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To cite this article: Edward Sutcliffe (2024) Embodied Preaching: Teaching, Women, and Example in Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Hagiography, *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 68:1, 64-84, DOI: [10.1080/13660691.2024.2432709](https://doi.org/10.1080/13660691.2024.2432709)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13660691.2024.2432709>



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Published online: 29 Nov 2024.



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# Embodied Preaching: Teaching, Women, and Example in Thirteenth-Century Franciscan Hagiography

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**KEYWORDS** female preaching; sermons; medieval; hagiography; Franciscan; example

This study surveys the genealogy of the thirteenth-century hagiographical trope of embodied preaching, as applied to laywomen associated with the Franciscan Order. It begins by establishing the importance of preaching by deeds in patristic and medieval contexts, and then briefly assesses the performative and exemplary aspects of the preaching of St Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226) and his followers. The discussion then turns towards theoretical treatments of the idea of women preachers, before examining the didactic activities of Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207–31), Umiliana dei Cerchi (1219–46), Rose of Viterbo (1233–51), Douceline of Digne (1214–74), and Margaret of Cortona (1247–97). In doing so, this article traces the ways in which hagiographers used the idea of embodied preaching to celebrate the teaching activities of women, arguing that exemplarity could serve as a tool for education in and of itself, but was often fruitfully combined with other strategies for vindicating female didactic activity.

The capacity of these women to preach has not gone unremarked in the literature. Rose of Viterbo and Margaret of Cortona, in particular, have been much discussed as prominent examples of female preachers from the Middle Ages.<sup>1</sup> Nor is the observation that Franciscan laywomen sought to teach by example a new one. The work of Darleen Pryds, in particular, and Krijn Pansters has sought to argue that the actions and example of Franciscan tertiaries not only constituted a form of teaching, but also contributed substantially to the historical evolution of the Third Order, and to the development of Franciscan intellectual culture in general.<sup>2</sup> The present study does not consider questions about the institutional impact of women teaching by example, seeking rather to map the development of a particular hagiographical pattern within the thirteenth century. Nor does it refer to later Franciscan laywomen who preached, with Angela of Foligno (1248–1309) and Clare of Rimini (1260–1326) the most obvious omissions.<sup>3</sup> While the discussion is therefore limited in

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Margherita of Cortona: Women, Preaching, and the Writing of Hagiography', *Medieval Sermon Studies*, 54 (2010), 38–50; Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Travis Allen Stevens, 'Preaching, Heresy, and the Writing of Female Hagiography', in *Beyond Catholicism: Heresy Mysticism and Apocalypse in Italian Culture*, ed. by Fabrizio de Donno and Simon Gilson (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 33–52; Darleen Pryds, 'Franciscan Lay Women and the Charism to Preach', in *Franciscans and Preaching: Every Miracle from the Beginning of the World Came about through Words*, ed. by Timothy Johnson, The Medieval Franciscans, 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 41–57; Darleen Pryds, 'Proclaiming Sanctity through Proscribed Acts: The Case of Rose of Viterbo', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverley Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 159–72.

<sup>2</sup> Darleen Pryds, "'Conforming himself to the Poor": Laity as Co-Creators of the Franciscan Tradition', *Franciscan Studies*, 77 (2019), 31–51; Pryds, 'Franciscan Lay Women and the Charism to Preach'; Krijn Pansters, 'Being the Teaching: Living Spirituality Lessons From the Franciscan Secular Tradition', in *Teaching and Tradition: On Their Dynamic Interaction*, ed. by Jos Moons, Rudi A. te Velde, and Archibald L.H.M. van Wieringen, Studies in Catholic Theology, 12 (Leiden: Brill, 2023), pp. 80–98.

<sup>3</sup> Angela of Foligno's postmedieval title *magistra theologorum* points to a rather different form of teaching. Her preaching and instruction is in any case best approached through her own writings rather than hagiography. See Angela of Foligno, *The Complete Works*, trans. by Paul Lachance, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1993). On Clare, see Jacques

both its intent and its chronological span, it takes a broad and open definition of ‘Franciscan’. Indeed, only one of the women under discussion had a formal vocational affiliation with the Franciscans.<sup>4</sup> However, the influence of Franciscan spirituality was wide-reaching, and the discussion encompasses women who were animated by the example of Francis and his followers, who confessed to and were guided by the friars minor, or who were claimed and posthumously memorialized by the movement.

This article sheds new light on hagiographical accounts of female preaching in two ways. Firstly, it does so by considering female teachers against the background of the long Christian tradition of teaching by example. The study therefore begins with a survey of what might be called ‘embodied preaching’ in patristic and medieval sources, up to and including St Francis of Assisi and the earliest friars. This context is essential in understanding the way in which the paradigm of teaching by example functioned, not least because it demonstrates that while this form of preaching came to be associated with lay women, it was also something that could be important for men and for clerics. Secondly, this article offers new insight into these women by framing the hagiographical texts in terms of contemporary debates about the female capacity for preaching. Exemplarity and embodied preaching are thus discussed with reference to debates about if, when, how, and where women might be permitted to teach. Analysis of this material suggests that teaching by example was readily combined with other strategies for legitimising female preaching, allowing hagiographers to celebrate the role of these women in instructing the faithful.

## Teaching by example

Christian theory of preaching has always emphasised the importance of conduct and action in teaching. Early commentators on the Gospels noted that Christ himself had preached not only using words, but also through his deeds.<sup>5</sup> In his influential *De doctrina christiana*, Augustine of Hippo (354–430) argued that the behaviour of a teacher informed the efficacy of their teaching. Having given extensive rhetorical advice, Augustine insisted that, in any case, ‘the life of the speaker’ was ‘more important than any amount of grandeur of style’.<sup>6</sup> This was because actions not only authenticated the message being preached, but also guarded against charges or suspicions of hypocrisy. Augustine lamented that there were teachers who:

benefit many people by preaching what they do not practise, but they would benefit far more people if they practised what they preached. There are plenty of people who look for a justification of their own evil lives from those in authority who teach them; they reply within their hearts or even, if they blurt it out, with their lips, ‘Why don’t you practise what you preach?’ That is why people do not listen with obedience to the man who does not listen to himself, and they despise the word of God preached to them as well as despising the preacher.<sup>7</sup>

An audience might well decide not to heed wise and eloquent advice delivered by someone they knew to be wicked. Augustine therefore recommended that preachers should ‘be an example to

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Dalarun, Sean L. Field, and Valerio Cappozzo (eds), *A Female Apostle in Medieval Italy: The Life of Clare of Rimini*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Alison More has shown that it was by no means uncommon for male clerics to assign medieval lay women or irregular religious to established — or fictive — organisations and orders. See Alison More, *Fictive Orders and Feminine Religious Identities, 1200–1600* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. pp. 157–60.

<sup>5</sup> On the origins and early medieval development of the idea of teaching by deeds, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo: An Aspect of Twelfth-Century Spirituality*, Harvard Theological Studies, 31 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 14–16.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, ed. and trans. by Roger Green (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), iv.151, p. 274: ‘quantumque granditate dictionis maius pondus vita dicentis’; translation above from Green, p. 275.

<sup>7</sup> *De doctrina*, iv.153, pp. 276–78: ‘Multis itaque prosunt dicendo quae non faciunt, sed longe pluribus prodessent faciendo quae dicunt. Abundant enim qui malae vitae suae defensionem ex ipsis suis praepositis et doctoribus quaerant, respondentes corde suo aut etiamsi ad hoc erumpunt ore suo atque dicentes, “quod mihi praecipis cur ipse non facis?” Ita fit ut eum non oboedienter audiant qui se ipse non audit, et dei verbum quod eis praedicatur simul cum ipso praedicator contemnant’. Translation above from Green, pp. 277–79.

believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity'.<sup>8</sup> Both here and elsewhere, Augustine stressed the importance of maintaining a good reputation by acting in a manner honourable in the eyes of both God and man.<sup>9</sup> This interest in the life of the preacher highlights what Beverly Mayne Kienzle has termed 'moral performance': the conduct and way of life that underpin and authorise a preacher's teaching.<sup>10</sup>

Augustine's primary concern was providing advice to those involved in the delivery of spoken sermons, and he argued that all should teach according to their own abilities. The ideal standard was for a preacher to teach with both wisdom and eloquence. Were this not possible, a teacher should speak wisely and without eloquence, rather than the other way around.<sup>11</sup> What, however, about a preacher who could speak neither with eloquence nor with wisdom? Augustine suggested that a preacher incapable even of teaching wisely without eloquence 'should seek to live in such a way that he not only gains a reward for himself but also gives an example to others, so that his way of life becomes, in a sense, an abundant source of eloquence'.<sup>12</sup> On these lines, Augustine not only indicated that there are different modes of teaching, but also identified exemplary living as the basic unit of preaching: both the *sine qua non* of effective verbal instruction, and an independent means of non-verbal instruction.

This interest in the active components of teaching was by no means limited to Augustine. In the sixth century, the *Regula pastoralis* of Gregory the Great (c. 540–604) developed the argument that a good pastor needed to lead his flock by example rather than by speech alone.<sup>13</sup> A similar sentiment animated western monastic traditions. Although there was no suggestion that ordinary monks should seek to edify others by their mode of living, abbots were required to teach by their example as well as by their words. This dual mode of teaching had been advocated by the anonymous *Regula magistri* as well as the more famous *Regula benedicti*, which required that:

anyone who receives the name of abbot is to lead his disciples by a twofold teaching: he must point out to them all that is good and holy more by example than by words, proposing the commandments of the Lord to receptive disciples with words, but demonstrating God's instructions to the stubborn and the dull by a living example. Again, if he teaches his disciples that something is not to be done, then neither must he do it, lest after preaching to others, he himself be found reprobate (1 Corinthians 9. 27) and God some day call to him in his sin: How is it that you repeat my just commands and mouth my covenant when you hate discipline and toss my words behind you (Psalm 49[50]. 16–17)? And also this: How is it that you can see a splinter in your brother's eye, and never notice the plank in your own (Matthew 7. 3)?<sup>14</sup>

Augustine had associated the dangers of hypocrisy with the negative impact it might have on a preacher's audience and had framed the necessity of teaching by example alone in terms of the intellectual limitations of the teacher. The *Rule of St Benedict* inverted these concerns. Hypocrisy was a

<sup>8</sup> *De doctrina*, iv.154, p. 278: 'sed forma esto fidelium in sermone, in conversatione, in dilectione, in fide, in castitate'. Translation above from Green, p. 279.

<sup>9</sup> *De doctrina*, iv.155, pp. 278–79; cf. Sermo 355, in *Patrologia Latina, Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne, 217 vols (Paris: Jacques-Paul Migne, 1844–55), 39 (1846), 1568–74.

<sup>10</sup> Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Medieval Sermons and Their Performance: Theory and Record', in *Preacher, Sermon, and Audience in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 89–124, (p. 96).

<sup>11</sup> *De doctrina*, iv.158, pp. 280–81.

<sup>12</sup> *De doctrina*, iv.159, p. 280: 'Si autem ne hoc quidem potest, ita conversetur ut non solum sibi praemium comparet sed et praebeat aliis exemplum et sit eius quasi copia dicendi forma vivendi'. Translation above from Green, p. 281.

