
VIATOR

MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE STUDIES

Volume 31 (2000)

PUBLISHED UNDER THE AUSPICES OF

THE CENTER FOR MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

BREPOLS

STIGMATA ON TRIAL: THE NUN OF PORTUGAL AND THE POLITICS OF THE BODY

•
by Ian MacInnes

1.

On the twenty-seventh of May 1588, Philip II's Invincible Armada was preparing to attack England, under the command of the marquis of Santa Cruz.¹ Before he would let it leave, however, the king ordered the entire fleet to assemble in the port of Lisbon, in front of the Dominican convent of the Annunciation, which was situated a few hundred paces from the beach. There the entire fleet was to be blessed by the young, well-born prioress of the convent, Sor Maria de la Visitación, one of the most famous holy women of her time, and a professed stigmatic.² A few months later, however, the marquis was dead and the Armada defeated, scattered, and destroyed. Amid the hysteria and fear that swept Spain after the defeat of the great Armada, Heironimo Lipomano, the Venetian ambassador in Spain, wrote, at the end of one official letter to the doge:

The nun of Portugal who was universally held for a saint has been found out at last. The stigmata are proved to be artificial and the whole trick invented to gain credit in the world. She was induced to act thus by two friars of her Order of Saint Dominic, with a view to being able some day to tell the king that unless he handed Portugal over to Don Antonio he would be damned for ever, and with the further object of raising a rebellion against the king. The friars are in the prisons of the Inquisition, the nun in a convent awaiting sentence.³

Sor Maria's trajectory, from universal religious renown to acute political disgrace, illustrates part of the changing understanding of the body in the Renaissance. Her story shows both the extraordinary amount of popular religious sentiment attached to the wounded human body in the early modern period, and the deep cultural anxieties it could elicit. The most influential wounds in sixteenth-century European thought were the wounds of Christ; arguments over the meaning of these wounds contributed to the great religious and political struggle between Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Stigmatics were powerful agents in this contest because they provided sensational and visible evidence of divine favor, but their influence over popular opinion

¹When the marquis died before the Armada set sail, he was replaced by the duke of Medina Sidonia. According to Thomas Wright, the marquis of Santa Cruz died of melancholy, after being disgraced by Philip II. Thomas Wright, *The Passions of the Minde in General* (Chicago 1971) 62.

²R. P. Mortier, *Histoire des Maitres Généraux de l'Ordre des Frères Prêcheurs*, vol. 5 (Paris 1911) 646.

³Quoted in Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (London 1952) 83.

often led to anxiety and suspicion about the value of their sanctity. Sor Maria offers us a perfect example of the peculiar combination of conviction and suspicion that characterized late sixteenth-century spiritual attitudes toward the body.

Given Sor Maria's widespread reputation in the years preceding her downfall, we know surprisingly little about her. The only substantial documents consist of a short *Life*, written by the well-known fray Luis de Granada and reported in several Italian and French works, and the account of her investigation and sentencing by the Inquisition. Sor Maria was born into a relatively well-to-do Portuguese family in 1556.⁴ Some time between the age of eleven and twelve she entered the Dominican convent of La Annunciada in Lisbon.⁵ Five years later she took the veil, and from then on began to have an increasing number of mystical and visionary experiences. Her stigmata appeared as the result of a series of visions of Christ. In 1575, according to Luis de Granada, Christ came to her wearing the crown of thorns and "bathed in blood."⁶ In her vision Christ took the crown of thorns from his own head and placed it on hers, resulting in a series of marks which persisted after the vision. Several years later she had another similar vision that left a red mark on her side. As a result of her mystical experiences, but also in part because of her family connections, she was elected prioress of the convent in 1582, apparently against the wishes of a number of the other nuns. Thereafter, in March of 1584, she had a climactic vision which resulted in the full stigmatization of her hands and feet as well as her side. This time, Christ appeared to her nailed on a cross, looking at her with "loving eyes" ("ojos amorosos"). From his five wounds came five rays of light which pierced her hands, feet, and side. In the midst of her exquisite pain she saw on herself the visible signs of Christ's wounds.⁷ These wounds also persisted; eventually her hands and feet even developed "nails" emerging from the wounds.

All of these events contributed to Sor Maria's reputation, but she eventually became most famous for the special quality of the wound in her side. This wound was not only larger than the wounds on her hands and feet but also bled periodically, a feature which eventually enhanced Sor Maria's reputation in this peculiar way:

Every Friday there come out of the side wound five drops of blood, ordered so as to form a perfect figure of a cross, and each drop of blood is no bigger around than a lentil, and to gather them she puts over the wound a cloth, the thinnest and most worn that she can find, doubled with four folds, through all of which these five drops of blood penetrate and pass from part to part, so that each Friday the wound produces four cloths.⁸

⁴Montague Summers, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism, with Especial Reference to the Stigmata, Divine and Diabolic* (New York 1950) 218. Luis de Granada's *Life* puts her birth much earlier, in 1550: Luis de Granada, "Vida de Sor Maria de la Visitación" in *Monjas y beatas embaucadoras*, ed. Jesus Imirizaldu (Madrid 1977).

⁵Summers (n. 4 above) 218; Herbert Thurston, *The Physical Phenomena of Mysticism* (London 1952) 83.

⁶"bañado en sangre," Granada (n. 4) 128.

⁷Granada (n. 4 above) 131.

⁸Granada (n. 4 above) 133-134. My translation. "Tudos los viernes les salen de la llaga del costado cinco gotas de sangre puestas por orden en una perfectisima figura de cruz, y cada gota de sangre es redonda poco mayor que una lenteja y para recojerlas pone ella encima de la llaga un lienzo, el más delgado y más usado que puede hallar, doblado con cuatro dobleces, los cuales tudos penetran estas cinco gotas y pasan de parte a parte, de modo que cada viernes salen cuatro paños de éstos."

