

## Article

# Thomas of Cantimpré's Hagiographies: Working with a Scientific-Historical Comparative Methodology in the Classroom

Scott Harrower 

Ridley College, Parkville, VIC 3052, Australia; harrower.scott@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This paper firstly describes how my teaching context and student body shapes the methodological and motivational resources that I use in the first three weeks of a section in comparative hagiographical studies. This practical example demonstrates the importance of being conversant with both our local learning context and the international scholarly comparative community. The second part of this essay outlines my methodological thinking as I propose a historical-scientific example of hagiographical comparison to my students, by employing taxonomies from psychological science for the sake of making helpful comparative observations between thirteenth-century hagiographies. The third part of the essay describes how I ensure that employing a particular psychological paradigm—such as “religious and spiritual struggles”—is appropriate to a given historical context.

**Keywords:** Thomas of Cantimpré; hagiography; hagiology; comparative method; comparison

Teaching comparative hagiography is one of the highlights of each of my academic years. Productive teaching and learning experiences strongly benefit from attention to our teaching context, our methodologies, and potential pitfalls in the discipline. This chapter outlines the significance of my teaching context as well as dealing with two critical issues that may stand in the way of scholarly comparative hagiography. These issues are the use of scientific psychological resources as clear points of comparison across texts, sensitivity awareness when dealing with trauma narratives, and the specter of anachronism when using contemporary tools for ancient hagiographical media. If unresolved, these critical issues will impact the extent to which teaching and learning in comparative hagiography can be pursued. In what follows, I firstly describe how my teaching context and student body shape the methodological and motivational resources that I use in the first three weeks of a section in comparative hagiographical studies. This practical example demonstrates the importance of being conversant with both our local learning context and the international scholarly comparative community. The second part of this essay outlines my methodological thinking as I propose a historical-scientific example of hagiographical comparison to my students, by employing taxonomies from psychological science for the sake of making helpful comparative observations between thirteenth-century hagiographies. The third part of the essay describes how I ensure that employing a particular psychological paradigm—such as “religious and spiritual struggles”—is appropriate to a given historical context.



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## 1. Context

I work at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. It is a small college of about 450 students, the majority of whom are pursuing tertiary awards in religious studies or mental health studies. I teach comparative hagiography on a regular basis in two subjects and also to our PhD cohort. The two subjects are as follows: Every second semester I teach a course called “Christianity in History (0–451 CE)”, and every second year I teach a subject on the philosophy of religion. For our PhD cohort, depending on the students' needs, I run seminars on comparative methods and the use of a number of tools suitable for working with hagiographies/collections of hagiographies. Because I teach in a religious

context, an appropriate methodology is critical in order to circumvent bias and ideologies that may be barriers to understanding the task of hagiology, as well as being barriers to understanding the hagiographies themselves. The need for a critical scientific methodology for comparative hagiographical studies is also driven by a number of cultural reasons and the nature of our student body. In what follows, I will briefly outline some general contours of our student body which has shaped my methodological approach in tandem with emerging scholarly literature in the field of hagiology.

## 2. Our Students: Graduates, Postmoderns, Historically Open Christians, Scientifically Minded

Our students are largely graduates, and their median age is approximately 30 years old. The significance of these demographic details for the study of comparative hagiography is that our older graduate students are often highly motivated to study and engage with the material, because they are preparing for a second career. Ideally, this means that my students will be well prepared for classes, by which I mean they will have listened to the recommended podcasts and read the recommended readings (and hopefully reflected on them) before class. For this reason, I usually set up a 3-week block of preparatory podcasts and readings in my classes or cohorts as follows—with the caveat that these may vary according to class composition and interest levels. For a given week in any of the classes mentioned, I might post two motivating podcasts in which Francis Xavier Clooney is interviewed on the nature of boundary-crossing in religious studies, as well as two methodological articles included in Massimo Rondolino's edited volume *Comparative Hagiology: Issues in Theory and Method* (Rondolino 2020). In my experience, students enjoy listening to Francis Clooney because he is deeply informed about his subject matter and also has a gentle as well as a thoughtful approach to religious traditions other than his own; the Clooney interviews motivate our students to pursue research on the comparative study of religious traditions and their hagiographies. Because the articles in Rondolino review the history of scholarship and detail the state of play as well as possibilities for the future, students find these articles helpful for orienting themselves in the discussion, and thus can see themselves as participants in a very worthwhile scholarly venture. For the subsequent week, I will include another podcast by Francis Clooney and a more technical work such as a chapter of Oliver Freiberger's *Considering Comparison* (Freiberger 2019). The rationale for including Freiberger's work is that he clearly articulates the belief that "comparison is a constitutive and defining characteristic of religious studies as a discipline".<sup>1</sup> For the third week, students will be offered pre-reading in the form of a case study in comparison from Barbara Zimbalist's *Translating Christ in the Middle Ages* (Zimbalist 2022, pp. 25–57), and an advanced article on the nature and work of hagiography, such as Aaron Hollander's work on hagiographical media (Hollander 2021).