<sup>13</sup> Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis*, ed. by Floribert Rommel, Sources chrétiennes, 381–82 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1992). See for instance ii.3, on p. 181: 'Sit rector operatione praecipuus, ut uitae uiam subditis uiuendo denuntiet, et grex qui pastoris uocem moresque sequitur, per exempla melius quam per uerba gradiatur'. For further examples, see the introductory letter, i.10, and iii.24.

<sup>14</sup> St Benedict, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict: In Latin and English with Notes*, ed. and trans. by Timothy Fry et al. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981), ii.11–15, p. 148: 'Ergo, cum aliquis suscipit nomen abbatis, duplici debet doctrina suis praeesse discipulis, id est omnia bona et sancta factis amplius quam uerbis ostendat, ut capacibus discipulis mandata Domini uerbis proponere, duris corde uero et simplicioribus factis suis diuina praecepta monstrare. Omnia uero quae discipulis docuerit esse contraria in suis factis indicet non agenda, ne aliis praedicans ipse reprobis inueniatur, ne quando illi dicat Deus peccanti: Quare tu enarras iustitias meas et assumis testamentum meum per os tuum? Tu uero odisti disciplinam et proiecisti sermones meos post te, et: Qui in fratris tui oculo festucam uidebas, in tuo trabem non uidisti'. Translation above from *RB 1980*, p. 185.

problem not because it might alienate an audience but rather because of the danger it posed to an abbot's own soul. Adhering to one's own teaching was important for any prelate who wanted to avoid sinning. By contrast, the power of teaching by example was now framed not in terms of the limited abilities of an illiterate teacher but in terms of the limitations of those being instructed. Deed and example could animate and stimulate a dull or stubborn audience who might have ignored, or failed to understand, verbal teaching. Action was a varied and flexible medium for teaching.

With the exception of the abbot, Latin rules and commentaries on monastic life had relatively little to say about the edification of others. As Caroline Walker Bynum has observed, the exemplary aspects of teaching highlighted in the early Latin tradition instead exerted a strong influence on secular canons in the Carolingian era, and even more so in the following centuries. Bynum's study of commentaries on canonical life established that twelfth-century secular canons not only regarded reputation and conduct as important correlates of verbal teaching, but were also capable of construing 'behaviour as a teaching agent in its own right, divorced from preaching'.<sup>15</sup> The secular canons therefore viewed teaching, by word and by example, as a prominent aspect of their vocation. Moral performance, either as the correlate of verbal teaching or as independent means of instruction, was an important part of canonical life.

However, the paradigm of individual monks teaching by example was not entirely absent from monastic texts. On the contrary, in the eleventh century, the idea that conduct and behaviour could constitute a type of preaching is visible in Peter Damian's (c. 1007–72) account of the life of the Camaldolese monk Dominic Loricatus (c. 995–1060). Dominic, who lived with Peter's monastic community at Fonte Avellana, was celebrated for his eremitical and penitential practices. He appears to have been illiterate, but this did not prevent Peter from extolling his didactic qualities as follows:

I am speaking of Dominic, my lord and teacher, whose speech, to be sure, is the vernacular, but whose life is truly accomplished and elegant. His life is a better tool for edification when he preaches in living deeds, than some sterile language that foolishly weighs each word in the neat balance of classical usage. For many years he wore an iron corselet next to his flesh, and engaged in implacable combat with the evil spirits. This eager fighter was always ready for battle, armed not only in spirit, but also bodily went forth against the enemy lines.<sup>16</sup>

To whom was this lived example 'preached'? Presumably, to Peter and the rest of the community. The lived example of Dominic was not related to a desire to guard against hypocrisy, to authorize verbal teaching, or to accommodate the spiritual needs of the dull. Rather, Dominic taught by deeds because he was not educated enough to teach otherwise. Peter was therefore reviving one of the points Augustine had made: that all should preach within their capabilities. And yet, Peter does not present illiteracy as a hindrance to teaching. Dominic was no second-rate substitute, and far from being held back by an inability to preach verbally, his moral performance of penitential austerity allowed him to preach far more effectively through his body, in 'living deeds'. Here was one way in which an ancient Christian interest in the didactic value of deeds and example influenced hagiographical writing of the high Middle Ages. Teaching such as this, conveyed through action and not through words, might be termed 'embodied preaching'.

<sup>15</sup> Bynum, *Docere Verbo et Exemplo*, p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Damian, *Die Briefe der Petrus Damiani*, III: 91–150, ed. by Kurt Reindel, *MGH: Die Briefe der deutschen Kaiserzeit*. 4.3 (Munich: Monumenta Germaniae Historica, 1988), ep. cix, pp. 210–11: 'Dominicum dico doctorem videlicet et dominum meum, cuius quidem lingua rustica est, sed vita artificiosa satis et lepida, quae sane vita satis utilius ad aedificationem vivis operibus praedicat, quam sterilis quorundam lingua, quae accurata faleratae urbanitatis verba inaniter trutinat. Longo iam annorum clabente curriculo ferrea ad carnem lorica praecinctus infoederabilem pugnam cum iniquis spiritibus conserit, semperque paratus ad proelium non solum corde sed et corpore praemunito adversus hostiles acies fervidus bellator incedit'. Translation above from Peter Damian, 'Letter 109', in *The Letters of Peter Damian*, IV: 91–120, trans. by Owen Blum, *Fathers of the Church: Medieval Continuation*, 5 (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1998), pp. 214–15.

Theoretical discussions of preaching from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries also recognized a limited role for conduct and example. The years leading up to the conversion of Francis of Assisi witnessed the rise of a new style of preaching associated with the *sermo modernus*. A burgeoning genre of aids and guidebooks advised preachers on how to construct and deliver ‘modern’ sermons.<sup>17</sup> One of the earliest such works was the *Ars praedicandi* of Alan of Lille (c. 1128–1203). At the outset of this work, Alan explained that:

There are three types of preaching: that which is by the spoken word, of which it is said: ‘Go, preach the Gospel to every creature’ (Mark 16. 15). Another is by means of the written word, as when the Apostle says that he has ‘preached’ to the Corinthians because he has written them a letter (cf. I Corinthians 5. 9–11). The third is by deed, as it is said: ‘Every work of Christ is our instruction’.<sup>18</sup>

As might be expected, Alan devoted the majority of his work to advising clerics on preaching verbal sermons on the gospel, but his taxonomy nevertheless points towards the importance of preachers maintaining proper moral performance. Moreover, it accepts the possibility that something that could be considered ‘preaching’ could also be practiced through action alone.

### Franciscans and Example

St Francis of Assisi himself was famously associated with dramatic acts of teaching, and with the communication of the gospel through action. As shown above, such activities were not wholly innovative. The concept of embodied preaching highlights not only concordance between speech and action, but also the power of deeds as an independent means of instruction that could be tailored to meet the intellectual limitations of either preacher or audience. This background is helpful in understanding the teaching of Francis. He was by all accounts a highly effective preacher, but he was also neither well-educated nor a cleric and these factors shaped his approach to teaching. The early hagiography of Francis contains numerous instances where his teaching was performed just as much as it was pronounced. For instance, when asked to preach to St Clare (1194–1253) and the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, he famously sprinkled ashes on the floor, sang the *miserere*, and left — to tremendous effect.<sup>19</sup> The saint’s first hagiographer Thomas of Celano (c. 1200–60) wrote that when Francis’ health began to deteriorate, he insisted on continuing to visit four or five towns and villages a day in order to preach. There, in failing health, he proclaimed ‘to everyone the good news of the Kingdom of God, edifying his listeners by his example as much as by his words, as he made his whole body a tongue’.<sup>20</sup> Francis is therefore quite rightly celebrated as one of the most prominent champions of an embodied style of preaching.

Within the Franciscan order, preaching by deeds was not limited to the founder. Francis sought to inculcate a similar attitude to teaching amongst his early followers. In an analysis of the earliest sources for modes of Franciscan teaching, Michael Blastis has concluded that ‘the primary

<sup>17</sup> For further details, see Siegfried Wenzel, *Medieval Artes Praedicandi: A Synthesis of Scholastic Sermon Structure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Alan of Lille, *Ars Praedicandi*, I, in *Patrologia Latina*, 210 (1855), 111–98, at p. 113: ‘Sunt autem tres species praedicationis; una quae est in verbo, de qua dicitur: *Ite, praedicate Evangelium omni creaturae*, etc. Alia est in scripto, unde Apostolus dicit se praedicasse Corinthiis, quia eis epistolas scripsit. Alia est in facto, unde dicitur: *Omnis Christi actio nostra est instructio*’. Translation above adapted from Alan of Lille, *The Art of Preaching*, trans. by Gillian R. Evans (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1981), p. 20.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Memoriale in desiderio animae de gestis et verbis sanctissimi patris nostri Francisci*, clvii.207, in *Fontes Franciscani*, ed. by Enrico Menestò and Stefano Brufani (Assisi: Edizioni Porziuncola, 1995), pp. 622–23; translated in *Francis of Assisi: The Founder*, ed. by Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellman, and William J. Short, Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, 2 (New York: New City, 2000), p. 380.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas of Celano, *Vita beatissimi patris nostri Francisci*, lib. II, iv.97, in *Fontes Franciscani*, ed. by Menestò and Brufani, p. 373: ‘ita ut una die quatuor aut quinque castella vel etiam civitates saepius circuiret, evangelizans unicuique regnum Dei, et non minus exemplo quam verbo aedificans audientes, de toto corpore fecerat linguam’. Translation above from *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, ed. by Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellman, and William J. Short, Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, 1 (New York: New City, 1999), p. 266.

preaching of the early brothers took the form of the example and witness of their lives'.<sup>21</sup> The *Earlier Rule* enjoined the brothers to seek permission of their ministers before preaching, and to preach in accordance with the practice of the Church. Nevertheless, it goes on to say 'let all the brothers, however, preach by their deeds'.<sup>22</sup> Francis, though capitalizing on an ancient form of teaching that was deeply embedded in the lives of secular canons, promoted preaching by example with renewed zeal, and as a tool that could aid in the work of public evangelization.

However, the familiar story of the community's evolution into a more clerical, more structured order likely undermined this approach to preaching. During the early thirteenth century, concerns about heretical public teaching by laypeople, including women, led to renewed scrutiny of the question of who was permitted to preach, and by what authority. Against this backdrop, the so-called *Later Rule* of the friars minor, which received official papal approval in 1223, makes no direct reference to preaching by deeds. It does, however, offer the blanket prohibition that no friar is to 'dare to preach in any way to the people unless he has been examined and approved by the general minister of the fraternity and the office of preacher has been conferred upon him'.<sup>23</sup> Later modifications slackened these restrictions, facilitating the progress of learned clerics to the office of preacher, but it seems likely that by the mid-1220s the order was increasingly divided between friars who were literate clerics and were licensed to preach verbally, and friars who were lay and/or illiterate and were excluded from the work of preaching altogether. In some quarters, the latter category were considered *fratres inutiles*, ill-suited to serving the new work of the order.<sup>24</sup>

Hagiographical material suggests that the idea of teaching by example offered one way of responding to this binary. It was a straightforward process to leverage the idea of exemplary action in memorializing the evangelical and didactic activities of those who were lay, illiterate, or otherwise excluded from the work of preaching. Though, as we shall see, the paradigm came to be associated with laywomen in particular it could also be applied to male friars. The best and earliest example of this is Benvenuto of Gubbio (d. 1232). Though little-known, Benvenuto is an important figure in Franciscan hagiography, and was probably the first friar other than Francis and Anthony of Padua (1195–1231) to be formally considered for canonization. The records of his process of canonization in 1236 do not survive, but evidence produced for the inquiry was later excerpted as part of the *Dialogus de gestis* compiled in the 1240s and usually attributed to Thomas of Pavia (c. 1212–84).<sup>25</sup> The biographical sketch of Benvenuto contained in *Dialogus* represents an intriguing attempt to frame a form of imitable Franciscan sanctity tied up with lay identity. Benvenuto had joined the order as an illiterate layman, but his admirers remained determined to emphasise his efficacy as a teacher. *Dialogus* reports that:

there was a certain man from the region of Gubbio, Benevenutus by name, who in keeping with the meaning of his name excelled in the gifts of divine blessing. Eminent in the grace of a venerable life, and also in the respectability of his conduct, he left to posterity a pattern of holy behaviour to be wondered at by all, or rather

<sup>21</sup> Michael Blastis, 'Preaching in the Early Franciscan Movement', in *Franciscans and Preaching: Every Miracle from the Beginning of the World Came about through Words*, ed. by Timothy Johnson, The Medieval Franciscans, 7 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 15–40 (p. 19).

