform meant in a Dominican community. Writing shortly before his death, Johannes Nider wrote of his despair that those who "bore the weight of the fight against the demons *(daemonum)"* would not achieve the full perfection of the reform because nuns were unwilling to take it up.[58] His subject—those who bore the weight of the fight against the demons—was male reformers like himself and his colleague, Barthélemy Texier (d. 1449), who together undertook to introduce the Observant Reform to the Dominican convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg in 1428. Approximately thirty years later, Johannes Meyer penned a history of the Observant Reform of the Dominican Order, the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens (Book of the Reform of the Dominican Order).* It particularly focused on the reform of Dominican nuns. Meyer urged readers of his text to remember that generations may pass away, but the institution of the convent remained steadfast in its spirituality

[57] Title taken from *BdRP* IV-V, Prologue to Book V, 43. *Zu ainem ebenbild uns nochkom.*
[58] Johannes Nider, *Formicarius*, ed. G. Colvener (Douai: Balthazaris Belleri, 1602), III.3, 195.

(des closter stat ewenklich mit siner gaistlichait) because of the example of the women whom Meyer went on to describe and their commitment to the project of reform.[59]

These two snippets of thought represent very different opinions of women's engagement with reform by two of the most prominent figures of the Dominican Observance. Despite their central role in reform and extensive scholarship on each figure individually, their views on this subject have not been directly compared. In this chapter, I will consider Nider's and Meyer's writings separately, examining their attitudes about monastic reform and especially the reform of women's convents. I will begin with Nider's view of the female monastic community, which offered the possibility of control for women but precious little else. His view was primarily based around the possibility of control that community provided, particularly through enclosure and the supervision of a (necessarily male) confessor or spiritual advisor. Turning to Meyer, I will demonstrate how Meyer viewed living in a reformed community as an admirable option for nuns. Meyer drew expressly on the past—both the immediate past of the earlier reforming decades as well as the golden past of the Dominican Order's earliest decades—to encourage the development of reformed spiritual communities. His view of community was more benign, though arguably still exhibited a measure of control through his (re-)writing of history in the Sisterbooks and other texts. He wrote and rewrote history in order to provide an appropriate overarching historical narrative for Dominican women, who often also produced their own historical narratives and also maintained their own excellent archives. In the final section of the chapter, I will discuss how Meyer, writing and working a generation after Nider, used and adapted Nider's life and ideas in his own texts. Meyer relied substantially on Nider's

[59] *BdRP* I-III, Prologue to Book III, 55.

Formicarius (The Anthill) as well as details of Nider's life and reform efforts in writing his *Book of the Reform of the Dominican Order.*[60] This use and adaptation of Nider reveals how Meyer expected Nider's thinking on reform to be understood, as well as how Meyer interpreted history and gender in his writing.

Nider and Meyer must be understood against a backdrop of increasing efforts to control nuns through limiting what avenues of spirituality and ways of life were available to them. The order's prescriptive documents, the Augustinian Rule and the additional Constitutions that governed life for Dominican nuns, were an attempt to legislate communal unity and harmony. They also served to enact a measure of control. Indeed, numerous scholars have written about theologians' efforts in the late Middle Ages to close options that had been available to women, replacing them with a more restrictive regiment. *Periculoso,* issued in 1298 by Pope Boniface VIII (r. 1294-1303), was a watershed text, mandating strict active and passive enclosure for nuns and, for the first time, requiring "uniform hierarchical oversight."[61] Legislation against the beguines, laywomen who took informal religious vows and lived in community, was on the increase also. The absence of permanent vows among the beguines was clearly threatening to clerics, especially in the wake of the condemnation of doctrines found in Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls* at the Council of Vienne (1311-1312) and the execution of its author in 1310.[62] French theologian and reformer Jean Gerson (d. 1429) contributed to a growing literature

[60] Of note, *Formicarius* also influenced the most important witch-hunting manual of the late Middle Ages and early modern period, the *Malleus Maleficarum (The Witches' Hammer).* Elliott, *Bride of Christ*, 264-265; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits,* 319.

[61] Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women*, 2-3, 42.

[62] Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001); Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014; Amy Hollywood, "Suffering Transformed: Marguerite Porete, Meister Eckhart, and the Problem of Women's Spirituality," in *Meister Eckhart*

on the discernment of spirits, determining whether visions were sent by God or the devil in an attempt to curtail women's visionary spirituality.[63] Nider would continue this initiative. In the closing years of the fifteenth century in Italy, the fiery preacher and reformer Girolamo Savonarola initially proposed that Florentine women, including laywomen and tertiaries, ought to take control over their own reform. Within a few days, he had backtracked on this idea and instead called for a "committee of men" to take charge of reforming Florence's women. Tamar Herzig has characterized his efforts to reform Dominican tertiaries as having "exclusively disciplinary connotations."[64] Nider, Meyer, and other Dominican reformers both took up and furthered these efforts.[65]

Part and parcel of these attempts at control was the misogyny of the late Middle Ages. As Caroline Walker Bynum said thirty years ago, this misogyny is well known as "was fully articulated in theological, philosophical, and scientific theory that was centuries old" by that time.[66] Scholars have engaged with medieval misogyny in a number of ways, both analyzing its existence and operation as well as considering the ways men and women perpetuated it or subverted it. Dyan Elliott, whose book argues that the downward slippage of the bride of Christ eventuates in the witch's copulation with the devil, assesses how the misogyny of Nider's

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and the Beguine Mystics: Hadewijch of Brabant, Mechthild of Magdeburg, and Marguerite Porete, ed. Bernard McGinn (New York: Continuum, 1994), 87-113.

[63] Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 264-296; Caciola, *Discerning Spirits*, 284-314; Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity*, 211-213.

[64] Tamar Herzig, *Savonarola's Women: Visions and Reform in Renaissance Italy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 17-18.

[65] Felix Fabri (d. 1502) went on two major pilgrimages to the Holy Land and wrote *Die Sionpilger,* a text intended to provide a virtual pilgrimage experience to enclosed nuns. He acted as confessor and spiritual advisor to the Observant nuns of Medingen and Medlingen near Ulm, and wrote the text for those women. Kathryne Beebe, *Pilgrim and Preacher: The Audiences and Observant Spirituality of Friar Felix Fabri (1437/8-1502)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 4-16.

[66] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 151.

Formicarius was central to this development. The laywomen he claims to have admired fare better than the nuns, but even laywomen, most notably Joan of Arc, could fail.[67] In this chapter, I am building on this work, but also attempting to show how male authors, steeped in the misogyny that permeated their environment, deployed shifting ideas about women's capabilities. These late-medieval authors also adjusted their presentation of the possibility and promise of reform for Dominican nuns depending on their audience.

Johannes Nider: Community as Control

Filled with tales of demons and witches, but also steeped in the fifteenth-century dialogue around reform, Johannes Nider's writings are virulently misogynist. Unlike the third-generation reformer Johannes Meyer, Nider did not devote the majority of his career to reforming nuns and writing texts for them. But, understanding his attitudes towards women, history, and community are important for understanding the reform movement's oftentimes suspicious and controlling attitude towards women. Nider's primary audience was men like himself: university-educated, Latinate clerics. To these men, he presented one view of the possibilities of reform for themselves in texts like *De reformatione status cenobitici* (On the reform of the monastic condition). He presented his male audience with a different view of reform for women, one that privileged control and was rife with overt misogyny, in *Formicarius.* Scholarship by the likes of Dyan Elliott and Michael D. Bailey has revealed how inseparable the themes of witchcraft, heresy, reform, and the suppression of female mystical religious experience are in Nider's

[67] Elliott, *Bride of Christ Goes to Hell,* 256-263.

work.[68] But closer attention to Nider's audience across multiple works reveals the contours of the latter two themes especially.

Johannes Nider was born in Isny, in Württemberg, around 1380 and entered the Observant Dominican friary at Colmar in 1402. After studying in Cologne and at the University of Vienna, he became the prior of the Nuremberg friary in 1427/28. During his time in Nuremberg, he was a key agent in the successful reform, following an earlier failed attempt, of the Dominican female community of St Katharina. The reform took place in 1428.[69] In 1429, he was sent to Basel to reform the friary there before the beginning of the Council of Basel (1431-1449). In 1434, he left Basel to teach in Vienna; he died four years later on a visitation to Nuremberg. During his peripatetic life, in addition to participating in the reform of St Katharina in Nuremberg, he was also involved in the reform of the convent of Tulln in 1436 and St Katharina in Colmar in 1438.[70]

Nider's views on reform were, as Michael Bailey has shown, interested in the spiritual renewal of the monastic orders as a way to achieve broader goals.[71] Somewhere between a conservative return to the original status of the order, before weakness and failing crept in, and progress towards an ideal that had existed in the past, reform offered the best path towards individual spiritual regeneration. His major works on reform for men do not focus on a single order and, in fact, make an effort to reach monks and friars of all orders. But these works—*De reformatione status cenobitici* and *De abstinencia esus carnium* (On abstinence from eating

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[68] Michael D. Bailey, *Battling Demons: Witchcraft, Heresy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); Elliott, *Bride of Christ,* 256-263; Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 294-296.
[69] For more on this reform, see Chapter Three.
[70] There is no complete modern study of Nider's life. Bibliographical overview from Eugen Hillenbrand, "Johannes Nider OP," *VL(2)* 6:971-977 and Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 11-28.
[71] Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 75-89.

meat)—are addressed to men, not women. Though Nider evinced support for beguines and other lay religious people, he held a less positive view of reform for religious women in convents.[72] Although reforming female convents was not a centerpiece of Nider's career, his conceptualization of reform for women is much more control-oriented in comparison with his view of reform for friars.

Reform for Men

Nider's treatise *De reformatione status cenobitici,* begun in 1431 and completed c. 1433-1434, was written in Latin for an audience of university-trained clerics. It specifically focused on the possibilities of reform for male religious, not female. In his analysis of the text, James Mixson draws attention to the emphasis that Nider placed on the communal life, rejection of private property, and "daily tireless effort" by each individual reformed community in order to maintain the reform.[73] This daily work reveals the extent to which reform was, for Nider, ideally an internal undertaking rather than one imposed from the outside. Moreover, in this kind of reform, recent history or even order-specific history played little role. Indeed, it could even be at fault, presenting old standards and ideals no longer relevant in the world of the fifteenth

[72] John Van Engen, "Friar Johannes Nyder on Laypeople Living as Religious in the World," in *Vita Religiosa im Mittelalter: Festschrift für Kaspar Elm zum 70. Geburtstag,* ed. Franz J. Felten and Nikolas Jaspert (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999), 583-615.

[73] James Mixson, "The Setting and Resonance of John Nider's *De reformatione religiosorum,"* in *Kirchenbild und Spiritualität: Dominikanische Beiträge zur Ekklesiologie und zum kirchlichen Leben im Mittelalter, Festschrift für Ulrich Horst OP zum 75. Geburtstag,* ed. Thomas Prügl and Marianne Schlosser (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2007), 324-332.

century.[74] The only way forward was in accordance with Paul's words to the Romans: "And be not conformed to this world; but be reformed in the newness of your mind, that you may prove what is the good, and the acceptable, and the perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2).

Unlike his treatise specifically on reform, Nider's magnum opus, *Formicarius,* is "a far more literary work," which consists of a series of loosely interconnected *exempla* and thus "can be read in many ways and for many purposes."[75] It takes the form of a dialogue between a "Theologian," clearly based on Nider's persona, and his student, Piger ("Lazybones"). It deals extensively with questions about the veracity of visions, particularly focusing on female visionaries, and is notable as well for the depths of its misogyny.[76] The text's sprawling nature and loose organization mean that many scholars have focused primarily on the final book, which is entitled "On Witches and Their Deceptions" and which became an important source for the witch-hunting manual *Malleus Maleficarum (The Witches' Hammer).* Michael Bailey's analysis is among the first to treat *Formicarius* comprehensively and place it into its proper context of concern not just about witchcraft but also heresy, the conciliar movement, and thoroughgoing church reform.[77] Unlike Johannes Meyer's focus on history as a useful genre for the reform of

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[74] As John Van Engen observed, the fifteenth century was "steeped in inheritances yet productive of innovations." For Nider, inheritances were properly biblical and patristic, not recent, and innovations had the power to restore at least parts of the church. Van Engen, "Multiple Options," 260. See also Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 82-85.

[75] Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 92.

[76] Ibid., 111-116; Werner Tschacher, *Der Formicarius des Johannes Nider von 1437/38: Studien zu den Anfängen der europäischen Hexenverfolgungen im Spätmittelalter* (Aachen: Shaker, 2000), 188ff; Martine Osorero, Agostino Paravicini Bagliani, and Kathrin Utz Tremp, eds., *L'imaginaire du sabbat: Édition critique des textes les plus anciens (1430 c.-1440 c.)* (Lausanne: Université de Lausanne, 1999), 213ff; Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women, 200-1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 256-267.

[77] Bailey, *Battling Demons*. See also Tschacher, *Der* Formicarius *des Johannes Nider.* This study focuses on witchcraft but also provides an excellent overview of the *Formicarius.* See also Osorero et al., *L'imaginaire du sabbat,* which includes an overview of the *Formicarius* as a whole and excerpts and translations from selections dealing with witchcraft.

women, discussed below, Nider was much more concerned with exempla both contemporary and patristic.

Nider's vision of reform expressed in the *Formicarius* was largely focused on the reform of monastic orders, rather than a full-blown reform *in capite et in membris* that would be too general and ultimately accomplish nothing. For Nider, reform of the orders would result in the kind of personal spiritual reform that was at the heart of Christianity and would be more successful than any conciliar attempts at primarily structural or institutional reform.[78] As a result, these works help establish a kind of masculine baseline for understanding how community, history, and reform might operate together for men. His view of individual spiritual reform as the most promising option was consequential for his pessimistic view of the reform of nuns.

Nider's focus on contemporary examples rather than examples from Dominican history squared with his view of reform as an individual project with a communal dimension, rather than a communal project with an individual dimension. His skepticism about women's merits deserves further consideration in order to understand how he perceived them fitting into his reforming goals.

Reform for Women in Texts for Men

Immediately in the prologue of *Formicarius,* Nider shared his suspicions of anecdotes recounted to him by women. Unless the women had repeatedly proved their reliability, he suspected them to be speaking deliriously on such matters *(in talibus delirare suspicor)* on

[78] Nider, *Formicarius,* I.7, 52-58; Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 75ff, esp. 88.

account of the fragility of their sex.[79] Werner Tschacher has analyzed Nider's oral sources. Most are monks and clerics, but the sources stem from a variety of social classes and Nider met them throughout his life and travels. Unsurprisingly, only two of the sources are women. One of these women was a relative, Elisabeth, from Isny; the other was a virgin from a farming village near Lindau.[80] And of course, Nider's work is pervaded with tales of women whose status as the weaker sex made them uniquely susceptible to demonic visions. Nider tells the story of Magdalena Beutler, a sister at the convent of Poor Clares in Freiburg, who (in)famously prophesied the specific day of her own death only to live. In the course of his telling, the Theologian informs his student that, when the actual outcome is different from the one envisioned, therein lies deception. This is why silly little women *(mulierculae)* too likely to believe visions need to be supervised by wiser monks and clerics.[81] Indeed, in the nearby city of Basel, the reform of the Dominican convent of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in 1423 demonstrated for Nider women's tendency toward ecstatic spirituality. Prior to its reform, the sisters often lost their senses in their devotions *(ubi sicuti antea frequenter in suis devotionibus alienata sensibus corporeis),* but after reform, their devotions became much humbler and they more effectively maintained silence under the guidance of their new prioress. These two examples illustrated for Nider and the reader how easily and in how many ways the female sex

[79] Nider, *Formicarius,* Prologue. Tschacher characterizes Nider's vivid reportage of contemporary exempla as in direct contrast to "women's miracle stories" *(den Wunderberichten der Frauen),* 134.
[80] Tschacher, *Der* Formicarius *des Johannes Nider,* 169-178.
[81] *Formicarius* III.8, 234. On Magdalena, see Caciola, *Discerning Spirits,* 317; Rabia Gregory, "Thinking of Their Sisters: Authority and Authorship in Late Medieval Women's Religious Communities," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 40, no. 1 (2014): 75-100; Elliott, *Proving Woman,* 197-200.

could err unless they were directed by the more prudent masculine sex *(quam faciliter, et multipliciter femineus sexus oberret, nisi prudens masculinus eum regat).*[82]

The reform of St Katharina in Nuremberg, which Nider aided in, featured prominently in Book III of the *Formicarius,* which deals primarily with false visions. Nider portrayed the reform as having been contentious: the whole city was divided along familial lines between those who felt reform was good and those who viewed it as something new and therefore pernicious *(aliis vero dicentibus nequaquam, sed novitas est perniciosa).*[83] During the ongoing debates between the townspeople, the order's master general brought eleven saintly reformers to the convent to initiate the reform. Eventually, the city council concluded that the sisters of the convent ought to accept the reform since it had already begun. Nider presents the reformers like himself as a bulwark against demonic fury *(contra iras daemonum);* although the sisters did not initially take up the reform voluntarily *(quod nulla sororum voluntaria fuit),* they eventually consented to the reform.[84] In Nider's account of the reform, the women are only granted the agency of resistance to the proper, inevitable forward path. Notably, the level of resistance that he described seems to have been an exercise of his creative license rather than a reflection of the situation in Nuremberg.[85] Tellingly, though, the reform is concluded after the sisters have accepted it and the appropriate psalms have been sung. Today, Nider says, that place has been totally reformed *(sicque locus ille hodie totaliter reformatus est).*[86] Elsewhere in the book, in response to a

[82] Nider, *Formicarius,* III.8, 235.
[83] Ibid., III.3, 195.
[84] Ibid., III.3, 195-197.
[85] See Chapter Three. See also alternative accounts of the reform in Theodor von Kern, "Die Reformation des Katharinenklosters zu Nürnberg im Jahre 1428," *Jahresbericht des Historischen Vereins in Mittelfranken* 31 (1863): 1-20.
[86] Nider, *Formicarius,* III.3, 195-197.

question from his student, Piger/"Lazybones," the Theologian argued against the more typical view of the reform. The lazy view, taken by Piger, is that friars and nuns had slipped from their original high moral standard and the best way to resolve this problem was through collective, communal reform. The Theologian concluded instead that those in power, such as princes and bishops and, by extension, priors and confessors, must shepherd their flocks. When they feed their lambs on the virtuous life *(agnos pascant vita virtuosa),* they will remedy the problems.[87] While in the hands of another theologian, an individual, interior reform might provide substantial leeway for women to engage and benefit, Nider's framework grants room to women only insofar as they are guided by wiser, moral men.

In Book V of the *Formicarius,* the book devoted to the subject of witchcraft and thus the subject of most scholarly attention, Nider returned to the subject of the reform of St Katharina in Nuremberg and reported how renewed attention to community conformity resolved a demonic infestation. In a varied discussion of demons and their powers, especially over virgins, Piger asked the Theologian for examples of demons disturbing communities *(domos).* Stressing again the difficulty of the reform at St Katharina *(cum extrema difficultate),* due to the unwillingness of the sisters and their extramural accomplices, he told Piger about a certain demon who arrived in the convent after it was enclosed *(postquam igitur locus regulariter clausus est)* and after the stubborn necks of the nuns had submitted to the yoke of obedience *(cervicosa gens sexus fragilis colla iugo submisit obedientiae).* In a story that Johannes Meyer would recount for nuns reading his chronicle (see below), the Theologian reports that, at first, he did not believe there was a demon. He told the sisters who came to him that the noises they were hearing were clearly cats

[87] Ibid., I.6, 51.

chasing mice. The Theologian suspected that womanly delusion was to blame. But, when the demon attacked a sister who had initially rebelled against the reform, the Theologian realized something needed to be done. The stiff-necked holdouts against the reform eventually submitted and, with that, the demon left the convent: the Theologian knew not where *(nescio quo devenit).*[88] In the tale, reformed community has a controlling power. The demon was able to terrorize the women because of cracks in the plaster of their reform. The moment these cracks were sealed through increased piety and conformity of the sisters' lives around the sacraments, the demon vanished. While interior reform may have worked for men, for women, community reform acted as a form of control in which the process was not as important as the conformity. Nider used both one-on-one conversation *(orationes privatas singulis)* and speeches to the whole convent *(publica)* to urge submission *(patientia)* and reliance on God.[89] With no other mention of the agency of individual nuns, though, the whole tale emphasized community unity in reform as the best way to counter potential demonic infestations.

Sometimes when Nider discussed reform for women, he was really speaking about reform for men. Nider included Nuremberg and the exemplary piety displayed by its laywomen in particular in his own day. He cited the stereotypical frequency with which Nuremberg's women took the Eucharist as evidence, for they communicated far more often than did Nuremberg's men. But the section quickly turns to a discussion of Nider's predecessor as the prior of the Nuremberg Dominicans, Eberhard, and Eberhard's work ministering to the city. Nider portrayed Eberhard as working passionately to develop the spirituality of Nuremberg along appropriate lines, where both friars and laypeople behaved in expected ways and were neither

[88] Ibid., V.2, 344ff.
[89] Ibid., V.2, 345.

sinful nor overzealously spiritual in their behavior.[90] Both Eberhard's devotion to improving the city's spiritual landscape and the portrayal of Nuremberg's laywomen as devoted to the Eucharist dovetail with Nider's suspicion of the monastic environment, support of lay spirituality and individual reform, and also his belief that women must be carefully supervised by qualified men. Who, after all, was better qualified than the prior of an Observant friary? Undoubtedly, reform of friars, who had a vital preaching role in their community, had a more obvious impact on the lay community, thus advancing Nider's goal of interior personal reform. Moreover, Nider's focus remained on the current state of the city, rather than relying on a perceived heyday of Dominican excellence: he and his immediate predecessor each were involved with the work of bettering the city through reforming its citizens in a forward-looking manner.

The Theologian tells Piger about the many good qualities of these Dominican preachers. Among other abilities, they can pray, they can explain and clarify the word of God, and they can provide an exemplar through the orderly, calm life they lead. But Piger raised an important question: what about the deterioration he has noticed among bishops and prelates here in Germany, who have begun to act more like secular princes rather than shepherds of a common flock? The Theologian's answer refers to biblical and patristic authorities, particularly Gregory the Great's homilies, as well as to contemporary examples. The first such example was Frederick of Aufseß (d. 1440), prince-bishop of Bamberg. Frederick's elevation to the bishopric distressed the badly behaved clerics of the diocese. They hoped for a more relaxed leader, but Frederick retained his high moral standards. The second example came from Nider's own youth *(tempore quo fui iunior):* Bishop Eckhard of Worms (d. 1405), who washed the stain of simony from his

[90] Ibid., I.1, 12-13.

diocese.[91] In both cases, reform in the bishopric resulted from a morally upright man becoming the bishop, maintaining his morals once in office, and subsequently creating an environment where it was easier to uphold the proper moral standards. Piger, of course, recants: he was too rash in his judgment of the prelates of all of Teutonia. Ultimately, any positive elements in Nider's view of church reform did not meaningfully extend to nuns, and the reform of the individual was a worthier project than corporate reform.

Johannes Meyer: History as Community

Johannes Meyer's copious textual output was almost entirely intended for the reformed Dominican female communities to which Meyer devoted much of his life. Through his writing of history, he created a vision of community that served to advance the project of reform. These histories included the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens (Book of the Reform of the Dominican Order),* which focused on the reform of Schönensteinbach and other Dominican female communities. In the prologue to the work, Meyer blessed his readers and set out the structure of the text, which is organized into five books. The first two recount the initial foundation of Schönensteinbach, the female convent at the forefront of the Observance, and its reform in 1397. The second two tell of the people involved in the reform, both nuns and friars. The final book "is a general book, and tells how the Order began to be reformed in this German province, how many convents were slowly reformed, and what happened in this time. It tells of the graves of the people of the reform, and their works, and the wisdom and patience they needed

[91] Ibid., I.6, 45ff.

so that they could advance the reform and the religious life so greatly."[92] Meyer also encouraged his readers to add to his book, noting that he had left space in the manuscript in case convents were reformed after he completed the work.[93] Meyer also translated and reworked Humbert of Romans' (d. 1277) *De officiis ordinis (Concerning the offices of the order)* into a German text called *Das Amptbuch (The Office-Book),* specifically intended for nuns, and redacted various fourteenth-century Sisterbooks (on which more later).[94] In the *Buch der Reformacio,* Meyer repeatedly referenced his reliance on convent archives as well as his use of oral histories, which involved consulting with nuns about their recollections and stories about their predecessors that they knew.[95]

Meyer was born in Zurich in 1422 and, shortly before his tenth birthday, entered into the conventual Dominican friary in his hometown. In 1442, at the age of twenty, he moved to Basel to enter the Observant friary there. Apparent ill health prevented him from attending the Dominican *studium generale,* but once he was ordained in 1454, he spent the remainder of his life as a traveling confessor to women's reformed convents scattered between Bern and Worms in a corridor along the Rhine River. After four years (1454-1458) at St Michelsinsel in Bern, he moved on to the female community that had been at the forefront of the reform in the Dominican province of Teutonia, Schönensteinbach, where he remained until 1465. After a period in

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[92] *BdRP* I-III, Prologue, 2.
[93] Meyer does seem to have intended this as a genuine call to readers to add to the chronicle as they could. *BdRP* IV-V, Prologue to Book V, 44. See also Claire Taylor Jones, introduction to *Women's History in the Age of Reformation,* 29.
[94] *Das "St Katharinentaler Schwesternbuch": Untersuchung, Edition, Kommentar,* ed. Ruth Meyer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1995), 65-72
[95] *BdRP* I-III, Prologue, 2; *BdRP* IV-V, Prologue to Book V, 42-43. See also Claire Taylor Jones, "Writing History to Make History: Johannes Meyer's Chronicles of Reform," in *Medieval Cantors and Their Craft: Music, Liturgy, and the Shaping of History,* ed. Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis, A. B. Kraebel, and Margot E. Fassler (York: York Medieval Press, 2017), 350.

Freiburg im Breisgau in 1465 reforming three of that city's four Dominican convents—Adelhausen, St Agnes, and St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen* (the Penitents of St Mary Magdalene)—he moved on to Sylo in Schlettstadt (present-day Sélestat), where he remained from 1467 until at least 1469. He then spent four years, from 1473 to 1477, at Liebenau in Worms. During this period, he was also a short-term confessor at St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen* in 1473 and at Hasenpfuhl in Speyer in 1475. His final long-term post was at Adelhausen, where he remained from 1482 until his death in 1485. In accordance with his request, he was buried in the convent's choir.[96] Whatever health problems may have prevented his university education did not get substantially in his way as he pursued a life of acting as confessor to numerous female communities and producing texts used in many others.[97] Meyer's direct involvement with multiple reforming female communities gave him a unique, albeit male, perspective on the needs of women engaged with the Observance.

Meyer's work seems to have stemmed from a conviction that developed during his years at the Dominican convent of St Michaelsinsel in Bern. That convent had been reformed in 1439 by a contingent of four sisters from St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in Basel. During his time at St Michaelsinsel, Meyer identified a shortage of texts in that convent's library and felt that having more texts available would be useful to the sisters as they carried out the many convent

[96] Meyer's biography has been a subject of scholarly investigation since the late nineteenth century. For the latest version, correcting errors made by earlier historians, see Werner Fechter's *Verfasserlexicon* entry and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin's addendum: Werner Fechter, "Meyer, Johannes OP," *VL(2):* 6: 474-489; Wolfram Schneider-Lastin, "Meyer, Johannes [Nachtr.]," *VL(2)* 11:1003-1004. For two recent treatments of Meyer's life and works, see the introductions to the following volumes: Johannes Meyer, *Das Amptbuch,* trans. and ed. Sarah Glenn DeMaris (Rome: Angelicum University Press, 2015), 1-37; Jones, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation,* 14-17.

[97] At least twenty-four manuscripts survive that either contain works by Meyer or are otherwise associated with him. See Claudia Heimann, "Beobachtungen zur Arbeitsweise von Johannes Meyer OP anhand seiner Aussagen über die Reform der Dominikanerkonvente der Teutonia, besonders der *Natio Austriae,"* AFP 72 (2002): 187-220; Meyer, *Das Amptbuch,* xxv-xxx.

offices and devoted their time to singing the liturgy. He was also obviously concerned that these women know their history, beginning with the earliest beguine communities who sought out their *cura mulierum* from Dominican friars, through the spiritual flourishing of the fourteenth century, skimming over the perceived depths of decline in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, and bringing history together with the present by recounting the more recent history of the nuns and friars who persevered in spreading the reform. Meyer's acute understanding of the utility of history and books in general for spreading and maintaining reform is supported not only through the sheer volume of his textual output, but also by the way that he envisioned this learning being communicated in convents and throughout the reformed communities of Teutonia. By analyzing Meyer's own advertisement for his book in an "open letter" to Dominican sisters, as well as considering his perception of the role of the convent librarian and his editorial efforts with the Adelhausen Sisterbook, Meyer's sense of both the importance of history to create community as well as his role in the process become clear.

Meyer's *Epistel Brieffe zu den Swestern Brediger Ordens* ("Open Letter to Dominican Sisters"), which survives in two manuscripts, is perhaps the most explicit text describing his understanding of the relationship between history, literacy, and community, as well as his own role in matters.[98] In both cases, the text of the letter was transmitted with Meyer's *Papstchronik Predigerordens,* a history of popes beginning with Innocent III (r. 1198-1216) from a Dominican perspective; the *Kaiserchronik Predigerordens,* a history of political rulers from a Dominican perspective; and the *Vitae Fratrum,* lives of important Dominican brothers.[99] The Berlin

[98] The manuscripts are Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195, fols. 253v-257r, and StAF B 1 Nr. 203, fols. 71v-74r.
[99] In the case of the StAF manuscript, the *Kaiserchronik* and *Vitae Fratrum* are in ms. B 1 Nr. 202, which is part of a pair with 203. Nr. 202 contains the table of contents for both volumes. The open letter is not referenced in the table of contents.

manuscript, written c. 1472 in Alsace, potentially at the convent of St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg, also contains Meyer's list of reformed Observant women's houses, along with a life of Albertus Magnus and a history of the rule of Pope Sixtus IV (r. 1471-1484). The Freiburg manuscript, which was written by Meyer himself in 1407 while in Guebwiller, contains only the texts common to both manuscripts.

Meyer opened the letter by touting his years of service to Dominican sisters and the great work *(grosse arbeit)* that he had carried out by producing books for the sisters. Particularly, he translated texts from Latin into German *(so ich es uß den latinsche buechere zu tůschtz gerihtet hatt)* so that they might be more accessible to the sisters, and others have checked his translations to ensure that they are both accurate and edifying. These books about their order *(unsers ordens bůcher)* include histories and chronicles of the deeds, struggles, and lives of saintly friars and sisters of the order *(den geistlichen rechten und von herverten hystorien und cronicen und von dem leben der heiligen vettren und swestren unsers heiligen predier ordens).* As a good historian ought, Meyer informed the sisters that he consulted primary sources: papal bulls, letters bearing seals, and other texts that he had seen many of *(bestlichen bullen und versigellten briffen und dig instrumenten der ich vil gesehen hab).* He had put these texts into order in his books in various separate chapters as best he can so that they might serve the nuns' needs *(und in bücher geordnet und in underscheidlich capitel geteilt so best ich kond noch dem also es closter frowen predier ordens aller hast gedienen mag).*[100] These practices are not unfamiliar to any historian writing today. Additionally, Meyer included excerpts or complete transcriptions of some primary sources, especially letters, in several of his texts. Some of these letters only survive today in that

[100] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195, fols. 253v-254r.

context, making his role not only that of an historian but also that of an transmitter beyond the original archival context of a letter to other nuns as well as (inadvertently and unintentionally) to modern scholars.[101]

Finally, after describing his genres, sources, and process of arranging those sources, Meyer elaborated on his purpose of serving the nuns. Through the writing of these books, he said, Dominican sisters may be given instruction and consolation unique to their order: other orders do not have similar books written about them *(durch die geschrifft diser bücher nit allein underwisung und trost gegeben sunder, och grosse erwirt im zu gezogen und wirdiges lop, fur alle ander closter frowen aller andren orden die solicher bücher von im und ir orden nit hant).* Meyer was rarely shy about stating his own role in events and he certainly did not hold back in this letter. He emphasized that he did the work of creating these books, and provided a list of his most important and useful books so that convents can obtain them *(so wil ich hie bestimen ettliche der grösten und der nützlichen bücher von mir zů samen gefügt us das ir sy wissen fur uwer clöster zů bestellen).*[102]

Among his most essential volumes, Meyer recommends the *Amptbuch* and its supplement, the *Buch der Ersetzung,* as well as the *Vitas Fratrum.* The fourth recommended text is the *Buch der Reformacio.* Meyer describes this as a big book *(ein michel bůch)* which is about the reformation beginning under Raymond of Capua, and about how it spread thanks to many helpers from Raymond's time to Meyer's present day. In his brief overview, he mentioned one specific, exemplary case of reform: St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg, where the prioress faced

[101] Jones, "Writing History to Make History," 341.
[102] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quar. 195, fol. 254v.

considerable resistance to her desire for reform.[103] The reform of St Nikolaus was the subject of eleven chapters of Book V of Meyer's *Buch der Reformacio,* one of the longer sections. The pre-reform prioress, Agnes Vigin, who advocated vigorously for the reform, convinced a number of her fellow sisters to support the reform project with her and persisted in pursuing the reform even when some other sisters were obstinately opposed.[104] Agnes's diligence in advocating for reform, her extensive letter-writing on behalf of the reform project, and finally her humility in stepping down from the post of prioress to allow Katharina Meyer, a member of the reform party from St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in Basel, to take up the position of first reform prioress all made her worthy of note in Meyer's open letter. Not only that, but Agnes's humility and subordination to her community demonstrate the sort of communal thinking that Meyer's histories aimed to depict for their readers. Her story acted as an ideal selling point for readers of the open letter to encourage them to add a copy of the *Buch der Reformacio* to their library. It was a recent example of the virtues that the reform aimed to instill.

Meyer concluded his letter by mentioning his other little books *(buchli)* in Latin and German, especially two of his Latin works. The first of these was a chronicle of the Dominican Order, the *Chronica brevis OP,* though he does not name it. The second was the *Liber de illustribus viris OP,* which Meyer titled with a German translation, *Von den durlůchten manen,* which consists of the lives of various Dominican luminaries, including a chapter on women. For the nuns' benefit and comfort, though, Meyer included the contents of these two Latin texts in the aforementioned German works *(und wissen, minen recht lieben swestren, das dise ij bücher*

[103] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195, fol. 255rv.
[104] *BdRP* IV-V, V.28-39, 80-95. See also Hirbodian, "Pastors and Seducers," 314-319.

latin sint so hab ich doch sy vast uch zů trost ingezogen in die obgenanten tützsche bücher).[105] There has been substantial scholarly debate over the Latinity of fifteenth-century nuns, who are often presumed to have lost all but the most basic Latin abilities in comparison with earlier sisters. The fact that the vast majority of the book production by Observant Dominican nuns was in the vernacular would, at first glance, seem to support this assumption.[106] More recently, however, scholars have begun to take a more expansive view of literacy and learning, both in Latin and in the vernacular, at convents.[107] They have recognized that medieval literacy does not need to accord strictly with our modern ideal of literacy, which entails the ability both to read and to write fluently in a language. David N. Bell proposed a useful scheme of four levels of literacy, ranging from being able to read a simple text without comprehending the words, through reading and comprehending a common liturgical text and then reading and comprehending a non-liturgical text, to finally the ability to compose one's own text.[108] In the introduction to her translation of Meyer's *Buch der Reformacio,* Claire Taylor Jones argues that Meyer himself had an even broader conception of women's literacy. Meyer mentioned nuns with the ability to translate challenging Latin texts into German, thus making the texts available to

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[105] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195, fol. 255v.

[106] See, for example, Peter Ochsenbein, "Latein und Deutsch im Alltag oberrheinischer Dominikanerinnenklöster des Spätmittelalters," in *Latein und Volkssprache im deutschen Mittelalter, 1100-1500,* ed. Nikolaus Henkel and Nigel F. Palmer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), 42-51.

[107] See, among others, Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Eva Schlotheuber, "Books in Women's Hands: Liturgy, Learning, and the Libraries of Dominican Nuns in Westphalia," in *Entre stabilité et itinerance: Livres et culture des ordres mendiants, XIIIe-XVe siècle,* ed. Martin Morard, Nicole Bériou, and Donatella Nebbiai (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 134ff; Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 5-8, 73-76. For a broad geographical and temporal view on nuns' literacy, see the three related volumes edited by Virginia Blanton, Veronica O'Mara, and Patricia Stoop: *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Hull Dialogue* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Kansas City Dialogue* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015); and *Nuns' Literacies in Medieval Europe: The Antwerp Dialogue* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017).

[108] David N. Bell, *What Nuns Read: Books and Libraries in Medieval English Nunneries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1995), 60. See also Michael T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England, 1066-1307,* 3d ed. (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

more members of the community. But he also had praise for a nun who could neither read nor write but who had a phenomenal memory for sermons and the Bible, and whose confessor reported "that she surpassed many great schoolmen in understanding."[109] Indeed, Meyer's explanation of the overlap between his Latin and German works, including providing the titles of the Latin works in German for accessibility, reflects this multi-layered understanding of nuns' literacy. The letter closed with a request for prayer and a greeting to all sisters in the Observance.

The letter left out numerous works that Meyer had already composed by the time he wrote it in the 1470s. In some cases, including an apparently lost text describing the altars of Schönensteinbach and their patrons, these texts would have been of primarily local interest. In other cases, such as Meyer's redactions of the Sisterbooks, additions of various lives to those Sisterbooks, and his life of the great Dominican Albertus Magnus (d. 1280), the reasons for omission are less clear.[110] It is possible that Meyer did not mention his work on the Sisterbooks because he did not consider them to be his own work in a meaningful way—he had not written or translated them the way he had the texts he did include—though the number of surviving fifteenth-century manuscript copies of the Sisterbooks from both reformed and unreformed convents suggests that they were certainly of more than local interest.[111] The life of Albertus Magnus was also, in Meyer's typical style, inclusive of details that would be of interest to Observant Dominican nuns—and was included in one of the two manuscripts that transmitted the

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[109] *BdRP* I-III, III.36, 93. Jones, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation,* 2, 22-25; quotation is Jones' translation, 119. The original German reads: *daz sy mangen grossen schulpfaffen über treff mit verstantnus.*

[110] Fechter says in the entry for Meyer in the *Verfasserlexicon* only, "In der 'Epistel' nannte M. nicht alle seine Schriften. Übergangen sind (wegen nur lokalen Interesses oder aus anderen Gründen):…" Fechter, "Johannes Meyer," *VL(2)* 6:483.

[111] See the appendix in Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women,* 286-291.

open letter itself.[112] While any argument about why Meyer left these works out of the open letter must necessarily be speculative, the works he chose to include do seem to have something specific to say about the Dominican community and nuns' role in the reform of that community. That is, not only would these texts have been of interest to Dominican nuns, but they privilege the perspective of these women as filtered through Meyer's pen. Meyer was adept at writing history from a Dominican perspective, as the *Papstchronik* and *Kaiserchronik* reveal, and had a keen sense of audience and purpose.

The works that Meyer envisioned as being most important for convent libraries were those that he felt had universal appeal and that brought history and the present into meaningful dialogue. It was not sufficient for a collection of *vitae* to cover the heyday of the Dominican Order or an individual convent, but to take in everything, from the beginning of the order right up to the present day *(von anfang predier ordens bis uf unser zit).*[113] After all, Meyer exhorted nuns to continue to add to his chronicle of the reform to keep it up to date—that is, to continue bringing it into the present.[114] Meyer's discussion of the duties of the convent librarian in *Das Amptbuch* further demonstrates the importance of the librarian's role in ensuring that beneficial books filled the shelves and that any gaps in the collection were remedied. The librarian may use alms for this purpose if appropriate. Meyer carefully described how to organize and catalogue a library, how texts should be sorted through annually to ensure their good condition and continued usefulness, and how all these tasks were important because "the greatest consolation enclosed religious women of good will can have comes from frequent preaching of the word of

[112] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195.
[113] Berlin StaaB ms. germ. quart. 195, fol. 255r.
[114] *BdRP* I-III, Prologue, 2.

God, frequent reception of the blessed sacrament, and from an abundant supply of good, approved books containing the holy scriptures and devotional materials from which to receive frequent and plentiful spiritual consolation and support and encouragement to lead a holy and pious life."[115] Essentially, it was not enough to purchase the books and keep them in the convent. Meyer stressed above all the need for these histories to be useful and known so as to provide informative consolation to the women and encouragement towards upholding the proper way of life.