Our students are largely postmodern. By postmodern I mean that they are imaginative beyond the boundaries of materialistic modernity, and beyond their received Christian tradition (which may be Anglican or Wesleyan). This openness to imagining other ways of living means that they are often willing to studying miraculous, supernatural, and confronting stories such as the thirteenth-century text *Christina Mirabilis* by Thomas of Cantimprè (c.1200–1272 CE), which I discuss below as a case study. Because my students are open to the fantastical and are motivated by it, the fact that Christina, the protagonist of *Christina Mirabilis*, has been referred to as the "zombie saint" may make Christina more appealing than not (Spencer-Hall 2017). This openness to the unusual and the spectacular is a marked contrast to the perspective of most students whom I taught when I began my teaching career in 2005. The students I met in 2005 were largely modern in the sense that they were mostly disinterested in the spiritual and psychological-affective experiences of people outside of their own religious tribes and traditions. Today this is not the case; there is an increased sensitivity and even empathy for peoples and religious traditions that are foreign to, and even challenge, their own. Therefore, I will include Jewish and Greco-Roman sources as well as those from various Christian movements and offshoots

in my courses, including Maccabean writings, the Roman *Devotio* of Publius Decius Mus, as well as *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, and figures from folk religion such as the Gauchito Gil.

Historically minded Christians make up the majority of our students. It is very important to note that these are mostly Australian mainline Christians who have very different religious and cultural interests when compared with North American Christians. For example, Christians are a cultural minority in Australia, which is secular at heart (contemporary Australia was founded at the height of the Enlightenment period). One significant aspect of our students being influenced by their secularised context and school educations is that they value the importance of history's contexts and causal powers for shaping elements of religious traditions, rather than directly and only assigning their beliefs and behaviours to the direct influence of the Holy Spirit. For the study of comparative hagiography, historical awareness means that our students are open—rather than defensive—when they encounter Christians with different emphases across various historical locations.

Another important aspect of our students being Christians when it comes to studying comparative hagiography is that they may understand many elements of the stories from an insider's point of view. For example, they will relate to many of the struggles that Christian characters in their stories face: they will empathize with a character who struggles to pray because their mind keeps on wandering off to think about their friends. Our students may experience emotions such as compassion when they read emotionally charged and tragic martyr narratives about people with whom they believe they share practices and beliefs, such as the protagonists of the third-century *Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*.

Our students are also scientifically minded. This has a downside and an upside. The downside relates to a low historical awareness that students have for themselves (even though they are historically minded Christians). Therefore, our students can have respect for historical context, while still having a low historical awareness themselves. As a teacher I face the problem that many of our students have not studied history since they were 15 years old. This is because culturally speaking, Australians are pragmatists at heart, and therefore the Australian education system emphasizes STEM subjects rather than the humanities. Therefore, studying documents like hagiographies may seem “useless” or boring to many of our students. Further complicating this problem is the fact that the study of early Christian history—in which students are introduced to comparative hagiography in their first year of studies—is the only compulsory subject that students must do. Generally speaking, students are less inclined to study history and hagiographies because of the fact that they are required to do so. I try to engage with this issue in the first class of each course, in the context of unpacking the issues to do with history's perceived uselessness and impracticality. I use a number of motivating and motivational tactics as described above. The upside of having scientifically minded students is that they are conversant with and open to empirically grounded methods such as those drawn from the field of psychology, which we use for comparative purposes (as I describe below). The fact that students are scientifically minded resolved a massive problem that I faced early on in my history teaching career. In 2005, I struggled to find helpful points for comparison between narratives. Sometimes the point for comparison was clear across two texts; for example, two saint stories might both emphasise the importance of prayer for the ideal life. However, much of the time the points for comparison were unclear or vague, and therefore poorly understood by me and students, with the result that comparative work failed to be truly comparative. I desperately needed a scientific methodology that my students would understand, and which also would allow for clear points of comparison between hagiographies. This critical methodological issue was in large part resolved when I discovered helpful paradigms for comparison that stemmed from research in the field of psychology. As I started using these, I noticed that my students immediately warmed to these taxonomies, they began using language like “realistic” and “practical”. At this point, I realised that Australian students were largely helped by a historical-psychological methodology for carrying out comparative hagiography.