<sup>22</sup> *Regula non bullata*, xvii.3, ed. by Carlo Paolazzi, 'La "Regula non bullata" dei Frati Minori (1221), dallo "stemma codicum" al testo critico', *Archivum franciscanum historicum*, 100 (2007), 5–148, at p. 138: 'Omnes tamen fratres operibus predicant'. Cf. *Fontes Franciscani*, ed. by Menestò and Brufani, p. 200. Translation above from *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, ed. by Armstrong, Hellman, and Short, p. 75.

<sup>23</sup> *Regula Bullata*, ix.3, in *Fontes Franciscani*, ed. by Menestò and Brufani, p. 178: 'Et nullus fratrum populo penitus audeat predicare, nisi a ministro generali huius fraternitatis fuerit examinatus et approbatus, et ab eo officium sibi praedicationis concessum'. Translation above from *Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, ed. by Armstrong, Hellman, and Short, pp. 104–05.

<sup>24</sup> Neslihan Şenocak, *The Poor and the Perfect: The Rise of Learning in the Franciscan Order, 1209–1310* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 47–48.

<sup>25</sup> The process was initiated in the bull *Mirabilis Deus*, for which see Giovanni Giacinto Sbaraglia (ed.), *Bullarium Franciscanum Romanorum Pontificum constitutiones, epistolas, ac diplomata continens tribus Ordinibus Minorum, Clarissarum et Poenitentium a Seraphico Patriarcha Sancto Francisco institutis concessa*, 7 vols (Rome: Typis Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, 1759–68), 1 (1759), 189–90. For the dialogue, see Thomas of Pavia, *Dialogus de gestis Sanctorum Fratrum Minorum*, ed. by Ferdinand Marie Delorme, *Bibliotheca Franciscana Asctica Medii Aevi*, 5 (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1923).

to be imitated. Not knowing letters, since he had never learned them, he demonstrated the virtue of letters more in deeds than in words, going forward in the commandments and rulings of the Lord without complaint.<sup>26</sup>

The case of Benvenuto demonstrates how the ancient pattern of teaching by deed and example appealed to Franciscans. The enduring effects of Benvenuto's conduct compensated for the fact that as an illiterate lay friar he was incapable of preaching doctrine verbally. Not only did he lack the requisite learning, but he had also not been appointed to the office of *praedicator* to which formal doctrinal preaching was reserved.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, *Dialogus* does not explicitly describe Benvenuto 'preaching', but does celebrate the transformative effects of his pious, virtuous, and imitable behaviour.

A further example is furnished by Cristoforo of Romagna, who died in 1272. A *vita* was written in the late thirteenth century by Bernard of Besse (*fl.* 1270s), and subsequently excerpted in *Cronicum XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum*.<sup>28</sup> The *vita* clarifies that Cristoforo, a cleric but not a learned one, did not hold the office of *praedicator*. Nevertheless, he

preached Christ amongst men through divine praise, sacred exhortations, and reproachment of sinners, so that in keeping with his name he truly was *Christophorus*, bearing Christ in his body through maceration, his heart through devotion, and his mouth through praise and the announcement of his law.<sup>29</sup>

Cristoforo, though a cleric, did not hold the office of preacher and was best able to teach others through his action and conduct. Both his personal piety — expressed in terms of penitential practices and prayer and devotion — and his public actions of exhortation and admonishment allowed him to preach through his body and his deeds. These two examples suggest that on the rare occasions when hagiographers sought to celebrate Franciscan friars who did not hold the office of *praedicator*, the power of action and example, which was deeply rooted in the tradition by the behaviour of Francis himself, provided useful ways to offset what might otherwise be regarded as a deficit. Embodied preaching ensured that lay brothers and illiterate clerics could be remembered as great teachers and preachers.

## Women and Preaching

Franciscan ideas about embodied preaching inherited and adapted a broad and extensive tradition in which deeds might be important as a means of authorising or demonstrating a verbal message, might be required to influence an illiterate audience more susceptible to drama and action, or might be necessitated by the limited capabilities of an uneducated teacher. As demonstrated below, all of these factors were readily translated to laywomen who were credited with preaching or teaching. However, the extension to women of the paradigm of preaching by example was not necessarily straightforward. As discussed elsewhere in this volume, precise and universal medieval proscriptions on women teaching can be surprisingly elusive.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that many

<sup>26</sup> Thomas of Pavia, *Dialogus*, ed. by Delorme, pp. 73–74: 'Fuit vir quidam de Eugubii partibus oriundus, Benevenutus nomine, qui iuxta sui rem nominis divini muneris benedictione praeventus, vitae venerabilis gratia necnon morum honestate conspicuus, miranda cunctis aut potius imitanda sanctae conversationis insignia posteris dereliquit. Litteras namque cum non didicisset ignorans, virtutem litterae plus opere quam sermone monstrabat, in mandatis et iustificationibus Domini sine querela procedens. Denique nacta salutis occasione perfecta, quid pio gerebat in pectore, operis attestacione firmavit ac, sprete oblectationibus mundi huius, gloriosi patris Francisci vestigiis toto nisu mentis se iungere satagebat'.

<sup>27</sup> For the development of this office, see Blastic, 'Preaching in the Early Franciscan Movement', pp. 15–40, esp. pp. 32–35.

<sup>28</sup> Arnaud of Sarrant [attrib.], *Chronica XXIV generalium Ordinis Minorum*, ed. in *Analecta Franciscana sive Chronica aliaque varia documenta ad historiam Fratrum minorum spectantia*, 10 vols (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1885–1983), 3 (1897), 161–73.

<sup>29</sup> Arnaud of Sarrant [attrib.], *Chronica XXIV*, 162: 'Christum inter homines divinis laudibus, sacris exhortationibus et severis peccatorum increpationibus praedicabat, ut iuxta nomen suum vere Christophorus Christum ferens in corpore per macerationem, in corde per devotionem, in ore per laudem et legis eius annuntiationem portaret'.

<sup>30</sup> In addition to Carolyn Muessig's contribution to this volume, see Nicole Bériou, 'The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction in the Thirteenth Century', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 134–45.

thirteenth-century clerics — Franciscans included — were in general opposed to the idea of women engaging in preaching.<sup>31</sup> The discussion below will argue that preaching by example represented one way in which women, or more precisely their hagiographers, sought to bypass these concerns about female teaching. Before turning to the Franciscan women, it will be instructive to briefly survey some of the circumstances and conditions in which thirteenth-century commentators acknowledged the theoretical possibility of female preaching.

In debates about women preaching, the question of audience was always an important one. While public exposition of scripture was generally understood as a male and a clerical activity, there were contexts in which women were permitted to preach. The ability of an abbess, for instance, to preach within her cloister was not contested. As such teaching was not public, and was addressed only to religious sisters, it did not fall foul of scriptural texts that expressed concerns about women teaching men. In addition to female-only spaces, domestic contexts also represented an environment where the didactic function of women was not only tolerated, but actively encouraged.<sup>32</sup> The domestic sphere was associated with the instruction of children, but some penitentials also prized the influence that women could exercise over their husbands, advising confessors to leverage this in promoting the recognition and correction of sin. In his famous manual for confessors composed in the early thirteenth century, Thomas of Chobham (c. 1160–c. 1235) went so far as to suggest that married women should be encouraged to consider themselves ‘preachers’ of their husbands. He reasoned that no priest could possibly soften the heart of a man as could his wife, and that women were therefore to be instructed to act as *predicatrices* within the marriage.<sup>33</sup> On a similar note, Robert of Sorbon (1201–74) took up the defence of women who appear to have been censured for repeating at home the contents of sermons that they heard in public.<sup>34</sup> In these examples, the teaching of women was mitigated both by the privacy of the domestic context, and by the sense that women’s teaching might be informed or supervised by their own preachers and confessors.

Even when it came to public environments, there was some scope for women to teach. *Quaestiones* of Parisian masters generally indicate that male clerics asserted a monopoly on the public, doctrinal, verbal, exposition of scripture. Yet they did not necessarily conclude that this meant women could not preach at all. On the contrary, men such as Walter of Château-Thierry, who briefly served as Bishop of Paris for a few months before his death in 1249, recognised that everyone, including laypeople, could preach in the looser and more generic sense of reciting the creed, exhorting others, and engaging in charitable acts.<sup>35</sup> The clear implication is that women, in their actions and their piety, were free to teach others in a manner that could meaningfully be called ‘preaching’, and that was associated with behaviour as well as speech. Similarly, the licence of women to preach in a broad and generic sense is made explicit in *Quaestiones* of Alexander of Hales (c. 1185–1245) predating his conversion to the Franciscan Order circa 1237.<sup>36</sup> In his response to various arguments about who should be able to preach, Alexander set out a threefold classification of preaching. He worked his way upwards from a generic form of preaching in which all could participate, to exposition of the literal sense of scripture which was limited to clerics and deacons, and then finally to the figurative interpretation of scripture, an activity reserved for those who

<sup>31</sup> Bert Roest, ‘Female Preaching in the Late Medieval Franciscan Tradition’, *Franciscan Studies*, 62 (2004), 119–54 (esp. pp. 119–31).

<sup>32</sup> For further discussion and example, see Nicole Bériou, ‘Robert de Sorbon et les femmes’, in *Au cloître et dans le monde: Femmes, hommes et sociétés (IX<sup>e</sup>–XV<sup>e</sup> siècles)*. *Mélanges en l’honneur de Paulette L’Hermite-Leclercq*, ed. by Patrick Henriot and Anne-Marie Legras (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2000), pp. 33–47.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas of Chobham, *Summa de commendatione virtutum et extirpatione vitiorum*, ed. by Franco Morenzoni, *Corpus Christianorum, continuatio medievalis*, 82B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), vii, dist. 2, q. 15, p. 375: ‘Mulieribus tamen semper in penitentia iniungendum est quod sint predicatrices virorum suorum. Nullus enim Sacerdos ita potest cor viri emolliere sicut potest uxor’.

<sup>34</sup> Bériou, ‘The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction’, p. 139.