This impulse, to bring the past and present into meaningful dialogue, was also at work in Meyer's editorial efforts with the Adelhausen Sisterbook. He undertook this work during the final years of his life while he was a confessor at the convent. Some scholars have seen these efforts as a dramatic culling of the original text, excising references to visionary experiences, but this extreme approach is unlikely for two reasons. First, an earlier manuscript survived in Adelhausen's library.[116] Second, a miscellany from St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen,* compiled around 1500, contains, amongst other texts, excerpts from the Adelhausen Sisterbook, including several *vitae* not redacted by Meyer.[117] Rather, Meyer's editorial efforts consisted of alphabetizing the nuns' names, including *vitae* from the Sisterbook either in part or in full, and adding the names, again in alphabetical order, of all the Adelhausen nuns he was aware of. Not only are many of the nuns whose names were included clearly identified as being nuns long after the Sisterbook was written—the inclusion of the 1465 reform prioress, Endelin von Au *([E]delin de aue priorissa do man die beschlützt und die gemein hie anvieng anno domini mcccclxv)* is a

[115] Meyer, *Das Amptbuch,* 302-307. Quoted translation is DeMaris', 483.
[116] StAF Hs. B 1 nr. 98.
[117] StAF Hs. B 1 nr. 163. For more on this manuscript and its significance, see Chapter Two.

prime example—but also a hand other than Meyer's own, perhaps belonging to one of the nuns, made additions that include some dates, presumably either year of oblation at the convent or year of death, for some of the nuns.[118]

More than Nider, Meyer tried to capitalize on the inclusive potential of the reform. Through texts, as exemplified by his open letter that proudly recounted the textual labor that he had undertaken to provide nuns with needed manuscripts, he strove to offer reformed Dominican nuns something unique to their order that demonstrated the value of reform and also created a sense of shared purpose in the project: histories. Never mind that Dominican nuns themselves had been writing their histories before Meyer arrived on the scene and continued to do so after his death. Meyer's peripatetic career enabled him to plumb the archival depths at numerous reformed convents and that work culminated in his chronicle of the Observance. Little—except maybe the elephant in the room, that women had already been doing and continued to do this work for themselves—escaped the all-encompassing reach of Meyer's net. He also trained his sights on Johannes Nider, his predecessor as the most prominent Dominican author of reform.

Between Nider and Meyer: Nider's Letter in Meyer's *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens*

Nider's career involved comparatively fewer quotidian interactions with reformed nuns' communities than Meyer's did. Nider's rampant misogyny and suspicion of women's religious experiences were sufficiently influential on subsequent witchcraft texts to demonstrate that his contemporaries were not unaware of his deep-seated distrust of women, and in fact found it

[118] StAF Hs. B 1 nr. 108, fols. 201r, 205r.

useful as they sought sources for witch-hunting manuals. Despite the disconnect between Nider's vision of reform for women and Meyer's, Meyer presents a sanitized version of Nider to the female audience of the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.* Meyer drew extensively from Nider's *Formicarius* and less extensively from *De reformatione religiosorum;* provided his readers with biographical details of Nider's life, especially as it related to the reform of nuns' communities; and also included a summary of some of Nider's works with which he was familiar, a list very similar to the list of his own works from his "open letter."

In Book IV, Chapter 21 of the *Buch der Reformatio,* Meyer lists some of Nider's books, which he describes as beautiful and useful *(schönen, nutzlichen bücher).* This list is part of Meyer's longer biographical treatment of Nider and included fifteen of Nider's works, because they were the only ones that Meyer knew *(der ich ein teil hie nennen wil die ich weiß).*[119] The works included texts that Nider wrote for confessors, such as the *Manuale confessorum,* or confessors' manual, which survives in a large number of manuscripts and early printed editions, attesting to its ongoing popularity, as well as *De morali leprosa (On the leprosy of the soul),* which deals with the commandments and the reasons that humanity has a hard time living up to them, a text which Meyer calls extremely useful for all preachers *(vast nůtz allen predigern).*[120] Meyer also cited the *Formicarius,* acknowledging his debt to this text in writing his own chronicle *(von dem selben bůch ich och vil gezogen hab in dis bůch).*[121] Although it is true that Nider wrote far more in Latin than he did in German, befitting his clerical audience, it is still worth noting that Meyer cited only Nider's Latin works and not those which likely would have

[119] Strasbourg, BNU Ms. 2.934 fol. 129r; *BdRP* IV-V, IV.21, 29-30.
[120] Ibid. See also Hillenbrand, "Johannes Nider OP," *VL(2)* 6:974.
[121] *BdRP* IV-V, IV.21, 29-30.

appeared in most convent collections because they were in German. It is possible that Meyer intended this list to be merely informative, that he did not expect the nuns reading the chronicle to use the list for anything. But it is worth recalling that Meyer recounted the life of a laysister, Magdalena Bechrer, who came from a wealthy family but insisted on joining Schönensteinbach as a humble laysister rather than as a veiled choir nun. Using her wealth, Magdalena bought may good and useful Latin books for the preachers' library at the convent so that the preachers would be better equipped to provide the sisters with comfort through their preaching *(sy bestellet mity rem kosten vil güter nützlicher latynscher bücher in die libery der bichtiger zü Schönensteinbach den swöstren zü trost, daz man yn da von predigen möcht).*[122] It was not uncommon for convents to have a library for the nuns as well as a separate library for the use of their confessors. Ideally, the nuns kept and catalogued the books separately, but the nuns would maintain a copy of both catalogues so that they knew what books belonged to the convent.[123] In this sense, Meyer's overview of Nider's works might have acted as a useful cross-reference for the nuns, and a way to advocate for their own pastoral care through knowledge about what books might be especially edifying for their confessors.

At least some nuns and convent libraries had access to Johannes Nider's works. The exemplary surviving library catalogue from the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg, which was reformed in 1428 and remained at the forefront of the reform thereafter in terms of sending reform parties as well as sending reform-related books, included several works by Nider. Barbara Gewichtmacherin (d. 1491), a copyist and illuminator of manuscripts, owned a little book of

[122] *BdRP* I-III, III.39, 99.
[123] Meyer, *Das Amptbuch,* 302.

prayers and sermons, including a prayer attributed to Johannes Nider.[124] Among the books that belonged to the convent library, the manuscript with the shelfmark M XVI, a collection that began with the German translation of Heinrich Suso's *Horologium sapientiae, Der Gemahelschaft der ewigen Weisheit,* also included a prayer by Nider on the theme of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, which was originally written in Latin *(hat gemacht vnd getichtet in latein der erwirdig vater meister Hans Nyder Preidger ordens)* but the sisters' copy was in German.[125]

The sisters were also interested in Nider's sermons, which is unsurprising given that their community would have heard Nider preach repeatedly in the late 1420s during his time in their city. The book given the shelfmark E XXXV, written in the convent in the middle of the fifteenth century, contained, among a variety of other sermons and devotional texts, a copy of Nider's German sermon on the opening of the Song of Songs *(osculetur me osculo oris sui).*[126] A miscellany that included a variety of *Sendbriefe* also included one from Nider on the theme of the Song of Songs 1:5 *(nigra sum sed formosa),* which was presumably sent to the sisters of Schönensteinbach originally, as was at least one of the other *Sendbriefe.* Many of the letters were

[124] Antje Willing, ed., *Die Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina zu Nürnberg: Synoptische Darstellung der Bücherverzeichnisse,* 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 1.37. The volume was given the shelfmark PV 52 and does not survive. Unfortunately, no information on the prayer is available except *das helt in im [das püchlein] zum ersten ein schöns gepet, das gemacht hat der erwirdig maister Hans Nyder, predigerorden.* On Barbara Gewichtmacherin, see Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, "A Library Collected by and for the Use of Nuns: St Catherine's Convent, Nuremberg," in *Women and the Book: Assessing the Visual Evidence,* ed. Lesley Smith and Jane H. M. Taylor (London: The British Library, 1996), 128-129; Jane Carroll, "Subversive Obedience: Images of Spiritual Reform by and for Fifteenth-Century Nuns," in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture,* ed. Therese Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 707.

[125] Willing, 1.683. This manuscript survives as Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. V, App. 81.

[126] Willing, 1.340. This manuscript survives as Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. VI, 43^{m}. The copyist of the sermon has been identified as Elsbeth Schürstabin; she copied other parts of the volume as well.

addressed to a sister, to nuns generally, or to widows; three, from Georg Falder-Pistoris, were addressed to the sisters at St Katharina.[127]

Nider also commissioned a German translation of John Cassian's (d. 435) *Conferences* for the nuns of St Katharina, of which they owned two copies. At least one (with the shelfmark J VI, now lost) was ordered by Nider in Basel for the nuns; the other, J VII, survives in the Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek and was copied by St Katharina's extremely productive scribe, Kunigund Niklasin, suggesting substantial interest in the *Conferences* among St Katharina's nuns.[128] Shelfmark J VIII contained Nider's treatise, *Die 24 goldenen Harfen (The Twenty-Four Golden Harps),* which originated as a sermon cycle Nider delivered during his time in Nuremberg. The text reached a broad audience, male and female, monastic and lay, and was based loosely on Cassian's *Conferences.*[129] The nuns of St Katharina got their copy of the text when the widow Kunigunde Schreiber joined the convent shortly following its reform in 1428.[130] Claire Taylor Jones has traced the transmission of both the translation of Cassian, which survives in two additional copies, both associated with Observant women's houses (one Dominican, Maria Medingen, and one Clarissian, Söfflingen near Ulm), and the *Golden Harps.* The *Golden*

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[127] Willing, 1.383. St Katharina shelfmark E XLI survives as Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. VII, 20.

[128] Willing, 1.506-507. J VI is described in the catalogue thus: *Item ein puch; das helt in im die XXIIII collacion der heiligen altveter, die uns unser erwirdiger vater, maister Johannes Nyder, ließ schreiben zu Pasel* (Item, a book. It contains the twenty-four *Collationes* of the blessed Church Father, which our venerable father, master Johannes Nider, had written for us in Basel). J VII survives as Nuremberg Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. IV, 19. Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 102.

[129] Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 98.

[130] Willing, 1.507; Karin Schneider, "Die Bibliothek des Katharinenklosters in Nürnberg und die städtische Gesellschaft," in *Studien zum städtischen Bildungswesen des späten Mittelalters und der frühen Neuzeit: Bericht über Kolloquien der Kommission zur Erforschung der Kultur des Spätmittelalters 1978 bis 1981,* ed. Bernd Moeller, Hans Patze, and Karl Stackmann (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 75-78; Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 100-101. The nuns also later had a printed copy of the *Golden Harps,* which also has not survived. It is listed in the catalogue as shelfmark J XXXVII, *item ein auffgedruckt puch von den XXIIII harpfen, als sy gepredigt meister Hans Nider, prior zu den predigern.* Willing, 1.548.

Harps treatise, in comparison, had a much broader transmission history, including copies owned by male and female monasteries of multiple orders as well as laypeople, and it survives in numerous copies. Jones argued that Nider had the *Conferences* translated for the nuns and that the nuns transmitted both the translation and the treatise together because the *Golden Harps* lacked the focus on continual prayer and recitation of scripture of Cassian's original.[131] With liturgical renewal and the importance of prayer for the program of the Observant reform, especially for enclosed nuns, both texts proved necessary.[132]

Meyer's depiction of Johannes Nider in the *Buch der Reformacio* is neither the misogynist deeply suspicious of women's spirituality and ability to interpret scripture and other texts for themselves in appropriate ways, nor the reformer concerned with renewing and upholding the liturgy.[133] Rather, Nider comes across much more like Meyer himself: a serious reformer who wrote a variety of works in service of the reform. Meyer plays up Nider's involvement with female communities. Although Meyer had previously mentioned Nider and quoted from *Formicarius,* he first treated Nider's biography in Book IV, which focused on the friars involved with the reform and especially the reform of Schönensteinbach. Even though Nider was buried in the friary in Nuremberg, Meyer told his readers, he was still so important to Schönensteinbach because he was the convent's first vicar after Fr. Conrad of Prussia, the first vicar after the reform. Meyer also discussed Nider's efforts to reform three additional convents and the difficulties he allegedly faced in doing so. At the first, he encountered nuns who served him what seemed to be a beautiful meal but, when the covers were lifted from the plates, the

[131] Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 109-111.
[132] Ibid.*,* 106-113, 119-126.
[133] Bailey, *Battling Demons,* 85; Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 119-126. There is truth to both portrayals of Nider, as I have shown earlier in this chapter. Bailey and Jones analyze different texts written for different audiences.

meal turned out to be only the kinds of clappers that beggars used. At the second, the sisters used the psalms at liturgy against the attempted reformers, reading the psalm "Deus laudem meam" (Ps. 108:2) and the Maundy Thursday Matins chants. At the final convent, facing unspecified resistance, Nider sometimes had to travel cross-country in secular attire because he feared for his life.[134] Although Meyer did not specify which convents Nider reformed, the clappers-for-dinner instance was likely at St Katharina in Nuremberg, where the sisters initially resisted reform before eventually becoming a vanguard of the Observance. It is no secret that Meyer often depicted the hardships of reform: unwilling, rebellious nuns, daring nighttime ascents of walls to bring about forcible reform, and other exploits are peppered throughout the pages of the *Buch der Reformacio.*[135] These difficulties clearly served his narrative purpose of depicting the reform as bringing necessary renewal to convents in severe spiritual decline, and Meyer fitted Nider tidily into these tropes. Meyer also noted Nider's role at the Council of Constance, combatting Hussite heretics, his work at the university in Vienna, and his interactions with the laity, but he granted these tasks much less space than Nider's work with convents, his good death, or the list of books he composed. Apart from the book list, Nider's biography is broadly comparable to those of Schönensteinbach's other early confessors, although in reality his dedication to reforming convents of nuns was qualitatively very different from that of Meyer or Conrad of Prussia.

In Book V, a clearer picture of Nider's reforming efforts, filtered through Meyer's lens, appears. In 1428, with substantial help from Nider, the community of St Katharina in Nuremberg accepted the reform after the failure of an earlier attempt, which had resulted in enclosure but not

[134] *BdRP* IV-V, IV.18-22, 26-31.
[135] For example, Ibid., Prologue to Book V, 42-43.

any other elements of reform, such as liturgical revisions or the giving up of personal luxury goods. Meyer opened the section on the reform of St Katharina in Nuremberg with a letter from Nider to the sisters of Schönensteinbach to request their assistance with the reform.[136] Meyer included the full text of the letter, which does not survive elsewhere: an example of Meyer plundering convent archives in service of his chronicle. The letter's style is much more consonant with what one might expect of Nider. He first informed the Schönensteinbach sisters that the sisters of St Katharina had decided, of their own accord, to take up the reform. Nider himself had taken up the post of vicar, while another learned cleric served as their confessor. The city council and Nuremberg's citizenry had thrown their support behind the reform. But, Nider cautioned, this auspicious beginning would be worthless if there were no reformed sisters who could teach the nuns of St Katharina how to carry out their offices and sing the liturgy properly. Nider urged Schönensteinbach to send a group of talented women to lay a good foundation *(die wir luterlich süchent, daz yr uns an sölich menig geschickter frowen senden wölent, daz wir ainen güten grund gelegen mugent.)*[137]

In order to convince the prioress that sending nuns was a good idea, Nider set out eight reasons. First, it would bring honor to Schönensteinbach as their nuns serve God and bring the reform to St Katharina. Second, it is in accordance with St Dominic's preference that sisters and friars spread out among many convents. Third, Nider argued that the reform of St Katharina would benefit the secular people of Nuremberg as well as the nuns.[138] Nider's fourth argument was directly connected to the third: he said that laypeople have attributed the Hussite heresy to

[136] Ibid., V.15, 60-64. The letter is dated 1428.
[137] Ibid., V.15, 62.
[138] This argument is particularly typical for Nider, who supported lay people living as religious in the world and believed them to be superior to the average religious. See Van Engen, "Nyder on Laypeople."

the lack of reform among clergy, monks, and nuns *(all laygen rüffent und sprechent, daz der Hussen ketzery uferstanden sig von dem, daz die pfaffhait und munch und frowen in clöstern nit reformiert sind.)*[139] These two reasons relate to some of Nider's central concerns, the Hussite heresy and the religious condition of the laity, making it unsurprising that he couched convent reform in these terms. Fifth, Nider guilt-tripped the Schönensteinbach sisters, reminding them of the favors that he had done for them in the past and that he might continue to do in the future—if they participate in the reform. Coming in sixth is the eternal benefit to the souls of the sisters. Seventh is another guilt-trip, connecting the reform of St Katharina to the reputation of the friars in Nuremberg, who were reformed in 1396, making them the first reformed friary in Teutonia. Finally, Nider returned to the laity, reminding the Schönensteinbach sisters that the citizens of Nuremberg were well aware of the reform. As a result, the reform would be a mockery *(gespöt)* if the Schönensteinbach sisters did not come to ensure that it "stuck."[140] The letter engaged very little with the actual subjects of reform, the nuns of St Katharina themselves. Nider argued that the sisters of Schönensteinbach would have the sins of their ignorant sisters on their consciences, but there was no sense of community solidarity with their unreformed compatriots.

Given that Schönensteinbach's sisters had already founded a new reformed community, St Mary Magdalene, at Wijk bij Duurstede near Utrecht in the Netherlands, in 1398, and had also reformed the convent of Unterlinden in 1419, the need for Nider's strident letter, which he entrusted orally *(muntlich)* to Fr. Conrad Speilburger, is puzzling.[141] In his subsequent description of the reform of St Katharina, Meyer did not indicate that Schönensteinbach's sisters

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[139] *BdRP* IV-V, V.15, 62.
[140] Ibid., V.15, 63.
[141] Ibid., V.15, 64. See also Winnlen, *Schönensteinbach,* 63. Winnlen argues that the nuns of Schönensteinbach were reluctant to participate in the reform of St Katharina, but cites only Nider's letter in *BdRP.*

were unwilling to contribute to the reform. Nider's letter, or the oral document that was copied down at some point, if it can be taken as his words, is better understood as a representation of his thoughts on reform more generally. Reform had the power to monasticize the laity, causing them to act more like monks or nuns, and to avert the danger of the Hussite heresy, two causes near and dear to Nider's heart. Having experienced sisters teach the newly reformed nuns by filling convent offices and showing them the ropes would also avert the danger of a repeat of the failed reform, which would be a terrible outcome from the perspective of Nuremberg's particularly pious laypeople. Given Nider's suspicion of the possibility of thoroughgoing church reform and his interest in laypeople who lived as religious, this view of the power of reform makes sense.

As vicar of the reformed convent, Nider would have had other duties, but he appeared only twice more in passing in Meyer's account of the reform of Nuremberg. After the successful introduction of the reform, only a few sisters decided to leave for the unreformed convent of Frauenaurach, which had originally contributed nuns to the founding of St Katharina in 1295.[142] Of these sisters, two soon died and either one or two others regretted their decision to leave St Katharina. It is implied that the deaths of the first two sisters may have played a role in that regret.[143] When these sisters' initial requests to be readmitted to St Katharina were denied, they did not give up. Eventually, Nider came to understand that their requests were serious. He agreed to readmit them to the convent. Meyer's chronicle is full of nuns who reject the reform and die

[142] *BdRP* IV-V, V.19, 68. On Frauenaurach's relation to St Katharina, see Leonard P. Hindsley, *The Mystics of Engelthal: Writings from a Medieval Monastery* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 190-191. The nuns of St Katharina eventually reformed Frauenaurach. See Ehrenschwendtner, "Library," 124-125.

[143] Claire Taylor Jones has noted that two manuscripts of the *BdRP* give either one or two sisters as the number who changed their minds regarding the reform. See Jones, *Women's History,* 181 n. 37.

shortly thereafter; this seems likely to be moralizing on his part, though it is impossible to double-check in most cases.[144]

Nider's second appearance as vicar of St Katharina is more interesting, and also informative about Meyer's sanitization of Nider for his monastic female audience. Nider's *Formicarius,* as discussed above, was rife with examples of the necessity of discerning spirits, an interest he shared with John Cassian. Meyer has also presented readers of the *Buch der Reformacio* with watered-down examples from *Formicarius* on the necessity of discovering whether women's visionary experiences came from God or from the devil.[145] The story, as Meyer told it, is as follows. For a long time, day and night, the sisters were troubled by an enormous ghost *(die lieben swöstren lang zit, tag und nacht, so swerlich gemüt wurdent von ungehürem gespenst).* Constant bangs and thumps and throwing of objects *(werfen, kloffen, schlachen)* disturbed the sisters, and the spirit sometimes revealed itself in open form *(etwen sich in etlicher form sich offenbarlich erzaigt).* The vicar, Johannes Nider, told the sisters that they ought not to believe that an evil spirit was doing these things, but rather big rats and cats *(sy söltent es nit geloben, daz es von dem bösen gaist wer, sunder die grossen ratzen und katzen detent es).* This excuse, already tenuous considering that the sisters had seen the ghost, became more difficult to swallow when a sister, who had initially resisted the reform but ultimately became a willing supporter, was snatched up by the spirit, tortured, and crushed nearly to death. Understandably, the sisters were extremely frightened by this turn of events, but the friars urged them to stand fast and pray rather than backtracking to their unreformed state. In the end, the spirit left the convent forever. As a result of the fright they had experienced, the last few sisters

[144] For example, *BdRP* IV-V, V.56, 119-120.
[145] For example, Ibid., V.12, 56-57.

who were skeptical of the reform offered a full life confession *(die selben von forcht und schreckung ween datent gantz volkomen bicht yrs lebens)* and put on the rougher clothes of the Observance *(laitent die alten klaider ab und trügent dar nach den andren glich).* The ghost disappeared, never to return.[146]

Meyer significantly watered down the misogyny that pervaded Nider's account while simultaneously granting more agency to the nuns than Nider did. Meyer does refer to "the poor female sex" *(daz arm fröwklich geschlecht)* being completely despondent and frightened to the point that Nider was unsure how to help them.[147] But in his account, Nider referred repeatedly to the delirium of women *(deliramenta…mulierum)* and the gullibility of their sex *(fuit autem totus stupidus effectus sexus mollis et femineus),* even though he ultimately identified the presence of a demon when he realized that these events might convince the last holdouts to accept the reform. And indeed, the demon only left when the last women took on the full responsibility of the reform *(ad plenum pietas reformatorum).*[148] In each account, of course, the women are correct: the convent was being terrorized not by a nocturnal game of cat-and-mouse in the attic, but by a demon (in Nider's telling) or a ghost (in Meyer's). Despite this, Nider's distrust of women and argument that women's ideas about spirit were not to be believed run through his account. Moreover, Meyer acknowledged that some of the women had seen the ghost before Nider believed them. Meyer's redaction engaged less with the issue of the discernment of spirits, a central concern of Nider's but not of Meyer's, and instead focused on the positive result that the supernatural infestation had for the reform. Nider's account encouraged his audience to focus on

[146] Ibid., V.19, 67-69. Nider's version, recounted in *Formicarius* V.2, is discussed above.
[147] *BdRP* IV-V, V.19, 69.
[148] Nider, *Formicarius,* V.2, 345.

the demonic infestation. He paired the story with a similar incident of demonic infestation among canonesses regular a few years earlier. The purpose of these two stories is to identify failings within monastic environments that lead to the arrival of fiends. Meyer's audience, genre, and purpose shaped his presentation of the story just as much as Nider's did, and this tale reveals the extent to which Meyer reshaped Nider's works to fit his needs. For as many times as Meyer has been accused of heavy-handed redaction of women's works, his revision and adaptation of Nider has gone nearly unnoticed.[149]

Conclusion

At first, Nider and Meyer seem either very obvious bedfellows—both prominent male Dominican reformers who initiated or aided in the reform of female communities during the middle of the fifteenth century—or very odd ones—Nider, writing predominately in Latin for a primarily male, clerical audience, and Meyer, writing extensively in German for an explicitly female audience. But their differing visions of reform and the kinds of texts they used to promote those ideas help us to understand the variety of reforming models, ideas about female spirituality, and uses of history to further reform. Nider's collecting of contemporary exempla, compiled in the multipurpose *Formicarius* to be of use to preachers composing sermons, squared with his idea of reform as primarily an internal, individual process, akin to his confessors' manuals. For

[149] Anne Huijbers briefly discusses how Meyer refers to Nider in the *BdRP:* "See here, how this friend of God, who has now attained eternal life, had to suffer immensely," etc. This authorial framing helps Meyer clarify the lesson he wanted his readers to draw from his portrayal of Nider. Huijbers does not discuss how Meyer used Nider's examples and the *Formicarius.* Anne Huijbers, *Zealots for Souls: Dominican Narratives of Self-Understanding During Observant Reforms, c. 1388-1517* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2018), 48-49.

Nider, communal reform of nuns' convents was necessary to ensure proper supervision by male clerics and the best environment (silent, enclosed) for individual reform, a process that would take longer but was more worthwhile if it could succeed. He remained skeptical of existing convents' ability to reform. For Meyer, communal reform was the answer via obedience to the reform and knowledge of the community's historical context. This accommodated both the lives of founding and early members who upheld the Dominican Order's highest standards and founding principles, if such biographical information was available, and knowledge of one's own convent as part of an interconnected community of reformed Dominican houses throughout the province of Teutonia. Meyer's goal was to make this information accessible to as many reformed nuns as possible, creating the broadest possible sense of community through history.[150]

Perhaps part of Meyer's ability to use history to support his reforming goals is that, by his day, there simply was more positive history to be deployed in support of the Observance: more good reforming friars, more sisters zealously taking on a stricter way of life, and more texts already written chronicling local reform efforts that could be stitched together to produce a triumphant tale of widespread reform. But that was not the whole story, since Meyer also used the more distant Dominican past to provide exemplars. On the other hand, attempting to foreground his own erudition, Nider found much less of value to support his goals in the early years of the Dominican Order and instead reached all the way back to the biblical and patristic past.

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[150] For this perspective, it is not important to debate, as some scholars have done, the extent of Meyer's misogyny. But I am indebted here to Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist: Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), esp. 2-3. Meyer's paternalism is a slippery beast. It is possible that he could have respect for the nuns he ministered to and also that this respect could have the effect of stifling women's voices.

These two approaches are, of course, not entirely at odds. Communal reform enabled personal spiritual improvement and those nuns unwilling to commit to at least some attempt at personal improvement required by renewed enclosure and revised liturgy were given the option to depart for a conventual community. Nider's ideas influenced preachers who gave sermons to nuns and, as the final section of the chapter discussed, Meyer conveyed information about Nider and his ideas to the readers of his *Buch der Reformacio.* But the variance nevertheless reveals the multifaceted options that confronted women who chose to undertake reform for themselves or whose families or local government urged reform upon them. It also suggests that women's views of reform as communal and ongoing situate them into the wider debate over church reform in the fifteenth century.

Chapter Two

Creating a Harmonious Community: Friendship and the Sisterbooks in the Observant Context

During the first half of the fourteenth century, nine Dominican convents—Adelhausen, Diessenhofen (St Katharinental), Engelthal, Gotteszell, Kirchberg, Oetenbach, Töss, Underlinden, and Weiler—recorded the lives of their sisters in the Sisterbooks. These works, which the nuns wrote to demonstrate the particularly holy nature of their community, featured Dominican women both as their subject matter and intended audience. Each book contained a series of *vitae* of the sisters, paying particular attention to their mystical experiences, especially locutions of Christ, and their eucharistic devotion.[151] In addition to these mystical experiences,the *vitae* also often recorded incidental details: the sister's age when she first joined the convent, basic information about her familial background, and whether or not she held any convent offices. The *vitae* nearly always concluded with details of the nun's death.[152] Sometimes only a few sentences long, other times several pages in length in their modern printed editions, the *vitae* also contain revealing information on interpersonal relationships, both friendships and tensions, within the convent context. The books performed a memorial function, with "each sister celebrated for her virtue, or grace, or supernatural visitation, each a link in a chain of holy

[151] See Richard Kieckhefer, *"Ihesus ist unser!:* The Christ Child in the German Sister Books," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture:* Alpha es et o!, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa M. Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 167-198.
[152] Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women,* 4-5.

memories."[153] They also served a community-building purpose by recording the lives of so many exceptional earlier sisters.

For instance, Adelheit von Breisach, a nun at the Dominican convent at Adelhausen in the decades after its foundation by a group of beguines in the 1230s, lived a notably holy life. She was, however, branded a heretic *(ein ketzerin)* by friars in chapter *(von den bredieren ze cappittel),* and she demonstrated her orthodoxy by singing *Laudate Dominum omnes gentes* (Ps. 117:1).[154] The young children in the choir joined her in her singing. After weathering this trying accusation, she withdrew to the cloister to thank God for sparing her. When another nun went looking for Adelheit and could not find her, Adelheit finally called out, "Berchte, I'm here!" *(Berchte, ich bin hie).* As a widow, she had a great longing for the status accorded to virginity that she no longer enjoyed. One day, an angel came to her and said that God had listened to her, and, truly, what she desired was possible—through another vision, in which she was bathed in blood, this status was returned to her. Presumably, this bloody scene was an inversion of the usual depiction of the battle to maintain one's virginity as a kind of bloodless martyrdom.[155] In this case, a laysister, Irnbrug, found her soaked in blood. Understandably, Irnbrug panicked and began to cry out for help, but then Adelheit explained that her wish had come true.[156] Adelheit's *vita* contains several of the common features of the Sisterbooks: visionary experiences, the singing of the liturgy, and the necessity of prayer. Most of these experiences are grounded in the

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[153] John Van Engen, "Communal Life: The Sister-Books," in *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition, c. 1100-c. 1500,* ed. Alastair J. Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 105-132 provides a useful, short overview of the Sisterbooks. Quotation at 110.

[154] It seems that the friars were only in chapter to accuse Adelheit of being a heretic, but the *vita* has no further comment on what was presumably a rather unusual occurrence, since the prioress would have been responsible for running the chapter meetings.

[155] Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women,* 251 n. 85.

[156] "Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen. Nach der ältesten Abschrift mit Einleitung und Beilagen," ed. J. König, *Freiburg Diözesan Archiv* 13 (1880), 154-156.

importance of the community. As Gertrud Jaron Lewis noted, it is rare indeed for nuns in German contexts to have called each other by their first names, so Adelheit calling out to Berchte by her first name represented a level of extraordinary familiarity.[157] Although Adelheit probably only shared this degree of intimacy with one or two nuns, the community writ large supported Adelheit when she was denounced a heretic—a trial which likewise would have been shared by the community. Moreover, Anna von Munzingen, the nun author of Adelhausen's Sisterbook, saw fit to record all these aspects of a somewhat messy life for posterity. The female readership of the Sisterbooks—subsequent generations of nuns at Adelhausen and other convents—could gain something edifying from reading about Adelheit's life in the context of a document designed to commemorate the virtuousness of an entire community.

The majority of the surviving medieval manuscripts of the nine Sisterbooks date to the period of the fifteenth-century Observant Reform. Reformer Johannes Meyer redacted several of the Sisterbooks, including Adelhausen's; many scholars have argued that he did so in order to diminish the prevalence of mysticism within them.[158] The previous chapter discussed the emphasis that Meyer placed on the writing of history for the spread and maintenance of the Observant Reform, and the Sisterbooks undoubtedly were a key element of that historical

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[157] Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women,* 223. Nuns were supposed to address each other as "Sister," "Lady," or "Mother." See also Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 260. He recommended that novices be taught to use the formal "Ihr" or "Sister [name]," and avoid using the informal "du."

[158] See, for example, Williams-Krapp, "Frauenmystik," 312; Williams-Krapp, "Ordensreform und Literatur im 15. Jahrhundert," *Jahrbuch der Oswald von Wolkenstein Gesellschaft* 4 (1986), 41-51; Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 443-444, 449-451. For recent arguments that push back against Williams-Krapp's thesis, see Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 57-85; Sabine Jansen, "Die Texte des Kirchberg-Corpus: Überlieferung und Textgeschichte vom 15. bis zum. 19. Jahrhundert," (PhD diss., Universität Köln, 2005), 133-141; Amiri Ayanna, "Bodies of Crystal, Houses of Glass: Observing Reform and Improving Piety in the St Katharinental Sister Book," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 43, no. 1 (2017), 37-42. Only one of the surviving Sisterbook manuscripts dates from the fourteenth century: it is Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, cod. 1338, dating to the middle of the fourteenth century.

interest. They were texts that recorded the previous spiritual efflorescence of Dominican convents in Germany, and therefore were useful for readers in figuring out how to recapture that spiritual zenith, as the Observants aimed to do. But too much focus on the texts' meaning for male reformers obscures the value that the Sisterbooks clearly continued to hold for their primarily female readers in the Observant fifteenth century. This chapter's genesis arose from questions about what made the Sisterbooks valuable, not to men like Meyer but to fifteenth-century female readers. What kinds of things did fourteenth-century readers find valuable about the texts, and how did that change in the fifteenth century? After all, as the title of Gertrud Jaron Lewis' book on the Sisterbooks reminds us, these texts were produced "by women, for women, about women." Claire Taylor Jones has advanced one compelling argument: the centrality of the liturgy in the Sisterbooks provided an important model for Observant convents, since the reform focused on revising and correcting the liturgy.[159] For both the original and later audiences, I argue that much of the value of these texts has to do with the formation of community and interpersonal relationships with a communal context—aspects that are all too often neglected.

Historians studying late-medieval nuns must work to find the often difficult balance between the male-dominated sources preoccupied with questions of reform and the nuns' own records of convent life. Although both prescriptive and proscriptive sources provide an ideal of what a convent should be, they tend to obscure lived reality. The overzealous condemnation of frivolous convent life produced by male reformers and those with a vested interest in portraying modern convent life as debased similarly served their authors' reforming agenda and therefore should not be taken at face value. The writing of women themselves generally represented the

[159] Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 59.

heights of spirituality and dedication to the goals of convent life. Unlike the well-known Italian examples such as the nun Arcangela Tarabotti, there are no first-hand accounts by nuns who felt trapped, or even apathetic ones resigned to convent life, that survive from the fifteenth-century German-speaking regions.[160] This fact presents a major challenge for studying the Observant Reform insofar as nearly all of our sources are from proponents of the reform representing instances of success. Scholars have a tendency to view monastic life as either a glass half full or half empty: either the convent represented an opportunity for medieval women to avoid childbirth and family life and pursue intellectual and spiritual goals or it was perceived as a constrained and stultifying situation reflecting the family's economic, civic, or social imperatives. It seems more likely that both of these extremes were present, even within the same convent at the same time. The Sisterbooks undoubtedly represent the idealized picture of convent life, but one that also provides glimpses into the quotidian.

Methodologically, the Sisterbooks have tended to be read as hagiography: that is, as belonging to the genre of saints' lives.[161] Hagiographical texts conform to particular expectations and purposes of the genre and were written for a particular audience. In the case of the

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[160] Arcangela Tarabotti (d. 1652) famously opposed convent life as an institution. Her *Inferno Monacale* ("Hell of Nuns," published posthumously) described the trickery that led young girls to believe their life in a convent would be an earthly paradise, only to find out that it was in fact more akin to a hell on earth. Arcangela Tarabotti, *L'inferno monacale,* ed. Francesca Medioli (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1990). See also Francesca Medioli, "Arcangela Tarabotti's Reliability about Herself: Publication and Self-Representation (Together with a Small Collection of Previously Unpublished Letters)," *Italianist* 23 (2003), 63-70. Scholarship on what Jutta Gisela Sperling has called "forced monachizations" is more prevalent about early modern Italy than anywhere else in the medieval world. Jutta Gisela Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic in Late Renaissance Venice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See also Sharon T. Strocchia, "Taken into Custody: Girls and Convent Guardianship in Renaissance Florence," *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 2 (2003), 177-200, which deals with the challenges of the sheer number of women who sought entrance to convent life in the sixteenth century after the period of reform in the fifteenth century.

[161] Anne Winston-Allen, "Rewriting Women's History: Medieval Nuns' *Vitae* by Johannes Meyer," in *Medieval German Voices in the 21st Century: The Paradigmatic Function of Medieval German Studies for German Studies,* ed. Albrecht Classen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), 147-148.

Sisterbooks, that audience was fellow religious women, a group that was expanding during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Since hagiographical texts are written to demonstrate the subject's (or, in the case of the Sisterbooks, subjects') sanctity, they are hardly straightforward representations of life as it was really lived. The text's author made choices to highly, downplay, or efface entire elements of an individual life in order to promote the vision of her as a holy woman. As historian Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg observed about hagiographies written in the early Middle Ages, hagiographical texts "provide contemporary perceptions, ideals, and valuations of women," rather than access to actual women's lives.[162] In the case of a collective hagiography like the Sisterbooks, where the purpose of the text is to convey the holiness of a whole convent, the texts are particularly well suited for understanding how the ideal community was viewed. How was it constituted and what there the relationships between members like? Paying attention to the communal aspect of the texts opens up new avenues.[163]

In this chapter, I try to suggest another potential framework for understanding nuns' relationships within the convent context, one based around friendship in the service of community. Classical and medieval philosophical approaches to friendship did not allow for the possibility of friendship between women: thinkers from Aristotle to Cicero to the English Cistercian monk Aelred of Rievaulx viewed friendship as a rare gem attainable only between men who were social, intellectual, and, in the medieval context, spiritual equals. For maintaining the Observant reform, however, harmonious relationships within the convent setting were

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[162] Jane Tibbetts Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society, ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

[163] Claire Taylor Jones has argued, extremely persuasively, that the Sisterbooks served the function of demonstrating the centrality of the liturgy to Observant communities—and indeed the Sisterbooks are filled to the brim with references to the liturgy. I am building on this argument to suggest that the liturgy is not the only way that we can see community operating in the Sisterbooks. Jones, *Ruling the Spirit,* 57ff.

important. The introduction of new, "foreign" sisters to establish the reform as well as the introduction of strict enclosure that the reform mandated ensured that Observant convents were, in some ways, self-contained.[164] And the Observants had a useful model available to them: the Sisterbooks.

This chapter argues that, on top of the model that the Sisterbooks provided for the liturgy's centrality to the lives of Dominican nuns, the Sisterbooks also possessed value for fifteenth-century Observant convents because of their model of communal life and communal harmony, including friendship. This interpersonal lens enables us to begin to look around and past the traditional spiritual high points and low points of convent life to something more quotidian: the daily interactions between enclosed Dominican nuns beyond the carefully structured space of the liturgy and meals.[165] Such a model was needed because of the nature of the prescriptive documents that structured convent life—in the case of the Dominicans, the Rule of St Augustine and the Constitutions that supplemented the notoriously laconic Rule. The chapter begins by considering classical, late antique, and medieval theories of friendship, including monastic spiritual friendship, before offering a definition of friendship between women. The chapter then turns to those normative documents that structured convent life, the Rule and Constitutions, to examine what they said or did not say about interpersonal relationships. The third section takes up the Sisterbooks in their original fourteenth-century

[164] See Chapter Three for some of the ways that reformed convents were *not* self-contained: for one, they were paradoxically more dependent than ever on outside economic support because strict enclosure limited the economic activities the nuns themselves could engage in.

[165] The issue of enclosure in the Sisterbooks is ripe for further exploration. The works depict both positive examples of enclosure and instances where enclosure is not maintained. Although the bull *Periculoso* supposedly mandated strict enclosure for all convents at the end of the thirteenth century, this mandate in fact did not gain teeth and therefore was often ignored until the Council of Trent.

context, tracing the circumstances under which it was possible for enclosed nuns in a Dominican convent to be something akin to friends. Within a particular set of circumstances—illness, visions, and for the benefit of the community—friendships between nuns were portrayed as positive and even desirable. This section privileges female-authored texts, at the same time recognizing that the Sisterbooks were by no means an uncomplicated representation of lived reality. The chapter's fourth section turns to two male contemporaries of the Sisterbooks, the prominent German Dominican mystics Henry Suso (d. 1366) and Johannes Tauler (d. 1361) and their own perceptions of female friendship. These perceptions will be read in the context of the earlier models and prescriptive texts to help explain why they failed to imagine broader possibilities for friendship between women. Suso and Tauler are also useful as points of comparison to the Sisterbooks for two further reasons. First, their texts—letters, sermons, and spiritual texts—remained popular among Dominican nuns during the fifteenth century. Second, their perspective expressed in these works helps clarify why Observant male reformers were incapable of perceiving friendships between women. In the final section, I turn to the Observant Reform itself and a largely unacknowledged copy of the Adelhausen Sisterbook. It stems from either the oldest extant copy of the Adelhausen Sisterbook, which dates to the decades before Adelhausen was reformed in 1465, or another lost pre-reform copy, revealing that this unredacted copy remained available. The different versions of the text offer tacit inroads into interpersonal relationships within reformed convents. They also demonstrate the original text's value for a fifteenth-century Observant female audience.

