

# Preaching the Observant Reform in Female Communities Related to the *Devotio moderna*

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## Introduction

The majority of the late medieval vernacular sermons from the Low Countries has been preserved from monastic houses, many of them female, related to the *Devotio moderna*, which in itself was, of course, an Observant reform movement.<sup>1</sup> The women within this reform movement — and particularly those living in convents of canonesses regular of St Augustine that adhered, formally or informally, to the Chapter of Windesheim, the monastic branch of the *Devotio moderna* — could make use of the excellent preaching services of confessors and preachers from within their own order. Several of these sermons have been recorded, often by the sisters themselves. Good examples are the sermons by Godevaert Kemp (1370-1449), Willem Storm (ca. 1414-1478), Jan Storm (before 1425-1488), and Paul of Someren (before 1425-1503), which were preached in the Brussels convent of Jericho and written down by Maria of Pee (ca. 1435-1511), Barbara Cuyermans (d. 1507), Janne Colijns (ca. 1454-1491), and Anne

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1 The *Devotio moderna* has been at the center of scholarly attention for many decades. The number of publications is endless. For a recent introduction, see Anna Dlabačová and Rijcklof Hofman (eds), *De Moderne Devotie. Spiritualiteit en cultuur vanaf de late Middeleeuwen* (Zwolle: WBooks, 2018).

Jordaens (d. 1491).<sup>2</sup> Adriaen Mant (d. 1460), a sister in Diepenveen, the motherhouse of the female branch of the Chapter of Windesheim, copied down the sermons that Beernt Arborstier initially preached for the canons regular of Sint-Salvator in Sneek between 1449 and 1454.<sup>3</sup> In Deinze near Ghent, the sisters of Sint-Margaretha committed the sermons that their rector and confessor Joris of der Salen preached in their convent between 1451 and 1480 onto paper. They are preserved in a mid-sixteenth-century copy written by Johanna Braem.<sup>4</sup> The late medieval tradition of preserving sermons by confessors of their own order extended far into the early modern period. Catherine Wouters, canoness regular of Sint-Elisabeth of Mount Sion in Brussels, wrote down the sermons Nicolaas of Winghe (d. 1552) preached in her convent, and the sermons Henricus Reyniers (d. 1571) preached between 1556 and 1560 in the convent of Sint-Salvator of Mount Thabor in Mechelen were written down by Elisabeth of Houte.<sup>5</sup> In Jericho, the sermon writing tradition continued until well into the eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

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- 2 These sermons are preserved in Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 1683-87, 4287, 4367-68, 15130, II 298, and IV 402, and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902. See Karel Stooker and Theo Verbeij, *Collecties op orde. Middelnederlandse handschriften uit kloosters en semi-religieuze gemeenschappen in de Nederlanden*, Miscellanea Neerlandica, 15-16, 2 Vols. (Louvain: Peeters, 1997) II, nos. 215, 218-219, 225, 230, and 234-235; Maria Sherwood-Smith, Patricia Stoop, Daniël Ermens and Willemien van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons preserved in Manuscripts from before 1550*, Miscellanea Neerlandica, 29, 7 Vols. (Louvain: Peeters, 2003 and 2008) I, 275-282, 389-408, 410-454, 611-612, and 620-646; IV, 440, 462-464, 502, and 522-523; and V, 247-275; and Patricia Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie. De zusters uit het Brusselse klooster Jericho en de preken van hun biechtvaders*, Middelieuwe Studies en Bronnen, 127 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2013).
  - 3 Deventer, Athenaeumbibliotheek, MSS 101 D 13 KL, 101 D 14 KL, and 101 F 16 KL. See Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, nos. 385-387 and Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* V, 149-184.
  - 4 Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 644 (dated ca 1550). See Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, no. 267, and Bas Diemel, *Daer es leven sonder sterven. Memoria en gemeenschapsvorming in Windesheimer kringen uit de laatmiddeleeuwse Zuidelijke Nederlanden, 1350-1550*, Unpublished PhD Thesis (Universiteit Gent, 2011), esp. 298-330.
  - 5 Respectively in Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 516 and Utrecht, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Cat. 1693. See Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, nos. 245 and 926. The convent of Thabor in Mechelen is not to be confused with the convent in Sneek where Beernt Arborstier preached.
  - 6 Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. 13.690 contains sermons from the period 1635-1714. See Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 16-17 and 423-424 (no. 36). The prologue to this sermon collection has been published in Patricia Stoop, 'The Writing Sisters of Jericho: Authors or Copyists?', in: *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, ed. Roger Andersson, *Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval and Reformation Sermons and Preaching*, 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 275-308.