<sup>35</sup> Bériou, ‘The Right of Women to Give Religious Instruction’, p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Quaestiones disputatae ‘antequam esset frater’*, *Bibliotheca franciscana scholastica mediae aevi*, 12 (Ad Claras Aquas (Quaracchi): Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1960), 1, 517–19, q. 29, Membrum I: ‘an officium praedicationis solis clericis spectet vel etiam monachis, immo et laicis’.

enjoyed both of the office of preaching and the requisite *scientia*. The first and most basic form of preaching was ‘the simple narration of the articles contained in the creed, and even old matrons can do this, who are able to teach youngsters these articles and the Lord’s Prayer’.<sup>37</sup> For Alexander, women should not seek to interpret scripture in public, or to usurp the didactic function of clerics, but they nevertheless ‘preached’ when they taught the basic aspects of the faith to others, and reiterated the creed.

Scholarship on the Franciscan teaching has made much of the distinction between ‘preaching’ and ‘exhortation’ promoted by popes such as Innocent III (r. 1198–1216) and Gregory IX (r. 1227–41). While formal, doctrinal, or scriptural preaching was reserved to the clergy, the broader and more flexible category of exhortation encompassed calls to penance, and was at least in theory open to a wider constituency that included adherents of lay apostolic movements.<sup>38</sup> The distinction played an important role in determining how different types of first order friar could teach, but the discussion above suggests not only that taxonomies of preaching were more complicated than this binary might suggest, but also that some scholastic texts endorsed the idea of women preaching in the broader sense of exhorting others to penitence and other pious deeds.

When it came to the narrower, technical, sense of preaching as the public exposition of scripture, Parisian masters used a series of biblical proof texts to develop a firm position that women should not preach. Passages that might be taken to imply that women did hold some teaching authority were easily glossed or deflected. Alexander of Hales, for instance, explained that when the Apostle had said ‘you may all prophesy one by one; that all may learn, and all may be exhorted’ (I Corinthians 14. 31), *prophetare* did indeed imply the exposition of scripture, but the meaning was simply that everyone, women included, was permitted to preach ‘to themselves alone, not in public in a church’.<sup>39</sup> That Alexander set out an argument based on this passage and developed a response may indicate that there was some debate on this point. Borrowing a phrase from the feminist theologian Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Bert Roest has suggested that medieval texts on female preachers should be approached through a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ that enquires about the circumstances under which proscriptions on preaching were deemed necessary in the first place.<sup>40</sup> There are also some positive indications that at least in some quarters the ability of women to preach was an open question. Alcuin Blamires has highlighted the example of the Franciscan friar Eustace of Arras (c. 1225–91), who addressed the issue of women preachers in a quodlibetal question dating from the 1260s.<sup>41</sup> Eustace set out to consider whether, through teaching and preaching, a woman could earn the *aureola*, or celestial crown, of the preacher.<sup>42</sup> In the analysis of Blamires, Eustace not only framed this as a ‘current and controversial’ issue, but offered a surprisingly enthusiastic response to the prospect of female preachers.<sup>43</sup>

Two aspects of Eustace’s contribution are of particular relevance to the present study. The first is his opening argument that ‘if there is purity of life in a woman who preaches — as in the case of the blessed Mary Magdalene and the blessed Catherine — nothing prevents her from having the fruit and crown for preaching, if she preaches’.<sup>44</sup> As demonstrated already, reputation had always played

<sup>37</sup> Alexander, *Quaestiones*, q. 29, l. 7, p. 518: ‘Notandum igitur quod triplex est praedicatio: quaedam quae est simplex narratio articulorum contentorum in Symbolo: et hanc potest etiam anus habere, quae potest docere iuniores hos articulos et dominicam orationem. Est alia praedicatio, scilicet exposition intellectus litteralis in doctrina quae est secundum pietatem; et haec est annexa Ordini presbyterum vel diaconorum, et ad eos pertinent. Est alia praedicatio, scilicet expositio intellectus tropologici, allegorici vel anagogici; et haec pertinent ad eos qui habent officium cum scientia’.

<sup>38</sup> For further discussion of exhortation as a form of preaching, see Muessig’s contribution to this volume.

<sup>39</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Quaestiones*, q. 29, l. 8, p. 519: ‘unicuique soli, non in ecclesia publice possunt’.

<sup>40</sup> Roest, ‘Female Preaching in the Late Medieval Franciscan Tradition’, p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> Alcuin Blamires, ‘Women and Preaching in Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy, and Saints’ Lives’, *Viator*, 26 (1995), 135–52.

<sup>42</sup> For this text and a transcription, see Jean Leclercq, ‘Le magistère du prédicateur au XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, *Archives d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age*, 21 (1946), 105–47, at pp. 119–20: Eustace of Arras, *Quodlibet II*, q. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Blamires, ‘Women and Preaching’, p. 147.

<sup>44</sup> Leclercq, ‘Le magistère’, p. 119: ‘Si ergo in muliere praedicante sicut in beata Maria Magdalena et beata Catharina sit vitae puritas, nihil impedit quin habeat fructum et aureolam praedicationis, si praedicet’. The translation above is adapted from Blamires, ‘Women and Preaching’, p. 142.

an important role in Christian theories of teaching; though not thinking of women, Alexander of Hales equally insisted that *meritum vitae* was proper to the office of the preacher.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the emphasis Eustace places on *puritas vitae* in connection with female preachers indicates that the criterion of an exemplary lifestyle may have been particularly important to women. If they were to be considered teachers or preachers, their behaviour mattered. As Bert Roest puts it ‘purity of life could overcome frailty of sex’.<sup>46</sup> The lived example of a female preacher might be subjected to greater scrutiny than that of a male preacher.

The second aspect of Eustace’s argument of importance here relates to the question of authority. Eustace was aware of the standard scriptural arguments against female preaching: that women should not teach men (I Timothy 2. 12); that women should not speak in church (I Corinthians 14. 34); and that no man or woman should preach without being commissioned by a prelate (Romans 10. 15). And yet, a woman like Mary Magdalene could preach. In addressing where Mary received the authority to preach, Eustace aligned himself with the suggestion that certain women might benefit from a direct spiritual mandate to preach. In other words, holy women like Mary ‘were not sent by a man (as by a prelate having power), yet they preached both by instigation of the Holy Spirit and sent by the Holy Spirit’.<sup>47</sup> Eustace could therefore countenance the idea that while women could not access the office of preaching, the Holy Spirit might send them to preach, and particularly to preach in places where faith was in jeopardy. The theoretical position for Eustace was therefore fairly clear. If a woman lived a pure life, and received direct divine inspiration, there was no reason that she might not merit the crown of the preacher, as she would that of the martyr or of the virgin. The example of women such as Mary Magdalene made it clear to him that, at least in principle, female preaching *could* be legitimate.

The theoretical examples above do not constitute a comprehensive survey of thirteenth-century debates about women as preachers. Though Eustace claims there were divergent opinions about the question of women preaching, he appears to have been something of an outlier. Nevertheless, the material above does signal the kind of strategies that could be used to legitimise teaching by women. In the thirteenth century, female ‘preaching’ might be authorised, firstly, by framing it in generic terms as exhortation or charity; secondly, by locating it in domestic or semi-private contexts; thirdly, by emphasizing the relationship between the content of women’s teaching and the sermons they heard male clerics preach; fourthly, by highlighting spiritual or prophetic abilities through which women could claim direct divine inspiration or commission; fifthly, through direct comparison with established and unimpeachable female preachers such as Mary Magdalene; and, sixthly, by pointing to the exemplary purity of the lives and conduct of women preachers. These strategies indicate conditions under which female teaching might be considered more palatable, and the discussion that follows argues that when framing holy women as exemplary preachers, hagiographers usually also leveraged one or more of these approaches.

### Elizabeth of Thuringia (1207–31)

The Franciscan movement offered fertile territory for the development of ideas about preaching and teaching through deed and example, and for the application of these ideas to women. The order itself valued preaching very highly, including — at least initially — preaching that took the form of simple and dramatic exhortations to penance. The Franciscans also won a large following amongst laywomen. By the end of the thirteenth century, the third order provided such women with an avenue for their spiritual vocation. However, the influence of the Franciscan movement was not limited to those who professed vows or associated themselves formally with the order.

<sup>45</sup> Alexander of Hales, *Quaestiones*, q. 29, i. 6, p. 519.

<sup>46</sup> Roest, ‘Female Preaching in the Late Medieval Franciscan Tradition’, p. 129.

<sup>47</sup> Leclercq, ‘Le magistère’, p. 120: ‘quia etsi missae non erant ab homine sicut a praelato potestam habente, tamen instinctu Spiritus Sancti et missae a Spiritu Sancto praedicaverunt’. The translation above is from Blamires ‘Women and Preaching’, p. 148. See also Muessig’s article in this volume.

Many laywomen inspired by Francis and his followers were subsequently celebrated in *vitae* commemorating, amongst other things, their teaching.

The earliest instance of a, broadly speaking, 'Franciscan' woman who *seems* to preach is perhaps Elizabeth of Thuringia. A widowed queen of Bohemia, Elizabeth devoted herself to acts of charity, founding a hospital dedicated to St Francis where she herself cared for the sick and the poor. Though her confessor and hagiographer was the Dominican friar Conrad of Marburg (c. 1180–1233), her spirituality was largely shaped by Franciscans, not least in her devotion to charity.<sup>48</sup> After Elizabeth's death, Conrad and others began to preach about her merits and virtues. When her canonization process opened in 1233, Conrad recorded that it was during one of his own sermons on Elizabeth that she worked one of her first postmortem healing miracles.<sup>49</sup> Being preached about by male clerics, or indeed being the subject of a *vita*, was an entirely uncontroversial way in which the virtuous and pious example of a woman could be offered for the edification of others. Many of the other women considered here were similarly the subject of preaching themselves.

Elizabeth is of interest to the present study because she was also remembered for teaching and instructing others in more private contexts during her own lifetime. Most importantly, Conrad of Marburg's *Summa Vitae*, written in 1232, describes how, on the night of her death, Elizabeth received the Eucharist and then 'afterward until the hour of vespers spoke frequently of the best things that she had ever heard in sermons, especially about the raising up of Lazarus and how the Lord cried in response to it'.<sup>50</sup> This impromptu greatest hits tribute act was delivered in the presence of religious men and women who were moved to tears by the spectacle. Conrad, clearly, saw nothing untoward in Elizabeth rehearsing her favourite sermons. He does not describe this activity as 'preaching', though as we have seen some contemporary men would have been quite happy for Elizabeth to repeat sermons in what must have been a reasonably intimate and private environment. Elizabeth's recollections also elicited strong emotional responses, and the drama of reciting from her deathbed appears to have lent the material greater potency than it would have wielded when preached originally. Elizabeth's actions here emulate both the suggestion that women might 'preach' in the sense of repeating sermons in domestic environments, and the notion that in such contexts, women might wield a particular prowess for softening the hearts of their household. Being female was not necessarily or universally a barrier to effective teaching.

Other witnesses also record Elizabeth engaging in activity that looked like preaching in a slightly narrower sense. In addition to Conrad's summary of her life and miracles, in 1235 four of Elizabeth's companions gave depositions concerning their own recollections of her holy life. They described her teaching, consoling, and exhorting in more straightforward ways. For instance, whenever she encountered people with leprosy, such as those supported through her charitable endeavours, she provided not only physical succour but also consoled the sick and exhorted them to patience.<sup>51</sup> Acts of charity might themselves constitute a form of exemplary teaching, particularly

<sup>48</sup> On Elizabeth and the various influences on her spirituality, see Matthias Werner, 'Elisabeth von Thüringen, Franziskus von Assisi und Konrad von Marburg', in *Elisabeth von Thüringen: eine europäische Heilige*, ed. by Dieter Blume and Matthias Werner (Petersberg: Imhof, 2007), pp. 109–35 (p. 112).

