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# Margery Kempe's Mystical Marriage and Roman Sojourn: Influence of St Bridget of Sweden

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Margery Kempe undertook several pilgrimages after experiencing a religious conversion. Among her pilgrimages both abroad and in England, she chooses to record and elaborate her pilgrimage to the Holy Land and Rome. One of the major events in the *Book of Margery Kempe*,<sup>1</sup> the Jerusalem pilgrimage is significant for Margery as a rite of passage to the realisation of truth. For as a pilgrim Margery experiences what anthropologists define as a liminal experience, one that separates her from her society, takes her to the margin of a new reality, and then returns her renewed.<sup>2</sup>

The liminal experience culminates in Margery's mystical marriage to the Godhead that takes place in Rome on her return from Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> From then on she feels entitled to proceed like the spouse of Christ on a level with Mary Magdalen and even with the Virgin. Intriguingly, the mystical marriage occurs in the middle of the *Book*, for contemplative literature usually interprets it as the ultimate goal of spiritual experience.<sup>4</sup> Yet, the significance of placing this spiritual marriage as an event concluding the pilgrimage is that it signals a new era for her spiritual progress and her relationship to the Holy Trinity. For sixteen years after the marriage she felt the fire of love;<sup>5</sup> and for some twenty five years, especially when she was in devout prayer, she received tokens of smell and sound, and she heard a voice that says 'God is in þe & þu art in hym' (chap. 35, p. 88, lines 19-20).<sup>6</sup> The mystical marriage enables her to embrace the Holy Trinity in her soul and assures her that God shall never dissolve their union.

At the same time, however, the mystical marriage seems to have happened in Rome because of Margery's contact with the holy sites that are associated with St Bridget of Sweden:<sup>7</sup> the visit could have precipitated her emulation of Bridget's identity as the spouse of God, wedded to the Godhead and standing solely in the service of God.<sup>8</sup> Thus Bridget seems to have exerted considerable influence in shaping Margery's spiritual ambition to be a spouse of God<sup>9</sup> and enriches the context of the spiritual union she pursues. Margery's mystical marriage,

her penitential charity and life of poverty during the Roman sojourn – all will be illuminated by analysing them in the context of Bridget's revelations.

## 1. Mystical Marriage

Revelations about Bridget's vocation as the spouse of God appear in Book I of the *Liber Celestis*.<sup>10</sup> There are parallels between the revelations of Bridget and Margery, which occur in a passage discussing her identity as spouse. For each of them the event is a threshold for their perception of spiritual life, and it empowers them as their awareness of a special mission grows.

In chapter 2 of the *Liber*, God ordains Bridget as the spouse of God:

"I haue chosen þe and taken þe to mi spouse, for it pleses me and likes me to do so, and for I will shewe to þe mi preuai secretis. For þou arte mine be a manere of [r]ight, foralsmikill as þou assigned thi will into mi handes at þe time of diinge of þi husband, eftir whose bereinge þou had grete boght and made praierie how þou might be pore for me: and þou had in will and desire to forsake all þinge for me ... wherefore I take þe | to me as mi spouse vnto mi awen propir delite, eftir it is acordinge and seminge þat God haue his delite with a chaste saule. As þou knawes, it langes to a spouse to be honestli and semingli araied and to be redi when þe husband will make þe weddinge. þan arte þou made clene when, with forþinkinge þat þou hase sinned, þou calles to minde howe, in baptime, I clensid þe fra Adam sin, and howe oft eftirwarde, fro þou was fallen in sin, I suffird þe and supported."

(LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 8, lines 14-28)

By virtue of her identity as the spouse, Bridget is entitled to know God's secrets. This identity also leads her to accept obedience to God, conforming her will and desire to that of God and choosing a life of poverty both literally and figuratively.<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Bridget is cleansed from sins and endowed with the virtue of chastity.

Margery is aware that both Bridget and she are chosen as the bride of Christ and that they will be told divine secrets.<sup>12</sup> Christ's words to Margery at the mystical marriage suggest Margery's knowledge about

Bridget's privileged position as the spouse of God, for the promise granted to Bridget is literally given to Margery:

"Dowtyr, I wil han þe weddyd to my Godhede, for I schal schewyn þe my preuyteys & my counselys, for þu xalt wonyn wyth me wyth-owtyn ende."

(chap. 35, p. 86, lines 16-18)<sup>13</sup>

This context elucidates the strategy Margery employs to justify the credibility of her revelations. In chapter 22 Margery recounts the pledge of her soul's salvation and her renewed identity as the bride of Christ, which raised her among holy virgins; in the following chapter she groups together the prophetic revelations she received: she could advise a vicar on his pastoral care and make predictions about the sick; she even prays for a dead soul, as she learns the fate of the dead from Christ. She recounts that many more such revelations this creature had in feeling. She seems to intentionally place this episode in such a way as to empower herself as the beloved bride to whom the bridegroom confides his secrets. But she is careful not to show off her prophetic power, as she emphasises the sense of gratitude and humility expected of the spouse by saying:

Þes be wretyn for to schewyn þe homlynes & þe goodlynes of owyr merciful Lord Crist Ihesu & for no commendacyon of þe creatur.

(chap. 23, p. 54, lines 29-32)

Moral qualities shown in Bridget's revelation<sup>14</sup> are requisite for spiritual marriage. Such qualities as chastity, fidelity to one's word, obedience, and meekness are further elaborated in the instructions Bridget receives:<sup>15</sup>

"Mi spouse, þou awe to haue foure þinges: first, þou buse be redi to þe weddinge of mi godhede, in þe whilke is no fleshli luste, bot þare is alþirswetteste gasteli delite, þe whilke | it semis and is acordinge God for to haue in a chaste saule."