However, the interests of female inhabitants in convents adhering to the *Devotio moderna* were not limited to sermons preached by their own confessors. Several convents — of canonesses regular, tertiaries, and sisters of the Common Life alike — also collected sermons by Dominican or Franciscan friars, or invited Observant mendicants to preach in their convents.<sup>7</sup> These women thus played an important role in the distribution and circulation of Observant ideas. In this article, I will explore how Observant Reformers and their sermons circulated in the Low Countries. For the sake

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7 Women from other religious denominations also were interested in sermons by mendicant — mostly Franciscan — preachers. Mariken die Berc of Oesterwijck, a beguine in Diest, for example, owned a manuscript containing, among many other texts, a cycle of sermons preached by an anonymous Friar Minor, likely in the beguinage (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS II 3047, fols. 10r-116r). Jenneken of den Eechout, ‘kerkmeesteresse’ [‘churchwarden’] of the beguinage in Molenbeek, owned a large manuscript (Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 3646-48) with the sermons of Frans Vervoort (ca. 1490-1555). She bequeathed it to the Benedictine abbey of Vorst after her death. In his capacity as the nuns’ confessor, the Franciscan friar Martinus of Turnhout (*alias* Martinus van der Keele; d. 1540) gave twenty-six sermons halfway the sixteenth century to the Urbanist Poor Clares in Louvain (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Néerl. 40, fols. 35v-56v and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Series Nova 12795, fols. 198r-290v; the latter copy is written by Mariken vanden Brant of Breda). Balthasar of der Heyden (*alias* De Merica or De Meryaca) preached on several occasions in the same convent. Twenty-eight of his sermons on the Passion of Christ, preached between 1565 and 1567, are preserved in Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 3039; a sermon on *Cantica canticorum* is kept in Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 490. Sint-Truiden, Instituut voor Franciscaanse Geschiedenis, MS a 14 contains a cycle of sermons on *Cantica canticorum*, likely preached for the Urbanist Poor Clares in 1559-1561. A cycle of sermons by Lucas of der Heyden on the same occasion has been preserved from the beguinage of Molenbeek (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 685). Whether the Sint-Truiden manuscript and this copy from Molenbeek contain the same text is not clear at this moment. In the 1560s, the Franciscan friar Johannes Mahusius (ca. 1503-1577) preached in the Cistercian Abbey of Ter Kameren (La Cambre) near Brussels. The nuns noted down fifty-seven of his sermons – twenty-nine on the ‘the twelve articles of Christian faith’, a sermon on the hymn *Veni creator spiritus*, and twenty-seven sermons on the *Pater Noster*. The original copies from Ter Kameren do not exist anymore. The extant copies stem from the Benedictine monastery of Vorst (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 3665-66 and 4297-98). This latter abbey also owned sermons by, among other preachers, Hendrik Pippinck (ca. 1524-ca. 1580), provincial of the *Provincia Germaniae Inferioris* in 1564-1568 and later guardian in Mechelen (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 3986-89 and 4289-96). See Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, nos. 203, 205, 401, 762-763, 765-767, 1242-1243, and 1247-1248. For the collections of sermons by Johannes Mahusius, see also Patricia Stoop, ‘Nuns’ Literacy in 16th-Century Convent Sermons from the Cistercian Abbey of Ter Kameren’, in: *Nuns’ Literacies in Medieval Europe. The Hull Dialogue*, ed. Virginia Blanton, Veronica O’Mara and Patricia Stoop, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 26 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 293-312, and Patricia Stoop (in collaboration with Emily Mariën), ‘Johannes Mahusius’ preek op het Onze Vader als gedragsregel voor de cisterciënzerinnen van Ter Kameren’, in: *Geest in letteren gespiegeld. Essays voor Thom Mertens II*, ed. Kees Schepers, John Arblaster, Veerle Fraeters and Patricia Stoop. Special issue of *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 91:1-3 (2021), 184-217.