<sup>49</sup> Conrad of Marburg, *Miracula sancta Elyzabet*, ed. by Albert Huyskens, *Quellenstudien zur Geschichte der hl. Elizabeth: Landgräfin von Thüringen* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1908), pp. 161–62; for an English translation, see Kenneth Baxter World, *The Life and Afterlife of St Elizabeth of Hungary: Testimony from her Canonization Hearings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 98–99. For sermons on Elizabeth, see Ottó Gecser, *The Feast and the Pulpit: Sermons and the Cult of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, 1235–ca. 1500*, *Collana della Società Internazionale di Studi Francescani*, 15 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 2012).

<sup>50</sup> Conrad of Marburg, *Epistola ad papam de vita b. Elisabeth de Thuringia sive 'Summa vitae'*, ed. by Huyskens, *Quellenstudien*, p. 160: 'accepit corpus Domini et postea usque ad horam vespertinam frequenter loquebatur de optimis, que audierat in predicatione, et maxime de suscitatione Lazari et quomodo Dominus flevit super eius suscitatione'. Translation from Wolf, *Life and Afterlife of St Elizabeth*, p. 95.

<sup>51</sup> See for instance *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, ed. by Huyskens in *Quellenstudien*, xxix, p. 121: 'Et postea, ubicumque reperit leprosos, sedit iuxta eos consolans et exhortans eos ad patientiam, nec plus horrebateos, quam sanos, multa eis largiens'. Translated

when targeted towards those with leprosy, who had played such an important role in the life and conversion of Francis. In offering charity and consolation, and promoting patience, Elizabeth's behaviour concurs with the advice given to hospital staff in *ad status* sermons, meaning that she literally embodied and enacted the standard preached message on charity.<sup>52</sup> By consoling as well as serving, Elizabeth also moved herself towards more clerical activities. Exhorting the sick to patience was the central plank of clerical pastoral activity in leprosy hospitals.<sup>53</sup> In other contexts, her companions developed this idea further, drawing an explicit comparison between the way she gave advice and the content of formal sermons. They recalled that when worldly matrons visited Elizabeth 'she would confer with them about God as if she were preaching', encouraging them to abandon the vanities of the world and to take vows of continence upon the deaths of their husbands.<sup>54</sup>

Though her hagiographers do not explicitly describe her as 'preaching', and do not emphasise the role of action and example in her teaching, Elizabeth is a useful place to open this survey. Elizabeth's actions, deeds, and speech recollect, replicate, embody, and enact public sermons. However, only when repeating the words of sermons she had heard preached is Elizabeth described as directly commenting on scripture, and most of her didactic activities take place in domestic or semi-private environments. Indeed, if Elizabeth's repetition and discussion of sermons constitutes preaching, then it is important that this took place from her deathbed. A woman who preached while dying was guaranteed not to repeat her preaching, and several other medieval women similarly taught from their deathbed.<sup>55</sup> As described in sources associated with her canonisation process, Elizabeth remained within the bounds of what was licit and acceptable for a laywoman.

### Umiliana dei Cerchi (1219–46)

The model of female Franciscan preaching by example is clearer and more emphatic in the *vita* of Umiliana dei Cerchi, written by her former confessor Vito of Cortona.<sup>56</sup> Umiliana was a pious young widow from a wealthy family who resisted pressure to re-marry and instead developed a life of penance and charity whilst living in the home of her father, a wealthy Florentine merchant.

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by Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St Elizabeth*, p. 201: 'Wherever she found lepers, she sat next to them, consoling them and exhorting them to patience — no more horrified by them than she was by healthy people — and donating many things to them'.

<sup>52</sup> See for instance Jessalyn Bird, 'Medicine for Body and Soul: Jacques de Vitry's Sermons to Hospitalers and their Charges', in *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler, York Studies in Medieval Theology (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), pp. 91–108.

<sup>53</sup> See for instance the texts edited and discussed in François-Olivier Touati and Nicole Bériou (eds), *Voluntate Dei Leprosus: Les Lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XI<sup>ème</sup> et XII<sup>ème</sup> siècles* (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1991).

<sup>54</sup> *Dicta quatuor ancillarum*, ed. by Huyskens, in *Quellenstudien*, xx, p. 117: 'Item secularibus matronis ad se venientibus quasi predicans cum eis de Deo conferebat, frequenter inducens eas et precum instantia voto astringens ad abstinendum saltem ab aliquo uno ad seculi vanitatem tendente, si ad plura vitanda eos non poterat inducere, velud de choreis et manicis consutiis, nimis strictis [...] postea inducens eas ad votum continentie post mortem maritorum'. Translation above adapted from Wolf, *The Life and Afterlife of St Elizabeth*, p. 198.

<sup>55</sup> For deathbed preaching by late-medieval women such as Catherine of Siena (1347–80), Caterina Vigri (1413–63), and Chiara Bugni (1471–1514) see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Catherine of Siena, Preaching, and Hagiography in Renaissance Tuscany', in *A Companion to Catherine of Siena*, ed. by Carolyn Muessig, George Ferzoco, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle, Brill's Companion to the Christian Tradition, 32 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 127–54 (pp. 151–52); and Gabriella Zari, 'Places and Gestures of Women's Preaching in Quattro- and Cinquecento Italy', in *Charisma and Religious Authority: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Preaching, 1200–1500*, ed. by Katherine L. Jansen and Miri Rubin, Europa Sacra, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), pp. 177–93 (pp. 180–84). The proto-beguine Marie of Oignies (c. 1177–1213) was reported to have sung about theological complexities on her deathbed. Although not called a sermon by Jacques de Vitry (c. 1170–1240), the author of her *vita*, it anticipates the more explicit portrayals of deathbed sermons. See Carolyn Muessig, 'Prophecy and Song: Teaching and Preaching by Medieval Women', in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. by Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 146–58 (pp. 150–51).

<sup>56</sup> Umiliana's *vita* is found in *Acta Sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur; vel a Catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur*, ed. by Jean Bolland, 68 vols (Antwerp: Société des Bollandistes, 1643–1940), Maii IV (1685), 385–401. For a translation of the *vita* see Diane Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, Manchester Medieval Sources (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), pp. 93–140. In addition to Webb's introduction, for Umiliana see Mary Harvey Doyno, *The Lay Saint: Charity and Charismatic Authority in Medieval Italy, 1150–1350* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 144–51.

The *vita* itself celebrated Umiliana and her piety, but it was not the only medium through which her example of penitential living could be promoted to the laity. Vito writes:

O mirror of sanctity, model of all humility, exemplar of chastity, way of honour, path of devotion, rule of obedience, solace of the poor, shield of patience! What virtue, what grace, was not fully present in you? What virtuous practice was lacking to your sanctity? If we have commended you, dearest, let no one wonder, for the bishop of Florence, Ardingo of happy memory, an exemplar of holy life, also much commended you in his public preaching.<sup>57</sup>

This vote of confidence shows one way in which Umiliana might be considered to have preached. Much like Elizabeth, her celebrated life could be offered as a template to the faithful by clerical preachers. Indeed, after her death, the Franciscans, whose historical role in her conversion remains difficult to detect, enthusiastically claimed and championed Umiliana as the embodiment of a Franciscan-inflected lay, female, urban sanctity.

Preaching and being preached about are of course distinct, even if a saint's pious life constituted a pre-fabricated example for the faithful. It has been suggested that Vito only considered Umiliana to have 'preached' after her death through the presence of her body at her tomb, and through the words of her clerical admirers.<sup>58</sup> Certainly, Vito was writing about Umiliana and her preaching in a hagiography produced after her death, but his text explicitly envisages her teaching during her lifetime. Vito wrote:

What about her preaching, in which she preached more by deeds than by words and does not cease to preach, now the body is dead, and will preach in perpetuity? If she did not abandon her father's home and her widow's weeds, it was not her own doing, since all that is under heaven she freely abandoned in her mind, but God did not permit it. He wanted to attract the sluggish of this world by her example, those who, held back by idle curiosity or timidity or being unable to find a religion after their own hearts in which they might be received, wallow in the depths of vice; so that no one from the lowest to the highest might have the excuse that they could not serve God to the best of their ability in their own home and in the secular habit, no one hide themselves from the warmth of her charity.<sup>59</sup>

There is much to unpack here. Firstly, the context and the use of tenses gives the distinct impression that Vito thinks Umiliana 'preached' during her lifetime, continuing to do so even in death. Her preaching is not limited to miracles recorded at her tomb or sermons preached about her by men. Secondly, the way in which she preached was *more* by deeds than by words. Vito does not, in fact, explicitly state that Umiliana did not teach using words, but the emphasis here is on teaching through deeds and through the power of her example and conduct. It is not impossible that she also offered unrecorded verbal teaching. Thirdly, Vito suggests that the example offered by Umiliana, the 'mirror of sanctity', was particularly effective when it came to moving people from the depths of vice to religion and piety. As we have seen, the idea that certain types of people might be more susceptible to exemplary action than to words was deeply rooted in the Christian tradition, as was the idea that some people might be capable of teaching only through their deeds. What is striking here is that the power of Umiliana's example comes not only from an audience 'distracted by timidity or idle curiosity', but also from her own status. It is precisely because Umiliana is a secular

<sup>57</sup> Vito of Cortona, *Vita*, v.54, p. 399: 'O sanctitatis speculum, totius humilitatis forma, castitatis exemplum, honestatis via, devotionis semita, obedientiae regula, paupertatis solatium, patientiae scutum! Quae virtus aut quae gratia in te plene non fuit? Quis enim actus omnium virtutum tuae defuit sanctitati? Si te in aliquo videmur commendasse, carissima, nemo miretur, quia Pontifex Florentiae civitatis, bonae memoriae, vitae et sanctitatis exemplum Dominus Ardingus, suis publicis praedicationibus te plurimum commendabat'. Translation from Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, p. 134.

<sup>58</sup> Kienzle and Stevens, 'Preaching, Heresy, and the Writing of Female Hagiography', p. 34.

<sup>59</sup> Vito of Cortona, *Vita*, II.13, p. 390: 'Quid de praedicatione, qua magis opere praedicavit quam verbo, et corpore mortua praedicare non cessat, et in perpetuum praedicabit? Si domum patris et vestes viduales non dimisit, non per ipsam stetit: quoniam cuncta quae sub caelo sunt liberali mente deseruit. Sed Deus non permisit: voluit enim exemplo ejus seculi otiosos trahere, qui vel curiositate vel pusillanimitate detenti, vel etiam non valentes invenire religionem secundum cor suum, in qua recipi potuisent, jacebant in infimis vitiis: ut nullus a minimo usque ad magnum viam excusationis haberet, quod Deo servire non posset juxta possibilitatem suam in domo propria et habitu seculari, et jam non sit qui se abscondit a calore caritatis suae'. Translation from Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, p. 107.

woman living in her father's home — qualities which might otherwise be expected to debar her from the work of preaching — that her embodied preaching is so potent, offering a readily relatable pattern and template. A secular priest, a friar, or a Franciscan nun would *not* have been able to 'preach' in the same way with the same effect. Umiliana's status, and the fact that God had not permitted her to take religious vows, ensured that her embodied preaching produced a response in people who may well have ignored a sermon by Vito or his co-religionists.