Because they were distributed widely, these cloths became one of the means by which most people encountered Sor Maria, who herself remained at the convent of the Anunciada. By all accounts the bloodstained rags were highly sought after and treasured by their owners. Mary, the wife of Diego de Guzman, count of Alba and viceroy of Sicily, apparently kept her cloth even after the Inquisition had condemned Sor Maria and demanded that all these cloths be destroyed.⁹ They were also credited with miraculous powers of healing, particularly of healing wounds. One woman's gangrenous lip, for instance, was cured when she applied a cloth to it.¹⁰ These cloths which were so regularly printed off of Maria's body, combined with more conventional portraits and printed versions of Granada's *Life*, eventually made her, as Ludovico Paramo describes it "famous throughout all the provinces of Spain and Italy and indeed even as far as the most distant confines of the eastern ocean."¹¹

At the same time that her religious reputation was gaining ground, however, Sor Maria began to attract some unfavorable attention from secular authorities. Philip II had taken the throne of Portugal in 1581. In 1582, the same year in which she was elected prioress of her convent, Sor Maria became an advocate of the exiled Portuguese pretender Don Antonio. Initially, at least, her political opinions remained muted, and in any case they were not exceptional. Many of the Portuguese Dominicans sympathized with Don Antonio and resented Spanish domination. During his visit to Portugal in 1587, the general of the Dominican order, Father Sisto Fabri, even thought it necessary to warn members not to challenge Philip's claim to Portugal.¹² During this same visit, Sisto Fabri also investigated Sor Maria's stigmata, not because of her political sympathies, but because her sanctity had been repeatedly challenged by other members of her order. Father Fabri certified her wounds as genuine, increasing her reputation even further. In addition, despite her well-known sympathy for Portuguese nationalism, Sor Maria remained extremely popular in Spanish aristocratic circles. In May of 1588, according to Mortier, she was "at the apogee of her reputation," venerated as a saint by no less than Cardinal Albert of Austria, the viceroy of Portugal.¹³ When the Armada was defeated, however, Portuguese nationalism reappeared, and Sor Maria began to champion the cause of Don Antonio more openly. According to Mortier, she used her status as a stigmatic to enhance her support for the Portuguese cause, since Christ's wounds figure in the arms of Portugal.¹⁴ By the Autumn of 1588 she had become increasingly outspoken and apparently made several public statements in support of Don Antonio. One of these, Mortier reports, was to the effect that "the kingdom of Portugal does not belong to Philip II, the king of Spain, but to the Braganza family. If the king of Spain does not restore the throne that he has unjustly usurped, then God will chastise him severely."¹⁵ By the time Sor Maria began making such statements, the political atmosphere was already dangerous. Lippo-

⁹Thurston (n. 5 above) 88.

¹⁰Summers (n. 5 above) 220.

¹¹Thurston (n. 5 above) 89.

¹²Mortier (n. 2 above) 643.

¹³Mortier (n. 2 above) 645.

¹⁴Mortier (n. 2 above) 645.

¹⁵Mortier (n. 2 above) 646.

mano's letters written during his final months as ambassador to Spain convey a vivid picture of a nation overcome by confusion and paranoia. Although preparations were underway for a second Armada, they bore "the stamp of defense rather than of offense," as Lippomano puts it in the same letter in which he reports Sor Maria's disgrace.¹⁶ The consternation that swept Spain and Portugal when news of the Armada's defeat began to arrive, combined with Sor Maria's inflammatory statements, were enough to reopen her case. On August 9, 1588, Cardinal Albert decided to allow the Inquisition to initiate an investigation.

From August 9 to the conclusion of its investigation on December 7 the Inquisition interviewed Sor Maria at length, as well as several members of her convent and a confidante, Sor Madalena de la Croix. According to the sentence published by the Inquisition, Sor Maria began by asserting her sanctity, despite being repeatedly confronted by the accusations of fellow nuns. On October 14, however, the investigators managed to wash off the stigmata with soap, thus proving to their satisfaction that "said signs of the wounds were painted with red color and the nails with black color and faked and not simulated and were neither miraculous nor gifts from gods." At this point, Sor Maria was reportedly "very disturbed and confused," but said she was not up to confessing anything that day. The next day, "with many tears and many signs of repentance, she threw herself at the feet of all and began to confess her sins."¹⁷ As the succeeding passages make clear, Sor Maria was made to admit the falsity not just of her stigmata, but of every vision she had ever claimed, particularly those having to do with Iberian politics. The Inquisition considered her faults a "great offense of Our Lord and of his wounds and of the Catholic Church" and "worthy to be seriously punished," but it also claimed to be lenient in its sentence. Sor Maria was condemned to perpetual seclusion in a remote convent; images of her, and any of the handkerchiefs stained with her blood, were to be collected and burned. Her friend, Sor Madalena de la Croix, was whipped through the streets of Lisbon for her obstinacy in supporting Sor Maria.¹⁸

2.

Sor Maria's trajectory from renown to disgrace tells us a great deal about the changing religious understanding of wounds in the late sixteenth century. But to understand the

¹⁶Thurston (n. 5 above) 83.

¹⁷"Sentencia de Sor Maria de la Visitación," in *Monjas y beatas embaucadoras*, ed. Jesus Imirizaldu (Madrid 1977) 187-188. Translations by Anne Sussman.

¹⁸Mortier (n. 2 above). Subsequent opinion about the validity of the Inquisition's case has varied extensively. Many contemporaries, like Lippomano, accepted the sentence without question, and as a consequence, Sor Maria's international reputation plummeted. Modern writers on stigmata have also tended to approve the Inquisition's sentence, so that Sor Maria is most frequently cited among examples of fraudulent stigmatics. Some, however, have taken her side. Montague Summers apparently believed fervently, although without much evidence, in her innocence and saintliness. For Summers, Sor Maria was the victim of envious members of her order. He calls the Inquisition's sentence "obviously written to order," and dismisses the charge that Luis de Granada died because he was ashamed of being deceived by Sor Maria as the "basest canard" (Summers [n. 4 above] 220). Others have been more reserved. Herbert Thurston declares that her cause must have been prejudiced by her open political sympathies. When he discusses Sor Maria's confession, one of the strongest points against her, he points out that by confessing to fraud, Sor Maria managed to avoid the more serious accusation of heresy, an accusation that would have led to

popular force of her spirituality, we must first look briefly at the origins of that spirituality in medieval Christianity, not only during the late Middle Ages when stigmatics first began to appear, but in the writings of earlier theologians as well, beginning with those of Augustine of Hippo. While Christian spirituality did not become heavily focused on the Passion until the high Middle Ages, the notion that Christ's humanity was spiritually crucial stretches as far back as Augustine. To theologians, the quality of the Incarnation had always been a subject of debate, but according to Margaret Miles, Augustine was the first to perceive the question of Christ's body as central. His work on the Incarnation, Miles claims, has "an urgency which occurs neither in the earlier patristic authors, nor in the philosophers."¹⁹ The task that Augustine saw as necessary, Miles argues, was to express the Christian model of a person as a unity of soul and body. Of course, Augustine has since acquired the reputation of one who celebrated the soul at the expense of the body and one who denigrated the body in all its aspects. But Miles argues that this reputation derives from Augustine's own unconscious revolt against his efforts to unite soul and body: in other words, his work is philosophically rather than emotionally consistent.²⁰