(LC, Bk. I, chap. 20, pp. 35-36, lines 34-36/1-2)<sup>16</sup>

"Þe second, þat þou buse trowe to mi wordes, for I ame sothfaste and oute at mi mouthe com neur bot treuthe, ne þere neur might be fundene in none of mi wordes bot treuth."

(p. 36, lines 7-9)

"Þe þird, þe behoues be obedient, þat þare be no membre in þe whilke þou hase trespassed, bot þou make it to do dewe penance and amend it, for all if I be mercifull, I forsake nogt rightwisnes: and þarefore obei gladli and mekeli to þaime at þou art halden [to]."

(lines 13-16)

"Þe ferthe, þe behoues be meke, for þou arte coupled in gosteli mariage ... chasti þi bodi bi discrete abstinence. Þan sall þou be frutefull with gosteli seed, þat sall profete to moni one. Luke þu florishe and bringe furth froite in mi grace."

(lines 22-27)

Christ further requests that the spouse abandon earthly ambitions and pleasures by submitting herself to the love of God in remembrance of the shame and spite he suffered:

"Þarefore, if þou, mi spouse, desire noþinge bot me, and if þou leue and forsake nogt alloneli childir and kinrede, bot also wirshipes and riches of þe werld, for mi loue, I sall gife þe most precieuse and sweteste rewarde ... I will be þi rewarde. And if þou be ashamed to be pore and dispised, take hede to me þi God, howe pore and reproued I was for þe."

(LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 9, lines 7-13)

Obedience and commitment are also central to Margery's renewed relationship with God. Through the mystical marriage she conforms her will to God's will in surrender:

"Dowtyr, for þu art so buxom to my wille & cleuyst as sore on-to me as þe skyn of stokfysche cleuyth to a mannys handys whan it is sothyn."

(chap. 37, p. 91, lines 14-16)

Arguably, Margery's whole-hearted conversion of will is enabled by her total trust in God, and her faith in God is sustained by the conviction that he is willing to be crucified again in the sharp words she suffers for his sake by virtue of their strong spiritual union. Christ assures Margery of this bonding:

"I am in þe & þu art in me. & herby mayst thou knowyn þat I suffyr many schrewyd wordys, for I haue oftyn-tymes seyde to þe þat I schuld be newe crucifyed in þe be schrewyd wordys, for þu schalt non oþer-wyse ben slayn þan be schrewyd wordys suffering." (chap. 34, p. 85, lines 27-32)

The pledge is reciprocal. Margery must submit her heart to Christ:

"I aske no mor of þe but þin hert for to louyn <me> þat louth þe, for my lofe is euyr redy to þe." (chap. 36, p. 90, lines 30-31)

This shows that an exchange of hearts and wills in obedience is central for their unique relationship.<sup>17</sup> Bridget receives a similar revelation at the beginning of her mystical career:

"Parefore, mi doghtir ... lufe me with all þi herte ... I made þe of noght and I offird all þe partis and þe membres of mi bodi to be torment for þi lufe. And git with swilke a charite I lufe þi saule, þat, or I suld want it, if it were possibill, I wald be festened againe to þe cros. Folowe þou parefore mi mekenes, for I, kinge of blis and of aungels, was cled with simpill clepinge; I stode naked at þe piller, and herd with mi eres all þe scornes and reproues. Sett mi will bifore pine." (LC, Bk I. chap. 1, p. 7, lines 16-24)

"And if þou will do þus, mi hert sall be with þi hert and it sall be enflammed with mi lufe, as þou sees a dri tre enflammed with fire ... I sall be within þe, and make all temporall þinges bittir to þe, and þe luste of þi fleshe als it were venim. Þou sall | riste in þe armes of mi godhede, where no fleshli luste of syn is, bot swilke ioi and delite of þe spirit at fulfille þe saule with swilke gladnes þat it can nowþir thinke ne couet bot þe blisse þat it hase."

(lines 26-33)

An exchange of hearts and wills is another prominent characteristic of this revelation and it is distinctly similar to the consent emphasised in the Bridgettine ritual for receiving new sisters, which was formed into a bride Mass.<sup>18</sup> The novice answers: 'I consent to God with all my heart and all

my mind, and I give myself to him in simplicity of heart'.<sup>19</sup> Noticeably, she wears a ring as a sign of being a new bride. And we know from Margery's account that she once lost a ring on her way from Jerusalem to Rome and was dismayed.<sup>20</sup> The inscription on the ring, 'Ihesus est amor meus' (chap. 31, p. 78, lines 14-15), is very close to '*amor meus crucifixus est*', the motto of the Bridgettine Order.<sup>21</sup>

This detail suggests a link between Margery's spiritual identity as the bride and that of a nun as the bride,<sup>22</sup> and the link is further tightened by the connection between Margery's clothes and a nun's habit. When a woman is admitted into the Bridgettine Order, she participates in a ceremony in which, as a token of humility and penance, she is dressed in a nun's habit: besides a ring, the habit includes a dress and a mantle, which do not seem to be white, though.<sup>23</sup> After her mystical marriage Margery receives a revelation in which Christ bids her to wear white clothes and make herself destitute for his love.<sup>24</sup> Margery's preoccupation with wearing a new dress<sup>25</sup> suggests that she is keenly aware of the Bridgettine ritual and aspires to be as close to a Bridgettine nun who is admitted to the Order as the bride of Christ through the ritual of vesting the habit.