Defining Friendship: Classical, Late Antique, and Monastic Depictions

Medieval theoretical conceptions of friendship fell firmly into the Ciceronian tradition of friendship *(amicitia).* Cicero's (d. 43 CE) *De amicitia* and Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius* were the best-known ancient works on the theory and practice of friendship in the Middle Ages, though both Roman authors drew on earlier Greek models. For instance, Aristotle's (d. 322 BCE) *Nichomachean Ethics* grouped friendship into three categories: friendships could be based on utility, pleasure, or virtue. Unsurprisingly, Aristotle viewed friendships based on equality of virtue as the superior type, but recognized that men could cultivate a few close friendships while simultaneously having many associates.[166] Cicero reprised many of Aristotle's ideas, though he viewed friendship and equality of virtue as being inseparable. Cicero wrote his treatise late in life, during the collapse of the Roman Republic. He may therefore have been attempting to shore up the Republican values of discourse and civility that were under threat following the murder of Julius Caesar.[167] The classical idea of perfect friendship *(amicitia perfecta)* as explored by Aristotle, Cicero, and other classical philosophers may be roughly characterized as exclusively male, conceived of as a single soul divided between two bodies, rarely occurring, and requiring of a long period of maturation.[168]

The English abbot Aelred of Rievaulx's (d. 1167) late twelfth-century theoretical work on the subject of friendship, *De spirituali amicitia* (Concerning spiritual friendship), drew directly on the Ciceronian tradition. Aelred also drew from Ambrose's (d. 397 CE) work, *De officiis ministrorum* (On the duties of the clergy), which emphasized the equality that ought to exist in friendship as well as the role friends played in listening to the innermost concerns of

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[166] McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* xxix-xxxi.
[167] Ibid., xxxiii.
[168] Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 4-5, 26, 36. See also McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* xxix-xl.

their fellows.[169] To Cicero's ideas about friendship, including its fundamentally masculine character, Aelred made a key addition. In the opening line of Book One, Aelred addressed his interlocutor, Ivo, saying, "You and I are here, and I hope that Christ is between us as a third."[170] Aelred echoed this sentiment at the end of the work: "Thus rising from that holy love with which a friend embraces a friend to that with which a friend embraces Christ, one may take the spiritual fruit of friendship fully and joyfully into the mouth."[171] Aelred "saw no gap" between loving one's friends and loving God: these friendships all existed on a continuum, advancing towards love of God.[172]

Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153) was vital in opening up the rich theoretical literature on the topic into practical possibilities for affective same-sex friendships between monks. Bernard, who founded the Cistercian Abbey of Clairvaux, loomed large in medieval conceptions of friendship as well as in the modern historiography of medieval friendship. Scholars have analyzed Bernard's writings for the light they shed on monastic friendships. Key among these texts are the treatise *On Loving God;* the letters Bernard exchanged with Peter the Venerable (d. 1156), abbot of the Benedictine abbey of Cluny; and Bernard's sermons on the Song of Songs. For example, despite the prohibition in the Benedictine Rule against abbots favoring certain monks over others, Bernard's meditations on the death of the monk Gerard suggested that he had strong feelings of friendship for the deceased.[173] Additionally Brian McGuire has analyzed the

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[169] Lawrence C. Braceland, introduction to Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* trans. Lawrence C. Braceland (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2010), 25-29.
[170] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship,* I.1, 55.
[171] Ibid., III.134, 126.
[172] McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* 296-298.
[173] Ruth Mazo Karras, "Friendship and Love in the Lives of Two Twelfth-Century English Saints," *Journal of Medieval History* 14 (1988), 309.

depth of friendship evident between Bernard and Peter the Venerable despite the competing monastic traditions to which they belonged.[174] Bernard's source material was primarily biblical, drawing particularly from the Song of Songs, though he also drew upon the writings of church fathers such as Jerome.[175]

Despite the fact that classical theoretical literature and the medieval models that built upon it contained only representations of same-sex male friendships, friendships sometimes developed between men and women in late antique and medieval Christianity. These friendships often occurred between a priest or monk and a religious woman he viewed as his "spiritual daughter," and were often unequal but mutually beneficial in nature. Moreover, concern over the *cura monialium,* the pastoral care of nuns, shaped perceptions of relationships between male and female monastics.

The classic example of heterosexual friendship, cited repeatedly by medieval authors, was between Jerome (d. 420 CE) and his aristocratic friend Paula, who had committed herself to a religious lifestyle. Jerome wrote numerous letters to Paula, instructing her on the proper way to dedicate her life to God. As Elizabeth A. Clark noted, the friendships which Jerome and his contemporary, John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE), cultivated with circles of holy women friends were "intended to be instructional and ethically uplifting."[176] Clark examined how Jerome was able to

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[174] McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* 252-258. Julian Haseldine has noted the dangers inherent in assuming that expressions of friendship (particularly the terms *amici* and *amicitia)* in letters always equated to feelings of genuine affection, but his analysis of Bernard and Peter's correspondence affirms that their relationship combined pragmatic and emotional ties. Julian Haseldine, "Friendship, Intimacy, and Corporate Networking in the Twelfth Century: The Politics of Friendship in the Letters of Peter the Venerable," *English Historical Review* 126 (2011), 253, 274-277. See also Ann Proulx Lang, "The Friendship Between Peter the Venerable and Bernard of Clairvaux," in *Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Presented to Dom Jean Leclercq,* ed. M. Basil Pennington (Washington, DC: Cistercian Publications, 1973), 35-53.

[175] McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* 291.

[176] Elizabeth A. Clark, *Jerome, Chrysostom, and Friends: Essays and Translations* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1979), 47.

conceptualize friendships with women when the classical literature available to him did not consider such friendships to be possible. She concluded that such relationships came to exist because Jerome perceived his female friends as men as a result of their particularly zealous faith. In addition, both Paula and Jerome's other female friends were of high social status and comparatively well educated, which helped to mitigate the perceived inferiority of their gender and met another ideal of classical friendship.[177] Church officials condemned syneisaktism, or spiritual marriage, and both the church and Roman society viewed the friendship as scandalous. Even so, their friendship continued to act as the prime model of male-female friendship throughout the Middle Ages and was invoked by later heterosexual friends who found themselves maligned.[178]

Perception of scandal in friendships between men and women reflects the slippage inherent between the concepts of friendship and love in the medieval world. With only one vocabulary available to speak about all types of love—holy and carnal, platonic or romantic—the borders between different types of love were often indistinct. Among others, Jean Leclercq and Constant J. Mews have noted that Bernard of Clarvaux took up the erotic language of the Song of Songs, the same language used by contemporary love poets and in the love letters of Peter Abelard (d. 1142) and Heloise (d. 1164), and used it to express the process of moving from love of self to love of God.[179] The Dominicans Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1272) and Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) addressed the possibility of slippage from love of God to carnal, sexual

[177] Ibid., 54-71.
[178] Elliott, *Bride of Christ,* 155-156.
[179] Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-Century France: Psycho-Historical Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), esp. 121-129; Constant J. Mews, "Bernard of Clairvaux, Peter Abelard, and Heloise on the Definition of Love," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 60, no. 3 (2004), 658-660.

relationships between previously virtuous men and women. Both Thomas and Humbert argued that religious women were the most blameworthy in such instances and that fornicators of all types found themselves particularly drawn to holy men and women.[180]

Despite fearing love's slippery slope, male religious figures at times viewed nuns as vital to the spiritual wellbeing of male monastics. The theologian and monk Peter Abelard, famed for his love of Heloise, wrote concerning the *cura monialium,* envisioning an ideal community in which monks and nuns lived together. Heloise, who became a nun and then an abbess at Abelard's behest, was instrumental in Abelard's realization, late in life, that women were beneficial to men's piety. In a letter to Heloise, he noted that the prayers of women were particularly effective, especially if an entire convent of women was praying.[181] Abelard viewed women's piety as utilitarian, freeing men for other duties.

In the rule which Abelard wrote for Heloise and her nuns at the Paraclete, the monastic establishment founded by Abelard and given to Heloise and her nuns after they lost their house at Argenteuil, he envisioned a community in which monks and nuns would work together. Monks would focus on the external and administrative duties of the community, leaving the abbess free to focus on the pastoral care of her flock of nuns *(pertinent curam monasteriis feminarum providere).* In this way, the abbess would be able to ensure that her flock remained free from the carnal contagion *(carnali contagio)* of the outside world in general and of sexual contact with men in particular.[182] Fiona J. Griffiths has examined Abelard's writings on the *cura monialium,* considering what they meant to the monks and nuns of the Paraclete. Griffiths argued that

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[180] Elliott, *Bride of Christ,* 204ff.
[181] *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise,* trans. Betty Radice (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974), 120-121.
[182] Peter Abelard, "Abelard's Rule for Religious Women," ed. T. P. McLaughlin, *Mediaeval Studies* 18 (1956), 258-260.

Abelard ultimately came to view the pastoral care of nuns as vital to his own redemption and as something that should be important to all male religious. Heloise and her nuns were likewise actively concerned with the quality of the pastoral care that was rendered to them. As a result, the later letters between Abelard and Heloise represent a challenge to the traditional view of the *cura monialium* as a burden on monks and, equally, a burden on nuns who were expected to compensate their caretakers financially.[183]

Griffiths has additionally pointed to the Guta-Sintram codex as evidence of the broader relevance of Abelard's ideas on the *cura monialium.* The Guta-Sintram codex is a famous manuscript written by one of the few identifiable twelfth-century female scribes, Guta. Two fellow members of the monastic community at Schwartzenthann, Trutwib and Gisela, assisted Guta. Sintram, a priest and canon at nearby Marbach, also aided them in the book's production.[184] Abelard's sermon 30, an elegant statement of the mutual benefit of monks and nuns working and living together, appealed to the communities at Marbach and Schwartzenthann. As a result, the sermon formed the basis for three chapters and the opening statement of the codex, known as *Beati pauperes.*[185] Griffiths' examination of Abelard's thinking on the *cura monialium* demonstrates that nuns and monks alike continued to think in complex ways about the issue of personal relationships involved in the care of nuns.

The potential for controversy inherent in relationships between male and female religious played out vividly in the *cura monialium* controversy in the thirteenth century. Although the

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[183] Fiona J. Griffiths, "'Men's duty to provide for women's needs': Abelard, Heloise, and Their Negotiation of the *Cura Monialium," Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2004), 6-7.
[184] Fiona J. Griffiths, "Brides and *Dominae:* Abelard's *Cura Monialium* at the Augustinian Monastery of Marbach," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 34 (2003), 1-2.
[185] Ibid., 74-76.

cura monialium did not necessarily entail friendship, fear that relationships between monks and nuns might become inappropriately close plagued prominent monastic figures. These men were also concerned about the proper way for monks to spend their time and did not prioritize providing necessary services to women. Many orders, including the Cistercians, Premonstratensians, and Franciscans, as well as the Dominicans, struggled over the question of whether the care of nuns was an appropriate task for monks. The Dominicans had an ambiguous relationship to the pastoral care of nuns from their beginning. Before Dominic, the order's founder, died in 1221, he had established three monasteries of nuns at Prouille, Madrid, and Rome, and had planned a fourth to be located in Bologna.[186] By the time of Dominic's death, however, he had come to question the value of nuns to the Dominican order and instructed his followers to avoid associating with women.[187] Despite Dominic's warnings, houses of nuns continued to become associated with the order. By 1250, there were approximately 32 convents in Germany alone under the order's care; by 1303, Bernard Gui, an inquisitor and historian of the order, listed 141 female houses, including 74 in Germany.[188] Many of these German communities were initially beguinages or other pre-existing *ad hoc* groups of laywomen. They then took up the Augustinian Rule and the Dominican Constitutions. Among these communities, several later produced Sisterbooks. But the friars took Dominic's concerns to heart. At the Dominican General Chapter of 1228, the assembled representatives passed a decree prohibiting the friars from undertaking the *cura monialium* at convents other than those founded by Dominic. According to the chapter, the care of nuns took time away from other, more important

[186] Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* 1.377.
[187] Brenda M. Bolton, *"Mulieres Sanctae,"* in *Women in Medieval Society,* ed. Susan Mosher Stuard (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 150-151.
[188] Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* 1.377.

duties of the friars. It was in this context that Humbert of Romans requested authority from the Pope to author a uniform Constitution for all houses of nuns, a text that will be discussed in the next section. The Constitutions were promulgated at the General Chapter of Valenciennes in 1259. In 1267, Pope Clement IV (d. 1268) finally intervened in the ongoing difficulty, instructing the friars to persist in the care of nuns beyond the four houses closely connected to Dominic.[189]

Finally, the Bible also included important ideas that had a bearing on the perception of friendship during the medieval period. For instance, Christ told his disciples that they were his friends if they did what he commanded, and they were friends rather than servants because he had shared what he knew of God with them (John 15:14-15). For Ambrose, this verse was prime evidence that friends had to share their secrets and innermost lives with each other.[190] In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul extolled the value of the virtue of charity *(caritas),* which was superior to faith and hope (1 Cor. 13). Thomas Aquinas drew on this epistle as well as John 15 in his discussion of charity as friendship.[191]

What did all this mean for women? Apart from Jerome's spiritual friendships with Paula and her aristocratic circle, women were categorically excluded from classical and monastic theories of friendship. But elements of these various definitions and ways of understanding friendship from the ancient world, late antiquity, and the Middle Ages can be adduced to create a working definition of friendship between women religious. Friendship entailed an element of

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[189] Edward Tracy Brett: *Humbert of Romans: His Life and Views of Thirteenth-Century Society* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1984), 59-74. See also Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* 387-393.
[190] PL 16:182-183.
[191] Anthony W. Keaty, "Thomas' Authority for Identifying Charity as Friendship: Aristotle or John 15?" *Thomist* 62, no. 4 (1998), 581-601.

intimacy through the sharing of personal information or aspects of one's inner life that would not be obvious to everyone in the convent. An aspect of charity could come into play as well, and we will see this particularly in the context of illness. Finally, friendship could act as a venue for furthering one's piety between women who were spiritual equals—that is, not a prioress and a choir nun who held no offices, but two choir nuns. In the context of the Sisterbooks, the nuns' *vitae* are often too short to "test" for all three aspects of this definition, but these components point us in the direction of friendship nonetheless.

Prescriptive Texts Structuring Relationships for Women

Given reformers' interest in returning the order to an idealized, even fictionalized, version of the past, a natural place to turn next for understanding how interpersonal relationships within the convent ought to be structured is prescriptive texts: the Augustinian Rule and its accompanying Constitutions, promulgated at the 1259 General Chapter in Valenciennes, which elaborated the terse Rule for Dominican nuns specifically.[192] Neither of these sources mentioned friendship. In the centuries before the Observant Reform, leading monastic figures had become increasingly apprehensive about how earthly relationships might get in the way of the only friendship that mattered: that with God and Christ.[193] The Augustinian Rule, which had

[192] The Constitutions went through several versions: the earliest are the Constitutions written for San Sisto in 1220. They were supplanted by the Constitutions of Montargis in 1250. That text was further revised by Humbert of Romans into the version of the Constitutions that was promulgated at the Dominican General Chapter at Valenciennes in 1259. The Constitutions of 1259 remained the official Constitutions of the Dominican Second Order until the 1930s.

[193] A telling example comes from the *vita* of Fr. Egidius, an associate of Francis of Assisi: *…solus Deus qui creavit animam, est amibus eius et non alius* ("Only God, who created your soul, is your friend: no other.") Quoted in McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* 413.

originated as a letter to nuns, explicitly warned against carnal love, urging followers towards spiritual love instead.[194]

The various Constitutions under which Dominican nuns lived demonstrated this concern with interpersonal relationships. In a surviving letter to the Sisters of Madrid, founded in 1218, St Dominic wrote to instill in the nuns the importance of silence. "Avoid long conversations among yourselves," he advised, and "do not waste your time in idle words about unnecessary things."[195] There is a middle ground between total silence and these projected long and frivolous conversations, and the *vitae* of the Sisterbooks demonstrate that their fourteenth-century authors and fifteenth-century readers were aware of such a middle ground. Dominic's primary purpose was encouraging the sisters to maintain a high standard in their religious vocation, a purpose which continued on into the period of the Observant Reform. Additionally, Dominic and others left the definitions of "idle" and "unnecessary" open to interpretation. While these exhortations may at first seem totally prohibitive to the formation of friendships, such an interpretation is only one way of understanding their meaning. In context, it seems most likely that Dominic was reminding the Madrid sisters not to be gossipy and not to fritter away time that ought to be spent in prayer.

The Constitutions bear witness to the constrained nature of interpersonal relationships within the ideal Dominican community. There was one instance, however, in which they prioritized individual interpersonal relationships, and that was in the care of the sick. The Constitutions of San Sisto enjoined the infirmary mistress "not to be negligent nor austere in the

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[194] Augustine of Hippo, *Regula Sancti Augustini* 6.3, ed. Luc Verheijen, 1.435. *Non autem carnalis, sed spiritalis inter uos debet esse dilectio.*

[195] Dominic, "Letter to the Sisters of Madrid," in *Early Documents of the Dominican Sisters* (Summit, NJ: Dominican Sisters, Congregation of Our Lady of the Rosary), 4-5

care of the sick" so that patients could quickly regain their health and return to the normal rhythms of monastic life.[196] The Valenciennes Constitutions expanded on the brevity of the earliest constitutions, emphasizing the dietary changes that were permissible for infirm sisters, but they added nothing further about the interaction between the sick and their caretakers.[197] This omission is hardly surprising. As with Dominic's letter to the Madrid nuns, or any monastic rule, silence was also given pride of place in all the Constitutions. The Valenciennes Constitutions urged silence in the oratory, cloisters, and dormitories, but permitted speaking in other places when it was required.[198] Many of the infractions which merited punishment concerned breaches of silence: for the first instance of breaking silence away from the table, the Constitutions required the nun to say one psalm as penance. For the second infraction, she would be disciplined during chapter, and for the third, she had to sit on the ground during lunchtime.[199] Moreover, silence and enclosure were closely related, an element of the Constitutions that Observant reformers certainly emphasized. The chapter on silence is also the point in the Constitutions which addressed the few porous zones in strict enclosure: the window in the secular parlor *(locutorii secularium)* and the grille for confession *(fenestras confessionum).*[200]

Although prescriptive texts such as the Rule and Constitutions must not be interpreted as an accurate description of convent life, one that was free of complications, their importance in

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[196] Dominic, "Primitive Constitutions of the Monastery of San Sisto," in ibid., 8-9.
[197] "Liber Constitutionum Sororum Ordinis Praedicatorum," *Analecta Sacri Ordinis Fratrum Praedicatorum* 3 (1897), 341.
[198] Ibid., 341-342. *Silencium teneant sorores in oratorio, in claustro, in dormitorio, in refectorio. Alibi vero loqui poterunt de licencia speciali.* The early Constitutions of Montargis urged silence in the same list of locations, before going on: *nisi forte silenter et breviter eliquid loquantur ab aliquam necessitatem* ("except perhaps that [the sisters] may speak silently and briefly on account of some necessity"). "Les constitutions primitives des soeurs domincaines de Montargis," ed. Raymond Creytens, *AFP* 27 (1947), 72.
[199] "Liber Constitutionum Sororum," 342.
[200] Ibid., 342. See also Smith, *"Clausura Districta,"* 32.

structuring the imagined ideal of a cloistered, Observant community should not be underestimated. For male reformers like Johannes Meyer, apart from the singing of the liturgy, enclosure and silence were key signs of an Observant convent; references to enclosure and silence pervade his *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.*[201] A letter from Barthélemey Texery, the order's master general, to the newly reformed nuns of the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg in 1428, similarly emphasized the importance of the Rule and Constitutions, and particularly the importance of enclosure, silence, and severing contact with friends and relatives outside the convent walls.[202] For these thinkers, the monastic Rule and Constitutions provided a structure for obedience and self-discipline shaped by the liturgical responsibilities of Dominican nuns.[203]

When the anonymous account of reform at St Katharina in Nuremberg is compared with parallel accounts of male reformers, the identities of the newly Observant sisters and their relationships to one another become much more significant than the prescriptive documents introducing reform might lead one to expect. The anonymous author was careful to note the number and name of the nuns present prior to the reform, the reform party that arrived from Schönensteinbach along with the convent offices they held, and the sisters who left.[204] For the anonymous sister who wrote this chronicle, the way that the reform restructured the cloister's inhabitants and their relationships to each other was as significant as and more noteworthy than

[201] For example, *BdRP* I-III, II.11, 37-38: the secure lock with which Conrad of Prussia symbolically and literally enclosed the nuns of Schönensteinbach.
[202] von Kern, "Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 18.
[203] Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 143-144.
[204] von Kern, "Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 7-12. For more on this source and the reform of St Katharina, see Chapter Three.

the reform of the liturgy, the reintroduction of strict enclosure, or a renewed emphasis on the Rule and Constitutions.

Locating Precursors: Friendship in the Fourteenth-Century Sisterbooks

The Sisterbooks provided the nuns with a useful model of how to live in community, whether in harmony or dealing with interpersonal conflict and tension. Within the context of illness, visionary experience, or communal selflessness, the Sisterbooks constructed and demonstrated a distinct model of friendship and interpersonal relationships that was not reliant on earlier, masculine models. Nor did it mirror the model of heterosexual friendship like that displayed between Jerome and Paula and echoed by other male advisors and their "spiritual daughters."[205] In contrast to these other models, the Sisterbooks depicted a myriad of possibilities for friendships, seeking to demonstrate how the monastic community itself was dependent on such bonds.[206] First and foremost, sisters sought friendship with God. This was the font of any commendable interpersonal relationships between nuns, which were nourished and sustained in their quest for God. The centrality of friendship to community provides a key as to why the Sisterbooks remained valuable texts to communities that adopted the Observant Reform, even after the redactions by male reformers.

[205] See also Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power.*

[206] Brian McGuire suggested that friendship must be understood within the context of the monastic community—in other words, that the broader community was significant to the shaping of friendships. In the Sisterbooks, however, friendships are a significant part of how the community is understood. McGuire, *Friendships and Community,* xiii-xiv.

Nuns as Friends of God

The most important friendship for nuns in the Sisterbooks was, of course, their friendship with God. The idea of being *Gottesfreunde* ("friends of God") stemmed from John 15:15, in which Christ referred to his disciples as friends.[207] Although some mystical authors had used the term in the thirteenth century, the idea gained particular popularity among fourteenth-century German Dominican authors, including Henry Suso and Johannes Tauler. The concept encompassed a range of possibilities, from a close but non-erotic relationship to a relationship more akin to a mystical union.[208] Near the end of the manuscript, the Diessenhofen Sisterbook included a hymn-like poem of the Holy Spirit, who was described as "a mild giver of graces, who gives his closest friends *(sinen heinlichen frúnden)* his grace so completely in one hour" that they would be unable to gain so much grace on their own even if they searched for a thousand years.[209] Friendship with God had distinct benefits for the worthy, though the poem's author gave no instruction on how such a bond might be formed.

The Dissenhofen Sisterbook is more forthcoming in the course of the *vitae* of Adelheit Pfefferhartin, Elsbeth von Villingen, and Adelheit von St Gallen, however. During a visionary experience that occurred almost immediately before her death, Adelheit Pfefferhartin told God that she was his good friend *(ich bin din guter frúnd).*[210] In this instance, the friendship between God and nun was declared not by God but by the nun herself, confident in the holiness of her life

[207] Rosemary Hale, "For Counsel and Comfort: The Depiction of Friendship in Fourteenth-Century Convent Literature," *Word and Spirit: A Monastic Review* 11 (1989), 94.
[208] Bernard McGinn, *The Harvest of Mysticism in Medieval Germany* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 2005), 407-415.
[209] *St Katharinentaler Schwesternbuch,* 120-121.
[210] Ibid., 153-154.

and reassured by the vision she had on her deathbed. Elsbeth von Villingen demonstrated another way in which a nun could become a friend of God. Her *vita* recounted how God took away Elsbeth's earthly friends and, along with them, the comforts that their companionship brought to Elsbeth. As a result, Elsbeth became wretched and lonely until God gave her his friendship and comfort.[211] This involuntary sacrifice of her earthly friends demonstrates that God was at the pinnacle of a hierarchy of earthly friendships. Adelheit Pfefferhartin and Elsbeth von Villingen's experiences are in contrast with the visionary encounter of Adelheit von St Gallen, who enjoyed a more reciprocal relationship with God. During a visionary encounter, Adelheit said to God, "Lord, I offer you my affection, a loving soul, and a loving heart." A voice, presumably God, replied to her that she was his "always-beloved daughter."[212] In return for her heart and soul, God gave Adelheit his love and friendship. While the author of Adelheit Pfefferhartin's *vita* cast her relationship with God in explicit terms of friendship, Adelheit von St Gallen's relationship with God more clearly resembled the trope of the *sponsa Christi,* or bride of Christ—a relationship which permeated medieval visionary literature and which bore more erotic overtones than the friend of God model.[213] No single model of intimacy with God sufficed for this convent; the *vitae* variously depicted the relationship of a nun with God as friendship or as an erotic relationship akin to the *sponsa Christi* model. The two models coexisted without conflict and neither was shown as being superior to the other.

Friendship with and in God is physically manifested by the small devotional images made and exchanged by nuns, known as *Nonnenarbeiten.* As art historian Jeffrey Hamburger has

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[211] Ibid., 165-166.

[212] Ibid., 105. *"Herr, ich oppfren dir einen mueden lib, ein minnend sel und ein begerendes hertz." Do hort si ein stimme, die sprach: "Du bist min allerliepste tochter."*

[213] On the development of the *sponsa Christi* throughout the Middle Ages, see for example Elliott, *Bride of Christ.*

demonstrated, these objects provide a visual representation of the kind of relationships with God that the Sisterbooks describe in words. Though the *Nonnenarbeiten* analyzed by Hamburger were produced at the Benedictine convent of St Walburg near the city of Eichstätt (Bavaria) at the turn of the sixteenth century, they provide a useful point of comparison with the Sisterbooks because they were likewise produced by nuns and intended for use within the convent.[214] Moreover, images could be exchanged as tokens of friendship within the convent.[215] The images from St Walburg included three depictions of the soul dwelling within the heart. Not only are these images the ones most directly relevant to understanding how late-medieval nuns understood friendship, but they are also the ones that Hamburger argued are most closely connected to nuns' spirituality through their evocation of both enclosure and the Eucharist.[216] This series of images—featuring nuns at Eucharistic banquets inside Christ's heart and the heart as a house where the nun dwells with the Trinity—"emphasize the viewer's active participation," serving "as both mirrors and models of the viewer's own activity."[217] Hamburger also noted how these images reflected Eucharistic devotion and the symbolism of the mystical marriage—both features of late medieval female piety and present in various forms in the Sisterbooks.[218] The nun

[214] The Sisterbooks included some internal evidence for nuns who may have been artists. Cynthia J. Cyrus has noted at least two nuns who are described as having some artistic skill. In the Töss Sisterbook, Elsbet von Cellinkon was described as a scribe or author and an artist. The Oetenbach Sisterbook recorded that three women joined the convent along with Ita von Hoehenfels, one of whom was a scribe who could both write and illuminate. Cynthia J. Cyrus, *The Scribes for Women's Convents in Late Medieval Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 83.

[215] Jeffrey Hamburger, "Visible, Yet Secret: Images as Signs of Friendship in Seuse," *Oxford German Studies* 36, no. 2 (2007), 141-162. Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, ms. Donaueschingen 424, which certainly belonged to a convent of Dominican nuns and possibly belonged to Adelhausen, was produced in the third quarter of the fifteenth century and contains a number of pasted-in images that depict Christ's Passion. It is possible that these images were sent to Adelhausen from another convent. The images are between fol. 194r and fol. 231v.

[216] Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists,* 136.

[217] Ibid.

[218] Ibid., 144ff.

contemplating these images was being invited to imagine herself interacting not only with the Trinity, but also with the nun who was already present in the image. The nun in the image had attained the ideal of monastic life by dwelling with God; the nuns viewing the image could either imagine herself as that nun or as joining that nun in her devotions, reflecting the corporate worship at the heart of the monastic community.[219]

Friendship Within the Convent Community

God was not the only friend a nun could have, however. She could also experience friendship with her fellow sisters, a relationship which fostered harmony within the community and promoted mutual spiritual growth. Friendship among nuns appeared in the Sisterbooks most frequently in the context of illness, visionary experience, and prayer, and moments that can best be described as community construction.

Times of illness, then as now, were challenging both for the woman who was ill and those who cared for her. They could also bring out both the best and the worst traits among the sisters. In the relatively short *vita* of Kunigund von Vilseck from Engelthal, the main theme was her illness in her advanced age. At first, Kunigund suffered along with her companion, another sister who was also unwell but who treated Kunigund very lovingly. When her friend died, however, the prioress assigned a maid to care for Kunigund. The maid treated Kunigund very harshly *(herticlich)* and left her without food one day.[220] The stark contrast between the loving

[219] Ibid., 169-175.
[220] *Der Nonne von Engelthal Büchlein von der genaden Uberlast,* ed. Karl Schröder (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1871), 38-39.

treatment of a friend and longtime companion and the harsh treatment of an indifferent maid, perhaps a laysister with no close connection to Kunigund, was dramatically emphasized by the fact that these two sentences describing the contrasting treatment are next to each other in the *vita.* With no further details, we can only imagine the circumstances that caused the maid to treat Kunigund so uncaringly. Perhaps she was stretched thin by caring for too many patients, or perhaps the combination of grief over the loss of a close companion and friend combined with the pain of her illness made Kunigund a difficult patient.

Brian McGuire has observed that the histories of friendship and grief are intimately linked, "for in lamenting over the dead friend, one describes what he meant in life."[221] Although no sisters specifically eulogized their deceased friends in the Sisterbooks, this connection between friendship and death is still clearly relevant. The life of Reinlint von Villingen from Adelhausen offers one example. Reinlint's unnamed friend, whom she trusted deeply *(si hatte zů einer swester sunderliche truwe),* was suffering severely from an unnamed ailment. Because of this, Reinlint felt deep pity *(si ebendolet ir gar vaste)* for her friend. And in fact, when her friend died, Reinlint, who often wept out of piety, shed tears for her companion. She became even more distressed because God might perceive that she was weeping for an earthly friend instead, but John the Evangelist reassured her in a dream.[222] Not only was Reinlint's sorrow over the loss of a close companion the first of several anecdotes in her *vita,* it also received spiritual approval in the form of a vision.

Sisters also expressed concern for what would happen to the nun or nuns left behind after a dear friend passed away from illness. In the Adelhausen Sisterbook, a friend asked Else von

[221] McGuire, *Friendship and Community,* xvi.
[222] "Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 173-174.

Nuwenstatt (Neustadt) what Else's friends *(sinen frúnden)* ought to do when she passed away. This touching moment occurred during a lengthy conversation between Else and her friend about the nature of God and love. Else assured her worried friend that she would be going to heaven, so all her friends should be happy for her.[223] This discussion about what those left behind ought to do when they lost a friend recognized the power that earthly friends had to provide comfort and space for discussions about a range of subjects, including death. In the case of Gotteszell, the community banded together to stand alongside an unnamed sister in her time of illness. The nun Adelheit comforted this sister, bestowing words of love on her *(vil liebes mein kint),* before they discussed the sister's impending demise and her fearlessness in the face of death.[224] Although the term "friend" was not deployed in this instance, as the case of Kunigund demonstrated, responses to illness could be negative, so the community support given to this anonymous nun should be seen as a gesture of charity in its guise of friendship.

A second context in which the Sisterbooks privileged friendship was in times of visionary experiences and prayer. Frequently, nuns would tell their closest friend about their visions. This practice acted to validate the vision by providing a witness, but the sisters' choice of whom they told is pertinent. For example, Sofia von Klingnau, a sister at the convent of Töss, chose to keep her visionary encounters private throughout most of her life. When she was nearing death, she

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[223] Ibid., 182-183.

[224] *Aufzeichnungen über das mystische Leben der Nonnen von Kirchberg bei Sulz Predigerordens während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts,* ed. F. W. E. Roth (Bonn: Hannstein, 1893), 132. Note that the Gotteszell Sisterbook was recognized as being separate from the Kirchberg Sisterbook only in the 1970s. Roth noticed stylistic differences between what he saw as two halves of the Kirchberg Sisterbook, but attributed these to different authorship: Roth, 104. In 1977, Hans Peter Müller argued convincingly that the works represented two separate Sisterbook stemming from two different convents. See Hans Peter Müller, "Das Schwesternbuch von Kloster Kirchberg (1237-1305)," *Der Sülchgau* 21/22 (1977/1978), 42-56.

finally told a sister with whom she had "long been especially intimate" about her visions.[225] The language used, in combination with the decision to reveal a deeply held secret, indicated that this unnamed sister was a trusted, close friend. As with Else von Nuwenstadt at Adelhausen and the anonymous Gotteszell sister, impending death often prompted friendship to take center stage. The nearness of death tended to dispel suspicions of special favor in the dying visionary's choice of a confidant.

At Gotteszell, the nun Adelheit von Hiltegarthausen did not wait nearly so long to reveal her most significant mystical experience to her friends. Although she had been sickly for much of her life, the narrative that precedes the culminating mystical vision describes her concerted devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary and several visionary encounters.[226] During her ultimate vision, Adelheit is completely removed from her senses:

> *Und da wart sie gefurt zu des firmamenten umlauf, und da von ging ein so suss don und klanck, der uber all synn was. Wann allein dar nach, da sie wider zu ir selber kome, und ir heimlich freunde zu ir komen, da sagt sie in das alles…*[227]
>
> "And [in her vision], she was led to the rotation of the firmament, and from there came a sound so sweet that it surpassed all sense. When she was alone again, when she had come to herself, and her intimate friends came to her, she told them everything…"

Adelheit was eager to share her vision, and her friends were the ideal audience. Not only does Adelheit convey what she saw and heard, but we are told that her fellow sisters were subsequently responsible for conveying the news of the mystical sounds of the firmament to

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[225] *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss beschreiben von Elsbet Stagel, samt der Vorrede des Johannes Meyer und dem Leben der Prinzessin Elisabet von Ungarn,* ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), 55. *…der sy lang sunderlich haimlich.*
[226] *Kirchberg bei Sulz,* 123-124.
[227] Ibid., 131.

others and therefore they too were rewarded by Christ.[228] Adelheit's life demonstrates how the communities that created the Sisterbooks not only valued the mystical occurrence itself but also its dissemination. The process of sharing was first effected verbally along the lines of friendship and then commemorated in the Sisterbooks themselves. In this way, the Sisterbooks became a written record of a process that already occurred within Gotteszell.

In other instances, nuns spoke at length with their friends about the nature of Christ. For example, Sister Gepe, a nun in the convent of Adelhausen, spoke with another sister, her good friend *(si sproch zu einre swester, die wz ir gut fruend),* about meditating on and thinking about Christ.[229] Gepe asked her friend how she was able to recognize Christ in her daily life, and her friend responded that she recognized Christ through all of her senses and thoughts.[230] Ultimately, Gepe took to heart her friend's advice about recognizing Christ and felt her spirituality grow as a result. Even more importantly, it was not a prioress encouraging a wayward sister on the path to improvement, nor was it the novice mistress educated a young oblate about the proper love of God as she learned her psalms—these two sisters communicated as peers.

Alheid von Igelstadt at the convent of Engelthal was perceived as having a more mature spirituality. As a result, God sought to advance her friend, Mehthilt Krumpsitin, as well. They are a rare pair of friends who are both identified by name, and in fact Mehthilt's *vita* immediately follows Alheid's in the text of the Sisterbook. One day, Alheid heard the voice of Christ saying to her that He wanted to bring Mehthilt closer to him, presumably by means of a mystical

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[228] Ibid.

[229] The Middle High German word *frund* ("friend") can also have the connotation of "relative" or "relation." Although it was not uncommon for several daughters from one family to be nuns in the same convent, instances like this one suggest that *frund* is used when referring to two nuns to mean that they are friends and companions in a way that has nothing to do with blood. There is no reason to think these two nuns were related.

[230] "Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 160-161.

encounter, because of the pureness of her soul. Mehthilt, Alheid's companion *(gespilen),* benefitted because of Alheid's status as one of Christ's lovers. Mehthilt and Alheid prayed together that Mehthilt would achieve a closer relationship with God, and their prayer was successful.[231] This situation, like that of Gepe at Adelhausen or the visionary women at Töss and Gotteszell, demonstrates the fundamental role of peer-centric, non-hierarchical friendship in the spiritual development of Dominican nuns. The effectiveness of prayer increased because they prayed together, and the trust and shared experience between the two sisters enabled them to find a mutually close relationship to Christ. It also fulfilled Christ's promise that when two or three are gathered in his name, he will be there among them (Matt. 18:20).

Finally, friendships helped to construct community in the Dominican convents depicted in the Sisterbooks in ways that went beyond the bonds developed in times of illness or as a result of visionary experiences. While religious life naturally placed constraints on nuns living in convents, interpersonal relationships helped nuns to feel welcomed into the life of the convent and as though they were a part of it. When they first joined the convent, sometimes at a very early age, girls and young women were often lonely, as the Sisterbooks vividly illustrated. Willi von Kostenz of Töss, who came to the community when she was only three years old, felt herself doubly exiled, sent away from her home and not received kindly by the nuns.[232] Behte Vinchin, who was a sister at Adelhausen, was so lonely upon joining the convent that she initially spoke to

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[231] *Der Nonne von Engelthal,* 17-18.

[232] *Leben der Schwestern zu Töss,* 48. *Sy was och gar ellend, das sy wenig trostes hat von iemand.* On the issue of age, the Montargis Constitutions and the subsequent Valenciennes Constitutions were clear: no one may be received among the sisters prior to the age of seven, and none may make a full profession before they were twelve *(nulla in sororem infra septem annos, nulla ad professionem infra duodecim annos recipiatur).* See the previous section for more on the Dominican Constitutions. "Les constitutions primitives," 73.

her crucifix as if she was speaking to a dear friend *(al sein frund mit dem andern).*[233] Both Willi and Behte found comfort in their relationship with Christ during their time of loneliness, but by the end of their respective *vitae,* they had discussed their religious experiences with another sister, bringing a temporal dimension to their spiritual bonds. These discussions demonstrated the comfort that they had found in their relationships with the women about them.

The Sisterbooks also offered examples of nuns who were selflessly available to those in their community who needed them to combat loneliness. Mechthilt die Rittrin of Diessenhofen exemplifies this selflessness, ready day or night to help a fellow nun in need because she practiced the virtue of common love.[234] Christ's voice spoke to another nun, Mechthilt von Torlikon and told her that Mechthilt die Rittrin would be her caretaker *(pflegerinen)* in her time of illness. This knowledge proved comforting to Mechthilt von Torlikon.[235] Mechthilt die Rittrin's *vita* brought together themes of illness, visionary experience, and community, while closely identifying Mechthilt with this distinct friendship. It ends by emphasizing Mechthilt die Rittrin's love for her fellow sisters and the key role that she played in her community as a source of trust, comfort, and friendship. Life's various travails, including loneliness, could be partially remedied through a relationship with Christ, but divine friendship was complemented by community and the interpersonal relationships among its members. The tacit reiteration of this premise in the Sisterbooks suggests that their authors, and probably the generations of their readers, regarded such relationships as lived reality for Dominican nuns.

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[233] "Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 174.
[234] *Die tugend der gemeinen minnen hatt si vsgenomenlich… vnd wa ir dehein swester bedorft, der was si allweg bereit naht vnd tag mit allem dem; so si kund vnd maht. St Katharinentaler Schwesternbuch,* 133.
[235] Ibid., 133-134.

This section has considered the value of the Sisterbooks in the fourteenth-century Dominican convents in which they were conceived. We will return to the Sisterbooks to discuss their fifteenth-century reception in the final section of this chapter, again assessing their continued importance in community building. The next section will examine two male contemporaries of the Sisterbooks.

Henry Suso and Johannes Tauler: Envisioning Convent Relationships

The Sisterbooks offer one interpretation of how to live as a community according to the Rule and Constitutions. But there is another important perspective on communal monastic life, and that is the perspective of prominent Dominican friars. Henry Suso, the fourteenth-century mystic, and his contemporary, Johannes Tauler, offer useful points of comparison. Both were involved with the *cura monialium* of Dominican nuns, and the works of both continued to be circulated during the fifteenth century among Observant convents.[236] In each case, friendship between women seemed beyond the bounds of the men's imagination.