of conciseness, I will limit myself here to Middle Dutch sermons that have been handed down from Observant Friars Minor.<sup>8</sup>

If we look at the circulation of sermons by Observant Franciscan friars, we observe two trends.<sup>9</sup> The first is that the sermons of certain preachers circulated relatively widely through the Low Countries, independent of the place where they had been preached. And the second is that sermons were preached by mendicant friars within modern devout communities, where their sermons, alongside the ones by the convents' own confessors (which were mentioned above), were written down by the inhabitants of those convents. Generally speaking, those sermons stayed within these communities as so-called *Hausüberlieferung*.<sup>10</sup> In what follows I will give a few examples of both tendencies.

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8 As I will focus on sermons by the (Observant) Franciscan friars in the remainder of this essay, I will only shortly mention the sermons preached by prominent Observant Dominicans in female convents related to the *Devotio moderna* here, as they are referenced in Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons*. They mainly are preserved from Brussels. Johannes van Namen (d. ca. 1475/6), founder and first prior of the convent of Observant Dominicans in Brussels, preached in 1466, 1471, 1472, and 1474 in the Brussels convent of Jericho (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 4287, fols. 192r-196v and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902, fols. 40v-44v, 175v-179r, and 188v-192r; see Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 406; and V, 254, 265-266, and 268). Possibly he also preached in the convent of Sint-Elisabeth op de berg Sion in Brussels (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS 15419, fols. 18r-19r; see Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* VI, 512). The subpriors of the Dominicans, brother Aert *alias* Arnoldus? (in 1466) and brother Petrus (between the end of 1466 and 29 september 1467), also came regularly to Jericho to preach. Additionally, a sermon by brother Egidius and two anonymous Dominicans have been written down by the canonesses from Jericho (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 1683-87, fols. 121v-128r; Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 4367-68, fols. 310r-330v; and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902, fols. 5r-10v, 12r-17r, 23v-27v, 172r-175v, 186r-188v, 192r-196v, 201v-207v, 212r-227v, and 235r-240v; see Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 279-280, and 452-454; V, 249-251, 264-265, 267-271, and 273. See also Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 272-273. From the convent of Nazareth in Geldern two sermons (the so-called *Kölner Klosterpredigten*) by *Meister Gerard* have been preserved. His identity is uncertain. See Freimut Löser, 'Predigen in dominikanischen Konventen. "Kölner Klosterpredigten" und "Paradisus anime intelligentis"', in: *'Paradisus anime intelligentis'. Studien zu einer dominikanischen Predigtsammlung aus dem Umkreis Meister Eckharts*, ed. Burkhard Hasebrink, Nigel F. Palmer, and Hans-Jochen Schiewer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2009), 227-264 (esp. 235).

9 Sermons by Franciscan Observant preachers in the Low Countries are also shortly discussed in Bert Roest, 'Franciscans between Observance and Reformation: The Low Countries (ca. 1400-1600)', in: *Franciscan Studies* 63 (2005), 409-442 (especially on 417-422).

10 Thom Mertens explains the term *Hausüberlieferung* as follows: 'was bedeutet, daß die Texte im betreffenden Haus selbst verfaßt und nicht außerhalb dieses Hauses überliefert wurden'. See Thom Mertens, 'Ein Prediger in zweifacher Ausführung. Die Kollationen des Claus von

## Circulation of Observant Franciscan sermons

The most famous Observant Franciscan preacher in the Low Countries was Johannes Brugman (ca. 1405-1473).<sup>11</sup> He played a large role in introducing the Observance in Brabant from 1447 on, when he chased the Conventuals out of the friary in Mechelen and shortly thereafter became the friary's new guardian. From 1458 onwards he was involved in founding Observant houses elsewhere in the region. He must have been such an ardent and eloquent preacher that a Dutch expression still refers to him. Someone who 'praat als Brugman' ('speaks like Brugman') is very well-expressed and persuasive. Although his proverbial eloquence is not entirely reflected in the extant versions unless in his frequent use of *exempla* and images from everyday life and his intense use of adhortations, his sermons were disseminated very widely throughout the Low Countries. His sermons have been preserved in no less than sixteen manuscripts. Although fourteen of them mainly contain so-called *Streu-Überlieferung* — that is one or two individual sermons per manuscript — two codices contain larger cycles.<sup>12</sup> The first manuscript, Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 1301, contains seven sermons and the scheme of a sermon, and originated in the convent of canonesses regular of Sint-Agnes in Maaseik, one of

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Euskirchen', in: *Predigt im Kontext*, ed. Volker Mertens, Hans-Jochen Schiewer, Regina D. Schiewer, and Wolfram Schneider-Lastin (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 421-432 (there 422).