Augustine's many allusions to the body support Miles's assessment, because he uses wounds both as a trope for sin and as a way of describing salvation. In the *Confessions*, the metaphor of sin as a wound appears almost accidental. Remarking on his delayed baptism, he criticizes the attitude that says, "Leave him alone; let him do as he likes; he is not baptized yet," by comparing physical and spiritual health: "We do not say: 'Let him have a few more wounds: he is not well yet'" (*Confessions* 1.1).²¹ Later, Augustine links wounds and sin with more theological sophistication. In the *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, for example, he uses the notion of a wound to describe the spiritual limitations and distractions of the body. The reason that a person may fail to "grasp God," is that "he did not have the eye of the heart. . . . Therefore there was a thing within, wounded, and a thing without, healthy. He has healthy eyes of the body, he has wounded eyes of the heart" (*Tractates* 14.12)²² At the final judgment, according to Augustine, the wound in Christ's left side, by signifying his humanity, renders his divinity invisible to those sitting on his left (*Tractates* 21.13). By calling sin a wound, however, Augustine also allows Christ to be "the complete physician of our wounds" (*Tractates* 3.3). Christ's own wounds not only guarantee that the body can be redeemed, but also constitute the treatment by which such redemption occurs: "Now my brothers, in the mean time, that we may be healed of sin, let us look upon the crucified Christ . . . so they who look with faith upon the death of Christ are healed of the biles of sin" (*Tractates* 12.11). On the one hand, Augustine uses wounds to symbolize mortal blindness to the spirit. On the other hand, he uses them to symbolize

her death if she had persisted in maintaining her saintliness (Thurston [n. 5 above] 85-88).

¹⁹Margaret Ruth Miles, *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula, MT 1979) 92.

²⁰Miles (n. 18 above) 131.

²¹Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York 1963) 29. All subsequent references are to this translation.

²²Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, trans. John W. Rettig (Washington, DC 1988). All subsequent references are to this translation.

an opening for immortal longings. These two potentials are always in tension throughout his work.

Elsewhere, Augustine uses wounds as metaphors for the process by which the body is included in a transcendental self. Wounds are not only both symptom and treatment of sin: they also become part of God's providential plan. The Lord, Augustine argues, is the one who "shape[s] sorrow to be an instructor, who give[s] wounds in order to heal, who kill[s] us lest we should die away from [him]" (*Confessions* 2.2). Likewise, Christ's wounds at the crucifixion are the basis for the church as well as individual salvation. "From the lance-pierced side of Christ hanging on the cross," Augustine says, "the sacraments of the church flowed forth" (*Tractates* 15.8). These references show wounds to have an important place in individual and social redemption. They show the body as more than something to be oppressed and denigrated at every opportunity, because God both causes and heals wounds (both metaphorical and real). Augustine conceives of the redeemed self in bodily terms. "Perfect health of body shall be the ultimate immortality of the whole man."²³ Finally, Augustine also gestures toward a view that will become common in the late Middle Ages: wounds can become a metaphor for divine love. In an extended passage at the end of the *Confessions*, he describes his missionary zeal as a wound:

You had shot us through our hearts with your charity, and we carried about with us your words like arrows fixed deep in our flesh; stored up in the recesses of our thought were the examples of your servants whose darkness you had turned to light and whose death to life, and so that heavy sluggishness of ours that might have dragged us down again to the depths was utterly burned up and consumed (*Confessions* 9.2).

While Augustine had hinted at the importance of Christ's wounds in his attempt to understand the redemption of the body, the later Middle Ages made these wounds the center of what Ewert Cousins calls an "emerging devotion to the humanity of Christ," a devotion that was itself a part of an increasingly inward and meditative spirituality.²⁴ The iconographic record gives a broad historical perspective on this interest in Christ's humanity. Vladimir Gurewich, for example, in tracing the development of images of the crucifixion from their first appearance in the fifth century, notes that from the eleventh century the triumphant Christ began to be replaced by the suffering Christ.²⁵ Christ's wounds no longer demonstrated simply his participation in a redemptive history; they began to act aesthetically. They involved devout Christians in an attempt to duplicate the Passion within themselves as an event of feeling. As Cousins puts it, "the one meditating perceives this event [the Passion] not as something in the distant past that is being viewed from the standpoint of the present. Rather he enters into the event, either as an eyewitness or as an actor in the drama of the event. . . . His involvement in the event opens to him its meaning and value."²⁶ Saints

²³Miles (n. 19 above) 92.

²⁴Ewert Cousins, "The Humanity and Passion of Christ" in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Rait (New York 1989) 375-391, at 376.

²⁵Vladimir Gurewich, "Observations on the Iconography of the Wound in Christ's Side, with Special Reference to Its Position," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20 (1957) 358-362.

²⁶Cousins (n. 23 above) 383.

were supposed to make this sympathetic duplication into a broad-reaching *imitatio Christi* in which wounds were not merely a sign of divine interiority but direct access to that interiority. This emphasis on sympathetic contemplation correlated with an explosion of interest in relics, fueled in part by the enormous number of relics sent back to Europe during the crusades. Reliquaries, which before the end of the twelfth century were closed receptacles, began to display relics to view, often in elaborate chambers of gold and crystal.²⁷ New holidays, such as the feast of the lance (*festum lanceae*, 1354), and new images, such as Christ as man of sorrows, also tended to center around the physical details of the Passion.