The *vita* of Umiliana therefore offers a carefully crafted celebration of her exemplary preaching and its effects, but it does more to further establish her authority. As outlined above, the Franciscan Eustace of Arras later championed the idea that women might well preach if they exhibited purity of life and were inspired by the holy spirit. The structure of the *vita* invites the suggestion that Vito, too, may have been aware of the advisability of outlining a source of divine inspiration for Umiliana's teaching. Vito's account of Umiliana as an exemplary preacher immediately follows a lengthy section in which he describes her ecstasies and visionary raptures:

How often did she soar higher than others in her mind? Rising above herself and miraculously united with God in contemplation, she was so often ravished in her senses in the sweetness of God that sweetly savouring God she slept, not a sleep of the body, but one of ecstasy, of which Christ speaks in the Canticle of his Bride: 'I adjure you, daughters of Sion, by the goats and stags of the fields, do not disturb or awake my beloved until she wishes' (Song of Solomon 3. 5). [...] On this level of ecstasy Umiliana tasted that secret manna of which it is said in the Apocalypse (cf. Revelation 2. 17) that no one knows it who does not receive it; and therefore no one can adequately treat of the grace she received unless he or she has tasted what she was privileged to taste.<sup>60</sup>

Is Umiliana's privileged access to the secret manna of grace intended to authorise her activity as an exemplary preacher? The connection between visionary authority and the teaching of disenfranchised figures, particularly women, has been well remarked in literature on medieval women and mystics.<sup>61</sup> Immediately following Vito's description of Umiliana's exemplary preaching, he outlines her receipt of the miraculous gift of the grace of tears, and nocturnal apparitions of a dove and an angel. There is an attractive prospect that ecstasy, preaching, and the grace of tears represent a combined claim to the guiding influence of holy spirit on Umiliana's life. If Eustace of Arras viewed purity of life and divine inspiration as the hallmarks of legitimate female preaching, Vito's portrait of Umiliana appears to have anticipated him.

### Rose of Viterbo (1233–51)

In 1252, Pope Innocent IV (r. 1243–54) opened an inquiry into the sanctity of the young laywoman Rose of Viterbo, who had died in the previous year. The process was not successful, but did lead to the production of a short *vita* which survives in a fragmented form.<sup>62</sup> Rose was eventually

<sup>60</sup> Vito of Cortona, *Vita*, II.12, pp. 389–90: 'Quot aliorum altius mente volavit? Quae quidem elevans se super se, contemplatione mirabili conjuncta Deo, tam saepe rapiebatur a sensibus in Dei dulcedinem, quam gustando suaviter in Domino dormiebat, non corporali quidem somno, sed extatico: de quo Christus dicit in Canticis de sponsa sua; Adjuro vos, filiae Sion, per capreas cervosque camporum, ne suscitatis neque evigilare faciatis dilectam donec ipsa velit. [...] In isto extatico gradu Humiliana gustabat manna ipsum absconditum, de quo in Apocalypsi dicitur, quia nemo scit nisi qui accipit; et propterea nemo plene de ipsius gratia tractare poterit, nisi gustaverit quod ipsa gratiosa gustavit'. Translation above adapted from Webb, *Saints and Cities in Medieval Italy*, pp. 106–107. Webb's translation elides a lengthy quotation from Gregory the Great glossing the quotation from Song of Songs. The passage is present in the Latin text of *Acta Sanctorum* but has been omitted here as well.

<sup>61</sup> Carolyn Muessig has argued that the visionary receipt of invisible stigmata functioned for some women as a sacramental marker that authorised preaching. See Muessig, 'Hidden Marks of Leadership: Holy Women and Invisible Stigmata in the Late Middle Ages', in *Medieval Mystical Women in the West: Growing in the Height of Love*, ed. by John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (London: Routledge, 2024), pp. 58–82. More broadly, see John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power: Female Saints and their Male Collaborators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 11–16.

<sup>62</sup> This short text was edited as 'Vita I' in *S. Rosa da Viterbo, terziaria francescana (1233–1251): Fonti storiche della vita e loro revisione critica*, ed. by Giuseppe Abate (Rome: Miscellanea Francescana, 1952), pp. 227–31. It was also excerpted within manuscripts of the *vita* composed in the fifteenth century and has most recently been edited in this context as chapter VII of the *vita* contained in *Vita et Miracula Rosae de Viterbio*, ed. by Attilio Bartoli Langeli, Eleonora Rava, and Filippo Sedda, *Corpus Christianorum: Continuatio Medievalis*, 306 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), pp. 10–14. See also the editors' comments on this textual history in the introduction, pp. xxv–xxx.

canonized in 1457, and depositions, miracles, and a new *vita* associated with this fifteenth-century process do survive.<sup>63</sup> Despite medieval and more recent efforts to cast Rose as a Franciscan tertiary, the short thirteenth-century *vita* offers very limited evidence of any association between the young laywoman and the friars. The text does describe her seeking out a habit and a cord to wear, and visiting the church of St Francis in Viterbo, but these are perhaps better understood as generic devotional activities rather than as evidence of a vocational affiliation.<sup>64</sup>

The earlier *vita* does depict Rose as a teacher. It reports that following a series of visions, Rose, moved by the holy spirit, gathered together a group of women *extra domum*, spoke to them about the glory of Christ, and led them in pseudo-liturgical procession round the churches of St John, St Francis, and St Mary.<sup>65</sup> Though not explicitly described as preaching, this was a moment of teaching that may have tested the limits of what was acceptable or appropriate for women, particularly for women operating independently of clerical supervision. In some regards, the author of the *vita* had recourse to tried and tested strategies for legitimising female preaching. Rose taught women (and therefore not men or clerics) and insisted that the Holy Spirit was with her. Her teaching was not supervised or inspired by clerics, but her actions were directly guided by visions of the Virgin Mary and of Christ. Furthermore, the *vita* elaborated on her prophetic abilities by describing her accurate prediction of the death of the Emperor Frederick II (1194–1250).<sup>66</sup> Rose, then, was a female teacher whose authority could be located in visions and prophecy.

In other regards, however, the original, fragmentary *vita* struggles to frame Rose's preaching in terms conducive to contemporary debates about licit female teaching. The *vita* explicitly emphasises that Rose spoke to women outside of her house, and therefore beyond the safety of a domestic context. The ambiguous performative procession not only took place in public, but brought Rose and her followers to churches, further complicating her teaching by moving her ever closer to the forbidden space of the pulpit. Concerns about her activities could only be compounded by the suggestion that she also sought to wear a habit. The fact that Rose was not immediately canonised, and the apparent failure of thirteenth-century friars to champion her cause, may indicate that ambiguities such as those outlined above cast her as a threat, who challenged and sought to usurp clerical authority, rather than as an exemplary model of urban mendicant piety like Umiliana, who was so readily embraced by the order.<sup>67</sup>

The fifteenth-century *vita* transforms Rose's relationship with the Franciscan movement. The text still does not describe her as having a formal or vocational association with the order, other than recording that she unsuccessfully attempted to join the local Damianite community at Santa Maria. In this later *vita*, the friars minor nevertheless take on a prominent role in Rose's activities. In their analysis of this later text, Kienzle and Stevens describe Rose as 'an avid consumer of Franciscan sermons' whose 'homiletic education' underpinned and authorized her teaching activities.<sup>68</sup> Now explicitly described as preaching, Rose is celebrated not only for exhorting people

<sup>63</sup> All are edited in *Vita et Miracula Rosae de Viterbio*, ed. by Langeli, Rava, and Sedda.

<sup>64</sup> For a fuller account of Rose as an independent lay penitent whose association with the Franciscans was manufactured post-mortem, see Doyno, *The Lay Saint*, pp. 152–61 (p. 152).

<sup>65</sup> *Vita et Miracula*, Vita, vii, p. 11: 'Tunc omnes mulieres surrexerunt et uenerunt ad ipsam uirginem et uirgo dixit mulieribus: "Venite omnes extra domum, quia beata Virgo Maria venit extra". Et exiuerunt post ipsam, et ceperunt omnes sedere, et uirgo sedebat in medio ipsarum, et inceptit dicere mulieribus: "Audite quia ego uideo sponsam Christi spetiosissimam, quam nemo uestrum uidet, que sponsa uenit ornata cum purpura splendida, cum corona aurea in capite plena gemmis et lapidibus pretiosis; que Sponsa mihi precepit quod ego ante uadam ornata ad beatum Iohannem et postea ad beatum Franciscum, et reuertar ad ecclesiam beate Marie". Que omnia altero die fecit, sicut sibi preceptum fuerat, et semper portabat maiestatem Iesu Christi secum quocumque ambulabat'.

<sup>66</sup> *Vita et Miracula*, Vita, vii, p. 14.

<sup>67</sup> Rose's tepid reception amongst thirteenth-century Franciscans may have had more to do with the rights and interests of the second order than the clerical prerogatives of the first order. Mary Harvey Doyno argues that while Rose's body was translated to the Damianite house of Santa Maria a few years after her death, this was a compromise designed not to endorse a Franciscan claim on Rose (which does not seem to have existed until later centuries), but rather to placate the sisters of Santa Maria. They were opposed to a 'monastery' of religious women that appears to have been established under the cognisance of secular clerics in Rose's former home, which was in the neighbourhood of Santa Maria and therefore constituted unwanted competition. See Doyno, *The Lay Saint*, pp. 158–61.

to penance, but also for debating and confounding heretics.<sup>69</sup> The thought of a female preacher may well have been more acceptable in the fifteenth-century context which produced the second *vita*, but it is also important that this authorised account depicts Rose operating under the auspices of the Franciscans, and targeting her preaching against sin and heresy, two of the greatest perceived threats to the late-medieval institutional church. In both of these respects, her activities appear to be both less transgressive and less independent: her dramatic and performative preaching was pitched as a natural extension of Franciscan didactic activities.

### Douceline of Digne (1214–74)

The relationship between women who preached by example and friars capable of supervising, directing, or inspiring their teaching is especially prominent in the life of Douceline of Digne.<sup>70</sup> Like Rose, there is no indication that she was a formal member of a Franciscan Order, though in this instance the influence of the mendicants is beyond doubt. Douceline was the biological sister of the famous friar Hugh of Digne (d. c. 1285). Moved and inspired by the example of St Francis, she sought to live a life of penance and piety. Guided by visions and directed by her brother, Douceline founded a lay religious community of women reminiscent of the beguinages of the Low Countries. After Douceline's death, her sisters composed a *vita*, while Douceline was also the subject of preaching by clerics.<sup>71</sup> The *vita* recalls a wide range of preaching activity on her own part as well.

Like Umiliana, Douceline received visions and ecstasies. Unlike Umiliana, as the leader of a lay religious community these visions formed the basis of teaching and preaching delivered in the company of the sisters. Indeed, the *vita*, which casts Douceline as the mother of the order, recalls several occasions when after being raptured and becoming intoxicated in the holy spirit, Douceline spoke wonderfully and indeed doctrinally. On one such occasion, speaking 'publicly' to the sisters 'in chapter' she offered what the *vita* describes as a 'great sermon'.<sup>72</sup> While the *vita* describes Douceline speaking publicly in chapter, the prerogative of an abbess to teach her nuns may have provided a degree of precedent for this preaching that took place within the community. However, Douceline's teaching also appears to be authorised and animated by the kind of visionary authority that may have satisfied Eustace's argument that a woman moved by divine inspiration could indeed preach.