Henry Suso, who was particularly involved with the pastoral care of Dominican nuns, formed a close friendship with Elsbeth Stagl (d. c. 1360), a nun at Töss who authored large portions of that convent's Sisterbook. Three letters that Suso wrote to Stagel have survived, each representing a key turning point in Elsbeth's spiritual life and known by their incipits: *Habitabit lupus cum agno* (Isa. 11:6) was written to Elsbeth when she was a young nun; *Nigra sum, sed formosa* (Song 1:4) was sent to Elsbeth when she was suffering from a severe illness; and

[236] Lewis discusses the Sisterbooks' perspective on the *cura monialium: By Women, For Women, About Women,* 176ff.

Annunciate dilecto, quia amore langueo was Suso's attempt to characterize the effect he thought his guidance had had on Elsbeth.[237] Suso began *Habitabit lupus cum agno* with an explication of that biblical verse before exhorting Elsbeth to take to heart a passage which he claimed to have encountered in a book: "Love maketh unequal things equal."[238] In order to live according to this passage, Elsbeth needed to forget her noble origins, give up her powerful friends, and act towards her sisters as if she were a doormat, lower in status than all of them. By embracing Suso's counsel, she would soon become one of God's chosen.[239] In his second and third letters to her, Suso made it clear that Elsbeth had attained the spiritual equality to which he had urged her in the first letter. Indeed, in *Annunciate dilecto,* Suso expressed joy over Elsbeth's report of the divine love which she had experienced and told her of a similar incident that had recently occurred to him. Though Elsbeth apparently had told Suso that he should be satisfied with being the Lord's servant rather than his lover, Suso eagerly reported the melding of his soul with God.[240] Rather than slipping from divine love to carnal, sexual love, Suso's affection and friendship for Elsbeth progressed upwards from the earthly to the divine, representing the fullest possibility for heterosexual spiritual friendships during the fourteenth-century heyday of mystical spirituality in Germany.

Initially, these letters seem to posit conflicting views on friendship: the abandonment of earthly friends and subsequent adoption of a particularly virtuous life that Suso mandates for

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[237] Henry Suso, *The Letters of Henry Suso to His Spiritual Daughters,* trans. Kathleen Goldman (London: Blackfriars Publications, 1955), 23-26, 41-46, 63-66.

[238] This passage was similar to a passage in Suso's spiritual autobiography, *Life of the Servant,* chapter 31: "For love makes love like itself and inclines itself to love wherever at all it can." Henry Suso, *The Exemplar, with Two German Sermons,* trans. Frank Tobin (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 128.

[239] Suso, *Letters,* 23-26.

[240] Ibid., 63-66.

Elsbeth and other religious beginners in *Habitabit lupus* gave way to the necessity of correspondence with exceptional, likeminded friends by the time *Annunciate dilecto* was written. This change in perspective on human friendship, from purely negative to suitable and even desirable if between appropriate parties, reflected Elsbeth's journey. As she transitioned from an inexperienced young nun, perhaps missing the comforts of her former life, into a mature mystic whose talents Suso admired and sought to emulate, the nature of her human relationships also underwent a change. She was clearly the more mystically adept, and so the traditionally hierarchical role of cleric and female penitent became inverted. As John W. Coakley has argued about other pairs of female mystics and male collaborators, clerics associated with late medieval holy women endowed these women with the power to "symbolize…what remained beyond [ecclesiastical] authority."[241] In the case of Elsbeth and Suso, Elsbeth was able to achieve a more affective and immediate experience of God, although Suso was quick to assert his own mystical encounter.

Even so, sensitive to the formal hierarchies of male to female or cleric to penitent that structured his relationship with Elsbeth, Suso seemed unable to envisage the possibility of a friendship between two women as peers. The potential relationships between women that he foresaw in his letters ran parallel to the sister who was a "doormat" for other sisters, purposefully debasing herself in order to gain in spiritual status, or the relationship of a prioress or subprioress to her flock, with its disciplinary function. In a letter to a subprioress, Suso told her that enjoying her office would be counterproductive. Because of her supervisory and disciplinary function, other nuns would always assume the worst of her, even when she did her best. It was her

[241] Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power,* 3.

responsibility to break up any "reckless relationships" or "harmful friendships" that she found within her flock: the specter of special friendships that had the potential to cause discord.[242] Suso built his relationship with Elsbeth on his ability to instruct her in spiritual matters, although he acknowledged her ability to achieve certain types of mystical experiences ahead of him. Although he recognized how he benefitted from Elsbeth, Suso viewed relationships as hierarchical and did not conceive of equality or true peer relationships. For Suso, nuns who were theoretically peers ought to debase themselves in front of each other, while nuns who held positions of authority were most likely to be despised by their subordinates and should desire such scorn. Without the ability to envision a strictly peer relationship, the way that classical thinkers had regarded friendship, Suso had no foundation to imagine convent friendship.

Moreover, over time, Suso seems to have become even more ambivalent towards earthly friendships in spite of his longstanding and mutually beneficial relationship with Elsbeth Stagel. Near the end of his life, Suso compiled the "authorized edition" of his works, known as the *Exemplar,* which included his account of his own spiritual journey, *The Life of the Servant,* along with the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom,* the *Little Book of Truth,* and a collection of his letters to various nuns. It was among the most popular books at Dominican convents during and shortly after Suso's life.[243] In the *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom,* Suso presented a dialogue between the Servant, which he identified as himself, and Eternal Wisdom. One of the subjects on which the two characters spoke was the relationship between God and his special friends or lovers (Suso used both terms interchangeably). The Servant asked Eternal Wisdom why the Lord judged

[242] Suso, *Exemplar,* Letter VII, 352-353.
[243] Cyrus, *Scribes for Women's Convents,* 116. Cyrus noted that a manuscript containing Suso's works, copied by Elsbeth Stagel at Töss, is now housed at the Engelberg Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 141. Cyrus, 267 n. 56.

wrongdoing so harshly, "even from your dearest friends," and Wisdom responded, "I expect childlike fear and gentle love from my intimate friends, so that fear may always hold them back from sinning and love may unite them with me in complete devotion."[244] For Suso, fear and love went hand in hand. Another element which characterized Suso's notion of what it meant to be a friend of God was the necessity of living inwardly. Eternal Wisdom elaborated that, in order to live inwardly, one must remain apart from the company of all humans, avoid outside images, keep apart from "everything that is accidental, binding, or brings worry," and constantly contemplate God in one's spirit.[245] Outside influences would lead a person astray from the only relationship that truly mattered: the one with God.

A concern that was common among Suso and the Observant reformers, contributing to the ongoing popularity of Suso's writing in the fifteenth century, was ensuring that nuns kept peace in the convent and did not start or continue dangerous relationships with secular individuals, particularly men. In his letter to a young nun, newly professed in the Dominican life, Suso bewailed those young nuns "who act like wild animals in a zoological garden," peering through the gate the instant it was shut behind them, wearing fancy embroidered veils, and, having renounced marriage, taking "to themselves that greatest of time-wasters, that most heart-breaking destroyer of spiritual life—human friendship."[246] Suso did not mean friendship between two women or even platonic friendship between a man and a woman, but rather a relationship between a nun and a secular man that, if it were not for the security of enclosure would no doubt

[244] Suso, *Exemplar,* chapter 8, 232-233.
[245] Ibid., chapter 22, 275.
[246] Suso, *Letters,* 17.

turn sexual.[247] This slippage in Suso's writing reflects classical and medieval thinking about friendship between the sexes. Indeed, later in the letter, Suso also urged his audience to maintain a certain placidity towards her fellow sisters. A nun should be on guard against anger towards fellow nuns, maintain silence except in cases of necessity, and not seek entertainment from other sisters. But, close association with sisters was valuable when those nuns had something to offer to spiritual development—and, presumably, the converse then is also true, that association with a sister who might benefit from spiritual advice from a more experienced nun is also appropriate.[248] This letter is the only context in which Suso imagined that nuns, although perhaps not as friends, might have discussions that edified and promoted spiritual growth.

Given Suso's affiliation in his own lifetime with the *cura monialium* and his attention to writing for nuns, it is no surprise that numerous copies of Suso's writings, including his letters and the *Exemplar,* belonged to Observant convents.[249] And at least one convent owned copies of all three of those crucial letters to Elsbeth Stagel: the nuns of St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg, reformed in 1431, owned two manuscripts that contained, among other texts, Suso's letterbooks.[250] Neither of these manuscripts had been on the convent's shelves since prior to the reform. In fact, several manuscripts containing Suso's works entered convents right around the

[247] In the letter *Nemo potest duobus dominis servire* ("No one can serve two masters," Matt. 6:24), Suso urged a nun to give up her friend, stop leaving her convent, and focus only on improving her "sinful way of life." Ibid., 58.
[248] Ibid., 19-20.
[249] Ingrid Falque, "'Daz man bild mit bilde us tribe': Imagery and Knowledge of God in Henry Suso's Exemplar," *Speculum* 92, no. 2 (2017), 486-489 has a helpful description of the illustrated manuscript copies of the *Exemplar,* many of which were affiliated with Observant convents. See also Regina D. Schiewer, "Sermons for Nuns of the Dominican Observance Movement," in *Medieval Monastic Preaching,* ed. Carolyn A. Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 83, 91; Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary,* 197-232.
[250] These manuscripts are Paris, BNF, Ms. allem. 222, which belonged to the nun Margareta Zorn before belonging to the convent, and Berlin, StaaB, Ms. germ. oct. 53.

time of their reform.[251] Although mere ownership of manuscripts is not enough evidence to presume their active use in the convent, the fact that Suso's writings continued to circulate and were introduced into Observant convents soon after their reform suggests an ongoing relevance for the kinds of spiritual advice that Suso provided, including his advice on interpersonal relationships within the convent setting.

Johannes Tauler, another significant fourteenth-century Dominican mystic whose sermons were particularly popular among Dominican nuns, complained of similar problems within the convent as those anticipated by Suso. According to Tauler, too much gossip and discord in the convent prevented nuns from seeking union with God. The best way to avoid these situations was to withdraw to one's room.[252] As with most of Suso's writing, Tauler could not envision any benefit to friendship or conversation in achieving spiritual growth, but instead could only imagine discordant, gossipy relationships that must be quashed for the good of the community or harmful and potentially sexual liaisons with secular men. It was easier for the men to imagine relationships that required their intervention and wisdom; friendships that did not lead to discord or that resulted in spiritual growth were not of concern to them.

Reading and Revising the Adelhausen Sisterbook

[251] These include BNF, Ms. allem. 22, as well as Einsiedeln Stiftsbibliothek Cod. 710, which probably entered the convent in 1503 when Dorothea Ehinger entered the convent: see Falque, "Henry Suso's Exemplar," 486. An additional example is Überlingen, Leopold-Sophien-Bibliothek Ms. 22, which was copied at the convent of Zoffingen around 1505 by two of that convent's prolific scribes, Cordula von Schönau and Regina Sattler. That manuscript additionally contains the St Katharinental/Diessenhofen and Töss Sisterbooks.

[252] Johannes Tauler, *Sermons,* trans. Maria Shrady (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), Sermon 33, 115.

With this fourteenth-century background in mind, it is time to consider how female audiences received and used the Sisterbooks. The nuns of the convent of St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen* in Freiburg, which the Observants reformed in 1465, produced a small miscellany sometime in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century.[253] Dating to at least thirty years after the initial reform, the manuscript contains various components: sermons, prayers, and a copy of a letter from a clergyman at the Freiburg Heiliggeistspital to his sister who was a nun at the Observant Dominican convent of Engelport in Guebwiller. In addition, the miscellany contains the *vitae* of forty-one nuns. Ten of these lives come from the original Unterlinden Sisterbook. Nine more lives concerned nuns from Unterlinden, although these came from a fifteenth-century addition to the original Sisterbook. The largest single source of *vitae,* however, was the fourteenth-century Adelhausen Sisterbook. Like St Mary Magdalene, Adelhausen had been reformed in 1465. This particular manuscript is significant for the blend of nuns' *vitae* that it contains. Clearly, some element of choice went into the lives that were included, and this helps us to understand the appeal of the Sisterbooks for their female audiences in the fifteenth century. This manuscript has been overlooked, perhaps because of its later date and lack of connection with a "big name" like Meyer. I believe, however, that this manuscript is crucial for understanding how female Observant readers approached the Sisterbooks and also for placing Meyer's redactions into a broader context.

The manuscript miscellany contains excerpts from two Sisterbooks: the Adelhausen Sisterbook and Elisabeth Kempf's German translation of and additions to the Unterlinden

[253] For more on the simultaneous reform of three of Freiburg's four Dominican convents—Adelhausen, St Agnes, and St Mary Magdalene—see Chapter Three. These convents also feature in Chapter Four. The manuscript is StAF, Hs. B 1 Nr. 163.

Sisterbook. The oldest surviving copy of Adelhausen's Sisterbook dates to 1433.[254] Two further copies, one a draft and the other a more final version, were edited, redacted, and rearranged into alphabetical order by nun's first name by Johannes Meyer after the reform.[255] The copyist of the St Mary Magdalene manuscript appears to have had access to the older manuscript—details that were present in the older manuscript but excised in Meer's redaction made their way into the St Mary Magdalene manuscript. This older manuscript could have been the surviving 1433 manuscript or another, now-lost manuscript copied from the original text by the Adelhausen Sisterbook's author, Anna von Munzingen.

The Unterlinden Sisterbook, the oldest example of the genre, was initially written in Latin. Elisabeth Kempf, Unterlinden's prioress, translated it into German in the middle of the fifteenth century. Elisabeth, who entered Unterlinden just two years after it was reformed in 1419, was a skilled Latinist who translated many works for her fellow non-Latinate sisters, including the Sisterbook.[256] Elisabeth's translation project made the exemplar offered by the Unterlinden Sisterbook more readily accessible to the Observant nuns. Moreover, Elisabeth added the lives of certain stellar nuns to her translation based on oral convent tradition.[257] Kempf had an extraordinary sense of the purpose of her translation in providing a mirror for her fellow sisters and portrayed her translation process as divinely inspired.[258] Sarah Glenn DeMaris has identified and studied an additional, previously unknown copy of Elisabeth Kempf's

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[254] StAF B 1 Nr. 98.
[255] StAF B 1 Nrs. 107, 108.
[256] Claudia Bartholemy, "Élisabeth Kempf, prieure à Unterlinden: une vie entre traduction et tradition (Colmar, 1415-1485)," in *Les dominicaines d'Unterlinden,* 2 vols., ed. Madeleine Blondel and Jeffrey Hamburger (Paris: Somogy, 2001), 2.167.
[257] Ibid., 169.
[258] See Elisabeth's "self-introduction" in the manuscript in the archive of St Katharine in Zoffingen, ms. MA 59, published in Sarah Glenn DeMaris, "Anna Muntprat's Legacy for the Zoffingen Sisters: A Second Copy of the Unterlinden *Schwesternbuch," Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 144, no. 3 (2015), 364.

translation.[259] DeMaris persuasively argued that the additional manuscript belonged to the nuns of the Observant Dominican convent of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in Basel, from where Johannes Meyer may have taken inspiration for his own Sisterbook redactions.[260] DeMaris' identification of this second copy of the German translation of the Unterlinden Sisterbook with the convent of St Mary Magdalene in Basel as well as Johannes Meyer provides potential explanation for how the Unterlinden lives made their way to Freiburg. The sisters of St Mary Magdalene sent a reform party to the Freiburg convent of St Agnes in 1465 as part of that city's reform of three convents, and ties between Dominican sisters in Freiburg and Basel remained close.[261] It is highly possible that these connections brought the Unterlinden Sisterbook to Freiburg, whether through the interlibrary loan network that operated among Observant convents or through a manuscript intermediary that has since been lost.

The Adelhausen Sisterbook's connections to Freiburg are obvious: Adelhausen was Freiburg's most prominent Dominican convent. As we saw in the previous chapter, Johannes Meyer, who spent the final years of his life in Freiburg as the Adelhausen community's confessor, redacted the Adelhausen Sisterbook in service of his vision of Dominican history. He also expanded the contents through additional, alphabetized lists of nuns, stretching like an unbroken thread from Adelhausen's mythologized early sisters to the nuns of Meyer's own time who were engaged in the project of reform. The lists did not provide individual details about lived reality or spirituality, but rather created a sense of continuity that had been slightly

[259] The main manuscript of Elisabeth Kempf's translated Sisterbook is Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibliothek Cod. Guelf. 164.1 Extravagantes. Karl-Ernst Geith, "Zur Textgeschichte der 'Vitae Sororum' (Unterlindener Schwesternbuch) der Katharina von Gueberschwihr," *Mittellateinisches Jahrbuch* 21 (1986), 230-238.
[260] De Maris, "Anna Muntprat's Legacy," 374-376.
[261] For more information on the reform in Freiburg, see Chapter Three. For ongoing close ties between Basel and Freiburg, see Chapter Four.

interrupted by a perceived spiritual decline. Most scholarship on the Sisterbooks in the fifteenth century focuses on these redactions, and as a result, the significance of the manuscript containing *vitae* from the Unterlinden and Adelhausen Sisterbooks has been overlooked.

This late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century manuscript, now Freiburg Stadtarchiv Hs. B 1 Nr. 163, contains several elements that suggest that it must have been copied and adapted from a manuscript of the Adelhausen Sisterbook other than the two Meyer redactions that survive from Adelhausen. The first is the life of Metze or Mechthild Tuschelin and her visionary experience. The versions of Mechthild's life in the 1433 manuscript and the later manuscript are not exactly the same. Both versions include, with fairly close overlap, a story which highlights the obedience that was central to monastic life. Mechthild was about to become the new prioress and was reluctant to take on the office. When she went to the choir to pray that God would allow her to turn down the position, God spoke to her and reminded her of the value of obedience, saying that her obedience would be akin to Abraham's in his eyes if she became the prioress.[262] Given the priority that Observant reformers placed on obedience, this part of Mechthild's story clearly retained value for an Observant audience. Johannes Meyer, too, included this opening element of Mechthild's life in his redaction.[263] But the second component of Mechthild's *vita,* as it appeared in both the 1433 manuscript and the later manuscript, was among the stories that Meyer found suspicious and excised. In this anecdote, Mechthild was contemplating Christ's crucifixion while standing before a cross when Christ spoke to her. He told her that he was hanging there, bloody and naked on the cross, because she had willed it. Therefore, he wanted

[262] StAF Hs. B 1 Nr. 163, fols. 93v-94r. Caroline Walker Bynum discussed this element of Mechthild's *vita.* Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 237-238.
[263] StAF Hs. B 1 Nr. 107, fols. 281v-282r.

her to work to break and sublimate her own will.[264] For Meyer, this affective exchange—which seems to have included a visual component as well, since Christ referred to himself as bloody—was idiosyncratic and suspicious, so he deleted it.[265] But for Anna von Munzingen, the Sisterbook's original author, as well as for the creator of the later manuscript, Mechthild's vision flowed quite naturally from her previous experience of hearing the voice of God: both instances focused on the abnegation of her own will in service of obedience. Given that the remainder of the *vita* is not a complete copy of the full text in the 1433 manuscript, it is clear that choices were made about which elements of Mechthild's life were worth including in the later manuscript. The creator of the later manuscript may have seen obedience as a virtue that needed renewing throughout one's lifetime, and thus pertinent to her life within the walls of St Agnes in the wake of the reform.

The second relevant life is that of one of the convent's male estate managers *(Stifter),* a rare example of the *vita* of a man contained within a Sisterbook.[266] He miraculously returned from the dead to tell the Adelhausen nuns that he had found himself among the damned at the gates of Hell when God returned him to life on account of the nuns' prayers. He immediately confessed his sins and proceeded on the path of a better life.[267] Unlike the life of Mechthild, it is

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[264] *Das ich nacket vnd blos stund an dem crutz durch dinen willen, des machtu mir niena mit als wol gedancken als da mit, dz du dich beroubest dines eignen wilen.* "Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 161. *Ich stunt nackent und blos am crutz durch dinen willen das mahtu mir nienan mit als wol bedancken als do mit dz du dich beroubst dins eigen willen.* StAF Hs B 1 Nr. 163, fol. 94r.

[265] Meyer's redaction of Mechthild's life otherwise follows the order of the 1433 Sisterbook manuscript. As such, we would expect to find Mechthild's vision of Christ hanging bloody on the cross on fol. 281v. It is not there.

[266] Normally, the Middle High German word for the role that I am translating into English as "estate manager" is *Schaffner.* I am following J. König: the founders *(Stiferinnen)* of Adelhausen were a group of (female) beguines, along with the countess Kunigund von Sulz, who contributed financially to the convent's beginnings. Therefore, *Stifter* probably means something else in the context of the Sisterbook. König suggested *Schaffner* or *procurator* as the likeliest meaning. König, "Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 185 n. 2.

[267] "Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen," 185-186; StAF Hs B 1 Nr. 163, fols. 106v ff.

less immediately clear why Meyer excised this life from his edition. Perhaps the estate manager represented a secular man whose relationship with the nuns was worthy of suspicion, since the Observants were concerned with limiting contact between nuns and nearly all men. The role of the estate manager would, by necessity, have required some contact with the enclosed nuns. Perhaps there simply was not room for this man among Meyer's rearrangement, which framed the Sisterbook as an alphabetical list of all the nuns he could identify from the convent's inception—an unnamed man did not fit. Or, perhaps the tacit assertion that the nuns' prayers brought someone back from the dead merited censorship.

The more interesting question, though, is why the creator of the late manuscript *did* include the life of the estate manager. Its most notable feature is, of course, the power of communal prayer, which would have continued to resonate within the context of the Observance. But it also represents an example of individual reform. The estate manager, whose way of life was not described but which presumably included substantial sin of some description, was condemned to Hell. Through the prayer of Dominican nuns, he returned to life, confessed his sins, and amended his way of life. Such personal reform, brought about by the prayers of women, would have had particular value for a community of women whose prayer and liturgy represented one of their chief spiritual benefits to their local community.

These two *vitae* suggest that the copyist of the later manuscript had access to either the 1433 manuscript or another, now-lost copy also stemming from Anna von Munzingen's original manuscript from the mid-fourteenth century. There are several possibilities for why they copied from an older manuscript. The first is that the sisters of Adelhausen were reluctant to loan their newest copy to the sisters of St Agnes—they feared never getting their Johannes Meyer manuscript back. Even though Meyer left two autograph copies of his Sisterbook redaction, the

other contents of each codex are different from each other, so a loss of one manuscript would be detrimental to the convent library. Another possibility is that the Dominican nuns of Adelhausen, St Agnes, or both perceived the 1433 manuscript as having continued utility and a purpose distinct from Meyer's redaction. In this scenario, the sisters of St Agnes would have requested the 1433 manuscript on purpose. Either way, this later manuscript suggests that Meyer's redaction efforts were not perceived in the way that scholars have sometimes suggested they were: as an attack on uniquely female visionary spirituality. Potentially, the sisters of Adelhausen viewed each manuscript as having a different purpose and loaned the manuscript to St Agnes that most suited the convent's communal, reform-oriented, and interpersonal needs. Or, more subversively, the manuscript loan was an act of resistance to Meyer's view of female piety, privileging other models and asserting their utility for an Observant community.

Conclusion

As Dominican convents sought to conform to the strictures of the Observance, the individual women who inhabited each convent had themselves to conform to new, stricter communal expectations.[268] Reform in the Christian church had always been as much an interior process as an exterior one, and the efforts of Observant Reformers to bring communities into a stricter way of life necessarily entailed some level of interior reform on the part of those who lived through the reform of their respective convents. In this chapter, I have argued that we can understand this blend of interior restructuring and communal reform along the lines of

[268] Asad, *Genealogies of Religion,* 140ff.

interpersonal relationships, perhaps even appropriately ordered friendships. Prescriptive documents help us to understand how such community ordering was possible and beneficial for this end, while also clarifying why male spiritual advisors and reformers sought to deny or undercut it.

An anonymous, unpracticed hand, perhaps belonging to the girl or woman herself, inscribed her name into Johannes Meyer's Adelhausen Sisterbook manuscript: "Anna Snewlin, Novitzin, 1483."[269] Other later additions are primarily limited to dates next to the names of some of the nuns who are listed with no further information. So what did it mean for Anna Snewlin, daughter of one of Freiburg's oldest and most prominent patrician families, to inscribe her name (or have her name inscribed) into this communal book?[270] Any answer is essentially speculation, but informed by the argument of this chapter, Anna Snewlin may have seen herself as both a new part of a community in her own time, indicated by her identification as a novice, as well as part of a community stretching back 250 years, as indicated by her decision to include herself in the list of deceased nuns. But it does not seem that her name was added to the manuscript as part of a concerted effort to update the alphabetical list to include all the nuns who had joined the convent between the book's creation and 1483. The inscription enables us to see Anna Snewlin, ever so briefly, as an individual. It also shows that she saw herself as part of a community that stretched back through time. No doubt Anna Snewlin purposefully chose which manuscript was most appropriate for her rather bold inscription of her name. What better place than the convent's Sisterbook, with its ties to centuries of women—including previous generations of Snewlin

[269] StAF Hs B 1 Nr. 108, fol. 201r.
[270] On the Snewlin family, see Hermann Nehlsen, *Die Freiburger Familie Snewlin: Rechts- und sozialgeschichtliche Studien zur Entwicklung des mittelalterlichen Bürgertums* (Freiburg: Karl Zimmer Kommissionsverlag, 1967).

women?[271] Which copy was more suitable than the one most closely connected to the Observant Reform, which Anna would be living? The Adelhausen Sisterbook was not relevant only to male reformers seeking to reshape female communities in the image of the stringent Observant Reform: it was the perfect place for a single novice to identify herself as an individual within the convent community.

[271] In most cases, all that is known of these women is their names—the entries are undated. But, for instance, Clemencia Snewlin, fol. 204r; Elizabeth Snewlin, fol. 205r; and Magdalena and Martha Snewlin, both on fol. 209r.

Chapter Three

Nuns, City Councils, and the Socioeconomics of Reform

Johannes Meyer told the story of a convent, St Michaelsinsel in Bern, that nearly starved after the introduction of strict enclosure because they had lost the support of the local community. The problem as diagnosed by Meyer was that the sisters lacked both food and spiritual discipline *(die swestern in dem anfang ir beschluctze so grossen mangel hatten in geistlichen und zeitlichen sachen).* Once the sisters righted the spiritual ship, so to speak, and regained the support of the order, the townspeople of Bern also renewed their support for the nuns.[272] On the one hand, a convent community that continued to maintain its strict standards, even in the face of deadly obstacles, was clearly spiritually successful. On the other hand, Meyer's presentation of the story suggests that broader community support shaped the longevity and thus the spiritual success of a convent. That is, a convent's successes could not be measured solely upon the nuns' own efforts. A convent strictly enclosed according to the mandates of the Observant Reform relied upon donations of money and goods, as well as support from local ecclesiastical institutions, in order to function. As a result of the reform, nuns were no longer able to engage in the local economy as extensively as they had in the past, but instead relied on intermediaries drawn from their surrounding community.[273] This anecdote, mentioned only in passing, illuminates the extent to which any successful convent reform relied on a substantial

[272] Wrocław University Library Cod. IV F 194a, fol. 115v ff.

[273] Specifically on St Michaelsinsel, which experienced modest economic prosperity in the 1440s in the wake of its reform thanks to the donation of a house and masses, see Claudia Engler, "Bern, St Michael in der Insel," in *Helvetia Sacra / Die Dominikaner und Dominikanerinnen der Schweiz,* ed. Brigitte Degler-Spengler and Petra Zimmer (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1999), 614-617. See also Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 152-154; Sharon T. Strocchia, *Nuns and Nunneries in Renaissance Florence* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 166-171.

support network. That is, reforming a convent could be as much a far-reaching bureaucratic process as an intimate spiritual undertaking. Successful introduction of the Observant Reform required support from not only the nuns themselves, but also from their families, the local government, and the Dominican hierarchy. Competing interests—spiritual, economic, social, familial, and bureaucratic—influenced the successful implementation of reform.

Often, the official, documented impetus for the introduction of reform at a Dominican convent was the city council or territorial ruler. But behind these motivating forces often lay debates between factions of nuns. Some nuns vigorously supported the introduction of the reform and welcomed the stricter spiritual standards that it brought. Frequently, however, other nuns were forceful opponents of the reform. They believed that their current way of life was sufficiently pious or felt that the conditions of life for which they had signed up (or for which they had been signed up by their family) were being changed without their approval. By the time that a city council or prince sought to reform a convent, the situation could be already decided in favor of reform. Convents like St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg or Sylo in Sélestat, whose sisters themselves officially requested the help of Observant sisters to institute the reform, thus are almost certainly not the comparative rarities that they seem. But reform, as Meyer's tale indicates, was bound to fail without the support of local political and ecclesiastical entities.

When historians have discussed the delicate balancing act between nuns, city councils, and other entities with jurisdiction over the region, they have tended to do so within the context of a single city. The convent of St Agnes in Strasbourg was reformed in 1475, nearly 45 years after Strasbourg's other Dominican convent, St Nikolaus *in undis*. A number of wealthy citizens and city councilors proposed the reform; their female relatives were among the nuns at St Agnes. Johannes Meyer reported that the prior of the conventual (i.e., non-Observant) Dominican friars

of Strasbourg, who was also confessor to the nuns of St Agnes, went to the nuns and stirred them up against the reform. He warned them that "foreign women" *(frömd frowen),* or nuns from other cities, were coming to invade their convent.[274] Historian Sigrid Hirbodian has revealed in her substantial body of scholarship on Strasbourg and its convents that there was not only a suspicion of foreign elements, but also a deeply class-based response to this contentious reform. Setting aside the question of the spiritual value of the reform, there was a fear among certain upper-crust elements in Strasbourg that not only the nuns intent upon reforming their convents, but also the friars who provided their pastoral care, would be from a lower social status and thus unfit to mingle with the patrician sisters who were already nuns in the convent. Importantly, Hirbodian demonstrates that the nuns were not simply passively affected by the swirling sociopolitical currents, but were themselves key players.[275] Analysis such as Hirbodian's work is vital to understanding the currents of reform and the relationship between convent and government prior to, during, and after the institution of reform.

In this chapter, I instead take a comparative approach to examining the interactions between nuns and city councils.[276] Doing so has two benefits. First, it allows us to find hints of the degree of control that nuns had over their own destiny even in instances where their own

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[274] *BdRP* IV-V, V.60, 124.

[275] Hirbodian, "Pastors and Seducers," 315ff; ead., "Dominikanerinnenreform und Familienpolitik: Die Einführung der Observanz im Kontext städtischer Sozialgeschichte," in *Schreiben und Lesen in der Stadt: Literaturbetrieb im spätmittelalterlichen Straßburg,* ed. Stephen Mossman, Nigel F. Palmer, and Felix Heinzer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 1-3.

[276] Gabriella Zarri has called for greater focus on the local context of Observant Reform efforts. Zarri, "Ecclesiastical Institutions and Religious Life in the Observant Century," in *A Companion to Observant Reform in the Late Middle Ages and Beyond,* ed. James D. Mixson and Bert Roest (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 58-59. Claudia Sutter recently noted how little the economic effects of the Observant Reform are studied in her article tracing the economic activities outside the walls of the convent of St Katharina in St Gallen. Claudia Sutter, "In Touch with the Outside: The Economic Exchanges of the Observant Dominican Convent of St Catherine in St Gallen," in *Women Religious Crossing Between Cloister and the World: Nunneries in Europe and the Americas, ca. 1200-1700,* ed. Mercedes Pérez Vidal (York: Arc Humanities Press, 2022), 37-59.

accounts of reform or opposition to it did not exist or do not survive. Texts written by the city council obliquely suggest the debates and conversations that preceded the official call for the introduction of reform. Analyzing multiple examples together thus allows us to draw a richer picture of the possibilities and contingencies that nuns dealt with as reform came to their convents. Second, it allows us to see how a consistent set of concerns, akin to Hardy's concept of associative political culture, motivated city councils to become involved in convent reform, even as local circumstances differed. At the heart of these concerns were efforts to balance the economic needs of the city and the convent, as well as a concern to maintain the social makeup of the convent.

I have chosen three case studies to examine the roles that city councils played in instituting and upholding the reform. Attention to religious reform and its local social, political, and economic context reveals motives and benefits of the reform that are obscured if we focus only on the convent or only on the spiritual or theological underpinnings of reform. The chapter begins with short contextual sections about women's wealth and social status in Germany and the practical process of introducing reform that provide an underpinning for the remainder of the chapter. The first case is the convent of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen,* also known as the *Steinenkloster,* in Basel. It was reformed in 1423. The *Steinenkloster's* nuns included a particularly high proportion of noblewomen, and the city council played a notable activist role in establishing a secure financial future for the convent. Second is the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg, reformed in 1428. St Katharina became a particularly important convent for the Observance because of the number of additional convents that it helped to reform. Its appeal for local families deciding which convent their daughter should enter grew to such an extent that, in the 1470s, the city council convinced the pope to officially limit the convent's size. The council

feared that, without this limitation, St Katharina might accept more nuns than it could ultimately afford to support. As we shall see, this incident reveals that the social and economic issues associated with reform did not vanish in the wake of successful introduction of the Observance. Finally, I will examine the unprecedented triple reform of Adelhausen, St Agnes, and St Mary Magdalene *zu den Reuerinnen* (the Penitents of St Mary Magdalene) in Freiburg im Breisgau in 1465. Unlike the other two cases, the reform was technically initiated by the prominent reformer and chronicler Johannes Meyer. Freiburg's city council, however, became immediately and actively involved. When the prioress tasked with carrying out Adelhausen's reform died less than a year after the introduction of the reform, the city council was the body that effectively jumped into action to secure an appropriate new prioress. Collectively, these examples reveal both the diversity of ways that local concerns and convent reform interacted as well as the ways that all parties needed to remain invested in the success of the Observant Reform over the years and decades subsequent to the introduction of the reform.

Wealth, Social Status, and Convents in German-Speaking Europe

Before examining each of the case studies, some background regarding social status, wealth, dowries, and entrance to convents is necessary. Medieval women from elite families were faced with two basic options—marriage or entrance into a convent—and the vast majority of these women had little choice between the two. Family strategies and economic realities dictated the choice.[277] As the introduction discussed, the political situation in German-speaking

[277] There are exceptions to every rule. Famously, Catherine of Siena, whose confessor, Raymond of Capua, initiated the Observant Reform, refused to marry and pursued a religious and political program outside of the walls of a

Europe in the fifteenth century was one of political division, and secular authorities often overlapped and intertwined with religious ones.[278] For instance, the city of Bamberg was ruled by a prince-bishop who effectively combined secular and religious authority in a single man. In 1457, prince-bishop Anton of Rotenhan initiated the reform of the Dominican convent of the Holy Sepulchre. In free cities, those that had no overlord other than the Holy Roman Emperor, the city council had substantial control over local governance, and therefore had substantial autonomy to do things like initiate convent reform.

During the fifteenth century, the class makeup and balance of power in German cities and towns was changing in ways that had implications for convents. Generally speaking, the old nobility was becoming poorer and moving away from towns, while the urban merchant class was gaining wealth and political power. The mayor and his city council members were generally unpaid, which effectively imposed a wealth requirement for holding these positions. Along with the rise of the urban merchant class, town councils became correspondingly more important in civic matters, supporting a paid bureaucracy that included the town clerk.[279] But nobles did not become so poor as to lose all ability to influence town life and retained influence in urban contexts, resulting in the potential for conflict between townspeople and nobility.[280] Similarly, although many Dominican convents had been founded by wealthy noble widows in the thirteenth century, by the end of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries, the nuns increasingly came

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convent. See Luongo, *Saintly Politics*, 28-36. See also some accounts of women resisting marriage, married women, and widowed women in the Sisterbooks: Lewis, *Sister-Books,* 205, 207-215.

[278] See also Thomas A. Brady, *Turning Swiss: Cities and Empire, 1450-1550* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 8-9.

[279] Joachim Eibach, "Burghers or Town Council: Who Was Responsible for Urban Stability in Early Modern German Towns?" *Urban History* 34, no. 1 (2007), 16, 20-21; Fritz Rörig, *The Medieval Town* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 161-165.

[280] Benjamin John Pope, "Nuremberg's Noble Servant: Werner von Parsberg (d. 1455) between Town and Nobility in Late Medieval Germany," *German History* 36, no. 2 (2018), 161-166.

from the new bourgeoisie. Essentially, the same merchant families on the rise gained access to local political power and began to send their daughters to Dominican convents at about the same time. Powerful merchant men who held positions on the city council often had mothers, sisters, or daughters who were nuns at the local Dominican convent. This conflict between the old nobility and nouveau riche merchants could play out within the context of convent reform. In many cases, though not all (St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen,* the first case study of this chapter, is an exception: it retained its noble character to at least some extent), the introduction of Observant reform meant that convent admissions became more open to women from the wealthy burgher families.[281] As a result, prominent opponents of reform were often noblewomen and noble families—especially less powerful noble families, who felt especially threatened by the rising fortunes of urban merchant families.[282]

At this time, it was substantially cheaper for noble and patrician families to send daughters to convents than to pay dowries for them to marry. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, approximately half of both sons and daughters of noble families in southwestern Germany married. By the end of the century, the ratio had changed: more daughters than sons remained unmarried.[283] Notably, German noble families practiced various forms of partible

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[281] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 36. Winston-Allen characterizes this widespread democratization of convent admission, which occurred across all the orders that had an Observant reform, as "one of the most significant and far-reaching changes brought by the Observance." *Convent Chronicles,* 85.

[282] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 88-89; Sigrid Hirbodian, "Die Dominikanerinnen: Ein Überblick," in *Die deutschen Dominikaner und Dominikanerinnen im Mittelalter,* ed. Sabine von Heusinger, Elias H. Füllenbach, Walter Senner, and Klaus-Bernward Springer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 35.

[283] Judith J. Hurwich, "Marriage Strategy among the German Nobility, 1400-1699," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29, no. 2 (1998), 175. Interestingly, Hurwich's study leads her to argue that the German nobility tended to marry their sons "up," to women of higher rank, and their daughters "down," to men of lower rank because of the way the dowry system worked—the inverse of many other parts of Europe. See also Karl-Heinz Speiss, *Familie und Verwandtschaft im deutschen Hochadel des Spätmittelalters: 13. bis Anfang des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993).

inheritance, rather than the practice of primogeniture that prevailed elsewhere in medieval Europe, which positively affected possibilities for suitable marriages since it allowed more sons to enter the marriage market.[284] Many of the unmarried daughters became nuns, and it seems to have cost only about one-tenth as much for a daughter to enter a convent as for her to marry.[285] Dowries were supposed to be "fixed by rank" among the German nobility, and there is no evidence that dowries became substantially inflated in the fifteenth century the way they did elsewhere in Europe.[286] Similarly, the marriage market was competitive, but not to the extent that it was in other parts of the continent, and even noble families granted their sons and daughters some ability to veto a partner whom they felt was unsuitable.[287]

Paying a dowry to enter a convent was technically forbidden as simony by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, but it remained common practice. In purely practical terms, and especially for strictly enclosed convents, the dowry both ensured a sufficiently dignified life for the individual nun and helped enable the economic stability of the convent.[288] Medieval commentators in the wake of Lateran IV, including Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure, justified payments in the case of monasteries that otherwise had no way to support a new nun.[289] Judith Hurwich has noted that, for Germany between 1450 and 1550, an unusually high percentage of

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[284] Judith J. Hurwich, "Inheritance Practices in Early Modern Germany," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 4 (1993), 699-705. Men tended to marry later, after their father's death.
[285] Hurwich, "Marriage Strategy," 175. For a specific but slightly earlier example, see John B. Freed, *Noble Bondsmen: Ministerial Marriages in the Archdiocese of Salzburg, 1100-1343* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 178. For a slightly earlier overview of the situation in France, see Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 23-27.
[286] Hurwich, "Marriage Strategy," 169-170; Judith J. Hurwich, *Noble Strategies: Marriage and Sexuality in the Zimmern Chronicle* (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2006), 48-49, 248.
[287] Hurwich, *Noble Strategies,* 105-115.
[288] Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession,* 25; Thomas M. Kealy, "Dowry of Women Religious: A Historical Synopsis and Commentary," (PhD diss., Catholic University of America, 1941), 1-3, 5-6, 12-14.
[289] Kealy, "Dowry of Women Religious," 13-14

daughters who remained unmarried entered the church. While only about 10-15% of all daughters born to the Spanish elite in that century entered the church, 37% of daughters born to German counts and barons in southwestern Germany became nuns. That percentage almost perfectly accords with the percentage of daughters who remained unmarried, suggesting that daughters really did have only those two choices. After 1550, however, as the rate of unmarried daughters entering convents rose elsewhere in Europe, it fell in Germany.[290]

Jutta Gisela Sperling has identified a precipitous rise in the number of women entering convents against their will in early modern Venice, without any real inclination towards a rich spiritual life. She argues that these "forced monachizations" represented a form of conspicuous consumption aimed at reproducing the pure body politic of noble families. These families could afford to "waste" the daughters of patrician families rather than see them marry a man of lower status.[291] The situation in the late medieval cities examined in this dissertation is not nearly as extreme as the Venetian example studied by Sperling, in part due to differing practices of inheritance and patterns of marriage in fifteenth-century Germany than early modern Venice. In Germany as in Venice, however, the nobility was a tightly closed caste: children born to a noble father but a nonnoble mother were unable to inherit noble titles.[292] This fact helps to explain the high percentage of unmarried daughters who entered convents. Religious life undoubtedly remained both a respectable choice for the daughters of wealthy families and distinctly cheaper

[290] Hurwich, *Noble Strategies,* 79.
[291] Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic,* esp. 11ff, 18-71. Judith Hurwich has found that, in the late seventeenth century (closer to the time period that Sperling studied), Catholic noble families in southwestern Germany did not send all their unmarried daughters to convents. Noblewomen continued to marry at fairly high rates, and "for the first time, the number of Catholic spinsters equaled or exceeded the number of nuns." Hurwich, "Inheritance Practices," 709.
[292] Hurwich, *Noble Strategies,* 7-9.

than a marriage dowry to a man of similar or higher status. At least in the early years of the Observant Reform, it may also have offered wealthy but non-noble families a way for their daughters to rub elbows with nobility. Overall, in Germany, most unmarried daughters of elite families entered convents, but they had better marriage prospects than women elsewhere in Europe.