Another significant parallel between Bridget and Margery is the spiritual tokens they receive through the mystical marriage. A token is considered as a *signum* by which we discern the working of the Holy Ghost in a person. After her marriage to the Godhead, Margery begins to see white angels, a vision that betokens God's presence in her,<sup>26</sup> and she receives more tokens from the Holy Ghost:

Also owr Lord gaf hir an-oþer tokne, þe whēch enduryd a-bowtyn xvj ger & it encresyd euyr mor & mor, & þat was a flawme of fyer wondir hoot & delectabyl & ryth comfortabyl, nowt wastyng but euyr incresyng, of lowe, for, thow þe wedyr wer neuyr so colde, sche felt þe hete brennyng in hir brest & at hir hert, as verily as a man schuld felyn þe material fyer gyf he put hys hand or hys fynger þerin. . . [owr Lord] seyde, "Dowtyr, be not a-ferd, for þis hete is þe hete of þe Holy Gost, þe whēch schal bren a-wey alle þi synnes, for þe fyer of lofe qwenchith alle synnes. And þu xalt vndirstondyn be þis tokyn þe Holy Gost is in þe, and þu wost wel wher-þat-euyr þe Holy Gost is þer is þe Fadir, & wher þe Fadyr is þer is þe Sone, and so þu hast fully in þi sowle al þe Holy Trinite ... God xal neuyr partyn fro þi sowle, for þei ben onyd to-gedyr wyth-owtyn ende." (chap. 35, pp. 88-89, lines 26-36/1-6 and 13-14)



'þe hete brennyng in hir brest' is the token of the Trinitarian love that purified Margery from the stains of sin and guided the fledgling spouse along her spiritual path.

Similarly, after the mystical marriage Bridget receives the husband's tokens on her breast:

"Also, þe spouse awe to haue tokens of þe husband vpon hir breste. So sall þou euir bere freshe in knowlage of minde þe benefice and þe werkes þe whilke I haue done for þe: howe nobilli I made þe, howe largeli I gafe mi giftes to þe, howe sweteli I boght þe ... þe spouse awe to do also þe husbandes will. Mi will is þat þou loue me aboue all opir and at þou will desire nopinge bot mi plesaunce".

(LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 8, lines 28-35)

The tokens on her breast remind her of Christ's redemptive work and of the gifts she received from him. Although Bridget does not specify the tokens, the implications seem to be relevant to the working of the Holy Spirit, which Margery perceived after the mystical marriage.

In another revelation Bridget learns that the Holy Spirit is with her when she desires nothing but God and she is enflamed with his love; she also learns that it is impossible for the devil to come near her when she is so disposed.<sup>27</sup> The distinctive character of the Spirit is shown by an angel: 'First, he is hote; he is swete and clene' (LC, Bk. I, chap. 54, p. 99, line 34). We know from one of her earliest revelations that Bridget is cleansed from sins by the heat of the Holy Ghost and rejoices in the heavenly fire of love.<sup>28</sup> These references to the signs of the Holy Spirit suggest that the token Bridget keeps could be identified with Trinitarian love in the form of heat which is distinctly similar to the heat Margery feels in her heart after the mystical marriage.

Furthermore, the illuminating grace of the Holy Ghost is relevant to the criteria of *discretio spirituum*,<sup>29</sup> a critical issue particularly for Margery.<sup>30</sup> A revelation that Bridget receives from the Virgin articulates the divine origin of her revelation and defines such spiritual inspiration as the gift of the Holy Ghost:

For right as a bodeli fire is kindeld of two þinges, þat menes aire and blaste | of mannes mouthe, so þe holi goste entirs a mannes saule with inspiracion and gude wirkinge of a mannes selfe, or gude spekinge, þat steris mannes saule to

God. Also þe holi gost, when he commes, he warmes a mannes saule to se God. (LC, Bk. III, chap. 20, p.228, lines 21-26)

In the same way, the presence of the Holy Ghost illuminating Margery's soul justifies the validity of her spiritual experience.

The tokens of the Holy Ghost in Margery's soul are further elaborated in chapter 36 in which Christ speaks of their relationship in terms of matrimonial intimacy.<sup>31</sup> The matrimonial context suggests that Margery conceives the mystical marriage to the Godhead as the consummation of marriage, which ushers in the grace of the Holy Ghost working in her mind.

Interestingly, both Bridget and Margery use the image of married life in a more prosaic sense. Christ orders his bride:

"take vpon þe gladli a litill trauale, þat þou mai þe sonner come to grete rewarde. It is acordinge þe wife to be in trauaile with þe husband, þat þai mai þe more traistli eftirwarde riste togidir." (LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 9, lines 20-22)

Margery also employs the image of husband and wife to convey her patience and faith in Christ over the surge of contempt and rebuke she suffers for his love.<sup>32</sup>

Margery concludes her account of mystical marriage with Christ's words celebrating her newly assumed identity as the mother of charity:

"Be þes tokenys mayst þu wel wetyn þat I loue þe, for þu art to me a very modir & to al þe world for þat gret charite þat is in þe, & get I am cawse of þat charite my-self, & þu xalt haue gret mede þerfor in Heuyn."

(chap. 36, p. 91, lines 9-13)

Bridget is also expected to be a mother through the mystical marriage; as Christ says, "I will haue bi þe moni gosteli sonnys and none fleshly" (LC, Bk. I, chap. 20, p. 36, lines 35-36).<sup>33</sup> And these words usher in the act of charity to which Margery dedicates herself during the rest of her Roman sojourn.