Now that I have outlined the importance of my learning and teaching context and how it generated the ideas that came together for a historical-psychological comparative method, we can turn to a brief description of one kind of comparative study that this historical-psychological method allows.

### 3. Case Study: Christina Mirabilis and John of Cantimprè

A historically aware comparative methodology that draws on the psychological science of religious struggles may be applied to thirteenth-century texts such as *Christina Mirabilis* and *John of Cantimprè*. Firstly, the students and I will review the historical and social contexts of the texts. *The Life of John Abbot of Cantimprè* was mostly written between 1223 and 1228 CE and refers to an Abbot born in the year 1155 CE; *The Life of Christina Mirabilis* was written in 1232 CE about a woman born in c. 1150 CE (Thomas of Cantimpré 2008, p. 125). Both were composed by the Dominican friar Thomas of Cantimpré (c.1200 CE–1272 CE). The *Life of John* narrates the preaching, mentoring, and wider leadership of a man who seems to lead the ideal Christian life.<sup>2</sup> *Christina Mirabilis*, on the other hand, narrates the death, miraculous resurrection, as well as prophetic ministries of a pious woman in Sint Truiden, Belgium. *John* and *Christina's* readership likely included Dominican communities as well as lay people between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries in the Sint-Truiden regions (contemporary Flemish Belgium), as well as religious elites such as nuns in Dutch speaking Low Countries (Zimbalist 2019). The full extent of the readers and hearers of the work cannot be known exhaustively, yet it was clearly intended to develop the beliefs and practices of their hearers.<sup>3</sup>

Both texts were written during a time of ecclesiological renewal and pietistic fervour in the face of increasing disparities between the wealthy and the poor—the “Great Awakening of the thirteenth century” (Newman 2008, p. 11). The intention of the texts in their original context was to stimulate the hearers to embrace an ideal form of religious life that defied the emerging materialistic and this-worldly ways of life (Newman 2008, pp. 11–13). *John of Cantimprè* was written to describe “an outstanding exemplar of the late 12th century evangelical movement”, he was “a northern Francis” (Newman 2008, p. 23). *Christina Mirabilis* was written to endorse new forms of female lay spirituality, as well as promoting spiritual growth by moving its audiences to piety and away from the spectre of purgatory and hell.<sup>4</sup> The uniqueness of Christina’s story—clearly crafted as an example of a holy person to be admired rather than imitated—is immediately evident to the reader. She flies into the air after her death and resurrection; throughout the story she flies into trees in order to find places for prayer and respite. Moreover, more particular features of Christina’s story are evident in comparison to the life of *John of Cantimprè*.

The contrasts between *Christina Mirabilis* and *The Life of Abbott John of Cantimprè*—written within a decade of one another—are remarkable. These points of comparison include very obvious differences that can be quickly noticed on a surface reading of the text, such as the gender of the protagonists and the role that the voice of Christ plays in the text (Zimbalist 2022, pp. 25–57). Beyond these superficial differences, there are deeper points of difference (as well as overlap). The important critical issue to address is how to identify these points of difference and overlap by means of a reliable scholarly methodology. Identifying these points of comparison requires what Oliver Freiberger calls “an analytical methodological framework that relates comparative practice to theoretical reflections” (Freiberger 2019, p. 2). Drawing upon Freiberger’s work on taxonomic modes of comparison in religious studies, because I am keen to identify points for comparison that yield clear results, I employ research from psychological science in order to approach hagiographies with scientific taxonomies as the basis of comparison (Freiberger 2019). The *tertium comparationis* between the *comparanda* could be taxonomies such as varieties of spiritual experiences (Yaden and Newberg 2022), and the literature of “religious-spiritual struggles” (Pargament and Exline 2022). I have recently been deploying religious struggles as the *tertium comparationis*.

Religious struggles are well documented and described by psychological science, referring to the potential of religious beliefs for heightening a person's psychological distress (Ellison et al. 2013, p. 224). That is, though religious belief has been positively correlated by psychological research with religious as well as mental-health coping, the psychological field of religious struggles points out that theistic religious faith may *complicate* and *intensify* the distress of religious adherents (Ellison et al. 2013, p. 215).