Many medieval religious writings contributed to the growing interest in Christ's humanity. Of these, some of the most influential for later understanding of Christ's wounds, particularly for female mystics, were Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons on the Song of Songs. To some degree Bernard echoes Augustine's metaphor of Christ's wounds as a medicine for human sin, itself conceived of as a wound. At one point, Bernard calls meditation on the wounds of Christ a "cure for the wounds of conscience."²⁸ At another point, he reflects "I have sinned gravely, my conscience is disturbed but not confounded because I shall remember the wounds of the Lord. What sin is so deadly as not to be forgiven in the death of Christ?" (*On the Song of Songs* 61.3). By Bernard's time such an understanding of Christ's wounds was relatively common. Bernard helped add to the medieval understanding of the wounds, however, the sense that these wounds provide objects for personal meditation. An individual Christian soul, according to Bernard takes joy in the "bitterness" and "ugliness" of the passion. "All her affections are preoccupied with the wounds of Christ; she abides in them by constant meditation" (*On the Song of Songs* 61.7). While Augustine wanted to explain the salvific importance of Christ's wounds, Bernard sought to make them the center of an individual and mystical spirituality.

"Constant meditation" on the Passion, as Bernard describes it, also has more mystical and emotional benefits than rational ones. One passage in particular from the *Song of Songs* prompts Bernard to discuss wounds at length. Among the bridegroom's many exhortations to his beloved in the biblical text, he says to her, "My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the crannies of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sounds in my ears" (Song of Songs 2.14). Drawing on an exegesis by Gregory the Great, Bernard glosses the "clefts of the rock" as the wounds of Christ and proceeds to examine the implications of such an interpretation (*On the Song of Songs* 61.3). His thoughts lead in two directions. First, by imagining Christ's wounds as openings, Bernard can interpret them as windows onto the loving nature of God:

The nail that pierced him has become for me a key unlocking the sight of the Lord's will. Why should I not gaze through the cleft? The nail cries out, the wound cries out that God is truly in Christ, reconciling the world to himself . . . he is no longer one who cannot sympathize with my weaknesses. The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body: that mighty mystery of loving is laid open, laid open too the tender mercies of

²⁷Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2 (Greenwich, CT 1972) 190.

²⁸Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Spencer, MA 1971) 62.7 Subsequent references are from this edition and will be noted by sermon and chapter.

our God, in which the morning sun from on high has risen upon us. Surely his heart is laid open through his wounds! Where more clearly than in your wounds does the evidence shine that you, Lord, "are good and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love"? (*On the Song of Songs* 61.4).

Bernard imagines this revelation of divine love in more than simply visual ways. "Through these fissures [the wounds]," he says, "I can suck honey from the rock and oil from the flinty stone—I can taste and see that the Lord is good. He was thinking thoughts of peace and I did not know it" (*On the Song of Songs* 61.4).

Second, because the dove in the Song of Songs is described as being in the clefts of the rock, Bernard also portrays them as a refuge or hiding spot, and consequently as a source of emotional comfort:

And really where is there safe sure rest for the weak except in the Savior's wounds? There the security of my dwelling depends on the greatness of his saving power. The world rages, the body oppresses, the devil lays his snares: I do not fall because I am founded on a rock (*On the Song of Songs* 61.3).

The image of a person, or even of a soul, actually inhabiting a wound may seem incongruous, but it only extends the more general notion of "dwelling" in the Lord. Bernard's paradoxical association of affliction and comfort reaches its greatest extent in the martyr, who actually desires to imitate Christ. At the moment of his greatest agony,

The martyr remains jubilant and triumphant though his whole body is mangled; even while the steel is gashing his sides he looks around with courage and elation at the holy blood pouring from his flesh. Where then is the soul of the martyr? In a safe place, of course; in the heart of Jesus, of course, in wounds open for it to enter (*On the Song of Songs* 61.8).

By describing the emotional comfort of Christ's wounds, and by attributing to them a message about the extent of divine love, Bernard directs attention away from the purely theological understanding of the Passion. For him, as for late medieval Christianity as a whole, the wounded Christ is nurturing and comforting rather than triumphant.

Eventually, Bernard of Clairvaux's work, and that of other religious writers such as Anselm of Canterbury and Gueric of Igny, led to a gendered understanding of Christ's wounds. By the late Middle Ages, Christ's wounds were often depicted as female attributes. In part, these depictions coincided with the church's overall emphasis on Christ's vulnerability; a patriarchal culture often associates suffering with the female. But as Caroline Walker Bynum explains, people also perceived Christ's wounds as feminine because they saw Christ's sacrifice as physically nurturing in a way that was analogous to maternal care. They treated "Christ's flesh as female, at least in certain of its salvific functions, especially its bleeding and nurturing." Bynum turns this attitude around to help her answer her primary question about women's bodily spirituality. "This fact," she says, "helps us understand why it was women more than men who imitated Christ bodily, especially in stigmata." "Women mystics often simply became

the flesh of Christ, because their flesh could do what his could do: bleed, feed, die, and give life to others."²⁹ The blood of communion could be interpreted as motherly nourishment (coming from the breast of Christ), and images of Christ's blood dropping onto a dragon at the crucifixion were designed to illustrate the fulfillment of God's promise to Eve about "bruising the head" of the serpent.³⁰ Of course, Bynum also cautions that "medieval thinkers used gender imagery fluidly, not literally."³¹ But by the end of the Middle Ages, the spirituality of the Passion was firmly identified with female religious experience, particularly with paramystical phenomena like stigmata.