## 2. Roman Sojourn

Margery traveled mostly the same pilgrimage route as that of Bridget:<sup>34</sup> in Rome she actively searches out those sites made notable by Bridget's presence in order to understand Bridget's life. A little before Christmas Margery cultivates meekness and charity in Rome by serving a poor woman at the bidding of her confessor. This reform of her life suggests a penance appropriate for the Advent season. But obviously Margery models herself on Bridget's pious poverty, for in a humble mantle 'Bride would go and sit among the beggars outside the church of Saint Lawrence in Panisperna, run by the Poor Clares'.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, Margery makes herself destitute for Christ's love by being as poor as Christ when he hung on the cross, an act which signifies the beginning of the life of charity and poverty in *imitatio Christi*.<sup>36</sup> Significantly, both Bridget and Margery emphasise this context of the *imitatio*:

"And if þou be ashamed to be pore and dispised, take hede to me þi God, howe pore and reproued I was for þe."

(LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 9, lines 11-13)

"Dowtyr, þu art not get so powr | as I was whan I heng nakyd on þe Cros for thy lofe, for þu hast clothys on thy body & I had non."

(chap. 38, p. 92, lines 33-36)

The experience of *imitatio Christi* becomes the means by which Margery expresses her compassion for the suffering Christ. Furthermore, Margery's compassion for Christ is heightened by her visit to a poor woman with a boy-child:

Þe powr woman clepyd hir in-to hir hows & dede hir sytten be hir lytyl fyer, geuyng hir wyn to drynke in a cuppe of ston. & sche had a lytel manchylde sowkyng on hir brest, þe wech sowkyd o while on þe moderys brest; an-oper while it ran to þis creatur, þe modyr syttyng ful of sorwe & sadnes.

(chap. 39, p. 94, lines 9-14)

Margery was moved to thoughts of Christ by the sight of a poor mother and her boy-child. The child sucking at her breast recalls the infancy of Christ, but at the same time the mother full of sorrow and sadness reminds

Margery of the sorrow of the Virgin who is already suffering in full association with Christ in the sorrows of his Passion. Such a compassionate partaker as Margery would naturally be overwhelmed by the juxtaposed images of the nursing Madonna with the Infant Christ in her arms and the sorrowing mother with the dead body of her son on her lap.<sup>37</sup>

Margery continues to wander in Rome among the poor people and to identify herself with them in gratitude for the poverty that she is in, 'trostyng perthorw to be partynyr wyth hem in meryte' (chap. 39, p. 94, lines 24-25). Soon after this experience of poverty God gives her grace to have great love in Rome: the people who once despised her because of her boisterous crying return to her because of her public reputation for holiness.<sup>38</sup>

On Bridget's feast day, Margery makes a devotional visit to the Casa di Santa Brigida and asks a former maidservant about the saint.<sup>39</sup> She learns that the saint was kind and meek and that 'sche had a lawhyng cher' (chap. 39, p. 95, lines 17-18). She also visits Piazza Farnese and the chamber where the saint died. Margery mentions that she attended a sermon by a German priest about Bridget's visions and life, through which we learn about the popularity of the saint. But, then Margery moves to a detailed account of a storm that she interpreted as an indication that God wanted people to venerate the saint appropriately.<sup>40</sup> This account is important because it indicates that Margery was sensitive to the uncertainty about the canonization of St Bridget,<sup>41</sup> for the authenticity of Bridget's revelations was attacked by Jean Gerson on the issue of the discernment of spirits which Alfonso of Jaén, Bridget's spiritual director, was consciously examining.

Margery's visits to the Bridgettine sites 'witness to her sense of security as a woman whose life-style expressed her divine mission'.<sup>42</sup> She is keen to emphasise her identity as a chosen bride who is divinely assisted to fulfill her mission. She recounts how an English priest financially provides for her return journey because he is impressed by her reputation in Rome. This offer fulfills what Christ said to her a little before: ' "Gold is to-þe-warde" ' (chap. 40, p. 97, line 9), whereby she is empowered as a prophet. Strategically aware of the potentiality of these events to buttress her power and privilege, Margery continues to recount that she survived the storm, crossing the North Sea in a small boat. Margery's stages of spiritual growth are 'coded rhetorically into the text in a structure of prophecy and fulfilment'.<sup>43</sup>

But the grace of God operative in her life is not only evidenced in these emblematic examples but also in those that describe a change in her own inner life. Margery recounts how she was frustrated with the linguistic

problem when sermons were delivered in foreign languages, and she desired to 'be refreschyd wyth sum crumme of gostly vndirstondyng vn-to hir most trustyd & entyrlyest belouyd souereyn, Crist Ihesu' (chap. 41, p. 98, lines 22-24). Then she is delectably fed with sweet conversation:

þan was hir sowle so delectabely fed wyth þe swet dalyawns  
of owr Lorde & so fulfilled of hys lofe þat as a drunkyn man  
sche turnyd hir fyrst on þe o syde & sithyn on þe oper wyth  
gret wepyng & gret sobbyng ... for þe vnqwenchabyll fyer of  
lofe which brent ful sor in hir sowle.

(chap. 41, p. 98, lines 27-33)

This spiritual experience is remarkably similar to that of Bridget: she describes her state of feeling when receiving revelations:

O, carissime Deus et omnium dilectissime! Mirabile omnibus  
audientibus est illud, quod tu fecisti mecum. Nam quando  
placet tibi, tunc sopis corpus meum, non tamen cum sopore  
corporali sed quiete spirituali.