Douceline did not only preach verbally. For the purposes of the present study, far more important is the example that she offered to others. Her exemplary teaching was of internal value within the community, where Douceline, embodying monastic ideals, became 'an example and mirror of contemplation and a model of profound humility and perfection'.<sup>73</sup> However, her example also

<sup>68</sup> Kienzle and Stevens 'Preaching, Heresy, and Female Hagiography', p. 37.

<sup>69</sup> *Vita et Miracula*, *Vita*, xi, pp. 17–18.

<sup>70</sup> On Douceline and her context, see Sean Field, *Courting Sanctity: Holy Women and the Capetians* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019), pp. 54–74.

<sup>71</sup> *La Vie de sainte Douceline, fondatrice des béguines de Marseille*, ed. by Joseph-Hyacinthe Albanés (Marseille: Camoin, 1879); *The Life of Saint Douceline, Beguine of Provence*, trans. by Kathleen Garay and Madeleine Jeay (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001). For Douceline as the subject of preaching, see *La Vie*, x.3, p. 126; translated by Garay and Jeay, *The Life of Saint Douceline*, p. 68.

<sup>72</sup> *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, ed. by Albanés, x.22, pp. 138–39: 'E cant fon retornada d'aquell sant raubiment, connoc li hom rennovellament singular e de cor e de cara; car meravillozaments semblava consolada. E apres, fes acampar capitol, e dis lur motas maravillozas parulas, fazen lur gran sermon, con fossan connoissens a Dieu de totz sos beneficis, e de totes sas gracies; e con fossan ben fermes en lur religion, e en lur estament, que per cert fermamens duraria. E parlant lur am generals parulas, rendia si sobre seguar, apres la sieua mort, dient: Que per cert lat testa hi meteria, que tostemps estaria aquell sant estament'. Translated by Garay and Jeay, *The Life Saint Douceline*, p. 73: 'And when she came out of that rapture, they recognized that her heart and her face were remarkably changed, for she appeared to be amazingly calm. Then she called the sisters together in chapter and spoke wonderful words to them in a great sermon, urging them to be grateful to God for all his kindness and favours, and to be faithful to their religion and to their order which would continue to be strong. And speaking publicly to them, she showed that she was convinced it would carry on after her death, saying that she would not hesitate to give her life to ensure that it would always exist'. For a further example of Douceline's verbal instruction within the community, see *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, ed. by Albanés, ix.65, p. 116; translated by Garay and Jeay, *The Life of Saint Douceline*, p. 64.

exerted a wider influence, most notably when taken in conjunction with the sermons of her biological brother Hugh, who was identified in her *vita* simply as ‘the Saint’. It was during one of Hugh’s sermons that Douceline made a public vow of virginity, and ‘many other women followed her example, so that there were 131 who pledged their virginity to Our Lord’.<sup>74</sup> Her fame and influence, and the power of her example, continued to grow:

Later, when the renown of her holiness and virtue had spread, at the time when the Saint was preaching fervently, many pious ladies were greatly moved by his words and came to join with her through great devotion, and took up her way of life and her fine doctrine. [...] But the devotion of the people increased when they saw her many examples; and, moved also by the marvellous sermons of the Saint who was drawing them to God, and on fire for Our Lord, others, by the will of God, virgins and widows, and even married women, leaving their husbands and children, came to her and placed themselves very humbly and with great devotion and reverence, in her company.<sup>75</sup>

That a lived example could move the populace to penitential action is no surprise here, and the efficacy of teaching through deeds is celebrated in many of the texts already encountered. The case of Douceline does, however, introduce a new dynamic in the form of the verbal preaching of her brother Hugh. Douceline’s lived example was the ideal complement to this teaching, and the two siblings appear to have developed a particularly effective collaboration.

The discussion so far has identified texts stressing the importance of living according to one’s own verbal teaching and has also identified women and men who taught through their deeds because they could not preach sermons. Exemplarity was therefore either a personal guarantee of piety, or an independent instrument for instruction. For Douceline, the situation is more complicated. In certain contexts, she did preach verbally, but the power of her example is associated in particular with contexts in which Hugh was teaching. Douceline’s lived example was neither purely the reflection of her own spoken message, nor an entirely independent form of instruction. Rather, her example constituted the moral performance of someone else’s sermons, her model of penitential life providing a template that Hugh’s audience, moved by his words, could readily embrace and adopt. The anonymous female author of Douceline’s *vita* deployed various strategies to legitimise her teaching, but the role played by her brother Hugh is especially important. Through Hugh’s clerical and male agency, Douceline’s way of life, her conduct, and her teaching are all gathered together under the auspices of unofficial Franciscan supervision. For Douceline, public teaching entailed embodying, living, and practicing the piety her brother Hugh preached, and doing so to pronounced effect.

<sup>73</sup> *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, ed. by Albanés, x.26, p. 142: ‘heissemles e mirals de contemplacion, estet entre las autras, en aissi con espell de gran humilitat e de perfeccion’. Translation above from Garay and Jeay, *The Life Saint Douceline*, p. 74.

<sup>74</sup> *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, ed. by Albanés, II.10, p. 18: ‘E adoncs illi escompresa e abrazada d’aquell fuoc de la caritat de Crist, am gran ardour d’amor, donet tota si mezesema a Dieu, ses tot revocament; e vodet a Nostre Senhor vergenitat de tot son cor, en un sermon az leras que fazia le Santz, e promes am mot gran fervor, davant tot lo pobol, en las mans de son fraire. E motas autras si mogron per lo sieu heissemple, tant que foron .vi. vins e .xi. qui voderon a Nostre Senhor vergenitat; e d’autres garen, outra .iiii.xx. que promezeron totas castitat, az aquel sermon, per lo sieu heissemple, en las mans del sant paire’. Translated by Garay and Jeay, *The Life Saint Douceline*, p. 31: ‘And thus kindled and burning with the fire of the charity of Jesus Christ, in great ardour of love, she gave herself entirely to God, with no turning back; and with all her heart she dedicated her virginity to Our Lord during a sermon given by the Saint at Hyères, and she made her vow with great fervour before all the people, placing her hands in those of her brother. Many other women followed her example, so that there were 131 who pledged their virginity to Our Lord; and many others still, more than 80, who made a promise of chastity, following her example at the time of the sermon, and they placed their hands in the hands of the holy father’.

<sup>75</sup> *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, ed. by Albanés, III.2–3, p. 22: ‘Es apres, cant li fama de la sieua sanctitat fon mot fort espanvida, e de sa honestat, el temps que le Sans era en la fervor de sa predicacion, motas devotas donas, mogudas ardentmens per las sieuas paraulas, per gran devocion vengron si ajostar amb ella, e penre son estament e sa bona doctrina. [...] Mais creissent li grans devocions de las gens, vezent lo sieu heissemple, mogudas atressi per los sermons meravillos del Sant, que las tirava a Dieu, e ardian totas en Nostre Senhor, motas autras, per volontat de Dieu, verges e vezoas, e neis cellas qu’eran en matremoni, dezamparavan lur senhors els enfans, e venian s’en az ella, e metian si mot humilmens, am gran devocion et am gran reverencia, en la sieua companhia’. Translation above from Garay and Jeay, *The Life Saint Douceline*, p. 32.

## Margaret of Cortona (1247–97)

Douceline was not the only woman associated with Franciscans whose exemplary behaviour was described as reflecting the preaching of a male collaborator. The teaching of Margaret of Cortona was animated both by direct instruction from Christ and by the preaching of her confessor and hagiographer, the Franciscan friar Giunta Bevegnati (d. c. 1312).<sup>76</sup> Born in the middle of the thirteenth century, Margaret became a Franciscan lay penitent after a scandalous romantic misadventure. Moving to Cortona with a young son born out of wedlock, she established a reputation for herself as a penitent in the final decades of the thirteenth century and died in 1297 after spending the last years of her life in penitential seclusion. The *vita* frames Margaret's behaviour as a powerful tool for teaching and suggests that her penitential life was divinely guided. Giunta records numerous instances in which she communed with Christ, receiving encouragement and instruction that shaped her spiritual practices. Indeed, Margaret was even instructed by Christ on the nature of preaching, relaying criticism and advice to Giunta and other Franciscans.<sup>77</sup> This role as advisor to preachers points to a further front for female didactic activity.<sup>78</sup>

In terms of her own teaching by example, Christ repeatedly told Margaret in an extensive series of visions that the gifts and graces she received were given for the benefit of all those who would witness, and be moved by, her deeds and life. 'I have made you', Christ told her, 'a mirror of sinners, so that through you they might come to know my mercy and then I will save them'.<sup>79</sup> In other words, Christ encouraged Margaret to fulfil a role similar to that of Umiliana: a lay woman who made a public spectacle of penance to soften and move the hearts of others. The idea of being a 'mirror to sinners' was clearly understood by Giunta to be proximate to preaching. Two aspects of the *vita* will suffice to demonstrate this. Firstly, on one occasion Christ, in a lengthy series of complaints, lamented that sinners did not listen to the word of preaching about himself, and refused to see him as a mirror or model for their own behaviour, preferring instead to imitate the devil.<sup>80</sup> The implied equivalence between sermons and mirrors and models gives the strong impression that Margaret's task was tantamount to preaching, and that her own lived example might serve to convert the obstinate sinners about whom Christ complained. Secondly, Margaret was frequently compared to Mary Magdalene — the most prominent and unimpeachable example of female preaching in the Christian tradition. For instance, Christ told Margaret:

'Remember how I acted towards Mary Magdalene when she was in the garden after my resurrection. I have made you to be a ladder for sinners, who can climb to me by following your example'. Margaret asked: 'How can I be an example for sinners?' The Lord answered: 'They will imitate your abstinence, your fasts, your humility, and your tribulations, which you have eagerly endured because of your love of me. Then, too, they will imitate the meekness of your holy conversation, your gentle manner, your honesty, and your zeal in fleeing the world'.<sup>81</sup>

Margaret, just like the Magdalene, was a ladder for sinners who could follow her example of penitential asceticism in order to ascend towards Christ. Later, when Christ instructed Margaret to

<sup>76</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda de vita et miraculis beatae Margaritae de Cortona*, ed. by Fortunato Iozzelli (Grottaferrata: Editiones Collegii S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, 1997); translated by Thomas Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret of Cortona (1247–1297)* (St Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publications, 2012). On Margaret, see Beverly Mayne Kienzle, 'Margherita of Cortona'; Doyno, *The Lay Saint*, pp. 197–241; and Joanna Cannon and André Vauchez, *Margherita of Cortona and the Lorenzetti: Sienese Art and the Cult of a Holy Woman in Medieval Tuscany* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1999).

<sup>77</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, viii.22, pp. 368–69; ix.12–13, pp. 377–80; ix.26, pp. 387–89; ix.61, pp. 412–14. Translated by Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 224; p. 231–33; p. 242; p. 266.

<sup>78</sup> Margaret and other women who collaborated with their confessors and preachers are discussed at length throughout John Coakley, *Women, Men, and Spiritual Power*.

<sup>79</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, v.4, p. 245: 'Te feci speculum peccatorum quantumcumque obstinatorum, ut agnoscent per te quam libenter impertior eis meam misericordiam, ut saluentur'. Translation above from Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 109.

<sup>80</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, ix.40, p. 400; translated by Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 253.