Maria de la Visitación had many ties spiritual ties to this medieval tradition. Beginning with Saint Francis in the middle of the thirteenth century, Western Europe saw an increasing number of professed stigmatics, many of whom eventually became canonized. Demographically, Sor Maria's case is typical of medieval stigmatics. Like the majority of these earlier stigmatics, Sor Maria was a member of a religious order. Like most of them, she was a woman, and as was the case for most medieval stigmatics, she received her wounds as the product of a series of visions. Many Renaissance stigmatics also consciously saw themselves as the spiritual descendants of the famous stigmatics of the late Middle Ages. For most of them the key figure was not Saint Francis, but Saint Catherine of Sienna, who had repeated visions of nursing from the side of Christ. Imbert-Gourbeyre's historical list of stigmatics repeatedly mentions stigmatics who received their wounds "à l'instar de Catharine de Sienna."³² Saint Catherine was also a popular subject for artistic representation in the Renaissance.³³ Sor Maria herself, while she did not literally imitate Saint Catherine in the placement of her wounds, had numerous visions of the saint, who appeared to her "with a sorrowing face and eyes full of tears."³⁴

Other aspects of Sor Maria's wounds are also typical of both earlier and later stigmatics. Such wounds appear suddenly in all of the documented cases, and often can disappear just as suddenly. Like Sor Maria, many other stigmatics experienced periodic bleeding from their wounds, usually on holy days. Even the nails which Luis de Granada saw emerging from her wounds are paralleled by such phenomena in a number of cases from the thirteenth through the twentieth century.³⁵ Sor Maria was relatively unusual in being so completely stigmatized, with both the "crown of thorns" and the five wounds, but, as Ian Wilson notes, the location and type of wounds vary wildly from one stigmatic to another.³⁶ The deciding factor in such cases seems to be the person's own imagined version of Christ and of the crucifixion. Stigmatics often reproduce the wounds on their favorite crucifix, for example. Modern clinical assess-

²⁹Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Relation* (New York 1991) 204, 222.

³⁰Schiller (n. 26 above) 105.

³¹Bynum (n. 29 above) 218.

³²Antoine Imbert-Gourbeyre, *La stigmatisation*, vol. 1 (Paris 1894).

³³Bynum (n. 29 above) 380-381, n. 87.

³⁴Summers (n. 4 above) 218.

³⁵Ian Wilson, *The Bleeding Mind: an Investigation into the Mysterious Phenomenon of Stigmata* (London 1988) 126.

³⁶Wilson (n. 34 above) 124.

ments of this psychosomatic phenomenon stress the subjective connection between the wounds and the vision which precipitates them. According to René Biot, the ecstatic vision "sets in motion the mental mechanism through which the subject represents past events to himself."³⁷ Sor Maria's stigmata, like those of others before and after her, were at least in part a function of increased interest and imaginative investment in the life of the historical Christ.

3.

In other ways, however, Sor Maria's case differs from that of a typical medieval stigmatic. When the church alleged that Sor Maria had been manipulated by men, it echoed medieval suspicions about holy women. Yet the speed and force of the Inquisition in her case were relatively new, and they demonstrated a new attitude toward such types of spirituality. According to Bynum, women's "affective" spirituality of the late Middle Ages was something "against which both Protestant and Roman Catholic reformations reacted."³⁸ They never reacted univocally or consistently, however, since each reformation drew heavily on medieval Christianity. The Protestant Reformation might seem to have offered the most direct challenge to the late medieval obsession with Christ's wounds. Protestant suspicion of images, complex ceremonies, sensational demonstrations of religious fervor, and the doctrine of salvation through works all seemed to distance and attenuate the physicality of the Passion. Artistic representations of the Passion in Protestant areas of Europe declined, and images of the triumphant Christ became more common than those of the suffering Christ.³⁹ Yet Protestant theologians also thought of themselves as more Christocentric than the Church of Rome, a tendency that only increased as the sixteenth century progressed.⁴⁰ More radical reformers, such as the followers of the "bitter Christ" who advocated the imitation of Christ ("die Nachfolge Christi"), constantly insisted on the theological importance of Christ's suffering "in head and members."⁴¹ This ambiguity about the nature and importance of Christ's body is almost paradigmatic of the relationship between late medieval and Protestant spirituality. The contemplation of the Passion in the late Middle Ages was characterized by the same kind of interiorized and individual spirituality that the Reformation encouraged, but it could also lead to the kind of sensational physical demonstrations of faith that most Reformation writers abhorred.

Luther himself was careful both to defend and to define his valuation of the Passion. In his "Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering" (1530), for instance, he responds directly to those "many false fanatics abroad . . . who say that we have nothing else to preach except faith alone, that we leave out the doctrine of good works and the holy cross and suffering."⁴² This was precisely the claim that the Catholic Reformation

³⁷Rene Biot, *The Enigma of the Stigmata*, trans. T. J. Hepburne-Scott (New York 1962) 140.

³⁸Bynum (n. 29 above) 121.

³⁹Schiller (n. 26 above) 189.

⁴⁰Eric Lund, "Second Age of the Reformation: Lutheran and Reformed Spirituality, 1550-1700" in *Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York 1989) 213-239.

⁴¹Timothy George, "The Spirituality of the Radical Reformation, in *Christian Spirituality: Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Rait (New York 1989) 334-371.

⁴²Martin Luther, "Sermon at Coburg on Cross and Suffering" in *Sermons I*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman,

was to use most effectively against Protestantism in the last quarter of the sixteenth century. In his defense, Luther explains that suffering itself is "true holiness," but that one must suffer at God's will, and not as a personal choice "as the fanatics choose their own suffering" ("Sermon at Coburg" 198). Those who meditate too flamboyantly on Christ's Passion, according to Luther, have a kind of works-righteousness:

But they are wrong, not only with respect to their choosing their own cross, but also in that they flaunt their suffering and make a great merit of it and thus blaspheme God, because it is not a true suffering but a stinking, self-chosen suffering ("Sermon at Coburg" 199).

And thus, paradoxically, Luther advises his audience to "drive the suffering and cross from your heart and mind as quickly as you can" ("Sermon at Coburg" 204).