*[Oh, dearest and most beloved God, everyone who hears the  
following is amazed at what you did with me. Because when  
it pleases you, you let my body sleep, not with bodily sleep  
but with spiritual quietness.]*

Animam autem meam tunc quasi a sompno excitas ad  
videndum et audiendum atque senciendum spiritualiter. O,  
Domine Deus, o, quam dulcia sunt oris tui verba!

*[But you, then, as it were, bring my spirit back from sleep to  
see, hear and feel in a spiritual way. Oh, Lord how sweet the  
words of your mouth are !]*

Videtur vere michi, quociens verba Spiritus tui audio, quod  
anima mea in se illa degluciat cum quodam sentimento  
ineffabilis dulcedinis sicut suauissimum cibum, qui cadere  
videtur in cor corporis mei cum magno gaudio et ineffabili  
consolacione.

*[Truly, each time that I hear your spirit speaking, it is as if  
my soul swallows your words into my body with a feeling of  
ineffable sweetness, like the sweetest food, which seems to  
fall into my heart with great joy and ineffable consolation.]*

Mirabile tamen hoc esse videtur, quod dum verba tua audio tunc utrumque efficior scilicet satiata et famelica. Propter hoc autem satiata, quia nichil tunc aliud michi libet nisi illa; propter hoc vero famelica, quia semper augetur appetitus meus ad illa.

*[But the following seems to be amazing: when I hear your words, I am made both satisfied and hungry. At that moment I am satisfied because I like nothing except for that spiritual word; and I am hungry because my desire for that word is infinitely increasing.]*<sup>44</sup>

Like many contemplative writers, both Margery and Bridget use sensual imagery to describe their experience of God.<sup>45</sup> As the Latin word for wisdom, 'sapientia', is derived from 'sapere',<sup>46</sup> the idea that knowledge and wisdom cannot be acquired through intellectual effort but only by savouring is established in the mystical texts. Bridget seeks to see, hear and feel in a spiritual way and ultimately to savour the sweet fruit of divine knowledge. Margery, though not having reached the same depths or heights as Bridget, uses the language of contemplative experience to convey the progress in her understanding of the holy conversation.

Following this spiritual progress, Margery recounts how she was received by the people in Rome: the following passage summarises the goodness of the whole experience of the mystical marriage:

Than owr Lord sent hyr grace to han gret lofe & gret  
fauowr of many personys in Rome, bothyn of religyows  
men & oper. Sum religyows comyn to swech personys of  
hyr cuntremen as louyd hir & seyden, "pis woman hath  
sowyn meche good seed in Rome sithyn sche cam hydir,  
þat is to sey, schewyd good exampyl to þe pepyl,  
wherthorw þei louyn God mor þan þei dede be-forn."  
(chap. 41, p. 99, lines 6-13)

This commendation of Margery is especially significant in that it correlates with Bridget's revelation that a spouse would be fruitful with spiritual seeds.<sup>47</sup> Bridget's calling as the bride of Christ emphasises charitable act and the bearing of spiritual children, whereby her mystical marriage is conceived as consenting to somebody and carrying out this consent during long years of faithfulness and patience.<sup>48</sup> Margery emulates this side of the bride's life: she commits herself to a life of charity among her fellow Christians and produces good seeds.

Furthermore, Bridget's account of her spiritual pregnancy throws lights on the way Margery understands her mystical marriage. One of her revelations links the birth of Christ with the coming of the Infant Christ in the human soul:

It fell on þe Cristemes night þat þe spouse, with one passing gladsomnes of hir hert, felid as it had bene a whike childe sterringe in hir hert. And at þe hye mes, þe modir of merci apperid to hir and saide, "Doghtir, right as þou wote nogt how þat gladnes and stiringe com so sodanli to þe bi þe sonde of Gode, so þe comminge of mi son to me was wondirfull and sodaine. And also sone as I assentid to þe aungels message, I felid in me a wondirfull whike steringe child, with a gladnes þat mai nogt be saide. And þerfore haue comforthe, for þis gladfull stiringe sall laste with þe and increas in þe, for it is þe comminge of mi son into þi herte, and þou sall shewe to mi sonnes frenndes, and mine, oure will."

(LC, Bk. VI, chap. 86, p. 460, lines 16-26)

The same spiritual experience occurs in another revelation:

I haue done to þe þre merueilous þinges. Þou sees with spirituall ein, and þou heres with spirituall eris, and þou felis with þi bodeli hand mi spirit moue in þi liuand breste.

(LC, Bk. II, chap. 18, p. 162, lines 24-26)

and git amange all opir þinges þis is more meruaile, þat mi spirit is felt moue in þi hert.

(LC, Bk. II, chap. 18, p. 163, lines 2-4)

The spiritual pregnancy submerged in these revelations signifies that Christ is born in Bridget's heart: she could feel by her hand his spirit in her breast. The idea of Christ's conception and birth in the human heart was established in the theological teaching of medieval Christianity,<sup>49</sup> and it is a crucial metaphor for medieval female piety. If not pregnant, many religious women in their visions assist the Virgin at the birth of Christ, just as Margery serves as a handmaiden in her infancy meditation.

In this context the idea of spiritual pregnancy illuminates Margery's spiritual experience in Rome. Margery describes the change in her spiritual feeling after the mystical marriage: 'sche felt þe hete brennyng in hir brest & at hir hert, as verily as a man schuld felyn þe material fyer gyf



he put hys hand or hys fynger perin' (chap. 35, p. 88, lines 30-33).<sup>50</sup> God tells Margery that the heat is the Holy Ghost and that as the Holy Ghost is in her, she has the Holy Trinity in her soul.<sup>51</sup> These examples suggest, if not distinctly, that Margery uses the same kind of vocabulary as Bridget. Although Margery does not specifically describe herself as being spiritually pregnant, she is embracing the presence of the Spirit in her heart through the mystical marriage.