<sup>81</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, vii.20, p. 333 'Cui Christus dixit "[...] Vide Magdalenam, cui me talem presentavi post resurrectionem in orto qualis eram apud se ipsam. Scalam peccatorum te feci, ut per exempla uite tue pergant ad me." Et Margarita respondit: "In quo uirtutis exemplo peccatores imitari me possent?" Et Dominus ad eam: "Immitabuntur abstinentias tuas, ieiunia tua, humilitatem et tribulationes, quas amore mei alacriter recepisti. Immitabuntur mititatem sancte conuersationis tue et mansuetudinem, quam habes in uita tua. Immitabuntur honestatem tuam et sollicitudinem, quam habes de fuga mundi". Translation above from Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 190.

withdraw from public life, he told her that she was ‘like Mary Magdalene, who converted many to the faith by her preaching, and then withdrew from the world and hid from the people’.<sup>82</sup> Without explicitly calling Margaret a preacher, Giunta leveraged a parallelism with Mary Magdalene, one of the few Christian women accepted by medieval commentators to have preached. To be a mirror of or ladder for sinners evidently involved preaching by example. Margaret was particularly well cast in the role of mirror for sinners. While Umiliana, who had been described by Vito as a ‘mirror of sanctity’, had embodied the urban piety of a wealthy widow, the sins of Margaret’s past made her example a compelling tale of penance and redemption that made her a ‘mirror of sinners’. Indeed, it was not the purity of her life, but her past sins that made her embodied preaching so effective. As well as providing a model of piety that could be imitated, Margaret stood as proof of divine mercy, and her association with the Magdalene, a famous paradigm of a penitent sinner, must have been especially potent. For the townspeople of Cortona, Margaret’s own lived example constituted a more useful, more proximate, more applicable template of penance than the conduct of a pious friar, than the example of a holy virgin, or perhaps even than the model of Christ himself, who complained that the laity failed to base their behaviour on his own example.

Margaret’s capacity for teaching was not limited to the lived example of repentance. Her own spirituality increasingly came to focus on the passion. On one occasion, having prayed to partake in the torments of the crucifixion, Margaret’s ‘soul became completely absorbed in God and she drank of the gall of his Passion’ with such dramatic effects that her re-enactment ‘greatly moved the people of Cortona’ who abandoned their work and flocked to the Franciscan convent.<sup>83</sup> However, this dramatic preaching by example was not an independent performance. Her hagiographer Giunta recalls how, when he himself was preaching during mass the following Sunday, Margaret was again overcome with sorrow, shouting as though mad and asking where the crucified lord had been taken. In Giunta’s narration:

at seeing Margaret in such a state, all the men and women present broke down and cried, so moved were they with fervent devotion. Then she turned to me for assurance that she would find her teacher. Without interrupting my sermon on the word of God, I answered in a loud voice that the Savior, whom she so ardently sought, in his kindness and generosity would cease to conceal himself from her, and would soon make his presence known.<sup>84</sup>

This interactivity, in which the embodiment of the passion spills over into Giunta’s sermon, indicates an even more complex relationship between preacher and performance. In her study of Margaret of Cortona, Beverly Mayne Kienzle writes that this public weeping and overpowering performance of sorrow not only ‘functioned as a good sermon would’, but even upstaged the preaching of Giunta with Margaret becoming ‘the mouthpiece for her confessor’s emotion over the passion’.<sup>85</sup> For Kienzle, Giunta was bound by the rhetorical conventions of the *sermo modernus* to speak with moderation, but the laywoman Margaret was free to exemplify the affective implications of his preaching on the passion, triggering a further emotional response from the audience. This embodied preaching, capitalising on Margaret’s life story and on the perceived capacity of women to convey emotion and soften hearts, augmented the verbal sermon. Actions, again, spoke louder than words alone.

<sup>82</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, vii.33 p. 345: ‘sicut postquam Magdalena praedicavit et conuertit multos ad fidem meam, usque ad suum obitum mundo se abstenauit et populos se abscondit’. Translation above from Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 201.

<sup>83</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, v.3, pp. 242–45; translation from Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, pp. 107–08. For further discussion of Margaret’s performance of the passion, see Carolyn Muessig, ‘Performance of the Passion: The Enactment of Devotion in the Later Middle Ages’, in *Visualizing Medieval Performance: Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, ed. by Elina Gertsman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 129–42 (pp. 131–33).

<sup>84</sup> Giunta Bevegnati, *Legenda Margaritae*, v.6, p. 246: ‘Ad cuius irremediabilem fletum omnes astantes, uiri et mulieres, cum deuoto feruore flere ceperunt. Ego autem, cui tam auide loquebatur, tum ad ingerendam cordi eius fiduciam de reinueniendo magistrum, tum ne predicatio uerbi Dei impedimentum reciperet, alta uoce respondi quod adeo erat curialis et largus saluator, quem sic ardentem querebat, ut diu non posset suam differre seu celare presentiam’. Translated above from Renna, *The Life of Saint Margaret*, p. 110.

<sup>85</sup> Kienzle, ‘Margherita of Cortona’, pp. 44–45.

## Conclusion

Margaret, whose *vita* was composed shortly after the close of the thirteenth century, is a natural place to conclude this study. Her *vita* neatly encapsulates and combines the wide range of strategies and patterns used by hagiographers to celebrate female teaching. Her life was framed as an imitable example for others, she channelled the message of clerical preaching in a powerful and emotive way, her teaching was inspired and directed through divine visions, the purity of her own later life established her reputation for holiness, and in her life of sin, redemption, and teaching she mirrored the person of Mary Magdalene, the model female teacher. Margaret therefore offers a compact summary of the different ways in which hagiographers sought to describe and to justify the teaching of women. As this article has shown, many of these strategies echo and anticipate ideas and concerns raised in theoretical discussion of the nature of preaching and the right of women to teach in general. The case of Margaret, and of the other women discussed above, demonstrates that preaching by example was one amongst several useful tools for celebrating female teaching, and was often augmented by claims not only about the purity of their lives, but also about their direct divine inspiration.

One obvious benefit of the trope of preaching by example was that it allowed hagiographers to describe women as teachers without suggesting that they preached verbally on scripture, in the narrower and more problematic sense. Indeed, in a Franciscan context, it is significant that the trope of embodied preaching was also applied to male friars who did not hold the office of preaching. Evidently, embodied preaching emerged in part to compensate for the fact that lay friars and women did not and could not hold the office of preacher. The idea of teaching according to one's own competencies was promoted by Augustine amongst others, but the wider context of patristic and monastic discussion of exemplary teaching suggests that it would be a mistake to conclude that embodied preaching was only useful as a way of offsetting the social and ecclesiastical restrictions imposed upon women. On the contrary, exemplary teaching was identified clearly and repeatedly as a mode of teaching that could be particularly well suited to the limitations of the audience, rather than those of the preacher. Certainly, the hagiographers of these women looked for opportunities to demonstrate that it was their gender and their lay status that made their teaching and their example so compelling. They were mirrors for both sin and for sanctity, and they embodied acts of everyday piety as well as the grand narratives of redemption. Their living deeds were capable of moving men, women, and children, softening the hearts of obstinate sinners and pious religious, and leading both the illiterate and the educated to conversion and penance. The actions of these women could also speak louder than words, particularly when it came to embodying affective and emotive responses to sin, redemption, and passion. Preaching by example gave women access to teaching roles, but it gave audiences access to imitable models of lay piety.

This article has traced the paradigm of 'embodied preaching' in a range of contexts, yet this remains an ambiguous and elusive label for a varied and flexible set of activities. In its most fundamental form, it could well be argued that the idea of preaching by example represents an excessively broad category largely indistinguishable from the principle that a life well-lived could serve as a model for others, particularly when promoted in *vitae* and sermons. This would mean that any saint, perhaps any good pious Christian, could be taken to preach by example. The women discussed here, however, were celebrated for something more than this. Their hagiographers stressed that in their actions and words whilst alive, they actually *did* motivate, inspire, and convert others. For instance, the moral performance of women such as Elizabeth and Umiliana was presented as a successful and independent mode of teaching in its own right, that brought about conversion in others. For women like Douceline and Margaret, the lived example by which they taught embodied not only the piety and penitential austerities of their own life, but also the content of sermons preached by their male confessors and collaborators.

Although this article has emphasised hagiographical examples from Franciscan contexts, the Franciscans did not invent the idea of embodied preaching. It first emerged not in the penitential

and apostolic culture that birthed Francis, but rather in older patristic and monastic traditions about teaching. Thirteenth-century friars leveraged the idea of embodied preaching in order to expound the virtues and didactic prowess of certain individuals who were otherwise debarred from the work of giving public, verbal, sermons on scripture. Further study of hagiographical accounts of women in other contexts, and in other periods, is required to determine whether or not female embodied preaching was an exclusively or particularly Franciscan activity. Certainly, there is no reason to think that Franciscan hagiographers exercised a monopoly on this trope. However, it is the case that the idea of female embodied preaching was very well aligned with the interests and activities of the friars minor, who exerted a strong appeal over lay urban audiences, readily engaged in performative, dramatic, and affective modes of teaching, and can be connected with a large number of lay female saints and *beati* in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Certainly, the women discussed here reveal much about the evolution of Franciscan spirituality.

The women discussed here also suggest that the idea of teaching by example is important in accessing and tracing the often hidden story of female preaching in the Middle Ages. However, our access to that story remains limited: the material discussed reveals a hagiographical pattern pertaining to embodied preaching, but it cannot offer unmediated or direct access to the women themselves, to their motivations and intentions, or to the actual form and content of any teaching in which they participated. This problem raises interesting and challenging questions about the relationship between these women and their hagiographers. Were historical acts of teaching reflected accurately, overstated, or downplayed? Preaching by example can be read as a hagiographical trope imposed on women and designed to regulate their relationship with teaching activities. Perhaps it offered hagiographers a neutral way of describing women using traditional and non-controversial language about the didactic effects of deed and example. In this sense, embodied preaching would be little more than a bland and inoffensive commonplace. The trope might also, however, have allowed hagiographers to add something to the stories that they told, exaggerating didactic activities to meet Franciscan expectations of evangelical and apostolic sanctity. Viewed in this light, the pattern of exemplary preaching could have allowed hagiographers to claim for female saints a status of teacher to which the women themselves did not aspire. On the other hand, embodied preaching could also have functioned as a way of sanitising and legitimising the transgressive preaching of women who defied social and ecclesiastical norms. On these terms, it would amount to a form censorship that allowed hagiographers to assuage concerns about illicit preaching by locating the teaching of women in actions and deeds, in ecstasies and visions, and in close collaborations with male clerics.

However the motivations of these women and their hagiographers are imagined, it is evident that the idea of teaching by example played an important role in the discussion and memorialisation of thirteenth-century women who can be understood in broad terms both to be 'Franciscan' and to be 'preachers'. Combined with other strategies for establishing the legitimacy of female preaching, it allowed hagiographers to credit women with public teaching even though they could not give sermons. Embodied teaching also encouraged hagiographers to highlight a mode of instruction in which lived example emerged as an affective and effective means of preaching to the laity, and a complement — rather than a challenge — to verbal clerical sermons. Elizabeth of Thuringia, Umiliana dei Cerchi, Rose of Viterbo, Douceline of Digne, and Margaret of Cortona were inspired to teach, they embodied, emulated, and repeated sermons, they worked in collaboration with male clerics, and they stand as an important testimony to the history of female preaching in the Middle Ages.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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