So You Want to Reform a Dominican Convent: A How-To Manual

How was the Observance introduced to a new convent? This section will briefly examine some of the practicalities and personnel of the reform, prioritizing what the Observant movement meant for female government and autonomy. As we will see in the case studies in this chapter, the impetus for reform could come from a variety of people or institutions: the convent's nuns themselves could call for reform, but so could a territorial prince, a city council, or local ecclesiastical authorities. Deliberations over whether to accept the stricter life enjoined by the Observance could likewise presumably take a number of forms, though it is likely that the true level of contentiousness within most convents is lost to us. It is probable that some women affected by the Observant movement reveled in its stricter standards and saw it as an improvement, while others resented it or felt trapped by it, and also likely that these women might coexist in the same convent.[293] What is clear, though, is that the convent's officials—particularly the prioress—were often the ones who were in favor of reform in cases where the impetus came from within. Even in convents that were not Observant, the prioress' job was to

[293] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 132.

ensure the smooth running and proper religiosity of the convent—in other words, the temporal and spiritual well-being of the community. Humbert of Romans' 1259 *Constitutions* for Dominican sisters granted the community itself the right to elect its prioress based on careful scrutiny of candidates, compromise if necessary, or perhaps general inspiration. The choice had to be confirmed by the master general or prior provincial, but by and large, the choice rested with the nuns. The prioress then had the sole power to appoint her own subprioress.[294]

One place where Dominican convents and nuns might lose their agency was in the initial introduction of the Observance, which entailed the arrival of outsiders. In the process of introducing the reform to new convents, another convent sent a reform party to aid in the transition. Unlike the decision to introduce the reform in the first place, a Dominican friar was often responsible for soliciting this assistance, either someone who ranked highly within the order or the confessor at the convent, if he was himself an Observant. The newly reformed convent had no control over where their reform party would come from. Generally, it seems that these contingents of nuns came from convents that were at the vanguard of the reform—places like Schönensteinbach, Unterlinden, St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen,* and St Katharina in Nuremberg, four of the first five convents in the region to be reformed—or otherwise from convents that were somewhat proximate. It was also possible though not common for a reform party to consist of nuns from two convents. These parties could be quite small, perhaps only three or four women, but often consisted of half a dozen or more nuns, or up to thirteen.[295] The nuns selected for reform parties seem to have been middle-aged, or at least not young, and often

[294] "Liber Constitutionum Sororum," 346.
[295] St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* was reformed by thirteen nuns, a number representative of Christ and his twelve apostles.

had held one or more offices in their convent of origin. In other words, they were experienced not only in the liturgy and rhythm of daily life in an Observant convent, but also in running one. But they were also outsiders and strangers, even if efforts were made to ensure that they were from a similar social class or perhaps from roughly the same geographic location as the community that they traveled to reform.

The introduction of the Observance took a generally recognizable ceremonial form over the course of a single day. The newly arrived sisters of the reform party would be escorted to the convent by a group of honorable laywomen.[296] Then, letters and papal bulls supporting the reform were read before a gathered audience of town elites and interested onlookers, as well as the nuns. Before the nuns processed into the convent's church, an antiphon might be sung. Mass was said and the nuns donned the appropriate habit if they had not been wearing it. The sisters took communion, and the convent was strictly enclosed with the gates and doors locked as the townspeople and reformers left.[297] The ceremonial aspects of this process marked the official institution of the Observance, but much of the work remained to be done in its wake. Not least was the fact that nuns sometimes took a trial period of a few months to one year to decide whether or not to remain in the Observance.

From the reform party, a new prioress, subprioress, and holders of other important offices like the novice mistress and those positions overseeing contact with the outside world (the *räderin* and *überhorerin)* were chosen.[298] This inflection point is another way in which the practical introduction of the reform might result in a loss of agency for nuns who acquiesced to

[296] *BdRP* IV-V, V.50, 114.
[297] *BdRP* I-III, II.8, 34.
[298] For more on convent offices and the reform, see Chapter Four.

the reform. Even prioresses who had actively advocated for or begrudgingly supported the goals of the reform movement stepped down in favor of a reform prioress from among the party of outside nuns. In some cases, after a period of time and the successful introduction of Observance, the pre-reform prioress might regain her office, but that would then depend on election per the *Constitutions* in a much-changed milieu. Johannes Meyer and other reform chronicles never clarified how the reform prioress and her subordinates were chosen—presumably they were not elected by the nuns at the convent where they had just arrived, but rather chosen as part of the selection process for deciding which nuns would act as the reform party. Therefore, the growth of opportunities for nuns who participated in the reform party—the chance to spread a way of life that one had accepted and saw as superior through holding an office in a new convent—meant the diminution of power for women whose convent was reformed, at least for a period of several years.[299]

Once a reform party traveled to a new convent, its members remained there—they did not return "home" to their original convent after a period of time. In several instances, particularly talented reformers might travel with multiple reform parties to introduce the Observance to many convents. One such case was that of Katharina von Mühlheim, who entered the religious life at Schönensteinbach. In 1428, she went to participate in the reform of St Katharina in Nuremberg; in 1436, she travelled onward to Tulln, in Austria, where she would be the reform prioress. In

[299] The old view is that all the women involved in the Observance were buffeted by forces outside their control: the reform parties were sent at the behest of men, and convents were reformed because men wanted to control women. While recent scholarship has rightly pushed back on this view and found substantial ways in which the Observance brought greater opportunity for women, particularly intellectually, this chapter highlights several ways in which women's agency suffered as a result of the reform both in its initial stages of introduction and also its maintenance over time. It is also true that women can be participants in the patriarchy and their own subjugation, or can grab power for themselves at the expense of other women.

1466, by which point she may well have been around sixty-five years old, she was tasked with one more reform mission, this time at the Dominican convent in Brünn, Bohemia (modern Brno, Czech Republic): far afield indeed. Katharina wrote a touching letter back to the sisters of Schönensteinbach after several years in Nuremberg in which she urged them to remember her to God and expressed the difficulties of being so far from the convent she had entered as a novice with only one fellow sister from Schönensteinbach for company.[300] The letter offers a rare glimpse into the emotions of a nun who participated in the Observant reform and the disruption that resulted from the reform, even though Katharina viewed it positively and accepted its spread as her task.

Within the newly reformed convent, both nuns and friars often had an interest in improving the quality and frequency of pastoral care. Friars provided the *cura monialium,* which encompassed tasks that could not be accomplished by nuns—performing the divine service, hearing confession, delivering sermons. Prior to the introduction of the Observance, a convent's pastor was not necessarily a Dominican friar, and this situation seems to have sometimes continued after the introduction of the Observance, especially in cities where the Dominican friary remained conventual.[301] In any case, the conduct between pastors and nuns became more regulated but also more regular. For nuns who supported the reform, this was undoubtedly a positive change, but for those who were less inclined towards the reform, the increased oversight

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[300] Seraphin Dietler, *Chronik des Klosters Schönensteinbach,* ed. Joseph von Schlumberger (Guebwiller: Boltz, 1897), 406. Anne Winston-Allen discusses this letter also: *Convent Chronicles,* 104-106.

[301] Hirbodian, "Pastors and Seducers," 306. For the canonical discussion of the incorporation of women's religious establishments into order and the debate over pastoral care that this entailed, see Herbert Grundmann, *Religious Movements in the Middle Ages: The Historical Links Between Heresy, the Mendicant Orders, and the Women's Religious Movement in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Century, with the Historical Foundations of German Mysticism,* trans. Steven Rowan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), 92-109. See also John B. Freed, "Urban Development and the *Cura Monialium* in Thirteenth-Century Germany," *Viator* 3 (1972), 311-327.

may have felt oppressive. Preaching and sermons gained greater importance and Observant nuns copied countless sermons to read within the convent when a preacher was unavailable.[302]

The process of reform meant the introduction of outsiders, even if they were from the same social class or geographical location. It also meant a certain loss of autonomy for those women who had been in the convent undergoing reform. Even if this loss of autonomy in matters such as the convent's right to elect its own prioress was not permanent, it must have been jarring. As will become clear through the following case studies, reform also invited further interaction between city council and convent which the nuns may have perceived as meddling and reducing their autonomy, and which seems to have increased over the course of the fifteenth century.

Financial Security and Noble Nuns: Basel and St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen*

On June 6, 1422, Basel's city council wrote to the Dominican prior provincial, Giselbert von Vleytingen. The letter requested that Giselbert help introduce the Observant Reform to St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* (the *Steinenkloster),* by means of people "who would bring so much energy for the restoration of the order" *(die so vil gütz mit in werdent bringen dar in…üwrem gantzen orden erlich un nutzlich sol warden).*[303] Seventeen months later, on

[302] Schiewer, "Sermons for Nuns," 76-77, 90-91; Andreas Rüther and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, "Die Predigthandschriften des Straßburger Dominikanerinnenklosters St Nikolaus in *undis:* Historischer Bestand, Geschichte, Vergleich," in *Die deutsche Predigt im Mittelalter: Internationales Symposium am Fachbereich Germanistik der Freien Universität Berlin vom 3.-6. Oktober 1989,* ed. Volker Mertens (Tübingen: Niemeyer Verlag, 1992), esp. 181-185; Hirbodian, "Pastors and Seducers," 317-319; Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* esp. 35-109.

[303] The letter survives in *BdRP* IV-V, V.7, 50-52. It is also quoted in Emil A. Erdin, *Das Kloster der Reuerinnen Sancta Maria Magdalena an den Steinen zu Basel: Von den Anfängen bis zur Reformation (ca. 1230-1529)* (Fribourg: Paulusdruckerei, 1956), 51. Erdin cited Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, Missiven III, 306. The archivist at the Staatsarchiv informed me that this has never been an archive signature at the Staatsarchiv and that the dates of the surviving

November 6, 1423, thirteen nuns arrived from the convent of Unterlinden in Colmar, bringing with them experience in the stricter way of life. Unterlinden had been the second German convent to adopt the reform; St Mary Magdalene became the third. A much later history of the convent explained that the honest *(ersamen)* city council of the praiseworthy *(loblichen)* city of Basel wanted to have a convent reformed in accordance with the Observance.[304] With no surviving account of the reform written by St Mary Magdalene's own nuns, we are left with only city council records, charters, account books, and other such sources of the type often referred to as documents of practice from the convent, along with narrative accounts and letters written by men or institutional groups.[305] These sources sometimes raise more questions than they provide answers. What was the city council's motivation for introducing the Observant Reform to a single Dominican convent, the *Steinenkloster?* There were other convents in town, including another Dominican convent, Klingental, as well as other unreformed convents associated with orders that had their own Observant movements.[306] Why did counselors choose the *Steinenkloster,* which had an unusually high percentage of noble nuns both before and after the

Missiven do not include 1422. Daniel Kress, email message to author, May 31, 2022. Due to Covid-19, I was unable to consult the convent archives in the Staatsarchiv personally.

[304] Heinrich Murer, *Chronik des Basler Predigerklosters und des Frauenklosters OP Maria Magdalena in Basel,* Frauenfeld, Kantonsbibliothek Thurgau, ms. Y 97, fol. 5r. For more on Murer, see Michel Guisolan, "Heinrich Murer (1588-1638): Kartäusermönch und Historiker," *Thurgauer Beiträge zur Geschichte* 132 (1995), 233-240.

[305] In addition to the city council records and letters and Heinrich Murer's chronicle, there is also another sixteenth-century chronicle by Basel mathematician, theologian, and historian Christian Wurstisen. Johannes Meyer described the reform in the *BdRP.* The convent's archives, which include account books, letterbooks, and inventories, are held in the Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt.

[306] The prioress of the Gnadental Poor Clares in Basel, Clara Seckingerin, brought the Observant Reform to her convent in May of 1447. Brigitte Degler-Spengler, *Das Klarissenkloster Gnadental in Basel, 1289-1529* (Basel: Kommissionsverlag Friedrich Reinhardt, 1969), 75-79. On the Observant Reform in Basel in general, including the prominent role of the city council, see Bernhard Neidiger, "Stadtregiment und Klosterreform in Basel," in *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen,* ed. Kaspar Elm (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1989), 539-567.

reform? And most intriguingly but also most difficult to know, how did the nuns feel about the introduction of the reform?

The image that we can piece together of the reform of St Mary Magdalene reveals that the city council played a very involved role because its members anticipated how the spiritual benefits of reforming a single convent would redound on the entire city. Importantly, the council was willing to manage the economic challenges of the reform in order to ensure its longevity. The case of the *Steinenkloster* shows us that understanding the interaction between the corporate body of the convent and its urban context, as well as the extent of familial relationships between nuns and city council members, will help us to understand the motivations behind reform as well as how the reform played out in the years and decades after its introduction. After a brief historical overview of the powers of Basel's city council and the convent itself, this section will examine the council's extensive involvement in the convent's economic affairs as well as how the class structure of St Mary Magdalene influenced the process of reform.

The flourishing and changing urban context of Basel in the early fifteenth century provides the backdrop to the reform of St Mary Magdalene. From the eleventh century onward, Basel and its hinterland had been part of the Holy Roman Empire. The immediate lordship of the city belonged to Basel's prince-bishops until 1386. In that year, the city council gained independence from the bishop, although city officials continued to swear allegiance to him.[307] In debt, the bishop sold part of the city, the quarter known as Kleinbasel, which was located across the Rhine from Basel's city center, to the city council in 1391. The city also acquired the

[307] Martin Alioth, *Basler Stadtgeschichte Vol. 2, Vom Brückenschlag 1225 bis zur Gegenwart,* 2 vols. (Basel: Friedrich Reinhardt, 1981), 20.

lordship of the Sisgau, a rural region bordering the city, in 1403.[308] In addition to its growing territory, Basel benefited from a prime location. A bridge over the Rhine River and a nearby Alpine pass meant that the city was at the crossroads of major trade and travel routes in Europe. Economically and politically, this effect meant that the guilds and their elite members became increasingly powerful over the course of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, replacing the Alsatian nobility who had been the primary political influence in the region, although the city's mayor was drawn exclusively from knightly families until the Reformation.[309] Basel's location and its intellectual and religious cultural prestige made it a prime choice to host one of the major church councils of the fifteenth century from 1431 to 1449. The Council of Basel gathered bishops, university clerics, and representatives from the monastic orders in the city and acted as a circulation ground for all of the day's hot intellectual topics, including both reform and the problem of heresy.[310] Politically, the major debate facing Basel in the fifteenth century was whether the city ought to remain part of the Holy Roman Empire or "turn Swiss" and join the *Eidgenossenschaft* (Swiss Confederation), which was growing in size and power. Eventually, Basel joined the Swiss Confederation in 1501.

The reform of the *Steinenkloster* can be understood within the context of an activist city council very interested in the finances of women religious as well as reacting to the swirling

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[308] Rörig, *The Medieval Town,* 169; Elsanne Gilomen-Schenkel, *Henman Offenburg (1379-1459), ein Basler Diplomat im Dienste der Stadt, des Konzils und des Reichs* (Basel: Kommissionsverlag Friedrich Reinhard, 1975), 35.
[309] Brady, *Turning Swiss,* 13; Hardy, *Associative Political Culture,* 52; Hans Rudolph Guggisberg, *Basel in the Sixteenth Century* (St Louis, MO: Center for Reformation Research, 1982), 4-6; Gilomen-Schenkel, *Henman Offenburg,* 35ff; Albert Bruckner, "Das bischöfliche Basel," in *Basel: Eine illustrierte Stadtgeschichte,* ed. Eugen A. Meier (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1969), 44.
[310] Alexander Patschovsky, "Der Reformbegriff zur Zeit der Konzilien von Konstanz und Basel," in *Reform von Kirche und Reich zur Zeit der Konzilien von Konstanz (1414-1418) und Basel (1431-1449): Konstanz-Prager Historisches Kolloquium (11.-17. Oktober 1993),* ed. Ivan Hlaváček and Alexander Patschovsky (Constance: Universitätsverlag Konstanz, 1996), 7-28; Hobbins, *Authorship and Publicity,* 191-192, 195.

currents of change and growth that suggest the appeal of a conservative religious reform. A little more than twenty years prior to the reform of the *Steinenkloster,* the *Basler Beginenstreit,* or "Basel beguine controversy," erupted. A Dominican friar and supporter of the Observance, Johannes Mulberg (d. 1414), preached a sermon attacking the way of life of the city's beguines, women leading a religious life whose lack of permanent vows and strict enclosure had made them the subject of intermittent attacks from ecclesiastical authorities since the early fourteenth century.[311] This sermon led the bishop of Basel to investigate local beguines and Franciscan tertiaries, whose way of life was similar to the beguines; he decided in 1405 to excommunicate them all. Mulberg attempted to drive the beguines and tertiaries out of the city. Seven houses of beguines that were affiliated with the Dominican order and received pastoral care from Dominican friars were forced to leave the city as a result of these attacks. Other groups of beguines managed to hang on for a little while longer, but by 1411, they too had been forced to leave the city, driven out by an activist, anti-beguine faction of the city council.[312] As Michael Bailey has argued, Mulberg's inflexible attitude towards beguines was characteristic of the zealous early reformers; just a few decades later, writing during the Council of Basel, Johannes Nider would advise reformers to be careful not to disrupt a convent's economic activities too severely in the name of reform while simultaneously defending beguines' way of life.[313] Although, as Bailey identified, the twenty years between the end of the *Beginenstreit* and the

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[311] On beguines and their unique way of life see Simons, *Cities of Ladies* and Stabler Miller, *Beguines of Medieval Paris.* On Johannes Mulberg, see Sabine von Heusinger, *Johannes Mulberg OP: Ein Leben im Spannungsfeld von Dominikanerobservanz und Beginenstreit* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2000).

[312] Sabine von Heusinger, "Beginen am Mittel- und Oberrhein zu Beginn des 15. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte des Oberrheins* 148 (2000), 67-96; Brigitte Degler-Spengler, "Die Beginen in Basel," *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 69 (1969), 32-39.

[313] Michael D. Bailey, "Religious Poverty, Mendicancy, and Reform in the Late Middle Ages," *Church History* 72, no. 3 (2003), 473-475.

arrival of the Observant Reform to St Mary Magdalene do represent a period of change, it is also true that the issues at play in the *Beginenstreit*—enclosure and the continued ability of women religious to support themselves financially—remained key elements of both the Observant Reform in general and the situation of the *Steinenkloster* in particular.

St Mary Magdalene had a lengthy history before the introduction of the Observance. The convent's early existence is somewhat mysterious, thanks to a thirteenth-century fire that destroyed its oldest records. But it certainly existed by 1230, when the pope confirmed the status and rights of a convent of *Reuerinnen,* of penitent prostitutes dedicated to the Magdalene.[314] Over the course of the 1290s and early 1300s, there was some discord at the convent over whether to remain part of the Penitents of St Mary Magdalene or to become Dominican. In the end, the convent decided to become incorporated into the Dominican Order in 1304. At this time, Dominican friars were engaged in ongoing debates about whether they could afford to bear the responsibility of the *cura monialium* for any additional sisters. As a result, the women of the *Steinenkloster* did not consistently have Dominican confessors until the fifteenth century, shortly before the introduction of the Observant Reform.[315] Although surviving sources do not allow us to understand in detail the nature of pastoral care at the *Steinenkloster,* it is not impossible that the eventual change in confessors to the Dominican order made some nuns more disposed to reform.

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[314] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 3-4. The sixteenth-century chronicler and humanist Christian Wurstisen places the foundation over a century earlier, but his evidence is unclear. Christian Wurstisen, *Bassler Chronik. Darin alles was sich in oberen teutschen landen, nicht nur in der statt und bistumbe Basel […]* (Basel: E. Birkhäuser, 1883), 180.
[315] Simon Tugwell, "Were the Magdalen Nuns Really Turned into Dominicans in 1287?" *AFP* 76 (2006), 56-58. Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 7-8.

Fortunately, the somewhat foggy picture of the convent's early centuries snaps into sharper focus with increased documentation in the fifteenth century. The city council's investment in the reform is apparent from the beginning, as the councilors laid out their plans for the reform in their letter of 1422 to the prior provincial. They suggested that nuns who opposed the stricter way of life of the Observance ought to be given the option of moving to Basel's other Dominican convent, Klingental, which would remain conventual. Three of the convent's sixteen nuns took this offer: Elsine von Therwil, Gredlin von Zell, and Agnes Huswirt left. These women all came from non-noble families.[316] Moreover, the city councilors proposed that they would provide financial support for the reforming endeavor. Up until this point in its history, the *Steinenkloster* seems to have been a somewhat poor convent with nuns who came from both the regional nobility as well as leading town families.[317] To support the Observance, the council gave the nuns income from a substantial tithe from the village church of Frick.[318] And finally, to manage their involvement in the reform process, the city council created a reform commission, consisting of five members: Hans Reich von Reichensten, the mayor, Burkart ze Rhein, the previous mayor, and three knights: Claus Maurer, Henman Offenburg, and Peter Gieg.[319]

Spiritually, the benefits of reform that the city council perceived and hoped for were straightforward and typical for the time, focusing on the restorative power of nuns' prayer for the urban environment. The city council's letter to Giselbert von Vleytingen, quoted in the opening

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[316] One additional woman, probably a novice, renounced the religious life entirely and returned to the world: Ennelin Steinbrunn. Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 45, 54.
[317] P. Angelus M. Walz, "Das Basler Steinenkloster und der Predigerorden," *Zeitschrift für schweizerische Kirchengeschichte* 25 (1931), 168; Albert Bruckner, "Das Klosterarchiv S. Maria Magdalena an den Steinen zu Basel," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung* 68 (1960), 157.
[318] *BdRP* IV-V, V.9, 53. Frick is about 35km/21mi from Basel as the crow flies.
[319] Wurstisen, *Bassler Chronik,* 182.

of this section, is preserved in Johannes Meyer's chronicle of the reform, and Meyer also provided an account of the reform. The letter blends spiritual and financial rationales for the reform fluidly, since neither its authors nor its audiences differentiated between spiritual and secular motivations. The counselors, including mayor Hans Reich, cited the poor state of religious belief throughout Christendom as one of the major motivations for reforming a local convent. They viewed prayer by "honest religious people" *(erbren, gaistlichen lüten)* as being more effective than prayer by "other sinful people" *(andren sündigen menschen),* by whom they meant the laity and possibly also dishonest or insufficiently pious religious people.[320] Given their emphasis on prayer, the councilors desired that a women's convent be reformed to benefit both the order and Basel: nuns' religious power lay in their continuous cycles of prayer through the liturgy. (Basel's Dominican friars would not adopt the reform until 1429.) Importantly, the councilors told Giselbert that they had done their legwork and ascertained that some percentage of the nuns favored the reform, including the noble prioress, Katharina von Zässingen.[321]

At the end of the letter, however, the councilors revealed a different, related, and perhaps equally honest motive: money and the prestige that accompanied it. "We hope and trust that, if the affair should proceed," they wrote, "we will not turn aside, and so many wealthy persons will enter this convent that they will bring much property with them, which by the grace of God will redound to the honor and profit of your whole order. Please respond."[322] As Anne Winston-Allen

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[320] *BdRP* IV-V, V.7, 51.

[321] Ibid., V.7, 51; Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 54.

[322] *BdRP* IV-V, V.7, 52. *Wir hoffen och und getruwent, sol die sach ainen fürgang nemen, daz an uns kan erwinden sol sin, und daz den sölch wol habent personen vil in daz selb closter werdent komen, die so vil gutz mit in werdent bringen dar in, daz es von den gnaden gotz üwrem gantzen orden erlich und nutzlich sol werden. Uwer antwurt und manung wölent y runs wider verschriben by disem poten.* Translation quoted is Claire Taylor Jones'. Jones, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation,* 166.

has noted, the increasingly affluent patrician class favored sending their daughters to Observant convents, but doing so also created problems for cities, including Basel, because the church of course did not pay taxes on its property.[323] Meyer recorded that many wealthy women did join St Mary Magdalene after its reform, bringing along their property and rebuilding the formerly poor convent. The necessary building work included tasks to bring the convent's structure into keeping with the needs of the reform: walls heightened, windows filled in or barred, locks repaired.[324] In keeping with the vows of the order, however, Meyer was careful to assure readers that the convent flourished in its poverty.[325] The tension between individual poverty and corporate flourishing did not unsettle Meyer or his contemporaries, since the success of the reform as a whole relied upon convents having the resources and support to continue existing.[326] The growth of the convent and its spiritual fruits for both the nuns and the city were safeguarded by the increased financial security of the convent.

Basel's city councilors were careful to ensure the financial security of the reform into the future, and managed to accomplish this goal without giving additional property into the "dead" hands of the church. Councils, including Basel's, had been keen to exert oversight on convent finances prior to the advent of the Observant Reform; this was not a new problem. In 1386, Basel had passed a law requiring all wills to be executed by the *Schultheißengericht,* or mayoral

[323] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 90.
[324] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 53.
[325] *BdRP* IV-V, V.9, 53.
[326] This tension between individual poverty in a monastic setting and the corporate flourishing of the monastery had been around for a long time by the fifteenth century. It had become a renewed issue as the new mendicant orders (Franciscans and Dominicans primarily, but also others) of the thirteenth century embraced both individual and corporate poverty. Even as they did so, the increasingly wealthy merchant classes gave increasingly substantial donations to mendicant communities in their area. See Lester K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), esp. 99ff.

court.[327] Doing so ensured that any property willed to religious houses was properly recorded and dealt with by both the city and the religious house in question. In 1423, facing the need to establish a secure financial footing for the *Steinenkloster,* the city council's reform commission granted the nuns half of the tithe belonging to the village church of Frick, as mentioned above. This tithe brought the nuns the substantial sum of 2,700 gulden per year. Frick was located in the Sisgau region, which had recently changed hands from the lordship of the Falkenstein family to the city of Basel. Almost exactly twenty years later, the nuns received the other half of the tithe (i.e., an additional 2,700 gulden annually) from two brothers, Hans and Thomas Falkenstein. Unfortunately for the nuns, the canons of St Martin in Rheinsfelden and the cathedral of Basel already had claims over some of the income from this tithe. As a result, the convent became tied up in litigation over the income well into the 1450s. Henman Offenburg, who was one of the knights who had served on the council's reform commission, was one of the arbitrators who ultimately determined that the nuns of St Mary Magdalene had the right end of the claim to the income.[328] For the nuns to earn such a substantial part of their income from a tithe rather than from income on property that the convent owned in Basel must surely have been seen as a boon by the city's councilors: the convent reform that they had had a hand in initiating was financially secure and, simultaneously, this goal was accomplished without a major loss in tax revenue for the city. Given the kerfuffle of the *Beginenstreit* at the beginning of the century, councilors were eager to ensure careful oversight.

The economic context of the reform of the *Steinenkloster,* sketched out above, becomes increasingly significant in the social context of the convent itself. We have encountered the key

[327] Hillenbrand, "Observantenbewegung," 244.
[328] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 84-85; Giloman-Schenkel, *Henman Offenburg,* 19.

figures from the council's reform commission, all of whom were from noble families. But, as was true of many other cities in the region, Basel's noble families were leaving the city while leading guild families were both becoming increasingly wealthy and gaining more political power as the nobility left.[329] The nuns of St Mary Magdalene included an unusually high proportion of noblewomen throughout the fifteenth century, both before and after the reform, as Swiss scholar Emil Erdin has shown. In a period when Dominican convents were increasingly composed of nuns from the growing urban patrician and merchant classes, especially at Observant convents, it is noteworthy that nearly half of St Mary Magdalene's nuns were noblewomen. After the reform, there were probably 25 nuns in the convent. Of these, sixteen came from noble families, including seven of the thirteen nuns sent from Unterlinden to reform St Mary Magdalene. Of the 85 novices who entered the convent from 1424 through 1480, 35 were noblewomen.[330] For a convent that had begun the fifteenth century as a small and relatively poor one, what drove the high number of noble nuns? One possibility is that the *Steinenkloster's* status as one of the earliest convents in the region to adopt the reform, behind only Schönensteinbach and Unterlinden, attracted noblewomen. This initial social structure may have then had a compounding effect: the class makeup of the convent continued to attract noble daughters and widows throughout the century even as the reform spread more widely. The fact

[329] Hektor Ammann, "Die Bevölkerung von Stadt und Landschaft Basel am Ausgang des Mittelalters," *Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertumskunde* 49 (1950), 44.
[330] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 45-46. On the more typical trend of increasing numbers of urban patrician women entering Dominican convents in nearby Freiburg, see Ulrike Denne, *Die Frauenklöster im spätmittelalterlichen Freiburg im Breisgau: Ihre Einbindung in den Orden und in die städtische Kommunität* (Freiburg: Verlag Karl Alber, 1997), 143ff.

that the convent was reformed relatively early meant that any potential shift in the nuns' social class prior to the reform did not have a chance to take root.[331]

The knight Henman Offenburg, who was on the reform commission and also involved in the arbitration over the tithe, illustrates the close connections between city council and convent and the importance of reforming a convent with a high proportion of noble nuns. Henman's eldest daughter, Brida, married a wealthy fellow councilmember, Hans Waltenheim. The couple had two children, a daughter and a son. Their daughter, Dorothea, entered the *Steinenkloster,* in 1433, when she was probably eleven or twelve years old; Dorothea died in 1469.[332] As Henman arbitrated the issue of the tithe, his granddaughter was one of the convent's choir nuns. But prominent patrician families also sent their daughters to St Mary Magdalene. The fact that, even as Basel's guilds and patrician families became increasingly powerful and wealthy, the mayoral position remained in the hands of noble families may also help explain the unique class ratio at the *Steinenkloster.* Nor was Henman Offenburg the only member of the council's commission whose connections to St Mary Magdalene went beyond that commission.

The close connections between three members of the commission and nuns in the convent reveal the personal stakes of the reform for both the councilmembers and the nuns themselves, as all parties navigated the changes brought by reform and familial relationships. Hans Reich von Reichenstein, Basel's mayor at the time of the reform, came from a family of knights that had been involved in Basel politics since the mid-thirteenth century.[333] Three

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[331] In contrast, convents reformed later had already undergone a shift in terms of the social class of nuns by the time they were reformed. See, e.g., Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 35-37.
[332] Giloman-Schenkel, *Henman Offenburg,* 20-21; Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 157.
[333] Emil A. Erdin, "Das Wasserschloss Inzlingen," *Nachrichten des Schweizerischen Burgervereins* 51, no. 5 (1978), 161.

members of successive generations of the Reich von Reichenstein family were nuns in St Mary Magdalene during the fifteenth century, at least one of whom was likely a nun during the reform period. Magdalena Reich von Reichenstein's date of entrance into the convent does not survive, but she died in 1428. Verena died in 1467; the final Reich von Reichenstein to be a nun at the *Steinenkloster,* Lucia, entered the convent in 1467 and was a nun there until her death in 1526.[334] Although there does not seem to be evidence of a family strategy at quite the level that Jutta Sperling describes for early modern Venice, it does seem clear that the Reich von Reichensteins saw the *Steinenkloster* as an appropriate convent for their noble daughters who could not afford to marry. The connection between this particular family and the convent lasted for a full century, almost up to the Protestant Reformation: Lucia Reich von Reichenstein died just three years before the Reformation came to Basel in 1529. As Sperling's work suggests, it is possible that these women entered St Mary Magdalene with little or no religious vocation, but merely as part of a recognized family strategy.

Burkart ze Rhein, who was the immediate past mayor at the time of the *Steinenkloster's* reform, also had a female relative, Ennelin ze Rhein, who entered the convent in 1424, the year after the introduction of the reform. The other two members of the reform commission do not seem to have had relatives among the nuns at the time of or shortly after the reform. The introduction of reform would ensure that these female relatives would lead the kind of religious life desired by their male relatives, who had the power to consign them to convents. The women in the convent may therefore have felt pressured by their male relatives to support the reform. Conversely, although no documents exist to provide the nuns' perspective, it is not impossible

[334] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 155.

that Magdalena Reich von Reichenstein, Ennelin ze Rhein, and nuns like them may have pressured their male relatives to support of the reform: after all, the noble prioress of the convent just before the introduction of the reform, Katharina von Zässingen, was pro-reform. Directionality is impossible to know in this case. Either way, the familial ties between convent and city council did not cease to matter once the reform had been successfully introduced.

Basel's city council and the convent strove to keep the wealth of noble nuns within the convent even as St Mary Magdalene became an important node for the dissemination of reform. In 1425, only two years after the introduction of the reform at the *Steinenkloster,* Duke Ludwig of Bavaria-Ingolstadt wrote to the Basel city council, requesting that they send three nuns from St Mary Magdalene to reform the convent of Liebenau, near Worms. Liebenau was in the duke's territory, and he was interested in trying to bring the reform to his lands. Basel's authorities rejected the request because St Mary Magdalene was too newly reformed and still too small to support the departure of even three sisters.[335] Ludwig had apparently heard of Fr. Peter Gegenbach, a Dominican who had acted as the first reform prior of St Mary Magdalene, and requested that Gegenbach come with a contingent of nuns to reform Liebenau as well. Ultimately, after the request for nuns from Basel was denied, Liebenau was reformed by a contingent of nuns from Unterlinden in 1426.[336] Erdin has argued that the nuns would not have perceived the directing of the request to the city council rather than to any type of ecclesiastical institution as strange.[337] In Erdin's view, because of the key role the city councilors had played in

[335] Three sisters was a very small reform party indeed: the *Steinenkloster* was reformed by a party of thirteen nuns (a common number, representative of Christ and the twelve apostles). Staatsarchiv Basel-Stadt, Missiven A 3, fol. 306.
[336] *BdRP* IV-V, V.26, 76-78.
[337] Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 65.

requesting the initial reform, the nuns and townspeople alike would have perceived the council as the appropriate arbiter rather than any ecclesiastical authority or the nuns themselves. But in the absence of any evidence, Erdin's proposal that the nuns passively acquiesced to the decision made by the city council is not the only way that the nuns could have responded. If there was a pro-reform faction among St Mary Magdalene's nuns, led by their prioress, prior to the reform, it is possible that the nuns might have seen the city council's interference as an affront to the reform's progress. Scholarship from decades past often assumed that nuns pressed into the service of the reform were merely at the mercy of the whims of powers larger than themselves over which they had no control. In the case of the nuns of the *Steinenkloster,* the situation seems to be more fraught than Erdin claimed. Familial lineage and the convent's wealth could have been at odds with desire among some nuns to participate in the spread of the reform.

Four years later, in 1429, again at the behest of Duke Ludwig and to assist Gengenbach, nuns from St Mary Magdalene did participate in the dissemination of reform. Six sisters from the *Steinenkloster,* three of them experienced reformers who had come from Unterlinden and three sisters who were setting out to help reform a convent for the first time, traveled to the convent of Himmelskron, near Worms, to introduce the reform there.[338] Nuns from St Mary Magdalene would go on to reform St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg in 1431, St Michaelsinsel in Bern in 1439, and St Agnes in Freiburg in 1465. Reforming so many convents made the *Steinenkloster* one of the key points from which the Observance spread outward through the region. Moreover, the agreement to send groups of reforms from St Mary Magdalene suggests that all parties agreed that the reform was sufficiently well established at the community to sustain the loss of a

[338] *BdRP* IV-V, V.27, 78-80.

few sisters in service of the reform—even more so because the nuns sent out to reform Himmelskron and St Nikolaus *in undis* included nuns from the reform party that had introduced the reform to the *Steinenkloster* in the first place. Only two nuns out of a total of twenty-one who made up the various reform parties sent out from the *Steinenkloster* were related to noble families: Gertrud von Laufenberg, who helped reform Himmelskron, and Katharina von Eptingen, who helped reform St Michaelsinsel. One possibility for the sharp class divide among the reform parties is that Basel's city council and the convent were interested in retaining the wealth of noblewomen within the convent. It could also reflect a potential loss of interest in supporting reform among noble nuns. Or, most likely, the class dynamic of the *Steinenkloster* was unusual among reformed convents and so the decision was made to send reforming parties made up of nuns who were more socioeconomically similar to the sisters in the convents to which they were traveling.

In paying such close attention to the social and economic status of St Mary Magdalene over so many years, the reform-minded city council unwittingly laid the groundwork for one of the Observant movement's most spectacular failures: the attempt to reform the wealthy Dominican convent of Klingental in 1480. Half a century prior, the city councilors and Dominican hierarchy attempted to create a solution that would allow St Mary Magdalene to be reformed while not forcing unwilling nuns to accept the strictures of life under the Observance: as mentioned earlier, nuns unwilling to accept the reform were allowed to move to Klingental. Between 1423 and 1480, three attempts were made to introduce small changes to convent life at Klingental, primarily stricter discipline and enclosure, but none of these efforts resulted in any

meaningful change to convent life at Klingental.[339] Because these perfunctory reforms did not result in any real changes and did not involve as substantial a cross-section of Basel society as the failure of 1480, it makes sense to turn to that final struggle.

Fifty-seven years after the reform of St Mary Magdalene, a group consisting of religious and laity of a variety of social classes from Basel and outside the city attempted one final time to reform Klingental.[340] Renée Weis-Müller's study of the networks of the pro- and anti-reform camps revealed that at least some of the families who were pro-reform at Klingental had been involved with the reform of the *Steinenkloster,* whether as part of the city council's reform party or as nuns themselves. These families included the ze Rheins and von Eptingens. Basel's mayor in 1480, nobleman Johannes von Bärenfels, strongly supported the reform of Klingental; Anna and Margrit von Bärenfels, his female relatives, had been nuns at St Mary Magdalene during its reform decades earlier.[341] Unlike the successful reforms of St Mary Magdalene and other convents, in which nuns from outside joined the existing sisters, the reform of Klingental was accomplished by entirely replacing the nuns. These women, who had called Klingental their home in some cases for decades, only one of whom wanted to accept the strictures of reform, were forced to move out, making way for the thirteen reform sisters. Among the sisters forced to leave was Agnes Huswirt, who had rejected reform at St Mary Magdalene and moved to Klingental in 1422. The resistance had also been aided by Archduke Sigismund of Austria (d. 1496, duke of Austria from 1439, archduke of Austria from 1444). As Weis-Müller and Anne

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[339] Weis-Müller, *Die Reform des Klosters Klingental und ihr Personenkreis*, 42. Weis-Müller was rightly suspicious that the state of affairs at Klingental was quite as bad as reformers claimed, but noted that a child was born in 1460 to a nun by the provost of the *Peterskirche,* 44.

[340] By this time, the Dominican priory of Basel had adopted the Observance, as had the Poor Clares. The spiritual geography of the city had changed since 1423.

[341] Weis-Müller, *Klingental,* 57ff, 97ff; Erdin, *Sancta Maria Magdalena,* 54, 99.

Winston-Allen have noted, Sigismund's involvement was actively unhelpful to the reformist cause. The reforming sisters offered Sigismund 3,000 guldin to support their cause, but the sisters who had left because of their opposition offered him 8,000 guldin. Sigismund, at the time indebted to the city of Basel for a large sum of money, took up the opposition's cause.[342] In this case, the nuns seem to have been savvy about the political and economic valences of the reform and unafraid to manipulate the situation when they had the means, financial or otherwise, to do so.