- 11 For an extensive biography of Johannes Brugman, see Frederik A. H. van den Hombergh, *Leven en werk van Jan Brugman O.F.M. (± 1400-1473). Met een uitgave van twee van zijn tractaten* (Groningen: Wolters, 1967); Benjamin De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi*, 3 Vols. (Nieuwkoop: De Graaf, 1974) I, 65-102; Nico Lettinck, *Praten als Brugman. De wereld van een Nederlandse volksprediker aan het einde van de Middeleeuwen*, Verloren Verleden, 5 (Hilversum: Verloren, 1999); and 'Johannes Brugman (Johannes Brugman/Jan Brugman, ca. 1400, Kempen-1473, Nijmegen)', in: Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, 'Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th century. A Catalogue in Progress' [<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>; accessed 11 July 2022]. De Troeyer also provides an overview of Brugman's works. Editions of his sermons are available in *Jan Brugman. Verspreide sermoenen*, ed. Am. Van Dijk, Klassieke Gallerij, 41 (Antwerpen: De Nederlandsche Boekhandel, 1948) and *Onuitgegeven sermoenen van Jan Brugman o.f.m.*, ed. Petrus Grootens, Studiën en Tekstuutgaven van Ons Geestelijk Erf, 8 (Tiel: Lannoo, 1948).
- 12 The transmission of Brugman's sermons in these two manuscripts has been analyzed in Thom Mertens, 'The Sermons of Johannes Brugman OFM († 1473). Preservation and Form', in: *Constructing the Medieval Sermon*, ed. Roger Andersson, *Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval and Reformation Sermons and Preaching*, 6 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 254-274.

the many female houses that followed the Windesheim regulations.<sup>13</sup> The second, Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, Neerl. 14, contains no less than 23 sermons attributed to Brugman.<sup>14</sup> It was most likely copied in the male convent of Korsendonk near Turnhout which belonged to the Chapter of Windesheim. Interestingly, sermons in both collections are addressed to a mixed audience of ‘bruyten in Christo Jhesu’ (‘brides in Jesus Christ’; Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, Neerl. 14, sermon 8), ‘lieve meechden’ (‘dear virgins’; Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 1301, sermon 2) or ‘susteren’ (‘sisters’; Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, Neerl. 14, sermons 9-10), or ‘lieve brueders’ (‘dear brothers’; Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, Neerl. 14, sermon 3), or more generally, of ‘lieve kijnder’ or ‘mijn kijnderkens’ (‘dear children’ or ‘my children’; Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, Neerl. 14, sermon 12 and Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 1301, sermon 1). This gives the impression that both the Maaseik canonesses and the Korsendonk canons collected Brugman’s sermons from several places, but more research is needed to be able to make more conclusive statements about this.

As far as we can deduce the manuscripts’ provenances from colophons and ownership inscriptions,<sup>15</sup> the other manuscripts with the *Streu-Überlieferung* also belonged to modern devout communities.<sup>16</sup> Apart from the collection mentioned above, the canonesses regular of Sint-Agnes in Maaseik owned a second codex with two long sermons by Brugman, which did not occur in the Ghent manuscript.<sup>17</sup> Another codex was owned

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13 For a short description of the manuscript and the sermons therein, see Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* V, 362-366.

14 See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 38-50; III, 1453; and IV, 101-102.

15 The following manuscripts contain no clues as to their origin: Aerdenhout, dr. Gerard Jaspers, MS z.s.; Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MSS I F 51 and I G 25; The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 133 F 31; Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Ltk 223. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Ltk 239 and San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, MS HM 1048 belonged to religious women, respectively Sister Jan Everwijns and Sister Elisabeth of Oldenbarnevelt (the Leiden manuscript), and Sister Mechtel Pijls. It is unclear in which communities they lived.