Interestingly, Claire Sahlin states that the liturgical season must have stimulated Bridget's experience.<sup>52</sup> This assertion provokes a chronological speculation about Margery's experience: her mystical marriage took place on 9<sup>th</sup> November, St Lateran's Day; therefore it might be around the season of Advent and Nativity that Margery felt the fire in her heart for the first time. This dating leads us to assume that Margery's experience was influenced by Bridget's spiritual pregnancy on the feast of the Nativity. In her imitation of the Virgin's maternal experience and Bridget's spiritual pregnancy, Margery might have felt the burning love of the Holy Ghost as a sign of mystical union between her soul and God.

Margery concludes the account of her Roman sojourn with the vision in which St Jerome talks to her soul when she is visiting his tomb: 'in þe wepyng þat þu wepyst for þe peplys synnes, for many xal be sauyd þerby. And, dowtyr, drede þe nowt, for it is a synguler & a specyal gyft þat God hath gouyn þe, – a welle of teerys þe which xal neuyr man take fro þe' (chap. 41, p. 99, lines 20-24). He endorses her weeping because she washes away not only her own sins but also the sins of all other Christian souls with the well of tears. As Margery's intercessory role is repeatedly emphasised in the *Book*,<sup>53</sup> her weeping is efficacious for advancing the salvation of her fellow Christians.

The efficacy of tears is also central to Bridget's spirituality. In the revelation that shows the judgement of Sir Charles, her son, the tears shed by his mother triumph over the devil's vicious prosecution for his sins.<sup>54</sup> For example, we hear the angel say:

"this haue wepinges and longe labour of his modre and many prayers doo; so that God, hauyng compassion of hir wailinges, yae hir sone suche grace that for eche synne that he did, he gat contricion and made meke confession of godly charite."

"The teres of his modre haue spoiled the [the feende] and broken thy sak and distroied thy wryting [of synnes], so moche hir teeres plesed God."<sup>55</sup>



Margery's tears, while expressing her experience of heavenly grace, have a power similar to those of Bridget. But Jerome's endorsement of the well of tears in the end of her Roman sojourn strengthens a sign of Margery's power, her link with God, which even shows competitiveness with Bridget for the favours received from Christ.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Bridget's revelations and her privileged identity as the bride of Christ provide Margery with a way to express her spiritual experience, stimulating a dynamic account of her mystical marriage and the Roman sojourn that follows it.<sup>57</sup>

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## NOTES

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

<sup>2</sup> Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*, New York, Columbia Univ. Press, 1978; pp. 1-39.

<sup>3</sup> For the mystical marriage, see BMK, chap. 35, pp. 86-87.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Dickman also sees the mystical marriage not as a description of *unio mystica* but rather as an induction into the group of Christ's brides in heaven, which shows God's public pledge of love for Margery as his bride. See Susan Dickman, 'A Showing of God's Grace: *The Book of Margery Kempe*', in *Mysticism and Spirituality in Medieval England*, ed. William F. Pollard and Robert Boenig, Cambridge, Brewer, 1997; p. 171.

<sup>5</sup> For the fire of love, see BMK, chap. 35, pp. 88-89. Allen noticed that the sensual rendering of the fire of love is recorded by Mary of Oignies, Bridget and Dorothea. See Allen, BMK, p. 302, n.88/26. For Bridget, see *The Liber Celestis of St Bridget of Sweden: The Middle English Version in British Library MS Claudius B.1.2, Together with a Life of the Saint from the Same Manuscript*, ed. Roger Ellis, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987, vol. 1 (EETS OS 291); Bk. I, chap. 54, pp. 99-100. Hereafter *Liber*. All references to the *Liber* will be to Ellis' edition and will be given by book, chapter, page and line numbers in parentheses.

<sup>6</sup> Various tokens in Margery's hearing include a sound like a pair of bellows blowing in her ear; then God turns that sound into the voice of a dove; afterwards into the voice of a redbreast that often sang merrily in her right ear. See BMK, chap. 36, pp. 90-91. The faculty of hearing and the Holy Ghost are sometimes linked in the Annunciation in which the Holy Ghost enters the Virgin through her ear.

<sup>7</sup> See BMK, chap. 39, p. 95. See pp. 9-10 below for the influence of Bridget's holy sites on Margery's charitable service to a poor woman.

<sup>8</sup> Gunnell Cleve argues that Bridget considers the mystical marriage as an entirely spiritual event, whereas Margery was more literal minded and inclined to interpret the spiritual intimacy in terms of her matrimonial experience. See Gunnell Cleve, 'Margery Kempe: A Scandinavian Influence in Medieval England?', pp. 163-78 in *Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, Exeter Symposium V, ed. Marion Glasscoe, Cambridge, Brewer, 1992; p. 177. As her marriage ring engraved with, 'Ihesus est amor meus' (chap. 31, p. 78, lines 14-15), implies, she had been wedded to the Manhood of Christ before she went to Jerusalem. See also BMK, chap. 65, p. 161.

