

Library MS Hh.1.12, with a specifically female viewpoint of Christ as a knight.

Denissen is quite rightly enjoying a particularly fruitful stage early in her academic career (chapters on *A Talkyng of the Love of God* in McAvoy and Gunn's *Medieval Anchorites in their Communities*, D.S. Brewer, 2017, and on *A Talkyng of the Love of God* and *The Tretyse of Love* in Flannery's *Emotion and Medieval Textual Media*, Brepols, 2018, and jointly editing *Late Medieval Devotional Compilations in England*, Brepols, 2020) in addition to the present publication. *Middle English Devotional Compilations* is an outstanding contribution to the field of late medieval devotion, literature, and cultural studies and Diana Denissen is to be warmly congratulated on producing such a timely and innovative study.

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***This Is My Body: Eucharistic Theology and Anthropology in the Writings of Gertrude the Great of Helfta.*** Ella Johnson. Colledgeville, Minn.: Cistercian Publications, 2020. 246 pp. \$34.95 (paperback) ISBN 978-0-87907-280-3.

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Readers of this journal will no doubt be familiar with the life and work of Gertrude of Helfta (1256-c.1302), one of the great mystics of thirteenth-century Europe. Also known as Gertrude the Great, the German Cistercian was a mystic, theologian, and spiritual writer. Together with Mechtild of Magdeburg and Mechtild of Hackeborn, Gertrude is often referred to as one of the "Helfta mystics." It was at the monastery of St. Mary at Helfta where Gertrude experienced the first of her visions at the age of twenty-five. Rigorously educated in a range of subjects, including Latin, rhetoric, scripture, patristics, liturgy, and theology, her mystical experiences called

her deeply into a life of prayer. Notably, Gertrude was an early devotee of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Her two extant works are *Legatus memorialis abundantiae divinae pietatis* (*The Herald of the Memorial of the Abundance of Divine Love*), consisting of her autobiography and visionary writings, and a collection of seven liturgical meditations, *Documenta spiritualium exercitationum* (*Teaching of Spiritual Exercises*), a classic devotional work still read by those drawn to the life of prayer today. These works, along with that of the other Helfta mystics, account for the largest body of woman-authored works in the period.

Despite the importance of Gertrude of Helfta in the history of Christian mysticism, there is limited scholarship devoted to her rich theological legacy. Ella Johnson's new book, *This Is My Body: Eucharistic Theology and Anthropology in the Writings of Gertrude the Great of Helfta*, corrects some of that balance in her exemplary study of Gertrude's visionary and devotional writings. Johnson, an assistant professor in the theology department at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, Iowa, regards her study as a "project of women's theological recovery" whereby "women writers in Christian history could then be celebrated rightly – not just for their holiness, but also for their scholarship, not just as mystics, but also as theologians" (p. xvi). Overall, Johnson examines Gertrude's eucharistic theology and anthropology, revealing her positive regard for the body and its relationship to eucharistic devotion.

The first two chapters of *This Is My Body* situate Gertrude in the context of her monastery at Helfta and give an overview of her life and writings. Chapters three and four discuss the "doctrine of spiritual senses" and how it was integrated into her eucharistic theology. While grounded in Origen, Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux, Gertrude expands these sources by affirming bodily forms of divine union.

An examination of Gertrude's writings from a liturgical perspective is the focus of chapter five, where Johnson investigates how she uses sensory language, ritual actions, and liturgical tropes and images. "These categories help to illustrate why Gertrude conceives almost any act of devotion as being eucharistic in its capacity for intimate union with God" (p. 148).

Chapter six focuses on gender in Gertrude's devotional works, where she consistently subverts traditional male/female dichotomies, emphasizing instead the belief that all have access to union with God. In this chapter, Johnson describes Gertrude's "visionary priesthood" whereby she takes on roles traditionally considered priestly. The last chapter of the book, chapter seven, builds on the previous chapter by arguing that "Gertrude makes a substantial contribution to the tradition of eucharistic theology and theological anthropology through her main teaching: that the human person, regardless of gender, as a body-soul composite, encounters both Christ's humanity and divinity in eucharistic communion"(212). In this assertion, Gertrude not only manipulates gender dichotomies, she breaks through them to claim that anyone has access to the authority of priesthood.

*This Is My Body* is an innovative and thought-provoking book. Johnson's careful reading of the texts supports her argument that Gertrude is a model for theologians who seek to move beyond dichotomies based in differences. Her accessible writing style makes the book an exciting read for academic and more general audiences.

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*Two books by Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis*

***The Care of Nuns: The Ministries of Benedictine Women in England during the Central Middle Ages.*** Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019. XX + 365 pp. ISBN 978-0-085128-6.

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How often have we heard, "The problem of nuns," in history texts? This is usually stated in reference to men's communities not wanting to accept responsibility for the pastoral care, and sometimes also financial responsibility, for women's communities. The assumption is that women could not care for

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