Elsewhere, however, Luther insists equally strongly on the value of contemplating the suffering Christ. In "A Meditation on Christ's Passion," he explains the impact of such meditation in personal terms:

When Christ is tortured by nails penetrating his hands and feet, you should eternally suffer the pain they inflict and the pain of even more cruel nails, which will in truth be the lot of those who do not avail themselves of Christ's passion.⁴³

In emphasizing the suffering of the individual believer Luther harks back to the medieval notion of *imitatio Christi*, but he is already modifying it by suggesting the fate of those who "do not avail themselves" (properly) of the Passion. For Luther, the Passion should not just create physical suffering in the believer, and certainly not the exquisite pain of the stigmatic, but mental terror. "They contemplate Christ's passion aright," he says, "who view it with a terror-stricken heart and a despairing conscience" ("On Christ's Passion" 8). The physical dimension the Passion corresponds to the emotions of the believer. "The real and true work of Christ's passion is to make man conformable to Christ, so that man's conscience is tormented by his sins in like measure as Christ was pitiably tormented in body and soul by our sins" ("On Christ's Passion" 10). In this equation, Luther relies on a purely Augustinian account of wounds as a metaphor for sin. The risen Christ, according to Luther, has "no wounds, no pain in him, and no sign of sin" ("On Christ's Passion" 12). Unlike late medieval accounts of Christ's wounds, which emphasized the parallels between bleeding and nurturing, Luther's work makes the wounds into a source of profound desolation. The "natural and noble work" of the Passion, according to Luther, is "strangling the old Adam and banishing all joy, delight, and confidence which man could derive from other creatures, even as Christ was forsaken by all, even by God" ("On Christ's Passion" 11). Thus, Luther's real objection to Catholic holy people who meditated on the Passion was the comfort they took from this activity. "Christ's suffering is thus used to effect in them," he complains, "a lack of suffering contrary to his being and nature" ("On

trans. John Doberstein, vol. 51 (Philadelphia 1959) 198. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be noted by title and page number.

⁴³Martin Luther, "A Meditation on Christ's Passion" in *Devotional Writings*, ed. Helmut T. Lehman, trans. John Doberstein, vol. 42 (Philadelphia 1959) 9. Subsequent references are from this edition and will be noted by title and page number.

Christ's Passion" 7).

Protestant theologians reacted particularly strongly to the popular devotional practices of the late Middle Ages, but in the post-Tridentine world of late sixteenth-century Catholicism, these devotional practices were already out of favor. The Catholic Church had embarked on its own reformation. What had once been a religion that was "often public, emotional, and organized around groups, such as the confraternities," according to Keith Luria, became "individualized, interiorized, and austere rather than collective, public, and emotional."⁴⁴ Those whom Luther condemned for "flaunting" their suffering were also condemned by the Catholic Church in its attempt to encourage what the bishop of Nimes describes as "fervor, veneration, silence, and order."⁴⁵ Even the sometimes flamboyant efforts of "internal missionaries" accentuated individual spirituality. The "esercizio devoto," a meditation on a devotional object, while performed in a communal setting, was nonetheless distinguished as an "individual act."⁴⁶ This emphasis on interiorized spirituality was partly the result of direct action by church authorities. New observances, new saints, and new hierarchies were all designed to replace the diffuse authority of the medieval church with centralized control. But many of the organizational changes mirrored changes in spirituality that were already taking place throughout Catholic Europe. In Spain, efforts to reform religious life (not popular devotion but life in the religious orders) created a heightened interest in spirituality among lay people. As for the Counter-Reformation as a whole, Spanish spirituality during the last quarter of the sixteenth century was characterized by "the passage from an objective spirituality based on vocal prayer and external works to another vital and subjective one based on personal experience."⁴⁷

4.

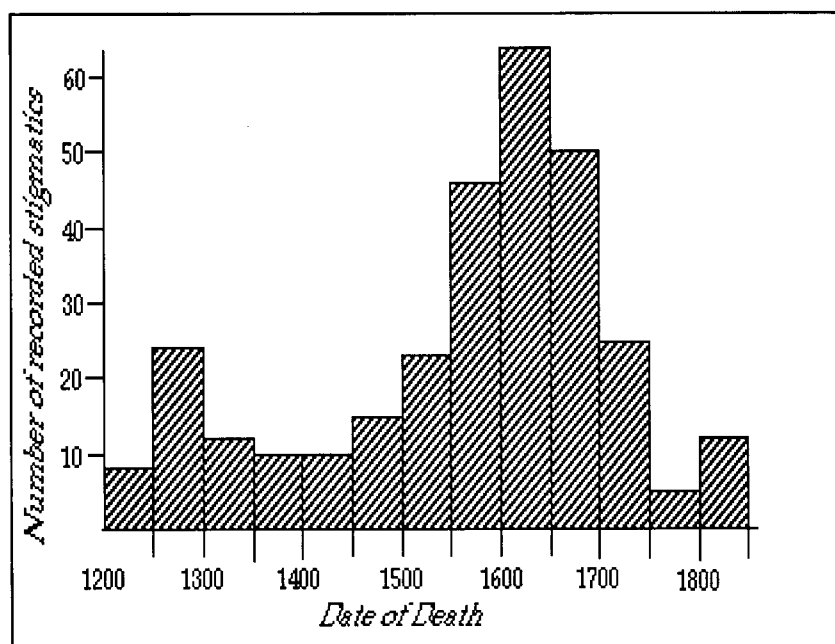
Although the Counter-Reformation turned away from "objective spirituality," however, it did not discourage such paramystical phenomena as stigmatism. The number of ecstasics and stigmatics actually increased dramatically in the late sixteenth century. According to Imbert-Gourbeyre's list of historical stigmatics, for example, there were a greater number of living stigmatics in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries than at any other period in history.

⁴⁴Keith P. Luria, "The Counter-Reformation and Popular Spirituality" in *Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York 1989) 93-120.

⁴⁵Luria (n. 43 above) 98.

⁴⁶Luria (n. 43 above) 120.

⁴⁷Kieran Kavanagh, "Spanish Sixteenth Century: Carmel and Surrounding Movements" in *Christian Spirituality: Post Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers (New York 1989) 70.