<sup>9</sup> Cleve argues that the ceremony held for Margery's wedding shows the competitive element in Margery's *imitatio* of St Bridget and a longing to be more favoured by the Trinity than Bridget was. See Cleve, p. 173. The author also sees the occurrence of the ceremony as an influence of the Sarum liturgy and hagiography. See Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Veneration of Virgin Martyrs in Margery Kempe's Meditation: Influence of the Sarum Liturgy and Hagiography', pp. 177-95 in *Writing Religious Women*, ed. Christiana Whitehead and Denis Renevey, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> For the passage in which Christ called Bridget his bride and his vessel, see *Extrauagantes* 47, *Den Heliga Birgittas Reuelaciones Extrauagantes*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksells, 1956 (Samlingar utgivna av Svenska Fornskriftsällskapet, Ser. 2, Latinska Skrifter, 5), p. 163: 'Tu quippe eris sponsa mea et canale meum, audies et videbis spiritualia et secreta celestia, et spiritus meus remanebit tecum vsque ad mortem', 'You will be my bride and my vessel; you will hear and see spiritual things and heavenly secrets; and my spirit will stay with you until you die.' All translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own. In medieval Latin *canale* is synonymous with *vena*. This passage seems to draw on Galen's theory that *pneuma* (*spiritus*) flows throughout human vessels, and to show that Bridget's vessels are the means by which divine secrets are transmitted by virtue of the flow of the spirit in her body.

<sup>11</sup> The virtue of poverty for the love of God is also central in a chapter entitled as 'þe spouse praied oure ladi to gete hir þe perfite loue of God, and sho telles how it mai be getin, declaringe certaine wordes of þe gospels', in which the Virgin says: 'Go, sell þat þou hase and giue it to pore men, and folowe me". Pat is to mene þus-he sellis all þat kepis ne coueites not more þan is nedefull to one bodi, and all þat he haues more, he gifes it þe pore for Goddes lufe' (LC, Bk. VI, chap. 46, p. 436, lines 18-26).

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 10 above.

<sup>13</sup> For Margery's emulation of Bridget on the mystical marriage, see Cleve, pp. 172-73.

<sup>14</sup> See LC, Bk. I, chap. 2, p. 8, lines 14-28 quoted above.

<sup>15</sup> The instructions conclude with the expectation that this marriage will be spiritually fruitful.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BMK: 'For-as-mech as þu art a mayden in þi sowle, I xal take þe be þe on hand in Hevyn' (chap. 22, p. 52, lines 26-28).

<sup>17</sup> It is asserted again at the end of Book One: 'þu hast gret cawse to louyn me ryth wel & to geuyn me al thyn hool hert wyth alle thyn affeccyonis, for þat I desyr & nothyng ellys of þe. And I schal geuyn þe þer-a-geyn al myn hert. And, gyf þu wilt be buxom to my wil I xal be buxom to þi wil, dowtyr, beleue it ryth wel' (chap. 88, p. 218, lines 30-36). See Allen, BMK, p. 302, n.90/30.

<sup>18</sup> See Birgit Klockars, 'S Birgitta and Mysticism', in *Studies in St Birgitta and the Brigittine Order*, ed. James Hogg, 2 vols, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 35:19 (Salzburg: Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Univ. Salzburg, 1993), I, 296-305 (p. 303).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> See BMK, chap. 31, p. 78.

<sup>21</sup> Cleve, p. 169. Julia Bolton Holloway also notices that the words are in consonance with the Bridgettine espousal and with the motto of the Bridgettine Order. See 'Bride, Margery, Julian, and Alice: Bridget of Sweden's Textual Community in Medieval England', pp. 203-22 in *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra J. McEntire, New York, Garland, 1992; p. 209.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Cleve, pp. 169-70.

<sup>23</sup> See C.B. Rowntree, 'A Carthusian World View: Bodleian MS. E Museo 160, A Brigittine Legislative Collection', in *Spiritualität heute und gestern*, Band 9, ed. James Hogg, *Analecta Cartusiana*, 35:9 (Salzburg, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Univ. Salzburg, 1990), pp. 80-81. Cf. Cleve, p. 169.

<sup>24</sup> See BMK, chap. 37, p. 92.

<sup>25</sup> Margery's preoccupation with 'white' clothes reflects her obsession with virginity. But her emphasis on the colour 'white' does not contradict her emulation of the Bridgettine nuns.

<sup>26</sup> See BMK, chap. 35, p. 88.

<sup>27</sup> See LC, Bk. I, chap. 4, pp. 10-11, line 30-37/1-7.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. LC, Bk. I, chap. 1, p. 7, lines 26-33, quoted on p. 43 above. The Virgin also teaches Bridget the way St Benedict increased the gifts of the Holy Spirit. See LC, Bk. III, chap. 20, p. 228, lines 21-26.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of '*discretio spirituum*' in relation to Bridget and Margery Kempe, see Rosalynn Voaden, *God's Words, Women's Voices: The Discernment of Spirits in the Writing of Late-Medieval Women Visionaries*, Woodbridge, York Medieval Press, 1999; pp. 73-154.

<sup>30</sup> It is this anxiety for the *discretio spirituum* that sent her to such spiritual experts as Julian. For the gift of the Holy Spirit expounded by Julian in her interview with Margery, see Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'The Book of Margery Kempe: A Study of Meditations in the Context of Liturgy, Devotional Literature and Iconography' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 2001), section II, chap. 3.

<sup>31</sup> See BMK, chap. 36, p. 90.

<sup>32</sup> See BMK, chap. 32, p. 81. The husband-wife motif is further elaborated in chapter 86 after the discourse on the Trinity and Holy Communion. See BMK, chap. 86, p. 213.

<sup>33</sup> The spiritual espousal illuminates the spiritual fecundity which Christ mentions in his thanks for her charity. See BMK, chap. 86, p. 212, lines 7-9.