Eventually, due to the persistence of the nuns who opposed reform and the support of their families, the effort collapsed. The reform party returned to their original convent and Klingental's sisters returned to their community.[343] The city council's work in the early decades of the century ultimately set the stage for the failure of reform at Klingental, by creating a dumping ground for reform-resistant nuns. Families like the von Bärenfels, von Eptingens, and ze Rheins remained committed to the success of the Observant movement in their city but ran up against ultimately insurmountable obstacles in the form of women who were convinced that they were already living good, religious lives. No amount of awareness of social class or conscious attention to financial security, the factors that had contributed to the reform of the *Steinenkloster,* could bring success in 1480 at Klingental.

Standing the Test of Time: Nuremberg and St Katharina

[342] Weis-Müller, *Klingental,* 160-165; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 93-94.
[343] Weis-Müller, *Klingental,* 136-137, 196-199.

In 1428, nuns from the convent of Schönensteinbach arrived to reform Nuremberg's prominent Dominican convent, St Katharina. The event was memorialized in several city chronicles, signaling its importance for civic identity and the pride that Nurembergers felt in their city. An anonymous chronicler, writing in the 1430s and 1440s, described the convent's reform as one of the four most significant events that happened in the city in 1428. According to the chronicler, the initial phase of the Observance took place before the ten reform sisters from Schönensteinbach even arrived. The nuns at St Katharina changed their rule, accepted strict enclosure, and ceased eating meat *(da verkerten dy Prediger sant Kathreyn closter den nunen ir regelen, und vermaurten sy in ire lieht und winden uberal und turren nimer flaisch essen).*[344] Two months later, ten nuns, including burghers' daughters, arrived from Colmar to oversee the reform *(da tet man zehen nunen hinein, dy kamen von Kolmarberg herauf und dy fullen den orden regiren und das closter, und waren etlich purgerskint hie).*[345] For the chronicler, as an outside observer, these three changes marked the adoption of the Observance for the nuns. Moreover, the author saw the reform and enclosure of one of the city's most prominent convents as sufficiently significant to note alongside political events of the day, suggesting that contemporary observers saw the convent reform as inseparable from civic politics. In this section, I will examine the relationship between the convent of St Katharina and the Nuremberg city council at two crucial inflection points: the reform of 1428 and the official limitation on the convent's size in 1476.

[344] *Chronik aus Kaiser Sigmunds Zeit bis 1434, mit Fortsetzung bis 1441,* in *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte: Nürnberg* vol. 1 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1862), 375.
[345] Ibid.

The city affairs of Nuremberg were controlled by a substantial merchant-patrician class which had an unusual amount of influence over matters of faith in the city. This influence had only increased following the gradual withdrawal of regional nobility from town life after the fourteenth century.[346] By law, these families made up the majority of the powerful *kleiner Rat,* the body of the city council with the most decision-making power. Generally, they used this influence to encourage foreign traders to operate within the city's walls, but they simultaneously supported Nuremberg's own production and trade, especially of high-quality metalwork. As a result, Nuremberg's merchants and metal goods could be found throughout Europe.[347]

St Katharina was one of Nuremberg's most prominent convents. It had been founded in 1293 thanks to an endowment from Konrad von Neumarkt and his wife, Adelheid, both of whom were from important patrician families. From that moment forward, the convent's nuns included women from the city's numerous powerful patrician families, including the Tuchers, Holzschuhers, and Schurstabs.[348] The convent's first two centuries were somewhat uneventful until a failed reform attempt in 1396.[349] In 1396, the Dominican friars of Nuremberg became the second friary reformed in Germany. Conrad of Prussia, who had introduced the Observance to the friars, attempted to reform the sisters as well. They, however, had other ideas. In response to Conrad's arrival accompanied by city councilors and bearing a papal bull, Meyer reported that

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[346] Anne Simon, *The Cult of Saint Katherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nuremberg: Saint and the City* (Farnham: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 1ff; Benjamin John Pope, "Relations between Townspeople and Rural Nobles in Late Medieval Germany: A Study of Nuremberg in the 1440s" (PhD diss., Durham University, 2016), 70-71.
[347] Rörig, *Medieval Town,* 103-105.
[348] Simon, *Saint Katherine,* 2 n. 5. For more on the Tucher family in particular, see Christian Kuhn, "Remembering the Dead for the Sake of the Living: Family Values in the Bequests of the Nuremberg Tuchers (1450-1550)," in *Hoping for Continuity: Childhood, Education, and Death in Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* ed. K. Mustakallio, J. Hanska, H.-L. Sainio, and V. Vuolanto (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandae, 2005), 215-225.
[349] Barbara Steinke, *Paradiesgarten oder Gefängnis? Das Nürnberger Katharinenkloster zwischen Klosterreform und Reformation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 19-21; Walter Fries, "Kirche und Kloster zu St Katharina in Nürnberg," *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Geschichte der Stadt Nürnberg* 25 (1924), 5-22.

the sisters were publicly disobedient and made obscene, unfeminine gestures. Conrad ordered that the sisters who behaved thus be bound. When he called upon a friar to help by picking up the feet of one of the nuns in order to tie them up, she said that she would allow "no one but this citizen, my cousin" to bind her *(ich wil von niemant gebunden werden, den von disem burger, minem vetter).* When he tried, she kicked him so sharply that he toppled over onto the ground. Conrad and his company were forced to retreat and develop a new strategy: they decided to carry little bags of flour under their robes to toss in the faces of disobedient sisters. The sisters, too, were busy listening to the advice of worldly, educated clerics *(welt wisen, wol gelerten schul pfaffen):* they attempted to bar Conrad and his party from entering the convent and, when they did make it inside, attempted to beat them with a large crucifix and started screaming so that they would not have to listen to the papal bull being read aloud. In the end, the convent was more strictly enclosed but not reformed in any other meaningful sense.[350] While it is important to take such a sensational story of opposition to reform recorded by Meyer, one of the Observance's leading lights, with a grain of salt—reformers often overstated the excesses of people who were resistant to their cause in order to give dramatic tension to their efforts—the sisters' opposition was vehement enough to cause the reform party to give up for the time being.

The ongoing question of reform at St Katharina touches on both economic questions and the relationship between the city council and convent. The failed 1396 reform was hardly ancient history in 1428, and it is likely that some nuns still at the convent in 1428 remembered the events of 1396. Unlike either Basel or Freiburg, there is a surviving account by an anonymous, pro-Observance sister, in addition to accounts by Johannes Nider and Johannes Meyer and some

[350] *BdRP* IV-V, IV.5, 12-14.

relevant documents produced by the city council itself.[351] Each of the three narrative accounts differs somewhat in focus and, while all three show that the city council played a vital role in the reform, they each portray it differently.[352]

The nun's account of the events of 1428 detailed how the Observance was brought to the convent, the nuns who belonged to the convent both before and after its reform, what possessions belonged to both individual nuns and the community, what property the convent sold at what price, and how this money was invested.[353] After listing the thirty-five sisters who were faced with the prospect of reform as well as the names of the ten Schönensteinbach sisters who constituted the reform party, the anonymous author explained that Barthélemy Texier, the Dominican master general, gave the sisters "a period of time, in which they could consider for themselves, whether they wanted to adopt the Observance. But those who did not wish to do this would be provided for in other convents" *(Item dar nach seczt der obgenant maister des ordens…ein zeit, in der sy sych bedechten, ob sy wolten die observantz halten, welche aber des nicht thun wolt, die mochten in andre clöster versorgt werden).*[354] Although the author did not record the community's deliberations over whether to accept the reform or not, she did record that eight sisters decided that the reform would be too difficult *(zw schwer)* and so elected to leave. Five of them left for Engelthal and the other three for Frauenaurach. All of them took their belongings, including books, clothes, incomes, and furniture.[355] Much of the rest of the account is likewise focused on the economic conditions of the convent as a result of reform. Importantly,

[351] The nun's account is edited in von Kern, "Die Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 1-20.
[352] See also Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 145-148.
[353] von Kern, "Die Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 7.
[354] Ibid., 9-10.
[355] Perhaps the requirement of giving up nearly all private property was one of the reasons that these nuns left.

one of the details that the anonymous author noted was the amount of money that the Observant nuns invested with the city as a result of the sale of the private belongings, such as clothes, furniture, furs, and luxurious devotional objects.[356] As with other pro-reform accounts by Observant nuns, this account gives only the merest glimpse into the attitudes of those who were opposed to the reform, leaving open many more questions than it answers in this regard. Unlike many other accounts, however, this record focuses on legal and financial questions rather than spiritual ones.

Meyer and Nider each portrayed the conflict over whether or not to reform—the conflict that the anonymous nun skirted around in her account—differently in ways that illuminate the relationship between the nuns and the city council. Anne Winston-Allen has usefully described the difference: Nider emphasized the power of prayer, while Meyer stresses the persuasive powers of Nider and the order's master general, Texery.[357] An additional element of their narratives is the way each author portrayed the relationship between the convent and the city council. According to Nider, dividing lines were immediately drawn throughout the city based upon blood relationships *(per consanguineos),* with one faction arguing that reform was good, while the other opposed it on the basis that new ideas were inherently bad. Nider reported that Texery supported sending a reform party into St Katharina in secret rather than openly *(potius furtim, quam aperte),* because there was as yet no consensus over the reform. It was necessary, in the end, to send a reform party in furtively. Consensus was eventually reached among the city council that the convent ought to be reformed, but only if all the sisters agreed, according to

[356] von Kern, "Die Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 12. Barbara Steinke suggested that the chronicle's term *kleinot,* which directly translates as "jewels," ought to be understood to include devotional objects like pictures, crucifixes, and sculptures. Steinke, *Paradeisgarten,* 23 n. 27.
[357] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 147.

Nider: perhaps unsurprisingly, he reported that all the sisters consented to the reform, dancing around the fact that eight sisters left the convent rather than agree.[358] On the other hand, Meyer, ever looking to amplify the drama for the sake of his narrative, reported that the city council revoked its support for the reform at the last minute. The reform party had arrived in its covered wagon from Schönensteinbach, but nuns from St Katharina complained to prominent laypeople and an unnamed hostile *(figentlicher)* but influential individual spurred the city council to withdraw its support. According to Meyer, in an effort to circumvent this unexpected roadblock, Nider talked to both the nuns of St Katharina as well as the reform sisters from Schönensteinbach. Both parties agreed to proceed with the reform. In this way, the city council was informed that the affair was settled.[359] Meyer also recorded a crucial economic motive for the reform. Kunigund, a wealthy widow of a Nuremberg citizen, wished to take her riches to Schönensteinbach and enter the religious life there. When the city council objected, she shared her desire for the Observant life and said that, if the council could affect the reform of St Katharina, she would enter that convent instead.[360]

These three competing accounts may never be fully reconciled, but they nevertheless reveal insights about the values of reformers and what they perceived as the appropriate relationship between convent and council. The anonymous nun's account is sparest on drama, prioritizing concrete financial practicalities that resulted from the reform. On the one hand, this makes sense given that her audience, unlike either Nider's or Meyer's, was internal, consisting of the reformed nuns who would continue to live their days under the strictures of the Observance.

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[358] Nider, *Formicarius,* III.3, 195-196. *Omnes in reformationem consenserunt*.
[359] *BdRP* IV-V, V.16-17, 64-66.
[360] Ibid., V.18, 66-67.

They would need this financial information to steward the reformed convent properly into the future. On the other, it is notable that her account does not detail any back-and-forth between the nuns and the city council: the council's only real role in her account is as the depository for the income gained from the sale of personal property. The most important step in the process of deciding whether to accept the Observance was clearly the internal debate in the convent, even if we modern readers are not privy to its details.

For Nider and Meyer, the tension between the city council and convent allowed them to portray the success of the Observance as a triumph in the face of substantial opposition. Notably, for both authors, the nuns' internal decision on the issue of reform, while important, is secondary to the tension between the city council and the convent. Telling a story of the reform as a battle between familial factions and the last-minute effort to prevent the reform's success allowed Nider and Meyer to emphasize the drama and heighten the stakes of the reform of a convent in the important city of Nuremberg. Nider and Meyer either were not privy to or did not feel it important to discuss any conversations among the nuns themselves in chapter meetings or elsewhere about whether to accept the reform or not, for such deliberations carried little weight for their respective grand narratives. The contrast between the anonymous nun's account, Nider's account, and Meyer's can partially be explained by the difference in their audiences and purposes, but potentially also reflects an understanding of who "owned" the reform.[361] The anonymous nun's account, while acknowledging the contributions and vital role played by Nider, Texery, and others, honed in on the female personnel and the concrete financial changes that resulted as private property was given up at St Katharina. Nider and Meyer were each more

[361] For more on Nider and Meyer, see Chapter One.

concerned with the reform's initiation by the city council and the challenges that some members of the convent posed in their resistance.

From 1428 to 1476, the life of St Katharina proceeded apace: its nuns built one of the largest German-language libraries of the fifteenth century through writing and copying books as well as commissioning manuscripts and receiving additional codices through donations. They also sent out multiple reform parties in service of spreading the Observance.[362] The combination of reform, flourishing spirituality, and healthy finances made St Katharina a particularly appealing place for families to send their daughters, a place where they could feel relatively secure that the combination of enclosure and oversight by presumably devout nuns would make it nigh impossible for a reluctant oblate to sully her family's name by behaving inappropriately or becoming pregnant. The increased demand for places in convents did not always correspond with a proportional increase in funds, however.

In 1476, the relationship between convent and city council became an issue again, as the city council aimed to limit the size of St Katharina. Additionally, the councilors wanted the convent population to be circumscribed so that it would only include the daughters of Nuremberg citizens.[363] Authorities had long cautioned convents not to accept more novices than they could afford to support, but it was a delicate balancing act since new novices were important for bringing in new revenue that helped to ensure the longevity of the community.[364] In 1476,

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[362] The library holdings of St Katharina are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

[363] Georg Pickel, "Geschichte des Klaraklosters in Nürnberg," *Beiträge zur bayerischen Kirchengeschichte* 19 (1913), 197. See also Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 91, though she does not mention the date.

[364] St Dominic had admonished the prioress and sisters of the early Dominican community in Madrid not to accept more novices than they could afford to support, and gave the decision about which novices to receive exclusively to the prioress and the convent. The reason was that Dominic could not offer outside financial support. This letter is preserved in a fourteenth-century copy in Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France ms. Lat. 4348, fol. 155v-156r. It has been edited in François Balme, ed., *Cartulaire: out histoire diplomatique de Saint Dominique,* vol. 3 (Paris: Aux Bureaux de L'Année Dominicaine, 1901), 79-80. *Et quia vos subvenire in temporalibus non possumus, nolumus*

Nuremberg's city council asked Pope Sixtus IV (d. 1484) to decree that St Katharina and the Observant Poor Clares (reformed by their order's Observant movement in 1452) only accept as many nuns as their financial situation would allow them to support. Each nun was expected to bring a dowry with her, though these dowries were usually much smaller than marriage dowries. Upon a nun's death, her property and dowry were inherited by the convent.[365] Although Nuremberg's city council had previously exerted influence over which women were admitted to convents, this status was only formalized in 1476. The issue at the heart of the decree, that of funding and the number of nuns, was not new, but rather had ebbed and flowed over the preceding centuries as convents' social and spiritual makeup changed. The decree cites the increasing fervor of religious support as the reason for these limits, along with the desire to ensure the longevity of these convents.[366]

The 1476 decree came at a time when Nuremberg's city council was particularly interested in exerting and expanding its control and seems to have come at the expense of some of St Katharina's independence and its nuns' control over their own destinies. The papal bull noted that the mayor and city council of Nuremberg were key drivers of the dictate: that is, the very men whose sisters, daughters, and nieces were nuns in the convent.[367] In 1479, Nuremberg's city council issued *Die Reformacion der kayserlichen Stat Nüremberg,* a revised, modernized law code that took into account Roman law and disentangled centuries of overlapping or conflicting laws. Work on the code began in 1477, and the revisions legislated a variety of

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vos onerare quod aliquis Fratrum recipiendi vel intromittendi mulieres aliquas habeat potestatem, nisi Priorissa tantum cum consilio sui conventus.

[365] Leonard, *Nails in the Wall,* 19, 93.

[366] StAN A 1 Nr. 1476-06-11.

[367] StAN A 1 Nr. 1476-06-11.

elements of daily life, such as marriage and inheritance, that had previously been outside the city's jurisdiction.[368] I do not want to push the link between the 1476 decree and the "reformation" of Nuremberg's civil legal code too far, not least because convents were exempt from civil law. But the atmosphere in Nuremberg in the late fifteenth century was one of modernizing and codifying situations relating to marriage, dowries, and other such topics that also touched on convent life, and the 1476 decree may fit into this pattern.

Moreover, the city council at this time was generally interested and involved in the city's religious houses of various types. The chronicler Sigmund Meisterlin (d. probably after 1497), who wrote a general history of Nuremberg from the time of the Romans during the mid-1470s, reported that the communities of St Katharina and St Clara had their guardians *(pfleger)* given to them by the wise city council, which was useful to them in other matters also.[369] This chapter of the work, describing the religious establishments of the city, mentions such oversight only for these two convents. This relationship, likely strict outside oversight imposed from above on top of the already stringent Observance rather than a harmonious partnership between secular and religious authorities, was recognizable to an outside observer and deemed worthy of inclusion in his chronicle of the city.

Prior to 1476, however, St Katharina's nuns had pushed back against impositions on their autonomy and oversight of their own affairs. In 1459, the nuns had written a letter to the pope protesting the imposition of taxes that went against their privileges; they had most recently received a reconfirmation of the convent's privileges from the Dominican master general, Guy

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[368] *Der Reformacion der kayserlichen Stat Nüremberg* (Nuremberg: Holtzel, 1503). Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century,* 218ff.

[369] Sigmund Meisterlin, *Chronik der Reichstadt Nürnberg* in *Die Chroniken der fränkischen Städte: Nürnberg* vol. 3 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1864), 75.

Flamochet, in 1451.[370] In 1476 and 1477, the tax dispute again became an issue, this time also involving the Poor Clares. A letter from the chancellery of Bamberg to the abbess of the Poor Clares, Margaretha Grundherr, stated that she and her convent would do best to reach an agreement with St Katharina over the issue and present a united front.[371] Although the ultimate outcome of the conflict over the bishop of Bamberg's additional tax burden does not seem to have survived in the archival record, it is not impossible that concern over the ability of the two convents to bear an increased tax burden was a factor in the city council's decision to push for the official limitation of convent size. By only accepting nuns from wealthy Nuremberg citizen families, not only would the "right" women make up the convent's choir nuns, but the dowries that they brought with them would be substantial enough to help the convent meet the new taxation.

On the whole, taking a decades-long view helps to show how undertaking the process of reform influenced the relationship between convent and city council. The convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg provides an opportunity to examine multiple narrative accounts of the initial reform as well as to see, albeit obliquely, how the issue of reform affected later relations between both institutions. Powerful patrician families had particular control over religious affairs in Nuremberg and held power in the city council, so the fact that these influences dovetailed during the reform of St Katharina is not surprising. What is noteworthy, though, is that the city council's efforts to intervene in convent affairs through limiting the convent size in 1476 can be viewed differently depending on our perspective. If we focus on 1476, the city council's

[370] StAN A 1 Nr. 1459-11-27.1; StAN A 1 Nr. 1451.
[371] StAN D 25, Nr. 40. The two convents were also connected through prayer confraternities and manuscript exchange. See Steinke, *Paradiesgarten,* 59.

intentions seem to be purely about making sure that women from a narrowly defined urban upper class became nuns at the city's most prominent convents. Considered in the broader reforming context, however, a more generous interpretation that does not completely discount the other reading is possible. Nuremberg's patrician families well understood the value of having a prominent Observant convent in the city that had stood up to the personnel and financial challenges of sending many reform parties of nuns to other convents. And, in the wake of the limitation of 1476, nuns from St Katharina successfully reformed one final community, the Dominican convent in Regensburg, in 1482-1483.

Freiburg and the Triple Reform

By the time the Observant Reform arrived to three of the four houses of Dominican nuns in Freiburg im Breisgau in 1465, the movement was well established throughout the region. As we have seen, city councils championed and assisted the cause of reform, and could take credit for initiating it. But the impetus for reforming three Dominican convents in Freiburg came from elsewhere: the redoubtable reformer and chronicler of reform, Johannes Meyer, reported that the idea of a triple reform came to him suddenly. Never had two convents in a single city been reformed simultaneously, let alone three. Such an event would thus naturally be a divine work rather than a human one.[372] Meyer was silent about the positive light this divine work would shine on the city council and civic pride, though this was undoubtedly a positive side effect. The

[372] *BdRP* IV-V, V.51, 114-115. Meyer was right: while a few cities had two convents that were reformed according to the Observance, they were generally reformed separately and at different times. For instance, across the Rhine River from Freiburg in Colmar, Unterlinden was reformed in 1419 and St Katharina was reformed in 1438.

case of Freiburg's triple reform reveals how, even in cases where economic concerns do not seem to have driven the engagement of the city council in the reform, the city council still involved itself in ensuring the reform's success. After briefly examining the socioeconomic makeup of each of the three convents in question, this section will proceed to examine the stakeholders in the triple reform and the city council's frantic search for a new reform prioress for Adelhausen after the untimely death of the first reform prioress.

As with other cities and convents, Freiburg's Dominican communities experienced a shift in their makeup over the first decades of the fifteenth century. Between the founding of Adelhausen in the 1230s and the middle decades of the fourteenth century, the convent's nuns were largely drawn from a circumscribed group of local noble families and wealthy urban patrician families. As the fourteenth century drew to a close, however, women whose families' fortunes were on the rise began to enter the convent as choir nuns. Families such as the Snewlins, Munzingens, and Küchlins were among the old-money patrician families whose daughters were nuns at Adelhausen and whose donations had funded the convent for the first two centuries of its existence. Members of each of these three families were mayors of Freiburg several times throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, along with holding other city offices and participating in trade.[373] By the second half of the fourteenth century, these women were joined by nuns from families like the Statzes and Weisweils, families whose reputation and wealth were growing, though the sources mean that a full reconstruction of the origins of the nuns is impossible.[374]

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[373] Nehlson, *Die Freiburger Familie Snewlin,* 139ff.

[374] Madlen Doerr, "Klarissen und Dominikanerinnen im Freiburg im 15. Jahrhundert: Sozialstruktur und Reform" (PhD diss., Albert-Ludwigs-Universität, 2012), 143-145.

At Freiburg's two other convents that were about to be reformed, St Agnes and the Penitents of St Mary Magdalene, the situation was similar. St Agnes, founded in 1264, counted women from the urban bourgeois and guild families as well as noblewomen among its nuns already in the fourteenth century.[375] St Mary Magdalene was initially founded as a convent of penitents before incorporating into the Dominican Order, much like Basel's St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen.* The smallest of the four Dominican convents in Freiburg, St Mary Magdalene had a larger proportion of women from burgher families (e.g., two daughters of the Weisslin family, who were merchants), and fewer nobles in the fourteenth century. In the fifteenth century before the introduction of reform, the only prioress at St Mary Magdalene whose name is known was Claranna von Falkenstein, from a noble family.[376]

Freiburg's three Dominican convents, and particularly Adelhausen, its most prominent convent, provide a unique glimpse into the stakeholders required to reform a convent. Johannes Meyer's personal involvement combined with his authorship of the narrative chronicle of reform effectively preserved an overview of the process at all three convents, although Meyer had a clear preference for Adelhausen and told its story most fully. Meyer reported that, after his divine inspiration for the triple reform, he sought the necessary permissions and assistance to conduct the reforms. These approvals and aid came from both ecclesiastical officials, including the bishop of Constance and the Dominican master general, as well as secular ones, ranging from Archduke Sigismund of Austria, whom we have already met in the context of Klingental's failed reform, the city's territorial overlord, to Freiburg city officials.

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[375] Doerr, "Sozialstruktur und Reform," 145ff.

[376] Doerr, 162ff. Ulrike Denne asserted that St Mary Magdalene had developed a "low reputation" by the fifteenth century, attested by the fact that she could not identify any nuns from Freiburg patrician families at that time. Doerr disagrees persuasively.

Local political figures were key in turning Meyer's dream into reform reality at Adelhausen. Meyer painted a somewhat grim picture of Adelhausen's nuns prior to the introduction of the Observance. They were deeply unwilling *(ser unwillig)* to accept the reform because they enjoyed their worldly delights *(weltlicher fröd)* too much and were too governed by their own wills *(aygens willens).* They were not, however, as openly hostile to the potential of reform as had been the case at some other convents.[377] Given Meyer's tendency to oversell the difficulty of reform and the lack of evidence for any sustained pattern of bad behavior among Freiburg's Dominican nuns, a dose of healthy skepticism is warranted. Nevertheless, Meyer described his tactics to bring the nuns around to the cause: a combination of informing and intimidating. Over a series of chapter meetings, Meyer convinced the sisters of the merits of the Observant reform. He showed them the letters he had received from secular authorities and the order's officials.[378] In other words, he revealed to them that the reform was essentially a *fait accompli.* The purpose of these chapter meetings was not to provide the nuns with the information required to make a decision about the reform, but rather with information required to accept a decision that had been made for them by Meyer and his divine inspiration. Meyer also relied on tactics that were more outright intimidating. In Book V, Chapter 57 of the *Buch der Reformacio,* which Meyer titled "What careful wisdom and firm prudence was used and practiced in the reform of the aforesaid three convents of sisters" *(Waz fürsichtiger wisshait und dapfer beschaidenhait gebrucht ist und geübt ist in der reformierung der vorgenamten diser*

[377] *BdRP* IV-V, V.54, 117-118.

[378] Ibid., V.54, 117. *So warent sy doch für die ersten zway mal nie also grob, ruch unzucht bewisen, als etwen von ettlichen swöstren beschechen ist, wie wol daz waz, daz der vatter Meger in dick und dick capitel halten must, und etwen von dem weltlichen gewalt al sim in den hobtbrieffen geboten waz von der gantzen maisterschafft des ordens.*

swöstren clöster), the reform described showing up for the chapter meetings that he had mentioned previously with an accompanying entourage.[379] This group included six strong, "good-willed" *(gut-willig)* knights from archduke's entourage, as well as members of Freiburg's city council; doctors, teachers, and masters from the recently founded University of Freiburg (1457); and the priors of the Observant Carthusian and Augustinian houses.[380] These secular and religious supporters of the reform, including three unidentified representatives of the city, spoke in turn. Their speeches seem to have been key to Meyer's strategy for convincing the nuns to agree to the reform. Interestingly, Meyer's only Dominican companions were a lay-brother and a secular canon, Johannes Crützer, who entered the Dominican order later that year. Clearly, Meyer did not underestimate the persuasive power of local political figures, who may well have been related to some of the nuns they were trying to persuade. But the inclusion of half a dozen knights suggests that persuasion was underlaid with shades of outright coercion. The persuasion (or coercion) was successful: the sisters eventually agreed to give the reform a try for a year.

Subsequently, Adelhausen, St Agnes, and St Mary Magdalene were reformed on the day of Our Lady's Visitation, July 2, 1465. Six sisters arrived from St Katharina in Colmar, across the Rhine River, to reform Adelhausen. Accompanied by twenty honest laywomen from Freiburg, the new sisters entered the cloister. There, they knelt in the church and sang the antiphon *Sub tuum* before the altar of Our Lady. They then entered the choir, where they sang the *Veni creator.* Among the six sisters was the new reform prioress, Endelin von Au, who had been

[379] Ibid., V.57, 120. In Jones' translation, this is chapter V.66. Jones, *Women's History in the Age of Reformation,* 238. The translation of the chapter title is Jones'.
[380] *BdRP* IV-V, V.57, 121. Freiburg's Dominican friars were not then, nor were they ever, reformed by the Observants.

the prioress at St Katharina in Colmar for twenty-four years.[381] Ultimately, according to Meyer, many of Adelhausen's sisters chose to leave before the end of the trial period; unfortunately, he does not tell us how many and the surviving records do not provide a complete list of sisters' names to determine what percentage of the convent's nuns departed for unreformed pastures, much less where they went. In fact, Meyer's reform narrative is relatively quiet on the subject of the first few years of the reform, despite him knowing quite well how difficult it was.[382] He reported only that Endelin von Au died after less than a year in office, resulting in a new prioress being appointed; at this time, many sisters chose to leave the convent. Such upheaval resulted in the replacement of the second reform prioress with yet another new prioress. Despite the rocky start, Meyer expressed hope that the reform would take firm root.[383] In a narrative dedicated to the advancement of the reform cause, Meyer saw little value in dwelling too long on these initial challenges.

Meyer's description of the reform process makes immediately clear how vital the support of secular authority figures was to a successful reform through a mixture of legitimate persuasion and bullying. The assent of Freiburg's territorial prince, Sigismund of Austria, was necessary; Sigismund's deputy in the Black Forest, Thüring von Hallwyl, was also a significant figure in the reform and may have had more to do with its success than his superior. But perhaps most important in the accomplishment of the reform was Freiburg's city council, whose involvement in the reform process was qualitatively different from that of Basel's or Nuremberg's councils.

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[381] The hamlet of Au is a few kilometers south of Freiburg; Endelin (or Adelheid) may have been from a family similar to those who sent their daughters to Adelhausen, making her well-suited to the task of being its reform prioress.

[382] Meyer spent the final years of his life at Adelhausen as its confessor and was buried in its choir at his request.

[383] *BdRP* IV-V, V.54, 118.

Freiburg's councilors were accomplices to rather than instigators of reform, unlike Basel; in contrast to Nuremberg, their interest in the reform never extended into legislation. They did, however, step in at a moment of crisis in the reform: Endelin von Au's death. Examining each party in turn will help demonstrate just how vital the city council was.

Sigismund of Austria was a vital player in the reform process, albeit not a particularly interested one—though, happily for the reformers, he was at least on their side in this case. Secondary scholarship on Sigismund focuses on the rising economic fortunes of the region during his rule and his various military exploits. His involvement in the ongoing conflict between the *Eidgenossenschaft* and the Habsburg rulers of the Holy Roman Empire was chief among these; the region around Freiburg, Basel, and Mulhouse was an epicenter of these struggles.[384] The conflict took Sigismund to Freiburg in 1468; he had last visited the city with his wife, Eleanor of Scotland, ten years earlier, so they were not in the area when Freiburg was reformed.[385] His military involvement does not seem to have left Sigismund with the time for any especially noteworthy pious deeds. Both he and Eleanor were involved in *Gebetsbruderschaften* and *Gebetsgemeinschaften* beginning in the late 1440s and continuing throughout their lives. These prayer circles or prayer confraternities encompassed a wide variety of orders, from one that included the entire Premonstratensian order to the Benedictines, Carthusians, Dominicans, and Augustinian hermits. Sometimes, the couple made a donation to accompany the inclusion of their name on the list recording the prayer circle's members, but

[384] For more on this conflict, see, among others, Tom Scott, *The Swiss and Their Neighbors, 1460-1560: Between Accommodation and Aggression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
[385] On Sigismund's career, see Wilhelm Baum, "Kaiser Friedrich III. und Sigmund der Münzreiche: Ihre Beziehungen vom Frieden von Wiener Neustadt bis zum Frieden von Zürich (1464-1478)," *Der Schlern* 69, no. 4 (1995), 209-226.

otherwise the couple were not actively involved.[386] While the couple did make a donation in 1457 to the community of Dominican nuns in Tulln, Austria, who had been reformed in 1436 by an Observant contingent from St Katharina in Nuremberg, there is no further indication that the couple was especially noteworthy in their religiosity or that they were particularly attached to either Dominican nuns or the Observant movement in any order.[387] Thüring von Hallwyl, Sigismund's deputy in the region, may well have tipped his boss to support the Observant reform of Freiburg's Dominican convents. He knew the area better and seems to have been more interested in pious matters.[388]

Even more consequential for the ongoing success of reform at Adelhausen was the role of Freiburg's city council. The city council's letterbooks survive in a remarkably complete series in Freiburg's city archives. Although they recorded copies of both incoming and outgoing letters, the copies of sent letters are more complete than those of received letters. Despite lacking replies, copies of outgoing letters demonstrate the city council's ongoing entanglement in the reform process, extending several years past the initial introduction of the Observance.

The one surviving incoming letter related to the reform, from Colmar's mayor and city council, confirmed that they were sending nuns from the convent of St Katharina in their city to Freiburg. Dated July 2, 1465, the day of the reform, the letter formally recommended the nuns to

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[386] Alfred A. Strnad, "Ein Konfraternitätsbrief der Oberdeutschen Franziskaner-Konventualen für Eleonore von Schottland, Gemahlin Herzog Sigmunds von Österreich," in *Per Padre Frumenzio Ghetta OFM: Scritti di storia e cultura ladina, trentina, tirolese e nota bio-bibliografica in occasione del settantesimo compleanno* (Trent: Institut cultural ladin, 1991), 683-698; Alfred A. Strnad, "Frömmigkeit, Heilkunde, Kultur und Mäzenatentum im spätmittelalterlichen Tirol: Ein Gnadenerweis des Zisterzienserordens für Herzog Sigmund von Österreich und seine Gemahlin Katharina von Sachsen," *Innsbrucker historische Studien* 16/17 (1995), 139-157.

[387] Strnad, "Konfraternitätsbrief," 681.

[388] Henny Grüneisen, "Herzog Sigmund von Tirol, der Kaiser und die Ächtung der Eidgenossen 1469: Kanzlei und Räte Herzog Sigmunds, insbesondere nach London, Britisches Museum Add. Ms. 25437," in *Aus Reichstagen des 15. und 16. Jahrhunderts: Festgabe dargebracht der historischen Kommission bei der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zur Feier ihres hundertjährigen Bestehens* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 160-161.

Freiburg's city council for their assistance with the reform. Thüring von Hallwyl was the go-between whose letters and requests caused the council to agree to support the cause of reform in Freiburg. In its tone, the letter used standard language about the need to remove worldly pleasures from convent life. Because of the friendly relationship between the two cities, Colmar was able to support the new reform.[389] Conspicuously absent from the letter are the names of the nuns. The letter dealt with the corporate elements of reform rather than any individuals. Its significance is in revealing the establishment of dialogue between these two cities and confirming Thüring von Hallwyl as one of the key players of the triple reform in Freiburg.

The outgoing letters, however, provide far more information about the city council's commitment to reform as well as hinting at how the reform was going for the nuns. When Endelin von Au died, Freiburg's city council wrote to Peter Möhr, prior of the Dominican convent in Gebweiler, near Schönensteinbach. The letter explained that Endelin had died and that the city council sought a new reform prioress to continue the process of bringing the reform to completion.[390] A follow-up to the letter again sought help in finding a reform prioress who could "help to further instill the Observance" *(helffen zu handeln damit die obßervantz furer besetzt).*[391] A third letter revealed that a new reform prioress, sought with the knowledge and agreement of Adelhausen's sisters, had been found: Ursula von Hornberg, a sister from Unterlinden in Colmar. Her job was "to confirm and enforce the reform in that place" *(zu confirmieren und zu bestetigen damit die reformacion an dem ortt by unns).* Ursula had been sent by God and the saints to Adelhausen to help instill spiritual governance *(…schickung*

[389] StAF B 5 XI Nr. 49/20.
[390] StAF B 5 XI Nr. 6 (1466), fol. 30. Peter Möhr and the Dominican friars of Gebweiler were involved with the reform of Engelport in 1466, making a substantial donation of property and income to the nuns there.
[391] Ibid., fol. 32v.

gottes…von den convent frowen zu Adelnhusen by unns einhelliclich zu einer regiererin der gestlicheit).[392] Final letters carried out the business of informing the prior of the Dominican friar in Basel, responsible for the pastoral care of Adelhausen, and Peter Möhr that a new reform prioress had been located.

Collectively, these letters reveal two important facets of Freiburg city council's involvement in the challenges that faced Adelhausen in its first reform year. First, their motive seems primarily to have been to save face and not risk having the reform fail. It is impossible to read the motivations of individual city councilors—spiritual benefit, female relatives who belonged to the convent, or financial commitments to the convent—from letters sent on behalf of a corporate body and without detailed knowledge of Adelhausen's personnel. In order to preserve the city's image and maintain what was potentially a tenuous reform situation at Adelhausen, they needed to act quickly. And they did: Ursula was installed as the second reform prioress shortly before Easter Sunday, which fell on April 15, 1466. Second, and perhaps more revealing, they prioritized this speed over qualifications and experience. Ursula von Hornberg is described only as a *convent swester,* not as holding any type of office, let alone having had previous experience as a prioress.[393] Unlike her predecessor, whose long service as prioress made her a natural choice as someone who would have understood the ins and outs of the job as it related to the Observant Reform, Ursula's qualifications are less clear. Perhaps the incoming letter which announced her as the chosen candidate would have provided some accounting of her abilities as perceived by Unterlinden's prioress or the city council of Colmar. This concern with

[392] Ibid., fol. 33v-34r.
[393] Ibid., fol. 36r.

speed suggests that the city council perceived that the state of the reform was tenuous and would not succeed without clear leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined three relationships between convents and city councils at and after the initial introduction of reform. It is perhaps strange that I have chosen two out of three cases where no chronicle by the nuns themselves exists to provide their point of view on the often-fraught process of interacting with the city council during the reform process and to counter sources written by men. Meyer's version of events, while adhering closely to chronology and basic factual details, often overstated either the level of resistance to or the level of acceptance of reform among the nuns in order to heighten the drama of reform in his historical narrative. As a result, city council documents, such as letters and other records, can provide an important corrective and alternative point of view on interactions between the convent and city, though of course city councilors had their own motives for acting as they did. In the case of Basel, such documents revealed how tightly the city council was concerned with the socioeconomic situation of the convent and how frequently the most important city officeholders were related to nuns in the convent. In the case of Nuremberg, we saw how the city council dealt differently with economic pressures on the convent and the prestige of St Katharina in the decades after reform. And finally, in Freiburg, the city council, which had not initiated the reform, nonetheless became a key player in locating a new reform prioress because of the benefit to the city of having it remain an Observant convent.

The value of studying these three reform efforts together is not solely comparative: it also addresses the appropriate scale at which to study the Observant Reform. So often, the scale is either extremely local, focused on a single convent or single city, or much broader, focused on the Observant movement across a large geographical sweep or the theological and ideological underpinnings over the Observance. This mid-range scale, a trio of cities that were home to more than half a dozen Dominican convents between them, enables us to attend closely to the local city context in each case and see how concerns were both shaped according to local context but also played out along expected lines: social class, economic viability, and investment in maintaining the reform. The middling scale also enables us to glean hints of nuns' attitudes towards the reform revealed through city council records that are lost when we take a broader view. So often, sources about the Observant Reform record or reveal voices strongly in favor of reform reporting on its success; occasionally, as at Klingental, the details of a spectacular failure of reform are very clear, though they were unfortunately not recorded by a nun. But the letters from Basel's city council and Freiburg's city council especially give us some idea of the quotidian negotiations that both led up to and followed the introduction of the Observance. Whether legwork to persuade the nuns of the value of reform prior to its introduction or the need to bolster it after it was in place, the texture that these city council records are able to provide to the triumphant narrative of successful reform is vital. It is also improved when evidence is gathered from multiple convents.

Finally, considering the local context of any reform effort is crucial. Medieval reform was never solely religious or spiritual; it was always tied up with local concerns and shaped by the relationship a religious institution had with its surrounding environment, its donors and supporters, other political and ecclesiastical institutions in the area, and economic issues. The

close connection of a religious institution with its local environment and these socioeconomic and political valences would not have surprised medieval people in any way. This chapter has revealed how a broader, comparative, but not too wide lens can help us gain this perspective more effectively.

Chapter Four

In Service of the Reform: Books, Instruction, and Modeling Reform

A tiny prayerbook, measuring just 57mm x 85mm (2.24" x 3.35") and containing prayers in both German and Latin, was made in the fifteenth century and survives today in the Freiburg im Breisgau Stadtarchiv. Books like this one, and the convents and individual nuns to whom they belonged, provide an ideal window into how Dominican nuns disseminated useful knowledge about the project of reform both to convents newly reformed and to those working to uphold the reform long-term. That particular individual prayerbook was ornamented throughout with many decorative, colored initials and three miniatures. The first of these miniatures, at the beginning of the book, features the name of *Ihesus* written in large Gothic script taking up nearly the full page. The name is surrounded by a decorative border and a flowering vine. The second miniature, at the book's end, is almost identical, except instead of Jesus' name, it is *Maria's* name at the center of the page. Near the middle of the book is a miniature depicting Veronica holding up the veil.[394] Jesus' face, which the artist originally depicted in its place on the veil, is almost completely faded, likely thanks to years of touching or kissing in devotion by its owner.[395] On the middle of the inside of the back cover, the book's owner recorded her identity: "This little

[394] StAF B 1 Nr. 126, fols. 2v, 217r, 81v. The story is apocryphal: Veronica supposedly offered Jesus her veil to wipe the sweat and blood from his face as he was carrying the cross to Calvary Hill. His face miraculously appeared on the veil, which was subsequently purported to cure blindness and other ailments. Although that story and the popularity of the veil as a pilgrimage destination emerged only in the early fourteenth century, the cloth was reported in Rome as early as the twelfth century. For more on the image and late medieval nuns' devotion to the face of Christ on the veil, see Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 317-382.