HISTORICAL DISTRIBUTION OF RECORDED STIGMATICS⁴⁸

This increase had its roots in Counter-Reformation theology. Because the austere and interiorized spirituality of the Counter-Reformation had certain surface resemblances to Protestant spirituality, Catholic religious writers sought to contrast themselves with Protestants less on the kind of spirituality than on the quality of an individual's relationship with God, and particularly the quality of divine love. To Luther's idea of "faith alone" (*sola fides*), the Counter-Reformation saw itself as offering "faith informed by love." And given the language of late medieval Christianity, the greatest evidence of divine love was Christ's Passion. Hence the interpretation and importance of the wounds of Christ became the center of one of the key religious battlegrounds at the end of the sixteenth century. Stigmatics were a powerful weapon in this battle because they allowed Catholicism to claim visible and miraculous access to the divine. Consequently, as part of its effort to regain ascendancy in Europe, the church recognized holy people, especially stigmatics and ecstasies, more openly. Of course, this process was not always, or even often, a positive one, as Sor Maria's experiences demonstrate. But even notorious cases of failure and scandal reflect the heightened imaginative and spiritual investment in the body that was characteristic of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The details of Sor Maria's history underscore this imaginative investment. The handkerchiefs on which her wounds were printed, in triplicate or quadruplicate, made her a religious reflection of Renaissance print-culture as a whole, with its emphasis on duplication and distribution. To her contemporaries, Sor Maria was distinguished at

⁴⁸Based on data from Imbert-Gourbeyre (n. 31 above)

first by her universal renown, and later by her universal disgrace. Many of those who wrote of her, like Lippomano, considered the amount of widespread attention she received more a source of wonder than the details of her paramystical experiences themselves. Also, unlike earlier holy women whose fame grew slowly if at all, Sor Maria's reputation was created and then destroyed in a comparatively short time. The speed with which Sor Maria's deeds became known throughout Europe and the amount of popular interest she enjoyed reflect an increasing popular interest in a bodily kind of spirituality, but they also speak to more general changes in the way information and attitudes were communicated in early modern Europe. Traditional hagiography had always relied on the relatively slow cults of relics and word of mouth. Sor Maria's fame was practically instantaneous by comparison.

Sor Maria's failure also shows how much anxiety was focused on bodily holiness in the period. Those few holy women who succeeded show how influential such holiness could be. Of these the most famous and influential was Teresa of Ávila, someone whose fame paralleled that initially given to Sor Maria. Saint Teresa's popularity was partly responsible for the exceptional speed of her canonization. She even shared with Sor Maria the "printed" relic. In 1595, thirteen years after her death, Diego de Yepes, who had previously supported Teresa, was moved to begin the canonization process when he witnessed blood from her corpse soaking into handkerchiefs.⁴⁹ Unlike Sor Maria, however, Teresa managed to convey her mystical understanding of Christ's body in a form acceptable to the church.

The attention that women like Sor Maria and Teresa of Ávila received shows the power and influence of the mystical understanding of Christ's wounds in the period and the place of such understanding in Counter-Reformation spirituality as a whole. But Teresa's orthodoxy is now taken for granted; she was not typical of Renaissance holy women in the period. If experiences such as hers were increasingly popular, they also inspired an increasing amount of suspicion in the church. Fewer stigmatics were canonized in the sixteenth century than previously, and more of these women were subject to critical investigation. Bynum notes this suspicion in her work on late medieval religious women. According to her, "Male suspicion of women's visionary and charismatic experiences, like male distrust of the female body, was never absent. It seems to have increased in the later fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth centuries."⁵⁰ The new and more rigorous standards for sainthood that the Council of Trent enacted also contributed to a growing atmosphere of skepticism.

In fact, Maria de la Visitación's failure is in many ways more typical of contemporary attitudes toward the physical phenomenon of mysticism than Saint Teresa's famous success. Modern critics who have written on Sor Maria's life, however briefly, have confirmed this possibility. Even those who believe firmly in her guilt consider her a paradigm of sixteenth-century spirituality. Imirizaldu, for example, calls her "the most outstanding and resonant case of pseudo mysticism and fraud of this century

⁴⁹Gillian Ahlgren, "The Canonization of Teresa of Ávila: Rewriting the Life of a Saint," presented at the 1993 Sixteenth-Century Studies Conferences in St. Louis, MO (unpublished).

⁵⁰Bynum (n. 29 above) 215.

'abounding with deceit in life and in history.'"⁵¹ I don't think the question of her guilt or innocence is relevant to this argument. Whether Sor Maria was guilty as charged by the Inquisition or not, the popular version of events reveals the source of sixteenth-century anxieties about religion and the body. Two details of Maria's story are particularly revealing. First, after her disgrace it was rumored that she was the tool of several monks of her order, although the Inquisition's written sentence does not report this. Second, although the Inquisition based its case entirely on her alleged fraud, the whole case against Sor Maria was well known to be motivated by her dangerous political sympathies. Thus, what "everyone" knew about Sor Maria (and what Heironimo Lippomano reported home) elaborated considerably on the official version of events.

When popular opinion accused Sor Maria of being the pawn of several unscrupulous men, it did not necessarily perceive her as weak or incompetent, but rather as the product of a criminal misappropriation of the system by which true stigmatics were validated. Like earlier stigmatics, Sor Maria depended on the reaction of her male confessors and counselors for acceptance. Historically, female stigmatics had been announced and denounced, celebrated and investigated, by men. Ironically, one of the ways by which a stigmatic or ecstatic could be approved was specifically by submission to male direction. Bynum notes that the importance of male direction and counsel was gradually increasing by the end of the Middle Ages: "In later hagiography, women are more isolated and 'male-oriented.' The figure of the confessor is more central, as a spiritual advisor or guarantor of orthodoxy."⁵² In discussing the canonization of Saint Teresa of Ávila, Ahlgren remarks on the way that her advocates stressed, and even exaggerated, her continual and patient submission to the will of various confessors and counselors.⁵³ The number of such counselors, their theological orthodoxy, and their reputation in the church all helped validate the experiences of the women they advocated. As Sor Maria's case demonstrates, however, the virtue of obedience could be turned against a woman. By alleging that she was a product of evil counsel, the authorities managed to portray her as a parody of the accepted version of a holy woman. Her disgrace also reflected strongly on the men who had been involved with her. Fray Luis de Granada, who wrote her vita and could thus be thought of as one of her advocates, did his best to distance himself from Sor Maria as soon as she was exposed. Many have seen his final sermon "Contra los Escándolos en las Caídas Públicas" [Against those who fall from public trust] as a direct reaction to Sor Maria's sentence.⁵⁴ Luis de Granada's opinion carried considerable weight in sixteenth-century Spain, and his support of Sor Maria was one of the strongest points in her favor. But the readiness with which popular opinion challenged his impression of her shows how tenuous the value of male counsel had become by the late sixteenth century. There were few alternative methods of validating paramystical phenomena, but the traditional process had become a source of suspicion. Sor Maria's disgrace thus reflects a

⁵¹Jesus Imirizaldu, ed., *Monjas y beatas embaucadoras* (Madrid 1977) 123; my translation.