16 The only exception to this rule is Cologne, Historisches Archiv, MS GB oct. 71 which was owned by the beguines of the Ronde Begijnhof in Amsterdam. See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* V, 488-493. The manuscript description in the *Repertorium* was made before the Cologne archive collapsed in 2009. It is unclear what happened to the manuscript at that time.

17 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 73 H 31. See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* II, 887-889 and V, 34-35. The first sermon in

by the canonesses regular of Nazareth in Geldern (nowadays just across the border in Germany).<sup>18</sup> Three other copies were owned by, respectively, the Sisters of the Common Life of Sint-Ursula (Brandeshuus) in Deventer, and the communities of tertiaries of Sint-Gertrudis in Bockum near Krefeld, just across the border in Germany as well, and of Sint-Agnes in Elburg near Kampen and Zwolle, so in the heart of the area where the *Devotio moderna* came into existence.<sup>19</sup> Particularly interesting is Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS Ltk 222. The manuscript cannot be located — according to the *Bibliotheca Neerlandica Manuscripta* it stems from Holland, perhaps Delft — and contains only one small excerpt from a sermon by Johannes Brugman (fols. 50r-51r). It is, however, the only codex that shows explicitly that Brugman actually preached in women's communities, in this case in the tertiary convent of Sint-Elisabeth in The Hague: 'Johannes Brugman mijnre broeder heeft dit navolgen gepredict in die capelle van sinte Elijsa-betteten [...] cloester inden Hage int jaer ons heren M CCCC ende LVIII' ['Friar Minor Johannes Brugman has preached the following in the chapel of the convent of Sint-Elisabeth in The Hague in the year 1458'; fol. 50r].<sup>20</sup>

Brugman's sermons display a clear Franciscan spirituality, and he is the only preacher of whom a sermon on St Francis of Assisi in Middle Dutch has been preserved.<sup>21</sup> In this sermon he sets the 'banierdrager des oversten conincs' ['standard-bearer of the highest king'; fol. 107v], who is signed by

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this manuscript in The Hague (an adaptation of a sermon by Ubertino of Casale (1259–ca. 1329) is transmitted in the collection that is now kept in the Ruusbroecgenootschap as well. The second sermon has no parallel transmission.

- 18 Cracow, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, MS Germ. Qu. 1085. See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* V, 547-548.
- 19 Deventer, Athenaeumbibliotheek, MS 101 D 12 KL (hs. I,66); Brussels, Bibliotheek van de Bollandisten, MS 678; and Weert, Gemeentemuseum, Minderbroederscollectie MS 26. See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 59-60; III, 1405 and 1448; IV, 419; V, 142-149; and VI, 465-471.
- 20 See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* III, 1440 and VI, 25-27; and <https://bnm-i.huylgens.knaw.nl/tekstdraggers/TDRA000000000863> [accessed 12 April 2022].
- 21 The full — albeit incomplete — version of this sermon occurs in Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, MS Neerl. 14, sermon 21 (fols. 107v-111v). An excerpt of it is preserved in Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek (UvA), MS I F 51 (fols. 312r-316v). The only other fragment of a sermon on the occasion of the Feast of St Francis in Middle Dutch is attributed to Johannes Tauler, in Utrecht, Museum Catharijne Convent, MS RMCC H 1 (fols. 141v-142r). See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 49-50; IV, 22-23, 101; and VI, 416. For the edition of Brugman's sermon, see *Onuitgegeven sermoenen*, ed. Grootens, 258-264.

God ‘metten vijf zegelen der heiliger vijf wonden ons heren ihesu christi’ [‘with the five seals of the holy five wounds of our Lord Jhesus Christ’; fol. 108v], as an example for spiritual people, in the sense that they should, like St Francis, dislike all earthly things and burdens and despise all worldly comforts from friends and relatives. In sermon 1 (Antwerp, Ruusbroecgenootschap, MS Neerl. 14, fols. 1r-8r) Brugman praises Francis’s affection for the Christ child for whom he made a manger:

‘Och, hoe grote begeerte hadde die heilige vader Franciscus tot deser geboerten des jongen kijndekens van Bethleem, doen hi die cribbe maecte, daer hi dat ewangeli voer sanck op den kerstnacht, daer die goedertieren heer hem gheweerdichden in te comen.’ (fol. 7r)

[‘Oh, how St Francis longed for the birth of the young child of Bethlehem, when he made the crib to which he sang the gospel on Christmas Eve, where the good Lord deigned to come in.’]