<sup>34</sup> For the map of St Bridget's pilgrimages and Bridgettine convents, see Holloway, p. 222.

<sup>35</sup> Holloway, p. 206.

<sup>36</sup> The service of active love is enhanced by the Virgin's charitable begging for Margery. The Virgin begs for her because Margery had many times begged for her and the Infant Christ in the infancy meditation. See BMK, chap. 38, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> Millard Meiss argues that 'the two [Pietà and the Madonna of Humility] are complementary or polar themes, presenting Christ in the lap of the Virgin at the beginning and end of his life on earth. One of them epitomizes the joys of the Virgin, the other her sorrows'. See *Painting in Florence and Siena after the Black Death: The Arts, Religion, and Society in the Mid-Fourteenth Century*, Princeton, Princeton Univ. Press, 1978; p. 145.

<sup>38</sup> See BMK, chap. 39, pp. 94-95.

<sup>39</sup> Holloway identifies her as Catherine of Flanders. See p. 209. Roger Ellis, however, takes issue with this identification. See his review of McEntire's collection of essays on Margery Kempe in *Mystics Quarterly*, 19 (1993): 182-85; p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> See BMK, chap. 39, p. 95.

<sup>41</sup> For the problems in the canonization process, see Cleve, pp. 168-69; Diane Watt, *Secretaries of God: Women Prophets in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Brewer, 1997; pp. 34-35.

<sup>42</sup> Marion Glasscoe, *English Medieval Mystics: Games of Faith*, London, Longman, 1993; p. 298.

<sup>43</sup> Janet Wilson, 'Communities of Dissent: The Secular and Ecclesiastical Communities of Margery Kempe's Book', pp. 155-85 in *Medieval Women in their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt, Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1997; p. 170.

<sup>44</sup> *Revelationes Sanctae Birgitte*, imp. B. Ghotan (Lübeck, 1492), Bk. IV, chap. 77. I have used where possible the Middle English translations edited by Cummings and Ellis, and I have checked them against the Latin edition of the whole work, the Ghotan edition of 1492. Where the translations have left gaps, I quote from the Latin directly.

<sup>45</sup> See Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, pp. 107-10; Rosemary Drage Hale, "'Taste and see, for God is sweet": Sensory Perception and Memory in Medieval Christian Mystical Experience', pp. 3-14 in *Vox Mystica: Essays on Medieval Mysticism in Honor of Professor Valerie M. Lagorio*, ed. Anne Clark Bartlett, Thomas H. Bestul, Janet Goebel and William F. Pollard, Cambridge, Brewer, 1995.

<sup>46</sup> 'Sapere' means to taste of, and can be used figuratively to mean to have discernment, and to be wise. See A. Ernout and A. Meillet, *Dictionnaire*

*étymologique de la langue latine: Histoire des mots*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1932; p. 854. See also Rebecca Selman, 'Voices and Wisdom: A Study of Henry Suso's *Horologium Sapientiae* in Some Late Medieval English Religious Texts' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Exeter, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>47</sup> See LC, Bk. I, chap. 20, p. 36, lines 22-27, quoted on p. 42 above.

<sup>48</sup> Klockars argues that being already a mature woman and the mother of eight children Bridget had no romantic ideas about married life, thus enabling her to devote herself to this prosaic side of the bride's life. See p. 302. See my argument on p. 46 above.

<sup>49</sup> For the idea of spiritual pregnancy and the influence of liturgical seasons on Bridget's revelation, see Claire L. Sahlin, "'A Marvelous and Great Exultation of the Heart': Mystical Pregnancy and Marian Devotion in Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations*", in Hogg (1993), I, 108-28. See 'mystical pregnancy' in Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion*, New York, Zone Books, 1991; pp. 146, 187, 194, and 354, n. 108.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. *The Incendium Amoris of Richard Rolle of Hampole*, ed. Margaret Deanesly, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1915; p. 145.

<sup>51</sup> BMK, chap. 35, pp. 88-89.

<sup>52</sup> Sahlin, p. 112.

<sup>53</sup> See BMK, chap. 22, p. 51, lines 11-14. In Margery's prayers composed after her return from the Jerusalem pilgrimage, she asks for the well of tears not only for the salvation of her soul but for 'helpyn & profityn myn euyn-cristen sowlys, lyuys er dedys' (Book Two, 'Prayers of the creature', p. 249, lines 6-7). Cf. Dhira B. Mahoney, 'Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power over Language', pp. 37-50 in McEntire; p. 49.

<sup>54</sup> Although Margery does not mention the efficacy of her tears, as a notable matter which Margery wished to recount in Book Two, she gives an account of her erring son who, like Bridget's son, had reformed through his mother's efforts and prayers. See BMK, Book Two, chap. 1, pp. 221-23.

<sup>55</sup> *The Revelations of Saint Birgitta*, ed. William Patterson Cumming, London, Oxford University Press, 1929 (EETS OS 178); repr. Millwood, NY: Kraus, 1987, Book VII, chap. 13, p. 121, lines 14-18 and 33-35. Significantly, before Margery undertook her pilgrimage, Christ, with the pledge of salvation, endorsed the power of her tears over the devil. See BMK, chap. 22, p. 51, lines 11-14.

<sup>56</sup> This vision is also significant in that Margery, whose desire to become a virgin causes her much pain, reconciled herself with Jerome, who is known as one of the most zealous advocates of virginity. See Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum*, PL.23. 221-96.

<sup>57</sup> I am grateful to Marion Glasscoe for reading and commenting on earlier drafts of this paper and to Professor Satoshi Oide for checking the Latin passages.