[395] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 323. See also Eamon Duffy, *Marking the Hours: English People and Their Prayers, 1240-1570* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).

book is Ursula von Stoffeln's, whom it answers sweetly."[396] Ursula von Stoffeln, a determined and devout inhabitant of the convent of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen,* also known as the *Steinenkloster,* in Basel, left that convent and traveled to Freiburg to become a prioress of the Observant Reform at St Agnes in 1505. Three of Freiburg's four Dominican convents had adopted the Observant Reform as a bloc in 1465; the Observance was even older at St Mary Magdalene, where it had been adopted in 1423.[397] According to the letter from the prioress of the *Steinenkloster* that recommended her, Ursula's job was to maintain the Observance according to the proper form at St Agnes, and she accepted the task out of her obedience to Christ.[398] Though we cannot be certain, it is likely that Ursula carried the tiny, eminently portable prayerbook with her on her journey from Basel to Freiburg.

Both nuns and books traveled in the service of reform—sometimes together, with nuns carrying the books themselves, but not always. Nuns brought practical expertise in singing the updated liturgy, in training new novices, and in leading a convent living according to the Observance. Concerns about a convent backsliding were not entirely unfounded: by 1500, several convents had abandoned the reform or disbanded altogether.[399] Likewise, up-to-date liturgical manuscripts, prayerbooks, and other devotional texts, among other types of texts, were

[396] StAF B 1 Nr. 126, inside of back board. *Dis buchlin ist der Ursel von Stoffel der es hab antwirte es ir suferlichen wider.*
[397] For the reform process of these convents, see Chapter Three.
[398] StAF A 1 XVI Aa 1505-02-06.
[399] The nuns of Klingental in Basel famously and successfully overturned the attempt to reform their convent with the help of family members and townspeople. See Chapter Three. St Agnes in Strasbourg, which experienced a deeply contested reform in 1465, had also slipped from the rank of the Observance thanks to the actions of the order's own master general, Martial Auribelli, who decided that the reform was too strict: the convent of St Agnes would remain enclosed but drop other elements of the Observance, and nuns who were unsatisfied by this decision could move to a stricter convent. See Amy Leonard, *Nails in the Wall,* 27-28.

hallmarks of an Observant convent's library.[400] Such books were often carried by male relatives of the nuns, by Dominican friars also traveling in the service of reform, and, as was possibly the case for Ursula von Sotffeln and her little prayerbook, by nuns themselves.[401] Books were given or loaned for a certain term for copying, in a system that Anne Winston-Allen has likened to interlibrary loan.[402] Likewise, nuns sometimes spent the remainder of their lives at a convent they had traveled to in order to introduce the reform, but others found themselves traveling from one convent to another, up to four or five times.[403]

The implementation of enclosure—the tightening of which was one of the notable features of the Observant Reform, as we have seen—was not a barrier to the movement of nuns in the service of reform. Fifteenth-century commentators on *Periculoso,* the papal decree of 1298 that mandated perpetual claustration for religious women, elaborated the cases under which nuns could leave their enclosure. These exceptions included nuns infected with a contagious disease such as leprosy, nuns who wished to transfer to another order, and nuns who had "reasonable and manifest cause" *(rationabilis et manifest causa)* to leave.[404] This third exception meant that traveling in the service of reform was, of course, sanctioned and permissible. So was departing a reformed convent for an unreformed convent: German legal scholar and law professor, Johannes Kölner de Vanckel, did not specify that a nun moving to a new convent needed to move to a

[400] Among others, see: Muschiol, "Migrating Nuns—Migrating Liturgy," 83-100; Anne Winston-Allen, "Making Manuscripts as Political Engagement by Women in the Fifteenth-Century Observant Reform Movement," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 42, no. 2 (2016), 224-247; Cathleen A. Fleck, *"Vergine Madre Pia:* Text and Image in a Medieval Psalter at a Renaissance Dominican Convent," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 34, no. 2 (2015), 5-13.
[401] Winston-Allen, "Networking in Medieval Strasbourg," 205.
[402] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 11.
[403] See Chapter Three for the example of Katharina von Mühlheim.
[404] Makowski, *Canon Law and Cloistered Women,* 1-8, 89-91.

stricter one.[405] For convents that accepted the Observant Reform, this interpretation meant that nuns who did not wish to live under the strictures of reform could leave the reformed convent for another conventual community.[406] The practicalities of late medieval travel also came into play. Johannes Meyer's *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens* contains multiple references to covered wagons and nuns being hosted in a private area of a local noble or patrician household as they broke their journey.[407] Art historian Jeffrey Hamburger has referred to the covered wagons—carefully designed so that they did not allow the nuns to glimpse the towns and countryside through which they were traveling, thus allowing them to focus on prayer for the success of their journey—as "a form of moving enclosure."[408] Tiny prayerbooks like Ursula von Stoffeln's, easily carried in a nun's hands, would have been a perfect companion to focus prayer during such a trip as well as a visible symbol of piety.

In this chapter, I examine the Dominican order in the province of Teutonia to look at relationships between convents, their libraries, and their personnel as agents of transmitting and circulating knowledge. Using traveling books and traveling women, I examine how Dominican nuns disseminated useful knowledge for and about reform to their peers. Useful knowledge ranged from answers to specific questions about specific issues facing a convent to models of reformed living in the form of histories and exempla. Useful knowledge might also be

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[405] Johannes Kölner de Vanckel, *Summarium textuale et conclusiones super Sexto, Clementinis et summarium et effectus extravagantium Joannis XXII* (Cologne: Johannes Koelhoff, 1488), VI 3.16.1, 127.

[406] Johannes Meyer reported numerous instances of nuns leaving for unreformed convents. Rarely, nuns left the religious life entirely: this drastic step was much less acceptable to ecclesiastical authorities. The option to leave a newly reformed convent represented an acceptable compromise.

[407] See, for example, *BdRP* I-III, II.23, 50; IV-V, V.16, 64.

[408] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "Magdalena Kremerin, Scribe and Painter of the Choir and Chapter Books of the Dominican Convent of St Johannes-Baptista in Kirchheim unter Teck," in *The Medieval Book: Glosses from Friends and Colleagues of Christopher de Hamel,* ed. James H. Marrow, Richard A. Linenthal, and William Noel (Houten: Hes & de Graaf, 2010), 125.

experiential and embodied. Both the women themselves and the books they diligently sent, received, exchanged, and copied were valuable agents of knowledge and expertise, including practical information on keeping the strictures of the reform alive. At times, this advice came from expected places—a fellow prioress, a fresh copy of or commentary on the Augustinian Rule—and at other times from somewhat more unusual sources—a chronicle of a different convent, for example. By considering these interrelated knowledge networks on a province-wide scale, we can understand how Observant nuns viewed their commitment to the reform as an ongoing process requiring careful, constant maintenance. Moreover, it demonstrates how crucial history-writing was for women, thus bringing full circle a theme which appeared in the first chapter of this dissertation.[409]

This chapter examines how knowledge circulated among Dominican nuns and convents in three parts. I begin with an examination of books as property: physical objects that required management and stewardship. This section will include a discussion of books and libraries and how they were understood and used by Observant nuns and reformers. The second section will examine some instances where we can clearly see nuns interacting with books and the ways that these interactions—letters communicating about books and book loans in particular—show both books and nuns as sources of knowledge and advice about questions regarding reform. Finally, human mediators were sometimes the best transmitters of knowledge, even though such modeling of embodied knowledge is the most difficult for historians to access at this long remove. Some expertise simply was not effectively transmitted in writing, and this is why contingents of nuns who were experienced in living the reform traveled to each newly reformed

[409] Chapter One examined Johannes Nider and Johannes Meyer and their visions of reform for women, including Meyer's commitment to history-writing in the service of reform.

convent. The *Kirchheimer Chronik* of Magdalena Kremer, who traveled to reform the Dominican convent in Kirchheim unter Teck in 1478, will serve as the basis of this section, along with a revisitation of Ursula von Stoffeln's prayer book.

Convent Libraries, Librarianship, and Books as Objects and Property

The number of manuscripts copied by and belonging to convents reformed by the Observants exploded during the period of the reform. The introduction of reform necessitated up-to-date liturgical manuscripts and other supplemental texts to aid in the nuns' spiritual edification. The remarkable survival of the library catalogue from the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg, along with about two-thirds of the convent's 600 or so manuscripts, reveals the types of texts that reformed communities counted among their libraries and provides us with crucial insight into late medieval library stewardship.[410] The library of St Katharina was certainly exceptional in its size and scope, but the convent's prominence among reformed communities and participation in the reform of other houses meant that its library management practices may well have been adopted by or similar to those of other convents with smaller book collections. Through examining normative texts on library stewardship that the library of St Katharina owned, we will understand the expected rules of engagement for books. Books are both objects and transmitters of knowledge, and so required careful stewardship in both regards, tasks which fell primarily to the convent librarian.

[410] Willing, *Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina.*

Formalized texts provided models for the responsibilities of a convent library. The thirteenth-century Dominican master general Humbert of Romans (d. 1277) wrote a work, *De officiis ordinis,* dedicated to explaining the duties of each of the different offices within the Dominican community, including the office of librarian.[411] Seeing a need for a German-language text that served a similar purpose but was devoted to the offices and duties of nuns specifically, Johannes Meyer translated and adapted that work into his *Amptbuch,* or *Book of Duties,* in 1454, during his time as confessor at St Michaelsinsel in Bern. Some offices, like that of librarian, entailed similar duties at both men's and women's houses, while Meyer added, deleted, or reframed the descriptions of other offices to make the book's content more directly relevant to nuns.[412]

The convent librarian, according to Meyer, ought to be someone who loved and highly respected books *(einer buch meistrin ampt ist, dz si gutte lieb hab zu bucheren vnd grosse genod).*[413] She was responsible for the physical environment of the library as well as the books it contained: it was just as important for the library room to be secure and protected from the weather and the cupboards or shelves for the books to be properly safeguarded from damp as it was for the library to have its books well organized. The librarian was responsible for creating and maintaining two or three up-to-date copies of a library catalogue: one copy was for the librarian herself, a second for the consultation by the rest of the nuns, and the potential third copy

[411] Humbert of Romans, *Opera de Vita Regulari,* ed. Joachim Joseph Berthier, vol. 2 (Turin: Typis A. Befani, 1888), 179-371. The description of the librarian's duties is at 263-266. See also Brett, *Humbert of Romans,* 134-150.
[412] For a description of this "translating" and adapting effort, see Sarah Glenn DeMaris' introduction to Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 33-37. To give one example, Humbert described positions within the order, like master general or prior provincial, that were not open to women. Meyer obviously omitted these from his text.
[413] Interestingly, Humbert did not have anything to say about the appropriate mindset for a librarian. This was purely Meyer's addition.

for the convent's priests or confessors. The librarian should unlock and lock the library at appropriate times. She should also care for the books. If any needed to be repaired, corrected, or re-bound, or if any were missing a table of contents, she was responsible for those tasks. In addition, she ought to work actively to increase the library's size, using alms if necessary. Should the convent end up with multiple copies of the same text, the librarian might sell the spare copy or copies and use that money to purchase new books; she might also weed the collection of books that were old, worn out, or "in any other way unprofitable" *(die sust nit tröstlichen sint).* With the help of other sisters, the librarians should take all the books from the shelves, check them over for damage, dust them, and compare them against the catalogue to ensure that all books were accounted for. Finally, the librarian needed to ensure that she kept track of books that were loaned out, whether to an individual sister for use in her cell, to another convent, or to another person outside the convent, as well as books that the convent had borrowed from elsewhere.[414] In other words, the librarian's responsibilities fell into two categories. One was dealing with the physical book as an object: if it was falling apart, let loose a cloud of dust anytime anyone opened it, or had been a snack for bookworms, these were problems that needed to be fixed to ensure the longevity of the codex. The second was dealing with books as a source of information or knowledge: if a book lacked a table of contents, could not be found in the library catalogue, or contained outdated information, these problems needed to be dealt with. These two categories are not perfectly distinct—bookworm damage could render a text incomprehensible if it was not caught in time—but still represent a useful division of librarians' duties.

[414] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 302-307.

The *Amptbuch* also specified the ideal organization for the convent library's books and corresponding catalogues.[415] Books in Latin ought to be kept separately from books in German; some convents may elect to keep their Latin books in the priests' house rather than inside the enclosure.[416] Each book should be given a shelfmark and books should be kept properly ordered so that people consulting the catalogue should have no trouble finding the book they were looking for. The cataloguing system that Meyer proposed used a series of letters and numbers. The letters corresponding both to a subject and to the physical cupboard or desk holding books from that subject. The numbers enabled readers to identify the book they wanted by using the catalogue. Meyer specified the subject matter for letters A through E: A was biblical material, B held glosses and commentaries on the Bible, C corresponded to the works of church doctors, D held the Lives of the Fathers and other passions and saints' lives, and E held histories and chronicles. The system of alphanumeric organization corresponding to book cupboards or chests was not unique to Meyer, or indeed even to the Dominicans. It was a common system of book classification dating from the late twelfth or early thirteenth century and at least to some extent reflected a hierarchy of importance for monastic readers.[417] Furthermore, the *Amptbuch* reminded convent librarians to indicate in the book the convent to which the book belonged as well as the person who donated the book to the convent, if that person was sufficiently

[415] The alphanumeric system proposed by Meyer was an addition: Humbert of Romans had not described any specific system for keeping a catalogue, just that one ought to be kept.

[416] The implication here is that fifteenth-century Dominican nuns would have no reason to be literate in Latin—and that is also the implication of Meyer's *Amptbuch* as a whole. But, we should not too hastily assume total Latin illiteracy among fifteenth-century Observant Dominican nuns. See, for example, Johannes Meyer himself in the *BdRP,* where he praised Claranna von Hohenburg for her ability to grapple with complex Latin and translate it into clear German. *BdRP* I-III, III.5, 63.

[417] Richard Gameson, "The Medieval Library (to c. 1450)," in *The Cambridge History of Libraries in Britain and Ireland, Vol. 1 (to 1640),* ed. Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Teresa Webber (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 23, 26-27.

distinguished.[418] As we saw with Ursula von Stoffeln's little prayerbook, such labels were a common, albeit not universal, practice.

The librarians of the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg loosely followed the method that Humbert and Meyer suggested, as we can clearly see from librarian Kunigunde Niklasin's (d. 1457) catalogue, compiled between 1455 and 1457.[419] The library used the same system of letters and numbers to form shelfmarks, though its letters do not perfectly correspond to those that Meyer proposed in 1454. The sisters of St Katharina took initiative to adapt Meyer's proposed system to correspond to some element of how the books were actually used in their convent, as well as the types of books they actually owned. Perhaps they adjusted based on which manuscripts they consulted more frequently or how the manuscripts filed the shelves or cabinets where they were stored. The thematic divisions used at St Katharina were as follows: biblical material (A), works of catechesis (B), psalters (C), lectionaries (D), sermons (E), *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (Rationale of the divine offices) (F), processionals (G), copies of the Rule of St Augustine and the order's Constitutions (H), hagiography (J), secular literature (K), prayerbooks and other books useful for worship (L), and various tractates and treatises (M, N, and O).[420]

Meyer's description of the catalogue and the librarian's duties suggested that the catalogue ought to be kept up to date as books were added to or weeded out of the convent's collection, and additions to and crossings-out from the St Katharina catalogue suggest that

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[418] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 305.
[419] The manuscript survives as Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. VII 79. The catalogue is edited in Willing, *Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina,* as well as an older edition: "Katalog der Klosterbibliothek 1455-1461," ed. Paul Ruf, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz,* vol. 3 (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1932), 596-637.
[420] Willing, *Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina,* xix-xxiii.

Dominican convent librarians in the fifteenth century made some effort to keep up with this task.[421] And in fact, in 1456, the Dominican General Chapter ordered librarians to produce new catalogues to show at their next visitation.[422] But medieval convent book catalogues rarely represented a perfect snapshot of all the books within the monastic enclosure, especially as the catalogue got older and books were created, acquired, lent, lost, or destroyed.[423] Their primary purpose was not to be exhaustive like today's modern library catalogue, but to be tightly focused on enabling sisters to locate relevant texts to read aloud at the table during meals and to check what books the convent owned.[424]

In addition to books owned by the convent and cared for by the convent's librarian, the convent also housed books belonging to individual nuns. Although such books generally fell outside the librarian's purview, catalogue evidence still exists for them. Moreover, even though Observant reformers stressed that nuns ought not to own private property, books fell into a liminal category because of the role that they could play in fostering devotion and inner spiritual life. This gray area had existed since late antiquity, when monastic rules enshrined the importance of private reading for monks and nuns. The Benedictine Rule included periods of time that were set aside for private reading, even if personal book ownership was not necessarily implied (rather, monks could take a book out of the library).[425] Isidore of Seville (d. 636) touted the ability of prayer and reading together as a way to be close to God and for God to speak to the

[421] See the next section of this chapter for more information on the additions and deletions.
[422] "Acta capituli generalis celebrati apud Montempessulanum, 1456," in *Acta Capitulorum Generalium Ordinis Praedicatorum,* vol. 3, ed. Benedict Maria Reichert (Rome: In domo generalitia, 1900), 263.
[423] Gameson, "Medieval Library," 17.
[424] Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* 2.204; K. W. Humphreys, *The Book Provisions of the Mediaeval Friars, 1215-1400* (Amsterdam: Erasmus, 1964), 89.
[425] Benedict of Nursia, *Regula Sancti Benedicti* 48.1, ed. Timothy Fry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), 248.

reader in his *Libri sententiarum* (Books of Sentences).[426] The Augustinian Rule, used by the Dominicans, likewise specified that books could be taken out from the library at a specific hour of the day, and that the brother in charge of the books should provide cheerful service.[427] In the Primitive Constitutions for the nuns of San Sisto, St Dominic specified that the sisters should spend time in reading and studying. They should devote themselves to reading, the Divine Office, and prayer on all feast days; after the evening office of Compline, sisters should have an hour for prayer, contemplation, or devotion.[428]

Even as these same rules decried private property, and the Observant reformers cracked down on private luxuries, privately owned books represented a compromise position: the benefits of personal book ownership, both for an individual nun and then for the community, if she left the book to them as she was supposed to, outweighed the problems.[429] For Dominicans, the more substantial problem than private book ownership was the acquisition and hoarding of more books than one could ever read in one's lifetime.[430] Some nuns brought books with them when they joined the convent; others produced their own once they joined the convent. St Katharina in Nuremberg's subprioress, Anna Purckrafin, owned at least three books that she had brought with her to the convent; the prolific scribe and librarian Kunigund Niklasin copied books for herself as well as for the community.[431] In some cases, we can trace books which originally belonged to an individual nun that, upon her death, became the property of the convent. Such is the case with

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[426] PL 83:679. *Qui vult cum Deo semper esse, frequenter debet orare, frequenter et legere. Nam cum oramus, cum Deo ipsi loquimur; cum vero legimus, Deus nobiscum loquitur.*
[427] *Regula Sancti Augustini* 5.9-10, 1.432-433.
[428] "Primitive Constitutions of the Monastery of San Sisto," 20.
[429] David N. Bell described the situation as a "compromise between a natural, if sinful, desire for private ownership and the specific prohibition of such ownership by all the monastic rules." Bell, *What Nuns Read,* 38-39. See also Hinnebusch, *History of the Dominican Order,* 2.217-218; Humphreys, *Book Provisions,* 20.
[430] Humbert of Romans, *Opera de Vita Regulari,* 1.449-450.
[431] "Verzeichnis der Privatbücher der Schwestern (1451-1457)," *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge,* 579-581.

a miscellany that belonged to Clara Keyperin, a gift from a secular friend, Grog Strumer, and which ultimately entered the convent's library as a gift from Clara and Grog.[432]

Dominican convents' book ownership exploded in the wake of the Observant Reform, a phenomenon which has long been noted by scholars. Library management practices, the position of the librarian, and related convent offices that dealt with books, such as the nun responsible for reading at meals, took on a particular and renewed importance in this context.[433] But prescriptive explanations of how libraries ought to be organized and what the duties of convent librarians were leave open many questions about what nuns did with books. How did they interact with them? How did they talk or write about them?

Exchanging Letters and Books: Knowledge and Its Human and Manuscript Mediators

One of the most visible ways that knowledge about the reform passed from nun to nun, from established convent to newly reformed convent, and from one generation of reform nuns to the next was through books. As a result, as we have seen, convent librarians carefully catalogued, arranged, and tracked books within their convent walls, and reform-minded friars and nuns offered advice on how to do these tasks. But books alone, even well catalogued ones, were not sufficient on their own to transmit knowledge. Books require human beings to interact with them, to transport them from place to place, to pull information from their pages, to make

[432] "Verzeichnis," *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge,* 594; Ehrenschwendtner, "Library," 125.
[433] Table readings are mentioned in *Regula Sancti Augustini* 3.2, 1.421; the office of the reader at table is described in Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 329-331.

sense of the words on the page.[434] As we have seen, Observant reformers valued books, created huge numbers of new books, and even permitted some level of private book ownership despite a simultaneous increase in strictures against the ownership of private property. This section examines how nuns interacted with books and perceived them as sources of information and advice on questions about the reform. It examines letters exchanged between two convent prioresses along with notes in manuscripts about the proper usage of important texts, such as the Augustinian Rule and Johannes Meyer's *Amptbuch.*

The issue of private book ownership was a concern for Angela Varnbühler, the capable prioress of the convent of St Katharina in St Gallen. The convent was reformed during Angela's tenure, in 1482. For advice on this and many other topics, Angela turned to the prioress of the convent of St Katharina in Nuremberg, Kunigund Haller. Kunigund was an ideal source of advice: the Nuremberg St Katharina had been reformed since 1428 and its sisters had gone on to help reform many other convents over the subsequent decades.[435] A series of letters between these two prioresses survives in the *Konventsbuch* (Convent Book) and *Schwesternbuch* (Sisterbook) of the convent of St Katharina in St Gallen, though unfortunately only the letters from Nuremberg to St Gallen were recorded. In and among counsel on all sorts of matters related to the reform—liturgy, the duties of nuns holding various offices, diet, discipline, etc.—are multiple pieces of advice related to what books a convent ought to own as well as guidance on what to do with the books.

[434] Stephen Nichols, "Why Material Philology?" *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 116, no. 13 (1997): 10-30, esp. 11-13.
[435] For more on the Nuremberg St Katharina and its process of reform, see Chapter Three.

Kunigund explicitly treated books as both communal and private property, discussing them as belonging to nuns who were sent out as part of reform parties. In the case of a book given to a nun by her relatives, Kunigund advised that these books should become the property of her final convent after her death. But if a sister took a book with her from her original convent when she was sent out to participate in reforming another convent, that book ought to be sent back to her original convent after her death.[436] While we cannot know the exact nature of Angela's original inquiry, Kunigund's response enables us to speculate that Angela was concerned with keeping track of books. Where had they come from? In the event that the book left its original home convent, to whom did it belong? What books counted as private property, and which as communal property?

For several reasons, Kunigund was an ideal adviser when addressing these questions. She certainly had access to a copy of Meyer's *Amptbuch,* the source of some but not all of her advice related to books, within her convent's well stocked library.[437] None of the surviving manuscripts of the *Amptbuch* have any connection to the St Gallen convent, so it is possible that the nuns there only had access to its information through indirect forms such as Kunigund's letters. In the absence of a surviving library catalogue, we cannot know what books the St Gall convent owned in the 1480s, though an inventory provides a summary: the convent owned 151 books, "namely books for the Mass, hymnals, and prayerbooks large and small, of which some are printed and

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[436] *Das 'Konventsbuch' und das 'Schwesternbuch' aus St Katharina in St Gallen: Kritische Edition und Kommentar,* ed. Antje Willing (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2016), 488-489.

[437] The manuscript is now Lilly Library, ms. Ricketts 198. See also Helga Butzer Felleisen, *"Instructiones de Officiis Ordinis, Constitutiones,* Papal Bull, and *Buch der Ersetzung:* Rules and Regulations for the Dominican Nuns and Supplement with History of the Order," *Indiana University Bookman* no. 17 (1988), 71.

some written on parchment or paper."[438] Moreover, the specific situation that Kunigund describes, of nuns taking their personal books with them as they traveled in the service of reform, reflects not only the probable traveling of Ursula von Stoffeln's little prayerbook with which I began this chapter, but also the experience of several nuns and books from St Katharina in Nuremberg. In 1465, nuns from St Katharina traveled to the convent of Altenhohenau, located roughly 200km southeast of Nuremberg. Along with them, they carried a number of books for copying at Altenhohenau before the original manuscripts were returned to St Katharina. But a number of nuns also transported specific books, often identified as belonging to them. Elisabeth Heinlin took a little book about confession in a book-box; its entry in St Katharina's library catalogue was crossed out by the convent librarian, suggesting that the book either was not returned or was not expected to be returned. And Apollonia Imhoff took two books with her: a *Life* of St Bridget of Sweden and a miscellany.[439] Meyer's *Amptbuch* stressed that good, appropriate reading material was, along with preaching and the sacrament, the best comfort to sisters.[440] In such an uncertain context as traveling to introduce the Observant Reform, unsure of what kind of welcome the reform party would face, a little comfort in the form of a book would have been welcome.

But sometimes, it was not enough to send advice excerpted from a text and based in practical experience: sometimes, it was necessary to send a full text. In 1485, Kunigund sent Angela and the sisters in St Gallen a copy of a German translation of Humbert of Romans'

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[438] Stadtarchiv St Gallen, Tr. XVIII, Nr. 53. Cited in Sr. M. Thoma Katharina Vogler, "Das Dominikanerinnen-Kloster St Katharina in St Gallen zur Zeit der Reformation," (PhD diss., Universität Freiburg i. d. Schweiz, 1934), 30. *…namlich meßbücher, gsang und bettbücher klin und groß, deren ettlich getruckht, ettlich in perment und papir geschryben.*

[439] Willing, *Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina,* 1.596, 603.

[440] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 302-307.

Expositio regulae Beati Augustini, a lengthy commentary on the Augustinian Rule.[441] He directed the text at both new postulants to the order and a subset of friars who felt that the Augustinian Rule was too vague and thus did not merit their attention. Humbert endeavored to demonstrate to his audience that the Augustinian Rule was, in fact, the ideal rule for the order, which was still relatively young at the time he was writing. It is not difficult to see what it was about Humbert's purpose that appealed to Observant audiences of the fifteenth century: the text offered a thorough reminder of the utility of the order's foundational documents. In fact, along with other commentaries on the Augustinian Rule, Humbert's commentary was widely translated and circulated in the fifteenth century.[442] In this instance, the creation of a custom translation and adaptation reflected the translators' recognition that Humbert's original text could be deployed for a variety of purposes by a variety of audiences, and that those audiences had specific needs that were not necessarily met through the original text.[443]

Simone Mengis has identified the copy of Humbert's text loaned by the Nuremberg sisters with a surviving manuscript, which the St Gall sisters quickly copied before returning.[444] In her letter accompanying the book, Kunigund praised the value of the text for Observant sisters. She explained that it had previously been used as a table reading, but even after it had not

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[441] Brett, *Humbert of Romans,* 117ff.

[442] Igna Marion Kramp, *Renovamini spiritu / Ernüwent den geist üwers gemütes: Deutsche Übersetzungen als Modernisierung im späten Mittelalter* (Münster: Aschendorff Verlag, 2009), esp. 9-13, 79-80, 110.

[443] Some of these updates were as simple as changing *praepositus* to *priorin,* but the switch from masculine terms to feminine ones is more thoroughgoing in the translation for the Nuremberg *Katharinenkloster* than in other cases—even to the point of replacing gender-neutral formulations with female terms. Kramp posits the translations as a "modernizing" effort, but in this instance they are also a strictly limiting one, in keeping with the Observant Reform's emphasis on strict gender roles and constraining female piety. Kramp, *Renovamini spiritu,* 207-208, 211-213.

[444] Simone Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen um 1500: Scriptorium und Bibliothek des Dominikanerinnenklosters St Katharina in St Gallen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013), 58 n. 60. The sisters in Nuremberg loaned the book for a period of two years, but it seems that the St Gall sisters copied the manuscript within the year. The relevant manuscript survives as Nuremberg, Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent VI, 46e.

been used in this context for several years, sisters continued to love the book and read it often. For this reason, Kunigund deemed it insufficient to send just excerpts of the manuscript.[445] Spreading the translation of this text, which was created for the sisters in Nuremberg, was a way not only of sharing knowledge about the proper way to live in an Observant convent, but also created an additional link between the two convents across distance and the bounds of enclosure. Any sister who read the St Gallen *Konventsbuch* or *Schwesternbuch* could be reminded of the source of the manuscript now in their library, copied by their own capable scribes. Kunigund's emphasis on the value of this text may also have influenced how the newly produced copy was used by the sisters of St Gall. Humbert himself placed an emphasis on the value of table readings, as did the translator of the text. Although no table reading catalogue exists from the convent, the entry in the *Konventsbuch* from 1507 noted that the sisters had 76 German books that they used as table readings *(Item túsche bucher, die man ze tisch an liset, geschriben vnd truckt, vnd sind klain vnd grosz, der sind 76).*[446] Whether or not the sisters at the convent in St Gall used this new manuscript as a table reading, the combination of manuscript and letters reveals how Observant convents structured and guided knowledge.

Additionally, letters about books served to mediate the history of the Observant Reform. Both male and female reformers wrote works of history; earlier historical works, such as the Sisterbooks, remained important reference points that reformers read and adapted or redacted.[447] The touchstone work of history was Johannes Meyer's *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.*[448] In 1489, Kunigund wrote a letter to Angela about Sister Margaret Karthauser, a nun at St

[445] *Konventsbuch,* 197-198, 503.
[446] Ibid., 329. Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen,* 182ff.
[447] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 1-17.
[448] See Chapter One for an introduction to Johannes Meyer and his *BdRP.*

Katharina in Nuremberg. Margaret's exceptional life served as a way into the text of the *Buch der Reformacio* for the letter's recipients. Margaret, who was from a Nuremberg merchant family, served the Observance for decades. She entered the convent of Schönensteinbach, far from home, at the age of fourteen because it was the only Observant Dominican convent in Germany at the time. She was then chosen to be part of the group of nuns from Schönensteinbach who reformed St Katharina in Nuremberg in 1428. Angela gave a full accounting of Margaret's noteworthy piety, including her devotion to prayer. Margaret was the convent's first chantress after the reform, and also was a noteworthy scribe, both positions that dealt extensively with books.[449] Moreover, Margaret became the prioress of St Katharina and remained in that position for 40 years, until her death, which represented an exceptionally long tenure. According to Kunigund's account, for the 21 years since Margaret's death, she had been celebrated with an annual mass—essentially, up to the date of the letter. Kunigund concluded her discussion of this particularly remarkable reform figure by urging Angela to read all about Margaret Karthauser and all the other reform sisters in the *Buch der Reformacio.*[450] Sure enough, Margaret Karthauser and the other nine sisters who reformed St Katharina in Nuremberg are named in Book V, Chapter 17 of the *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens.*[451] Kunigund referred to the book only by this title and did not name its author, knowing that this text was an important enough touchstone that it would be familiar to her fellow prioress. Indeed, the sisters of the convent in St Gall owned a copy of the *Buch der Reformacio* and could have consulted it. Their

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[449] Anne Winston-Allen, "'Es [ist] nit wol zu gelobind, daz ain frowen bild so wol kan arbaiten': Artistic Production and Exchange in Women's Convents of the Observant Reform," in *Frauen—Kloster—Kunst: Neue Forschungen zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters,* ed. Carola Jäggi, Hedwig Roeckelein, Jeffrey F. Hamburger, and Susan Marti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 193-194.
[450] *Konventsbuch,* 492-493.
[451] *BdRP* IV-V, V.17, 66.

copy is dated 1483, within the year after their reform; they copied it from a manuscript that the sisters of the Nuremberg convent loaned them.[452] Kunigund's reference to this text, with its genealogical connection to her convent, demonstrates how carefully convents maintained knowledge of their book loans and connections with convents over time. Moreover, her focus on the exemplary life of Margaret Karthauser emphasizes sacrifices made in the service of reform, longevity of devotion and service to the Observance, and the need to maintain the memory of earlier Observant generations.

In fact, Meyer had urged his readers to disseminate his texts, including the *Buch der Reformacio,* farther afield. In his *Epistel Brieffe,* or "open letter" to Dominican sisters, Meyer provided an account of how he produced his histories before giving a list of his most important and useful books so that convents could obtain and use them for themselves.[453] He also urged the sisters at the convent of St Nikolaus *in undis* in Strasbourg to copy and disseminate the *Buch der Reformacio* to all convents that they knew of where German was understood and where the book might be "praiseworthy to God, useful to the convent's inhabitants, and promote salvation."[454] Kunigund's reference to the utility of the text in her letter to Angela demonstrates that Meyer's text continued to serve this purpose. Like Meyer, Kunigund saw the value of connection between strictly enclosed, reformed convents through a history that expanded the reformed community beyond the walls of any individual convent. Learning about the lives of noteworthy Observant nuns and understanding how convents were connected to one another through the travels of

[452] The St Gall convent's copy of the *BdRP* survives as St Gallen Stiftsbibliothek Cod. Sang. 1916. Its date and origin are mentioned in the *Konventsbuch,* 169. The manuscript was copied by Sister Cordula von Schönau. Mengis, *Schreibende Frauen,* 359-362.
[453] Berlin StaaB Ms. germ. quart. 195, fol. 254v. For more on Meyer's *Epistel Brieffe,* see Chapter One.
[454] Berlin StaaB Ms. germ. quart. 195, fol. 13v.

reform parties or the copying and exchange of manuscripts was a net benefit, particularly in the initial adjustment period of reform but also for the ongoing maintenance of the Observance. The correspondence sent between the prioresses at convents in Nuremberg and St Gallen demonstrates that Meyer's intended dissemination of texts continued unabated more than two decades after he first wrote the *Buch der Reformacio,* and the book remained a reference point for prioresses deeply concerned with the success of the reform.

We can also see how nuns copied, supplemented, and generally interacted with standard texts to address their own specific needs. For example, a copy of the Augustinian Rule that was produced by the sisters of Adelhausen in Freiburg, reformed in 1465, whose fragile spine and dirty and worn edges testify to its regular usage, includes a few tantalizing hints about how this particular manuscript was deployed by the sisters.[455] The small manuscript, copied by the sisters for their own use *(den closter frawen hat geschriben),* contains the German text of the Augustinian Rule and the Dominican Constitutions, as well as two lists of points, one describing how to act when people are admitted to the convent in twelve items and one enumerating the twenty-one days on which one may take communion.[456] The existence of the Rule and Constitutions in one manuscript is not surprising; they are two documents which belong together and which would have been read regularly at the table.[457] But the repeated references to the text being copied by the sisters themselves, as well as the inclusion of the two additional lists, suggest that this book met a specific need in the context of maintaining the reform several decades after

[455] UBFr Hs. 478.
[456] Ibid. The Augustinian Rule is on fols. 2r-37r, the Constitutions on fols. 38r-136v, the description of how to behave when outside individuals are in the convent on fols. 137r-141v, and the communion days on fols. 142rv.
[457] Tobias Tanneberger, *"…usz latin in tutsch gebracht…": Normative Basistexte religiöser Gemeinschaften in volkssprachlichen Übertragungen. Katalog—Untersuchung—Fallstudie.* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 183-187.

its introduction at Adelhausen.[458] The list of behaviors to adopt when someone enters the convent includes reminders such as that a new novice cannot pay for her spot in the convent, because that is simony, and that only worthy persons should be admitted.[459] Both the Rule and Constitutions are somewhat vague on the process of admitting novices, and this short precis filled in some gaps. It is not clear where this text originated, though it may have been produced by the nuns of Adelhausen themselves. Moreover, as we will see in the next section, the process of admitting and training novices was a crucial one for sustaining the longevity of the reform. The task of ensuring that the sisters had access to useable copies of key texts, along with any necessary explanation of potentially confusing or problematic points from the perspective of the reform, was vital.

The sisters of St Agnes in Freiburg, which was also reformed in 1465 in the third generation of the reform, owned a copy of Meyer's *Amptbuch,* which was copied in 1481.[460] In other words, the book was made about a generation after the arrival of the original reformers, a point in time when a renewal of reform initiative might have been necessary for its continued maintenance. Before the text of the *Amptbuch* begins, a sister wrote a helpful description of the text. The *Amptbuch,* she informed potential users, was useful for teaching and demonstrating *([D]is buch der Empter ist nutz gut lerlich vnd vnderwislich),* but it was neither necessary nor typical to designate it as a table reading. Instead, it provided instructive advice for officeholders that they may consult as needed.[461] The explanatory note about the text's purpose and usage was not part of the traditional text of the *Amptbuch.* Meyer's original intent for the text's readership

[458] UBFr Hs. 478, fols. 2r and 37r.
[459] Ibid., fols. 137r, 139v.
[460] StAF B 1 Nr. 147.
[461] StAF B 1 Nr. 147, fol. 1v.

is not made clear in the introduction: no suggestion is made about a limited audience. In fact, in its opening line, Meyer addressed the work "to all my dearest sisters…in the care of the Order of Preachers" *(meinen aller liebsten geswistrigeten…vnter der phlicht prediger ordens).*[462] The prologue went on to provide information on the text's history and Meyer's decision to undertake producing a translation of Humbert of Romans' original text for nuns.[463] Only in the penultimate chapter on the book's title did Meyer suggest that the text's audience might be limited to sisters who were appointed to offices for which they felt unprepared might have a ready source of advice.[464] The sister who wrote the preface to St Agnes' copy of the manuscript therefore limited the text's audience by focusing it much more clearly from the beginning than Meyer had. A sister selecting the book off the shelf would understand, immediately upon opening the cover, that the book was designed for sisters who held positions within the convent. If she did not, she might not read on, whereas Meyer's inviting address to "all" Dominican sisters might have prompted engagement with the text even from nuns who did not currently have a practical need for its advice. Perhaps unwittingly, this anonymous nun created a hierarchy of knowledge that Meyer had not intended. The sisters of St Katharina in Nuremberg, at the vanguard of the second generation of reform, did not use their copy of the *Amptbuch* for table reading either, but their copy of the manuscript did not provide any details about its use.[465] Being at the forefront of reform, it is unlikely that St Katharina's nuns needed such instructions. In yet another copy of the

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[462] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 153.
[463] Ibid.*,* 153-157.
[464] Ibid.*,* 349. In humble fashion, Meyer then told these sisters that they could feel free to ignore this advice—it was not an obligation that they follow it. But it was drawn from only the best sources, the implication being that they would ignore it at their peril.
[465] Willing, *Bibliothek des Klosters St Katharina,* 1:502 has the library catalogue description of the manuscript: *Item ein news puch; daran stet die amptswester, was yder zugehor und etlich epistle und etlich gut matery auß der constitucion und der conversen swester und pruder regel und von sant Dominicus rew, eins geistlichen lebens form.* The convnet's table reading list, ibid., 2.845ff, does not include this manuscript.

Amptbuch in Freiburg, this one belonging to the nuns of St Mary Magdalene, the third of Freiburg's convents reformed in 1465, there are again no instructions for usage.[466] Therefore, the self-conscious note to the nuns of St Agnes, presumably by one of their own sisters, about how to use the *Amptbuch* provides unique insight into how the book was both used and not used. Advice such as this might become increasingly important as the original generation of reformers passed away.

In other words, the book-related needs of newly reformed convents and those that had been reformed for several decades were different. Convents that adopted the Observant Reform in its second or third generation needed to be introduced to the myriad specialty texts that existed for Dominican nuns, as well as provided with directions on how they should be used. In the next section, we will examine texts that required human mediation to explain their nuances: simply reading the text was not as effective as seeing its precepts modeled. These texts dealt with knowledge that lived in the body as well as that which was readily apparent on the page.

Traveling Women, Traveling Books: Modeling Knowledge

At times, a letter or even the loan of a full manuscript was insufficient. The constellations of people and their activities that made up the Observance could not be reduced to the written word, even as some of the types of knowledge they sought to convey were best communicated by individual nuns themselves. The hints that we can obtain from traveling texts, such as Ursula von Stoffeln's little prayerbook with which I began this chapter, as well as records of traveling

[466] StAF B 1 Nr. 108. The *Amptbuch* is on fols. 21-145. By the seventeenth century, this manuscript belonged to Adelhausen; both St Mary Magdalene and St Agnes were destroyed in a fire in 1644.

nuns, like Ursula and others, provide a window just wide enough for a glimpse of how this embodied knowledge might have functioned during the Observant Reform in Germany. The human presence of experienced nuns could model behavior in a way that a book never could. This section will trace some of the ways that we can see such modeling before considering its connection with embodied spirituality.