The importance of scientific taxonomies for this work cannot be overstated. Because our students are largely from a STEM background, scientific methods provide students with solid ground on which to stand as they approach historical texts. This method, a historical scientific one, is a cross-disciplinary one. By employing an interdisciplinary methodology that draws together scientific research with historical research, my classroom work aims to develop hagiologists who can employ diverse methodologies across domains of scientific and historical knowledge. This kind of work thus hopes to address David French's observation of the state of specialized Western scholarship and the limitation that this hyper-focus places on hagiographical studies.<sup>5</sup> Naturally, employing contemporary taxonomies for comparative work in the affective psychology of spirituality cannot be carried out woodenly as the stories which are reference points for hagiography exceed the limitations of these paradigms, because these stories have unique contours that scientific taxonomies cannot fully describe nor analyze: these points of excess are noted as we engage with the texts.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, if we employ paradigms from the psychological science of religious struggles, we can see that *Christina Mirabilis* has unique features beyond superficial difference, when compared to the *Life of John of Cantimprè*. To start with, in *Christina* the author raised every kind of religious-spiritual struggle recognized by contemporary psychology (Pargament and Exline 2022). The author—as well as many of the characters—described and wrestled with each major category of spiritual struggles: “divine struggles”, “demonic struggles”, “interpersonal spiritual struggles”, “struggles with doubt”, “moral struggles”, and “struggles of ultimate meaning” (Exline and Pargament 2021). On the other hand, the struggles with which the story of John wrestles are largely “interpersonal spiritual struggles”, “moral struggles”, and “struggles of ultimate meaning”.

Due to the space limitations of this article, I cannot work through the details of these differences, but I will take the opportunity to make the critical methodological point that an awareness of the literature to do with spiritual-religious struggles not only allows us to compare key elements in the narratives, but also helps us make headway towards resolving the issue of anachronism. Before dealing with the issue of anachronism, the importance of a sensitivity warning needs to be mentioned.

#### 4. A Sensitivity Warning

It is vitally important to include sensitivity warnings when leading students through hagio-texts that include traumatic events/responses such as *Perpetua and Felicity*, and/or self-harm in the case of *Christina Mirabilis*. Because student wellbeing has (thankfully) become an area of focus across universities, this kind of warning is not jarring in our context—rather it is welcome and appreciated. Omitting such a warning would be seen as unusual and even negligent. I usually post a warning the week before the class that will deal with these texts, and I repeat it at the beginning of the class. Depending on the material, I may say something like: “the texts we are examining in this class describe traumatic events including assault and self-harm. Because these texts may be traumatizing or triggering, perhaps they are not suited for you at this time. That is, this might not be the right time in your life to deal with these texts—there have been times in my own life in which I have not been able to reckon with such material, however, thanks to psychological support I am now able to do so. Therefore, you may choose not to come to class for the session that we deal with this text, and you will not be penalized. If you do come, yet find it uncomfortable, please feel free to leave. If you had a biological need such as to do go to the bathroom we would all, be fine for you to leave the classroom, and the same goes for if you have a

psychological or emotional need to leave the class because of the material. Please feel free to leave and seek support from our student services if necessary”.

For those doing longer term research into texts dealing with violence, I would like to implement a strategy for offering ongoing support and skills if their research requires ongoing interaction with violence, trauma, and recovery.

### 5. The Issue of Anachronism

The issue of anachronism—in the form of applying contemporary scientific paradigms to works from the distant past—is understood to be one of the potential pitfalls that comparative religious studies face.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I offer three reasons why it is appropriate to use taxonomies to do with religious struggles when dealing with narratives written by Thomas of Cantimprè. These reasons are as follows: Firstly, Thomas himself experienced religious struggles throughout his life. Secondly, he also explicitly experienced religious struggles of his own with respect to whether or not he should write *Christina Mirabilis* in the first place. And thirdly, Thomas’s context was intensely focused on religious struggles.