⁵²Bynum (n. 29 above) 129.

⁵³Ahlgren (n. 48 above).

⁵⁴Imirizaldu (n. 50 above) 123.

larger crisis in the methods by which the sanctity of bodily experiences was substantiated.

The political motives behind Sor Maria's case also show how threatening such bodily experiences had become in the late sixteenth century. That the voice of a holy woman should be heard in political circles was not entirely unknown. In the Renaissance, holy women such as Luca da Narni, Osanna Andreasi, and Stefana Quinzani were adopted as "spiritual advisors" by political leaders who wished to increase enhance the authority and reputation of their courts.⁵⁵ Although no single aristocrat laid claim to Sor Maria, she did develop a impressive clientele among the Spanish and Portuguese aristocracy, among them the ill fated marquis of Santa Cruz. But Richard Kagan, in his study of Lucrecia de León, notes that most holy women involved with figures of secular authority did not get involved directly in politics, and that when they did, as in the case of Bridgit of Sweden, such involvement seriously challenged their spiritual claims in the eyes of the church.⁵⁶ This fact leads him to describe Lucrecia's own political visions as an "anomaly." But it isn't always easy to separate the spiritual from the political in a late sixteenth-century context. Politics had become an increasingly important part of religious discourse in general by the last quarter of the sixteenth century, and the status of Catholic holy women depended partly on their utility to the aims, both religious and political, of the Counter-Reformation. Sor Maria's blessing of the Armada is a case in point. The war against England certainly had a spiritual flavor if not even a spiritual fervor, but it was just as political as many other wars. In asking Sor Maria to bless the invasion fleet, the authorities wanted a public authentication of Spanish imperial ambition. And her celebrity, just as much as her actual sanctity, made her the obvious choice. The power that had been invested in Sor Maria was not just spiritual, any more than the conflict between Reformation and Counter-Reformation was just spiritual.

In many ways the political claims of women like Sor Maria actually typify the atmosphere of the late sixteenth century. They were not accused and convicted simply because they entered politics. On the contrary, holy women were an important tool of political propaganda in the post-Tridentine world. Their bodies, at least, were widely treated as political statements. Nor were these women accused because they made the wrong political statements. It is true that Sor Maria's contemporaries spoke of her disgrace in the context of dangerous political statements, but they did so after the fact. Actually, Sor Maria's sympathies for the exiled Portuguese pretender were always well known, even as her reputation continued to climb in Spanish aristocratic circles. It was not until the extended crisis of public opinion following the defeat of the Armada that her subversive political voice attracted serious attention. At that moment the very thing that made her attractive to the authorities, her celebrity, became her greatest liability. The careful investigation by the Inquisition, with its foregone conclusions about Sor Maria's fraudulence, reflects much larger anxieties about institutional authority over voices like hers. It shows how the authentication and reproduction of

⁵⁵Richard Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams: Politics and Prophecy in Sixteenth-Century Spain* (Berkeley 1990) 5.

⁵⁶Kagan (n. 54 above) 6.

these voices increasingly threatened to escape the control of the institutions that stood to profit or lose in their deployment.

5.

Of course, holy women like Sor Maria and Teresa of Ávila were exceptional even in the sixteenth century. No matter how popular the tradition of stigmata became, there was never a statistically significant number of them in terms of the general population. Nevertheless these charismatic figures generated an exaggerated amount of attention and interest, both popular and official. The wounds of Christ were the center of religious and political contest in the sixteenth century, and stigmatics represented the most extreme and sensational position in this contest. The ways in which they were depicted and the ways they were treated by the male authorities show how spiritual energy and doctrinal orthodoxy were often at odds during this period. Most of all, stigmatics demonstrate how sixteenth-century anxieties about the religious significance of wounds derived from their presumed power to transform others, spiritually and politically. From its cloistered origins in late medieval spirituality, the notion that the human body could visibly imitate the body of Christ became, in the Renaissance, a source of popular obsession, capable of sweeping Europe like wildfire.

Albion College
Albion, MI 49224

CONTENTS

Abstracts

The *Rex renitens* and the Medieval Idea of Kingship, ca. 900–ca. 1250
BJÖRN WEILER

Urban Space, Memory, and Episcopal Authority: The Bishops of Amiens in Peace and Conflict, 1073–1164
JOHN S. OTT

Churchmen and the Promotion of Peace in King Stephen's Reign
PAUL DALTON

Etienne de Gallardon and the Making of the Cartulary of Bourges
JOHN W. BALDWIN

The Widow's Portion: Law, Custom, and Marital Property among Medieval Catalan Jews
ELKA KLEIN

Defining Rape in Medieval Perpignan: Women Plaintiffs before the Law
REBECCA LYNN WINER

"Ecce virgo concipiet": The Iconography and Context of Duccio's London *Annunciation*
ROGER P. TARR

The Text Recontextualized in Performance: Deschamps' Prelection of Machaut's *Voir Dit* to the Count of Flanders
JOYCE COLEMAN

Middleham Jewel: Ritual, Power, and Devotion
PETER MURRAY JONES AND LEA T. OLSAN

Francisco Sá de Miranda, Garcilaso de la Vega, and the Transfer of Italian Poetic Forms to Portugal and Spain
IGNACIO NAVARRETE

"These are people who eat raw fish": Contours of the Ethnographic Imagination in the Sixteenth Century
FLORIKE EGMOND AND PETER MASON

Montaigne's Art of Idleness
VIRGINIA KRAUSE

Stigmata on Trial: The Nun of Portugal and the Politics of the Body
IAN MACINNES

Taming the Visible: Word and Image in Oviedo's *Historia General y Natural de las Indias*
JESÚS CARRILLO

The Traction Trebuchet: A Triumph of Four Civilizations
PAUL E. CHEVEDDEN, ZVI SHILLER, SAMUEL R. GILBERT, DONALD J. KAGAY