In order to get the rituals of standing, kneeling, praying, singing, and gesturing that the liturgy and daily convent life required into one's body, modeling was particularly beneficial given the reformers' emphasis on the value and necessity of silence in the convent setting. The Augustinian Rule had little to say about silence, but the Dominican sisters' Constitutions specified the importance of maintaining silence in order to allow more time to focus on prayer and thus on God.[467] Instead of ordinary conversational speech, liturgical singing, prayer, and readings at table served as the main avenues for human voices; enclosure limited the other sounds that reached nuns' ears to bells and perhaps disembodied, muffled voices from outside the walls.[468] The Observant reformers sought to eliminate secular guests, who could fill convents with gossip, raucous laughter, and other inappropriate noises.[469] Magdalena Kremer, in her chronicle of reform at the convent of Kirchheim unter Teck, reminded her reader that the scriptures did not praise verbose individuals, but rather those who could hold their tongues, quoting Psalm 139:11: *Vir linguosus non dirigetur in terra.*[470] Silence, or near-silence broken

[467] "Liber constitutionum sororum," 44-45.
[468] Although addressing a different time period (early modern), different country (English nuns in exile in the Netherlands), and a different monastic order (Carmelites), I found the following helpful in thinking about sound in convents. Nicky Hallett, *The Senses in Religious Communities, 1600-1800: Early Modern 'Convents of Pleasure'* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 147-159.
[469] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 217.
[470] Magdalena Kremer, *Kirchheimer Chronik,* in *Geschichte des Herzogthums Würtemberg unter der Regierung der Graven,* vol. 4, ed. Christian Friderich Sattler (Tübingen: Georg Heinrich Reiß, 1777), 174-175. Psalm 139:11 in the Vulgate corresponds with Psalm 140:12 in most modern translations. The Douay-Rheims translation is "A man full

only by slight murmurs of prayer or reading, was ideal for inducing contemplation, according to late-antique authorities like Augustine, Ambrose, and Isidore of Seville, as well as later medieval authorities.[471] In this atmosphere that was, ideally at least, one of contemplative white noise broken only purposefully, novice mistresses too had to be thinking about speech and silence. Meyer's description of the novitiate school, where novices were instructed, urged that the school be located in a place that was away from the regular comings and goings of the sisters so that when the novice mistress needed to speak to one or more of the novices, she could take them to this school. There, they could speak without disturbing others and the novice mistress could teach the novices the proper behavior for the moment.[472] For the Cluniacs, who had an unusually strict approach to silence, Scott Bruce has argued that the teaching of Cluny's unique sign language to novices was accomplished by a mix of written and oral methods alongside observation and imitation.[473] Although Dominican nuns had no sign language as extensive as Cluny's, the same mixture of methods for instructing novices on speech and silence in the convent setting would have applied. Novice mistresses taught their novices a sign to use in order to request permission to speak in places or times when silence usually applied.[474] In this atmosphere of contemplative quiet, the ways that the body knew to comport itself, move, and behave were an important point of knowledge that nuns brought with them and that were best taught by modeling.

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of tongue shall not be established in the earth"; the NRSV translates *linguosus* as "slanderer." Magdalena clearly understood it to mean "talkative."

[471] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture,* 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 214-215, 282, 429 n. 68.

[472] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 257.

[473] Scott G. Bruce, *Silence and Sign Language in Medieval Monasticism: The Cluniac Tradition c. 900-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 69-73.

[474] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 259.

It may seem odd to return to Ursula von Stoffeln's little prayerbook at this point: a book in and of itself cannot reveal embodied knowledge or its demonstration to others. But Ursula, traveling in 1505 to become the new prioress of a convent that had been reformed for four decades, carrying her little book, opens a window for us. Ursula's role as the new prioress of St Agnes in Freiburg was to uphold the Observance there. The convent had experienced a fire, which provided the impetus for Ursula to become the new prioress.[475] It seems that some restoration of order provided by a steady guiding hand was necessary for the convent's recovery. Ursula's devotion to the Observance and watchful eye could prevent the trauma left behind by the fire from causing devotional chaos. Through her very presence and influence, she would steer the convent through troubled times.[476]

The book itself, smaller than Ursula's hands that held it and easily tucked within her habit, is structured roughly in two halves. The first, as suggested by the opening carpet page, revolves around prayers to Jesus—prayers and meditations on his suffering, reflections on each part of his body, and other prayers. The second, indicated by the closing carpet page, revolves around prayers to Mary—the *Ave Maria* and others, including a homily comparing Mary's virtues to flowers attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux. In each half, some texts are in Latin and others in German; some are identified by their source and others are not.[477] Ursula may have written the manuscript herself, as the hand in the colophon identifying her as the book's owner is the same as the hand throughout the manuscript. Even if she did not write it herself, she likely chose the prayers contained within, or at minimum the two-part focus and structure. In an era

[475] StAF A 1 SVI Aa 1505-02-06.
[476] Ibid. *…sy, durch sich selbs und ir krafft…*
[477] StAF B 1 Nr. 126.

when nuns' Latin literacy is much debated, Ursula potentially had enough Latin to make sense of prayers that were at times heavily abbreviated with ligatures. Though there are no marginal notations beyond a few corrections or addenda to the text of the prayers, Ursula's regular use of the book is apparent in the miniature depicting the worn face of Jesus on Veronica's veil.

Jeffrey Hamburger has extensively studied small devotional images similar to the one in Ursula's book. Johannes Meyer was at best indifferent and at worst hostile to images because of their suggestive power.[478] But nuns opposed attempts to curtail the presence of images in their convents, ironically producing more images of a variety of types—illustrated choir books, small *Nonnenarbeiten* that could be exchanged or sent as gifts, tapestries, and others—rather than fewer.[479] A manuscript containing rites for the sick and the dead as well as for burial, possibly belonging to Adelhausen or another nearby Dominican convent, contains a number of small images depicting Christ's passion pasted into the manuscript.[480] Unlike enormous liturgical manuscripts designed for communal use, or tapestries or wall paintings that were on view at all times, these smaller images guided personal devotion.[481] Images therefore act as another layer in the process of conveying Observant spirituality, and perhaps one that, as Hamburger has

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[478] Thomas Lentes, "Bild, Reform, und *Cura Monialium:* Bildverständnis und Bildgebrauch im *Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens* des Johannes Meyer," in *Dominicains et dominicaines en Alsace, XIIIe-XXe siècle: Actes du colloque de Guebwiller, 8-9 avril 1994,* ed. Jean-Luc Eichenlaub (Colmar: Conseil général du Haut-Rhin, 1996), 177-195. Notably, however, a miracle associated with a series of images—each nun was given a different image of the Passion, and all the images were miraculously transformed into the same image of Christ on the cross—marked the occasion of the introduction of reform to Schönensteinbach. *BdRP* I-III, II.9, 35. Just as the images changed, so too did the nuns. Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary,* 428.

[479] Hamburger, *Visual and the Visionary,* 458-459; Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists.*

[480] Badische Landesbibliothek Karlsruhe, Ms. Donaueschingen 424, fols. 194rv, 197rv, 208rv, 211rv, 220rv, 222rv, 229rv, 231rv.

[481] On such enormous liturgical manuscripts, see Jeffrey F. Hamburger, ed., *Leaves from Paradise: The Cult of John the Evangelist at the Dominican Convent of Paradies bei Soest* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Library of the Harvard College Library, 2008).

suggested and as Ursula's prayerbook also indicates, can approach more closely to nuns' devotional concerns.

Manuscripts such as Ursula's book illustrate how use of these codices, as well as other types of sources such as liturgical manuscripts, was not necessarily apparent and could, in the case of individually owned books, be highly idiosyncratic. Prayer focused on the sufferings of Christ and Mary and designed to produce an emotional response was a common feature of later medieval prayer practices, a milieu to which Ursula's book clearly belonged.[482] Nuns built up prayer practices through ongoing, purposeful repetition, but prayer books were not users' manuals. Dominican mystics like Heinrich Suso and the women whose lives were represented in the Sisterbooks, along with reformers like Nider and Meyer, offered some advice on private prayer, but other elements of private prayer, as with the liturgy were not best taught by reading but by demonstrating and following.[483] In his treatise, *Die vierundzwanzig goldenen Harfen* (The Twenty-Four Golden Harps), directed primarily at a lay audience, Nider advised readers not to begin prayer by speaking *(mit dem munde),* but rather to turn their heart towards God and imagine standing before Christ or Mary.[484] Only then should they begin praying verbally. The image of the veil of Veronica and the pages with Jesus' and Mary's names may potentially have acted as a reminder to Ursula to bring herself into the proper mindset prior to reading the prayers in her book.

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[482] Fleck, *"Vergine Madre Pia,"* 5.

[483] For instance, several Sisterbooks implicitly warned their readers about the need to walk a fine line between the spiritual value of repeated prayer (such as saying hundreds of *Pater nosters)* versus extended contemplation in the course of saying a single prayer. See Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women,* 144-150, at 148.

[484] Johannes Nider, *Die vierundzwanzig goldenen Harfen: Edition und Kommentar,* ed. Stefan Abel (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 185. This comports with Augustine's precept in his rule: *Psalmis et hymnis cum orates deum, hoc versetur in corde quod profertur in ore. Regula Sancti Augustini* 2.3, 421.

Meyer offered somewhat more proscriptive advice for the novice mistress, who was responsible for teaching her charges the proper way to pray outside of the context of the Divine Office. Among her other tasks, Meyer described the novice mistress's duties as including teaching novices to pray at any spare moment they had.[485] They were also responsible for teaching the novices how to pray, since at times there was great variation among paraliturgical prayers from convent to convent; the prioress was responsible for setting the prayers said by novices.[486] Finally, novice mistresses needed to teach their chargers how to conduct themselves when they prayed. In agreement with Nider's emphasis on one's spiritual alignment, Meyer urged novice mistresses to teach their charges that one's inward devotion was more important than simply saying a lot of prayers out loud. The proper bodily position for prayer, according to Meyer, was not prostrate on the stomach or with the head too deeply bowed, but kneeling upright with the head slightly bowed.[487] And importantly, a nun should not abandon the novice mistress's teachings on prayer once she took her final vows, but should carry these teachings forward throughout her life.[488]

Meyer's advice moved beyond prayer to address each of the senses in a section of his description of the office of novice mistress entitled "how she should teach the novices about how they should outwardly comport themselves."[489] On this subject, Meyer begins with the body as a whole. Novices should keep control of their hands and feet: feet should not wander uselessly; hands must not be raised in anger. They should walk in a dignified and purposeful manner and,

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[485] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 269-270.
[486] Ibid.*,* 281-282.
[487] Ibid.*,* 285-287.
[488] Ibid.*,* 290.
[489] Ibid.*,* 259. *Wie man die nouitzen leren sol, wie si sich halten sond noch den sitten des vsseren menschen.*

when standing, they should stand still, not like a swaying reed *(bewegliches ror)* but like a person who stands their ground *(…als die festen vnd stetten vff irem grad).*[490] Meyer then proceeded to discuss how a novice should control her eyes to avoid seeing anything improper, keep their tongues under control *(in meisterschafft),* and speak respectfully at the times they must speak. They should control their facial expressions, casting their gaze slightly downward, and be sure not to listen to anything that is useless, idle, worldly talk *(vnnützer, müssiger vnd weltlicher red).*[491] Finally, if they smell something unpleasant, they should not pinch their noses but instead endure the malodor gratefully as though it was penance for a sin they had committed.[492] In other words, novice mistresses had the task of introducing their charges to the bodily ways of being in an Observant convent, ranging from full-body movement to each individual sense. It was for this reason that nuns who traveled to reform convents often had experience in the office of novice mistress and then took on that job at their newly reformed house. Meyer made clear how important proper control of the body was in a reform convent.

These contemporary Observant sources of advice on prayer demonstrate why Ursula's prayerbook reveals so much about the expertise she brought to a fire-ravaged convent. We know very little about the state of St Agnes' library prior to the fire, and manuscripts were, of course, especially vulnerable.[493] The disruption in the wake of the fire would require a purposeful restoration of order, schedule, and the proper way of life. Ursula's little prayerbook, with its visual reminders to focus one's mind before beginning verbal prayer and its tiny size that

[490] Ibid., 260.
[491] Ibid., 260.
[492] Ibid., 260.
[493] On fire damage and medieval manuscripts, see Raymond Clemens and Timothy Graham, *Introduction to Manuscript Studies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 99-100.

enabled her to keep it close at hand for praying during any quiet moment, is a palpable reminder that the Observance required continual maintenance and upkeep. Ursula was ideally suited to serve as a source of guidance who could observe problems from the outside and correct them in the moment. The tiny manuscript represents her embodied, detailed knowledge of prayer and the Observant reform.[494]

Chronicles can also provide useful evidence for understanding the importance of modeling behavior. The Dominican nun Magdalena Kremer wrote the *Kirchheimer Chronik,* an account of the reform of the convent of Kirchheim unter Teck by a group of sisters from Silo in Schlettstat (today Sélestat) in 1478. The process of reform at Kirchheim was contested. Count Eberhard V of Württemberg initiated the reform, but the convent became caught up in a conflict between him and his cousin and successor, Eberhard VI.[495] There was also a group of nuns opposed to the reform in the convent itself, led by Anna Dürrin.[496] In addition to writing the convent's chronicle around 1489-1490, Magdalena Kremer was novice mistress, sacristan, choir mistress, a talented scribe and artist, and eventually the convent's prioress from 1495 until 1501 or 1502.[497] This text has been approached from a wide variety of disciplinary angles, but Magdalena and her fellow reform sisters' contributions as transmitters and modelers of knowledge has not been explored. Along with five other choir sisters and one laysister,

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[494] Although he was making a somewhat different point, I was thinking about Stephen Nichols' observation that we ought to "constru[e] the manuscript critically as a crossroads for a variety of social and professional expertise." Nichols, "Why Material Philology?" 14.

[495] Kremer, *Kirchheimer Chronik,* 178. See also Gisela Muschiol, "Kloster Kirchheim im Reformnetzwerk der Dominikanerinnen," in *Die Chronik der Magdalena Kremerin im interdisziplinären Dialog,* ed. Sigrid Hirbodian and Petra Kurz (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2016), 80; Stefanie Neidhard, "Die Kirchheimer Chronik—Ein Werk für die Observanz," in ibid., 86ff.

[496] For example, Kremer, *Kirchheimer Chronik,* 160.

[497] Ibid.*,* 157. Hamburger, "Magdalena Kremerin," 125-126.

Magdalena traveled from Silo to Kirchheim.[498] Magdalena's chronicle described the sisters who reformed Kirchheim along with which convent office they initially held. Barbara Bernheim, Kirchheim's first reform prioress and the daughter of a burgher family in Kirchheim, had joined the Dominican Order as a nun at Kirchheim as a child. Upon learning about the Observant Reform, she moved to Silo to live a stricter life. Likewise, Elizabeth Herwert, the first subprioress, had left the convent of St Katharina in Augsburg, where she took her vows, to go to Schönensteinbach, the original German Observant convent, after "God pricked her conscience" and led her to a stricter way of life. The process of electing nuns to these positions would have followed a well-known procedure that Magdalena Kremer did not find it necessary to describe, mentioning only that prayers accompanied the choice.[499] In 1478, Barbara Bernheim was older than 50, and Elizabeth Herwert was 67: both women had years of experience living in Observant convents to bring to bear at Kirchheim.[500]

The nature of Observant chronicles does not make them obvious sources of information about the process of learning and teaching how to live in a newly reformed convent. The aim of these texts is to report the story of the corporate community, not the individual recording the text. Magdalena Kremer is not front and center in her own work, and in fact the argument has been made that she did not write the chronicle at all.[501] But, as with Ursula von Stoffeln's little prayerbook, the chronicle enables us to glimpse several ways that the experienced reformers

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[498] Kremer, *Kirchheimer Chronik,* 154.
[499] Ibid.*,* 157. See also Stefanie Neidhart, "Die Reise der Dominikanerinnen von Silo nach Kirchheim unter Teck 1478 im Kontext der spätmittelalterlichen Klosterreform," *Zeitschrift für Württemburgische Landesgeschichte* 72 (2013), 111.
[500] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 107.
[501] Nigel F. Palmer has argued that the chronicle was instead the work of the convent's *Schaffnerin* and various other authors in the convent, rather than the work of a single individual, namely Magdalena Kremer. I have chosen to retain the traditional authorial designation. Nigel F. Palmer, "Die Chronik der Nonne von Kirchheim: Autorschaft und Überlieferung," in *Die Chronik der Magdalena Kremerin,* 119.

could model the rituals associated with the Observance. These instances were vital to the success of the contested, hard-fought reform at Kirchheim. In a section on prayer and the Mass, Magdalena Kremer describes how singing Mass and reading scripture provided real comfort to the sisters in a truly dire situation, where the sisters were suffering hunger during the zenith of the conflict between the count and his successor.[502] Treated skeptically, we might read these words as a formulaic statement of what Magdalena Kremer felt she was expected to say: that the reform brought spiritual comfort even in the face of difficulties created by the circumstances of that very same reform. But the ritual nature of Mass with its physical movements and bodily component offers another possibility for understanding the comfort it provided. In her seminal work, *The Body in Pain,* Elaine Scarry discussed how the perception of a bodily state like hunger could approach pain when left unsatisfied. The imagination offers one path to distract from ongoing bodily discomfort.[503] In the case of the *Kirchheimer Chronik,* the familiar bodily rituals of the mass, the process of singing and worshipping together, provided this space of mental safety and comfort. The liturgy appeared in the chronicle at a moment of ongoing conflict to remind readers of the particular power that the liturgy had for nuns in moments of hardship, by providing them with a different set of bodily sensations, motions, and actions to reorient themselves away from the difficult sensations of hunger or fear.

Looking at a different chronicle of the reform allows us to see how the convent offices were divided up among reformers in a way that emphasized the role the reform nuns played in modeling knowledge that was best conveyed through physical presence rather than the written

[502] Kremer, *Kirchheimer Chronik,* 180-181.
[503] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 166ff.

word. At St Katharina in Nuremberg, one reform sister, Katharina von Mühlheim, whose "letter home" was introduced in Chapter Three, held a number of positions. She was appointed novice mistress, sacristan, councilor *(rotschwester),* and one of the listeners at the speaking grille *(vberhorerin am redvenster).*[504] Most of these positions had to do with modeling embodied knowledge or, in the case of the listeners, more direct discipline and control over behavior to ensure adherence to the stricter standards of the Observance around speaking to outsiders and secular people.[505] Sacristans were responsible for knowing the liturgy to such a high standard that they could address any questions or uncertainties that other sisters had regarding the liturgy. They also were responsible for ensuring that the main directives from the Constitutions and the Ordinarium were written up and displayed in the choir so that the nuns could check if they were uncertain about some element of the divine office.[506] Listeners at the speaking grille served a primarily supervisory purpose, listening to conversations conducted at the grille in order to ensure that nothing was said which was inappropriate.[507] The grille, which allowed enclosed nuns to speak with those outside but did not allow them to see or make eye contact with their interlocutor, was a common feature of Observant convents, which had perfected the completeness of enclosure.[508] Meyer's description of the office in the *Amptbuch* emphasized the importance of good conduct for listeners: they were to serve as models of mature, sensible

[504] von Kern, "De Reformation des Katharinenklosters," 7.
[505] Councilors provided advice to the prioress on issues such as spending substantial sums of money, hiring servants, allocating the books that had belonged to sisters who had died, and other matters that Meyer described as being of middling importance—too substantial for the prioress to make a unilateral decision but not so substantial that the entire community needed to be consulted. Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 296-298.
[506] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 204-205. See also "Liber constitutionum sororum," 339-340, on liturgical directives.
[507] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 218.
[508] See Duval, *"Mulieres Religiosae* and *Sorores Clausae,"* 193-218 and Uffmann, "Inside and Outside the Convent Walls," 83-108.

behavior *(tapffer, vernünftig)* for other sisters.[509] In addition, Meyer mentioned the sisters' Constitutions as a further source of valuable advice on carrying out the office of listener. The Constitutions advised sisters who were appointed as listeners to ensure that sisters talking at the grille did not act reprehensibly in word, gesture, or any other way *(in verbo vel gestu vel aliter).*[510] In other words, both Meyer and the sisters' Constitutions viewed the office of listener both as one that required substantial embodied knowledge in order to model proper behavior for nuns who had occasion to speak at the grille, and as an office that supervised the operation of embodied knowledge in those sisters who spoke at the grille. Were those sisters speaking modestly about appropriate, necessary topics, and not attempting to circumvent the grille's complete prevention of sight and eye contact? The combination of all these offices in the single person of Katharina von Mühlheim were thus a testimony to the way that she embodied knowledge of the reform, and could be relied upon to assist a wide range of other nuns at St Katharina in developing that knowledge for themselves, from the period of their novitiate onwards.

Katharina von Mühlheim's experience as a reformer had led her to develop this embodied knowledge. As we have seen in Chapter Three, she traveled to three separate convents as part of reform parties—leaving Schönensteinbach for St Katharina in Nuremberg, before traveling on to Tulln and then Brno. Her letter back to her original home convent expressed her sorrow at living so much of her life separated from the sisters she had known so well. She expressed a desire that the sisters of Schönensteinbach would offer both individual and communal prayers for her soul

[509] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 218.
[510] "Liber constitutionum sororum," 342. This occurs in the chapter on silence.

and the work she was undertaking as a reformer.[511] Homesickness and sadness saturated Katharina's letter. Barbara Rosenwein has argued for understanding medieval emotions within the context of an "emotional community," and Katharina's homesickness can be understood as an appropriate expression of emotion within the context of the Observant Reform.[512] I contend that Katharina's homesickness also serves as a useful reminder of the embodied elements of reform.[513] The expression of these emotions was made appropriate within the framework of prayer so crucial to the Observant Reform, while also expressing the heaviness of the burden that reformers faced, even if it was a task they wanted to take on. Katharina also carried at least one manuscript with her from Schönensteinbach to Nuremberg, a book containing transcripts of several sermons by several preachers, including sermons delivered by Gerhard Comitis, a Dominican preacher from Nuremberg who had preached at the convent of Unterlinden near Schönensteinbach.[514]

Finally, this section turns to mysticism. Both medieval hagiography and modern scholarship stress female somatism, spirituality that was often physical and therefore sometimes even visible.[515] But because it was deeply personal and rarely narrated in the first person, it is arguably the most difficult aspect to track. In the milieu of the Observant Reform, reformers largely aimed to downplay the mystical currents that were a hallmark of late thirteenth- and early

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[511] Dietler, *Chronik,* 406.
[512] Barbara Rosenwein, "Worrying about Emotions in History," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 3 (2002), 842-843.
[513] Carolyne Larrington has written about the physiological aspect of early medieval emotions. Carolyne Larrington, "The Psychology of Emotion and Study of the Medieval Period," *Early Medieval Europe* 10, no. 2 (2001), 251-256.
[514] Nürnberg Stadtbibliothek Cod. Cent. VII, 34. The sermons by Gerhard Comitis are on fols. 196r-178v and 181r-190r. The present codex combines Katharina's sermon manuscript with two other manuscripts, one also from Schönensteinbach and the other probably from St Katharina. See Karin Schneider, *Die deutschen mittelalterlichen Handschriften: Beschreibung des Buchschmucks Heinz Zirnbauer* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965), 316-324.
[515] See especially Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), as well as ead., *Fragmentation and Redemption.*

fourteenth-century Dominican nuns' spirituality: reformers were suspicious because they could not regulate these experiences.

The fourteenth-century Sisterbooks help situate Dominican nuns within this embodied tradition. In the oldest of these texts, the Unterlinden Sisterbook, there is a description of bodily scourging:

> *In adventu Domini et per omne tempus quadragessime universe sorores post matutinas in capitulum divertentes, sive ad loca alia oportuna diversis flagellorum generibus corpus suum usque ad sanguinis effusionem lacerantes crudelissime et hostiliter ceciderunt, ita quod sonitus verberancium se ubique per omne monasterium resonaret, ascendens in aures Domini Sabaoth suavior omni melodia, cui talia humilitatis et devocionis opera multum placent, nec despicit gemitus contritorum.*[516]
>
> In Advent and throughout Lent, all the sisters, turning in to the chapter house or some other suitable place after Matins, struck themselves relentlessly and hostilely with all kinds of whips, mangling their bodies continuously until the blood pours, so that the sound of the lashing resounded everywhere through the whole monastery, rising sweeter than all melody to the ears of the Lord of Hosts, to whom such great works of humility and devotion give great pleasure, and who does not disdain the groans of penitents.

The sweet sound of bodily scourging—sweeter than any melody, which is noteworthy since the Sisterbook's author told readers that the nuns had just come from singing the morning office—was pleasing to God. For medieval people, music was closely linked with the experience of the physical, human body, both in the body's ability to come alive upon hearing music and in the body's ability to make music.[517]

Pleasing musical sounds were not the only way that late medieval women experienced embodied spirituality. Richard Kieckhefer, Caroline Walker Bynum, and others have written

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[516] Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, "Les 'Vitae Sororum' d'Unterlinden: Édition critique du manuscript 508 de la Bibliothèque de Colmar," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 5 (1930), 340.
[517] Bruce Wood Holsinger, "The Flesh of the Voice: Embodiment and the Homoerotics of Devotion in the Music of Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179)," *Signs* 19, no. 1 (1993), 94.

about the prominence of severe illness among late medieval holy women and the religious significance of such illness.[518] In the Töss Sisterbook, the nun Anna von Klingnau is remembered as being unwell before her death, and from her sickbed she composed a short poem of things Christ had said to her. It began with the line "the sicker you are, the more beloved you are to me" *(ie siecher du bist, ie lieber du mir bist).*[519] Pious women also cared for the sick. Catherine of Siena, in addition to receiving the stigmata, also cared for lepers and other sick people in and around Siena.[520]

At the same time as the Observant Reform required a renewed commitment to liturgy and an increased renunciation of the earthly world, its primary male figures worked to limit texts that described nuns' mystical, embodied spirituality for fear that newly Observant readers would take away the wrong message. Physical knowledge gained through practice and time could cause a reader to approach texts about a variety of subjects, ranging from music to illness to living under a monastic rule, differently. This made the jump from reading about something and attempting to experience it for oneself potentially dangerous. We can understand Johannes Meyer's redactions of the Sisterbooks, including that of Töss, through this lens, as at least partly an effort to keep women from finding out about and attempting to emulate such mystical ecstasy.[521] Meyer also repeatedly urged novice mistresses to avoid teaching their charges to be concerned about having

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[518] Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth-Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 57-58; Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast;* Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption,* 188ff.
[519] Elsbet Stagel, *Das Leben der Schwestern zu Töss beschrieben von Elsbet Stagel,* ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906), 37. The poem continues: *ie verschmächter du bist, ie necher du mir bist / ie ermer du bist, ie gelicher du mir bist* ("The more faded away you are, the closer you are to me / The poorer you are, the more you are equal to me").
[520] 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. E. Ann Matter and John Coakley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 105-110.
[521] For more, see Chapters One and Two.

visions or working miracles, since these could be deceiving or even actively harmful to salvation.[522] This fact makes it all the more difficult to track the reformation of the heart: the process not just of enclosure and obedience, but any process of changed or renewed spirituality among nuns in newly reformed communities.

In addition to the role of the novice mistress discussed above, women likely also played some role in providing spiritual direction for each other within the Observant context. In a description of the role of novice mistress excerpted from a letter from the sisters of St Katharina in Nuremberg to the convent of St Katharina in St Gallen, many of the details accord with Meyer's description of the office in the *Amptbuch*. But the nun who wrote it acknowledged some of the challenges of the office in a way that Meyer did not: the process of teaching and learning behaviors, physical motions, and the requisite Latin could be hard in the beginning *(schwär am anfang).* The letter advised the novice mistress to be patient and reasonable with the novices because of this learning process.[523] Novice mistresses were, as we have seen, an important component in the spread of the reform and chosen for their ability to provide direction to new postulants in the order. But spiritual direction was not limited to this role.

Women also intended their history-writing to have a purpose between education and spiritual direction. Magdalena Kremer's *Kirchheimer Chronik* has a section on prayer and worship, which began with an exhortation that this section was to provide information by which all the subsequent generations at the convent might better themselves by ensuring that they upheld the proper way of doing things.[524] For Magdalena, therefore, a work of history could have

[522] Meyer, *Amptbuch,* 288.
[523] *Konventsbuch,* 657.
[524] *Kirchheimer Chronik,* 180.

distinctly practical pedagogical value. That is, the convent's past was not the only subject that was fair game, but the devotional elements necessary to uphold the reform were, too. Magdalena also advised her readers to use not only Kirchheim but other convents as models when it came to upholding reform through quotidian spiritual practices. She wrote that "when one speaks about this cloister [Kirchheim] keeping the Observance, they mean in its first, proper sense like the sisters of Schönensteinbach in Alsace and the sisters of St Michaelsinsel in Bern."[525] Magdalena Kremer also reported the story of a nun, Sister Ursula Surgendin, who was in a "open" (i.e., conventual) convent, St Katharina in Colmar. The city of Colmar had another Dominican convent as well, Unterlinden, which was the second Observant community after Schönensteinbach. Fearing that she was on her deathbed because of a severe illness, Ursula prayed to God for advice, asking if she should move to Unterlinden to die there. God instead advised her to work to bring the Observance to St Katharina, which she did; Ursula then went on to be among the nuns who traveled from Colmar to Sélestat to reform the convent of Sylo. There, Magdalena informed her readers, Ursula provided by a good example *(guter exempel)* of a wise and devout woman.[526] While it could be argued that such teaching of novices and ensuring that prayer was carried out properly were matters more of discipline than spiritual direction, for the women of the Observant Reform, maintaining the right way of doing things through modeling, particularly of prayer and behavior, was akin to ensuring that quotidian spirituality within the convent operated appropriately.

Nuns understood that some elements of knowledge about the reform were best spread through direct teaching. Elements of prayer, the liturgy, and comportment in the reformed

[525] Ibid., 223. St Michaelsinsel was reformed in 1439.
[526] Ibid., 224-225.

convent became second nature only through repeated, proper, carefully supervised practice. These jobs—in the form of the novice mistress, listener, sacristan, and others—were often filled by experienced nuns brought to the convent as part of the reform party. While it might be possible to interpret this fact through the lens of disciplinary control over nuns new to the reform, thinking of it in terms of modeling and conveying both embodied knowledge and daily details of spiritual practice lends a deeper understanding of the purpose of nuns who traveled as part of a reform party: they were tasked with ensuring the longevity of the reform in part by passing on its bodily rhythms and ways of thinking to a new group of nuns, who could then disseminate them in turn. No doubt there was some element of disciplinary control at work, but by only looking at the reform through such a lens, we risk missing the perspective of those nuns who did not leave a newly reformed convent for a conventual one but whose writings either did not exist or do not survive.

Conclusion: Women, Books, and Women-and-Books

These three frames of reference for traveling nuns and traveling books that this chapter began with offer a way to understand the knowledge implicit in the Observant Reform that occasioned such an enormous production of texts, especially texts in the vernacular. Books needed to be managed carefully and kept track of in order to preserve their purpose as mediators of knowledge. It was also important to ensure access to books in order for that knowledge to be spread and preserved: a book only divulges the information it contains upon human interaction. Books could be borrowed, exchanged, or copied through the networks among Observant convents, and books also helped maintain those networks by preserving details about the

historical connections between various convents. But it was not always necessary to exchange an entire book manuscript in order to convey knowledge contained within a book. Observant nuns were adept at addressing concerns with reference to books, as we saw in the case of the letters exchanged by the prioresses of St Katharina in Nuremberg and St Katharina in St Gallen shortly after the latter's reform. And it is through books that we have access to the ways that nuns modeled the physical, embodied elements of the reform that could not be taught solely through a book: instead, they required a skilled human mediator, one of the dedicated Observant nuns who traveled in the service of the reform.

Conclusion

The fifteenth-century Observant Reform aimed to return those monastic communities that accepted it to an imagined "original" way of life. For Dominican nuns, this entailed the institution of a revised liturgy; renewed observance of the Augustinian Rule and Constitutions, including reviving the ideal of poverty and communal living; and the introduction of strict enclosure. Some women not only eagerly accepted the stringencies of reform but actively participated in its spread and wrote accounts of their experiences. Other women equally vigorously resisted attempts to change their way of life, enlisting outside help when they could or choosing to leave their convent entirely, a choice which may have resulted in serious repercussions. The drama of these communal tensions is somewhat flattened by the surviving sources, which almost inevitably portray successful reform. There were also more quotidian ways that nuns supported the reform, as well as acts of resistance less dramatic than the failure of the reform at Klingental.

In this dissertation, I focused on the reform's winners, the women who supported the project of reform and enjoyed the new intellectual horizons that it brought or who eagerly helped spread the Observance to other convents. But if I were to expand it, I would spend more time dwelling on the losers and those who resigned themselves to the constraints that the reform placed on them. Every communal instinct strained to portray success, and the chronicles written by women at Observant convents demonstrate women's agency, ingenuity, and full-throated support for the movement. Understanding these works, the women who wrote them, and their perspectives is vital: late medieval women religious were not simply pawns moving about the chessboard at the behest of male reformers. But those women who lost should be ascribed

respect as well, even if their ability to act on their own terms was severely constrained. Scholarship has moved beyond understanding late medieval nuns as decadent women enjoying their luxuries to understand how women seriously engaged the project of reform, but has not yet paid the same close attention to the response of those women who were resistant to reform efforts.

This dissertation has examined the Observant Dominican community at a variety of levels, ranging from single convents to their broader urban context to the entire Dominican province of Teutonia. In doing so, I have attempted to examine relationships and power dynamics, tracing ways in which Observant nuns both gained and lost autonomy and viewing the Observant Reform as I argue the nuns who supported it did, as a long-term process requiring purposeful upkeep. Older scholarship tended to view Observant nuns as pawns, sent hither and thither by male reformers with little ability to influence the circumstances in which they found themselves. More recent scholarship has rightly pointed to the manifold ways that many women supported and advanced the reform, particularly through writing histories and chronicles, as well as instances of women totally opposing reform, and this is the research that I have tended to build on.

One key theme that has emerged from my research, though, is that the situation is not so cut-and-dried. For those women with a genuine vocation, or who developed one along the way, the reform was a boon; for those without such a calling, the reform may have been confining and stultifying. Even those who supported it could face a loss of autonomy and power along the way. For instance, women who supported the reform in their capacity as prioress or subprioress could do so only to lose their positions of authority upon the arrival of a reform party. At the convents I studied in this dissertation, it was difficult to assess what the response was to such a loss of

power. Proponents of reform, like Meyer, portrayed it as pure obedience, thus fitting neatly into the virtues promoted by Observants. But it is all too likely that the women who found themselves supplanted did not welcome the opportunity to practice this particular virtue. It would be worthwhile to tease out the fate of the ousted prioresses and to dig more fully into the power assigned to a newly appointed reform prioress, whose nomination did not follow the typical process guaranteed by the Constitutions. Such an examination would build on the discussion in Chapter Three of the pre-reform prioress of St Mary Magdalene *an den Steinen* in Basel, Katharina von Zässingen, who was forced to step down in favor of a prioress from the reform party that came from Schönensteinbach, along with the scramble by the city council of Freiburg to find a new prioress to institute the reform at the convent of Adelhausen after the death of Endelin von Au.

An additional key theme that has emerged from this dissertation is the question of scale. The Observant Reform was a Europe-wide movement that affected nearly all the monastic orders at one level or another. But for nuns, the reform was often more intensely local than anything else: shaped by socioeconomic questions within the city or town where they were located and introduced by outsiders who were derided by the reform's opponents as foreign entities. Even though friaries were also reformed by outsiders, there was less fear that foreigners or friars of a lower class would sully the friary than there was in the case of nuns. Friars also tended to come from more diverse geographic, economic, and educational backgrounds and enjoyed a variety of opportunities outside of the strict enclosure required by nuns. Individual nuns emerged from a few slim references in scattered sources, too: Ursula von Stoffeln and her little prayerbook provided a fruitful way of discussing both women and books on the move in the service of the reform, despite the fact that Ursula herself was only mentioned in one other surviving document.

Focusing primarily on either the macro or micro, however, leads us to run the risk of missing helpful patterns and trends that otherwise may be obscured by the nature of the sources. Temporal scale also matters: in each chapter, I have made an effort to consider the years and decades after the reform's initial introduction, arguing that doing so enables us to see conscious efforts at maintaining the Observance which were of equal importance to the nuns as its initial introduction. Where men could lock the gates behind them and declare the reform complete, women had to live with it, navigating changed internal dynamics, newly complex relationships with city councils, and a historical community that stretched backward and forward in time.

This study also opens up avenues for further analysis. Chapter Three began with a survey of marriage prospects and dowries for women in Germany in an effort to contextualize the case studies that made up the bulk of the chapter. In doing so, it became clear that there has been little work done to contextualize the Observant Reform from this very pragmatic, social perspective. Research on marriage and inheritance patterns and dowries among the upper classes remains generally scantier for Germany than it is for places like England and Italy, and what research does exist has generally not been put into conversation with scholarship on the Observant Reform. A rare exception is the work of Sigrid Hirbodian on Strasbourg, which although excellent, is limited to a single city. A more systematic effort to examine the relationship between women's secular possibilities and their implications for monastic vocation may reveal valuable insights into issues related to the reform.[527] How did the particularities of the marriage market shape professions at Observant convents or nearby conventual ones? Did changes in dowry price or expanding or narrowing options for marriage prior to the Reformation lead to

[527] This would be akin to what Jutta Sperling has done for Venice. Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politic.*

situations like that in Nuremberg where so many women wanted to enter the convent of St Katharina that the papacy officially limited who could become a nun there?

Second, given the medieval interest in both corporate reform and the interior reform of the individual heart, the matter of what happened to those nuns who chose to leave a convent that was about to be reformed is an interesting one. Are there any possibilities for determining their motives for leaving? Scholars, myself included, have been guilty of assuming that they simply viewed the reform as too difficult to endure or as going against the conditions for which they had signed up. But what social pressures did they face? Is there a way to understand what stigma they may have faced as a result of leaving for a nearby conventual convent or, in rare cases, leaving the religious life entirely? Chronicle evidence does not really exist for resistance to reform—such accounts were penned by the victors. I suggested in Chapter Three, however, that city council records offer unexpected insights into the debates that led up to successful reform. Other such documents of practice may provide new outlooks on the resistance to reform. Following up on individual cases in creative ways will help us better understand the resistance to reform beyond the few spectacular examples of communal resistance, such as that at Klingental in Basel. Did reformers, either men or women, express remorse over the failure to achieve a total reform not only of an institution but also of all the women who were originally there? Other scholars have argued that the Observant reform came to affect even those convents that did not officially adopt it; what role in that process did these women who decided to try their luck at another convent play? In other words, how did the corporate and individual interact during the initial introduction of the Observance?

There is the possibility that this perspective would also lend a new understanding to what the arrival of the Protestant Reformation meant for the German convents as well. For convents

that had proudly maintained the Observance, their connections to the city council and notable local families meant that they were well-placed to weather the Reformation and survive into the late sixteenth century.[528] But some of the convents that feature in this dissertation were located in cities that remained Catholic, such as Freiburg im Breisgau. The sixteenth-century history of these convents has, to the best of my knowledge, received much less attention. To what extent did the Observant Reform continue to shape them fifty or more years later?

I wrote the majority of this dissertation during Covid-19, a period of forced isolation. I do not want to draw facile comparisons between my comfortable, twenty-first-century life, and the lives of fifteenth-century nuns—as challenging as it was to keep in touch with colleagues, family, and friends via Zoom and text message, I am grateful that we had such means of instant communication. But I do think that the context in which I wrote changed some of the assumptions about gender and enclosure that I began the project with. I have always approached the lives of medieval women religious as a "glass half full," and I still believe that many women who entered convent life found intellectual freedom, close companionship, and opportunities to wield authority there that exceeded any they could have found in the secular world. But my own experience of the early semi-lockdown phase of Covid-19 made me more curious to understand the "glass half empty" perspective and more open to reading sources with this viewpoint in mind: those women for whom the Observance did not represent new chances to engage with intellectual life, book production, and the expansion of a religious project that they supported, but rather a closing-down and narrowing of their world through strict enclosure and renewed

[528] For example, Leonard, *Nails in the Wall,* provides this perspective for Strasbourg.

supervision by zealous priests and friars. I think this dissertation represents a more nuanced view of the lives and experiences of these fifteenth-century women as a result.

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