### 6. Religious-Spiritual Struggles in Thomas of Cantimprè’s Own Life

It is also reasonable to study religious-spiritual struggles in Thomas of Cantimprè’s writings because he experienced this kind of distress from an early age, that very likely shaped his hagiographies. Thomas of Cantimprè experienced a lifetime of reckoning with his family’s and his own religious struggles. In terms of his family, it was his father’s sins on crusade that resulted in Thomas being dedicated to the priesthood as an atonement for these sins. The entire course of Thomas’s ministry was thus driven by his father’s failures to believe and behave as he expected he should.<sup>8</sup> His father’s struggles literally cast a pall over Thomas’s life: Thomas believed that his deceased father’s ghost was tormenting him from within purgatory, showing him his bloodied hands and asking whether Thomas would help him.<sup>9</sup> A terrible spiritual psychological pressure was put on Thomas: it was up to Thomas to alleviate his father’s sufferings. This fundamental strain on the attachment between Thomas and his father likely had repercussions for how Thomas understood the stability and goodness of his attachment to his heavenly father.

This situation may have been made worse by Thomas’s thirteenth-century Christian theological beliefs. These are what Spencer-Hall refers to as the “horrors of orthodoxy” (Spencer-Hall 2017). In other writings of his, such as his *Bonum universale de Apibus*, Thomas clearly struggled with spiritual struggles to do with God as he is related to violence and murders.<sup>10</sup> His *Christina Mirabilis*, therefore, can be partly understood as a work in which Thomas was wrestling with his own traumatizing religious imagination within a theological context that could have magnified these struggles.<sup>11</sup> One reason—not the reason—that he composed his hagiographies is possibly that he may have been partly motivated to write *Christina* and the subsequent hagiographies as vehicles that transport him to an imaginary world in which he could begin to resolve them for himself.

#### *Religious-Spiritual Struggles to Do with Writing Christina Mirabilis in the First Place*

Thomas of Cantimprè’s *Christina Mirabilis*, the hagiography of a thrice deceased “zombie saint” opens with:

“Whoever reads these things should bear in mind that I have believed them on the testimony of witnesses who would by no means deviate from the truth even at the risk of losing their heads. I admit—and it is true—that my account surpasses all human understanding, inasmuch as these things could by no means have occurred according to the course of nature, yet they are possible to the Creator”.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the narrative begins with a sense of trepidation that prepares the implied medieval Christian audience for the horrific events that will unfold. A disclaimer is offered, cautioning that the story contains wholly unnatural events that only God could bring about.<sup>13</sup> Thomas clearly experienced his own spiritual struggles as he heard the story and

eventually composed it. He also expresses concern that the story is likely to generate religious distress, tension and uncertainty in his audience.<sup>14</sup>

### 7. Religious-Spiritual Struggles in Thomas of Cantimpré's Context

A further reason why it is valid to study religious-spiritual struggles in Thomas of Cantimpré's writings is that describing and remedying religious-spiritual struggles were key concerns of both religious elites and lay people of his time. Concerns over religious growth and decline and their profound influence on faith and mental health are not limited to our times, but rather were central to Christian theology and hagiography in the thirteenth century. In the theological context that likely shaped Thomas of Cantimpré, for example, the language of *affectus/defectus* was employed to describe growth and decline in the soul in the context of what today may be referred to as religious struggles.<sup>15</sup> Authors of his time understood that religious distress could lead to decline in the soul which in turn may move a person away from loving God, whereas the soul that gradually loves God once again may experience growth towards God in love.<sup>16</sup> Religious concerns from Thomas's context therefore suggest that exploring religious struggles in Thomas's corpus is appropriate rather than inappropriate, even if these are carried out with contemporary psychological tools.<sup>17</sup>

### 8. Conclusions

In this work I have described how my experience in the classroom with students has shaped the scholarly literature with which I and they have interacted for the sake of comparative hagiographical studies. My professional environment has enabled me to remain closely engaged with methodological and exemplary scholarly work in comparative hagiographical studies; these have prompted me to develop a historical and scientific approach to saintly narratives that my students find helpful. My hope is that the local Australian historical-scientific approach will yield world-class research that in turn develops international scholarship; this Australian scholarship would function as a "thank you" to international scholars mentioned in this work for the generative and productive efforts that have benefitted us so deeply. Finally, it is important to note that in the course of the work above, two critical methodological issues have been described: the use of scientific taxonomies for the sake of comparison, and the potential for anachronism. In light of these, it has been suggested that the literature on religious-spiritual struggles is both helpful for the sake of comparative work itself, and for the sake of partly resolving the issue of anachronism. The question of how scientific bodies of research may provide helpful comparative taxonomies for comparative hagiographical work at the same time as resolving methodological pitfalls is an area for further cross-disciplinary research.

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### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Freiberger continues: "While cross-cultural and trans-historical comparative studies might indeed be the most distinctive exemplars of religious studies scholarship as it is perceived by other disciplines, I suggest that the entire spectrum of comparison is foundational for the discipline". (Freiberger 2019, p. 20).
- <sup>2</sup> "The Life of John shows us a canon, who was in many ways a model Dominican. (John died in c. 1205, so he lived just before the Dominicans entered the region in any numbers) John preached to heretics and confounded them, he converted influential secular lords to lives of Christian charity, and, following a practice that foreshadows the strong relations between mendicants and holy women that Thomas of Cantimpré himself would exemplify, John gave strong support to Cantimpré's female community at Prémy and in fact seemed to rely on female spiritual counsel". (Freeman 2009, p. 189).
- <sup>3</sup> "it is impossible to delineate precisely the composition of the readership of Christina's vita. What is clear, however, is that this biography of a lay holy woman was accepted—at least by some—as an effective means for inspiring faith, even for members of

the clergy and monastics". (Spencer-Hall 2017, pp. 352–53). On the English audiences of the texts, see Heffernan (2023). "The particulars that were promoted in John's hagiographies have been identified as ardent devotion to the Eucharist, visions and raptures, penitential ascetism, purgatorial piety, and evangelical zeal, all carried to theatrical extremes that reinforced the old adage of *admiranda sed non imitanda*". (Newman 2008, p. 13).

4 "Thomas de Cantimpré, among others, sought ways to have these women officially recognized within the framework of traditional ecclesiastical structures. Both by preaching and writing saints' Lives, they attempted to validate these models for female religious devotion and to offer some guidance as to the role that the clergy should play in the spiritual direction of the beguines". (Andenna 2020, p. 1046). On the one hand, *Christina Mirabilis* was a successful story in terms of endorsing new forms of women's spirituality and promoting purgatorial and Eucharistic piety. However, though Christina is claimed by some as the patron saint of those of us who experience mental illness, she was never canonized and her cult was limited.

5 French points out that "our particular scholarly communities . . . are ill-practiced at—and perhaps ill-equipped for—crossing over traditions in the interest of interdisciplinary perspectives and compelling theories that might expand our ways of knowing". (French 2019, p. 577).

6 I draw the language of excess for saintly figures from Smith (2018).

7 Oliver Freiberger has shown that addressing these is necessary for those who seek to work productively in the current scholarly context (Freiberger 2019, pp. 45–80).

8 Thomas of Cantimpré, *Bonum Universale de Apibus* II. 53. See Thomas of Cantimpré (2020).

9 See note 8 above.

10 Resolving religious questions raised by horrific events is not foreign to the *Bonum*. In the *Bonum*, there are numerous theological-historical resolutions to religious struggles generated by traumatic events, such as the murder of a girl. On this see Resnick (2019, pp. 95–97).

11 Alicia Spencer-Hall may be right say that Thomas's work in *Christina* was to expose just how horrendous orthodox beliefs about Purgatory were for Thomas himself (Spencer-Hall 2017).

12 VCM 3, (Thomas of Cantimpré 2008, p. 128). The description as a zombie saint is from Spencer-Hall (2017).

13 VCM 3, (Thomas of Cantimpré 2008, p. 128).

14 When I say "Christina" I refer to the literary character the author developed, as well as to the unique echoes of the historical person who generated many of these stories. I follow Newman in terms of seeing a referent to a historical person in the literary character (Newman 2008).

15 Some emotional struggles may arise from a misunderstanding and doubting one's movement towards God in terms of character and trust in him. Isaac of Stella, *De spiritu et anima*, 51; PL 40, 817, in (McGinn 1977, p. 261; Deme 2007; Buchmüller 2016).

16 Isaac of Stella, *De spiritu et anima*, 36, PL 40, 807 in McGinn (1977, p. 240). See how Isaac and his contemporaries understood the range of generating factors and emotions associated with spiritual growth and decline (Knuuttila 2004, pp. 233–34; see also Pezzini 2013).

17 Niederer Saxon (2018). As an Augustinian, Thomas's reflections were unsurprising given that he and his peers inherited the reparative theological reflections of St. Augustine and others who sought to care for the wounded human soul. Paradigmatically, Augustine's *Confessions* played the role of enabling him to reframe a 30-year-long religious struggle with himself in light of the Christian God.

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