In passing, Brugman also expresses his own admiration for the founder of his order:

‘Daer was corts een man bi ons, die seide dattet een sijnlike devocie was, die sinte Franciscus doen hadde, doen hi die cribbe maecten. Mer hadde ic daer geweest, ic woude sijn knecht geweest hebben, opdat ic de vuericheit hadde moegen ghenieten myns lieven vaders ende vanden cleynen kijnde verblyden.’ (fol. 7r)

[‘There was also a man with us for a short period, who said that it was a sensory devotion, which St Francis had when he made the crib. But if I had been there, I would have been his servant, so that I could have enjoyed the passion of my dear father and rejoice about the little child.’]

In sermon 3 in the same codex (fols. 15r-24v), the manger features again, this time in the story of the Nativity. In this case, the manger and the stable in which Christ lies, surrounded by the ox and the ass as St Francis

arranged it in Greccio in 1223, function as a token of victory of poverty over the vanity of the world and temptations of the flesh.<sup>22</sup>

Another central and recurrent motif in the sermons is how ‘onse heer Jhesus, coninc der glorien, heeft alle die teeken en sijnre moegentheit ende clearheit verborghen, ende hem in armoeden ende snoetheiden ende in menichvoldighen cruce verduystert’ [‘our Lord Jesus, king of glory, hid all the signs of his power and splendor and surrounded himself with darkness in poverty and nullity and in all manner of crucifixions’; fol. 19r], so that humankind could relate to him, receive him, acknowledge him, and follow his example. Other central virtues that are often repeated are purity, humility, simplicity, voluntary poverty (the renunciation of earthly goods, which in Brugman’s view is particularly relevant for monastics), austerity, penitence, and Christ’s suffering and the importance of emulating it. It is very important, in Brugman’s eyes, that people should be ‘recht als beslabde kijnder, die in der koeken lopen, daer men niet op en acht’ [‘like children with bibs walking in the kitchen, but to which no-one pays attention’], in other words, so humble and modest that they are almost unnoticeable.<sup>23</sup> Although Brugman seems to push all these virtues a bit more to the extreme than I have seen in other sermons, all of them seem appropriate for any man or woman living under a monastic rule, and in that regard they are easily transferrable to any religious context.

### **Observant Franciscan sermons and the printing press**

A second preacher whose sermons circulated relatively widely — especially in the Southern Low Countries — was Hendrik of Santen (fl. 1487-1493). Little is known about him apart from the fact that was guardian in Mechelen in 1487 and probably again from the second half of 1488 onwards until his death in 1493 (in the meantime he was commissarius in the Observant province of Cologne).<sup>24</sup> Part of his sermons, *Die collacien vanden*

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22 See *Onuitgegeven sermoenen*, ed. Grootens, 40, 43, 58. – St Francis is also mentioned in the manuscript on fols. 29v-30r and 35r.

23 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 133 F 31, fol. 8r. See *Onuitgegeven sermoenen*, ed. Grootens, 120.

24 De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* I, 141-156. See also P. Mattheus Verjans, ‘P. Hendrik van Santen († 1493). Een mystieke minderbroeder (i)’, *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 4 (1930), 196-204. See also ‘Henricus de Zanten (Henricus Xantis/Hendrik van

*ervverdigden vaders broeder Henricus van Santen, gardiaen van Mechelen*, have been printed — likely posthumously but a date is unknown — by Jan Seversz in Leiden.<sup>25</sup> The collection that deals extensively with contemplative life ('scuwende leven'), was reprinted twice in Antwerp by Hendrik Eckert of Homberch. The first edition was probably printed around 1510; the second around 1515.<sup>26</sup> Although the Ghent copy of Homberch's second edition of Hendrik of Santen's sermon collection belonged to a Sister Mary,<sup>27</sup> it is hard to tell whether and to what extent the printed copies circulated within convents of the *Devotio moderna*: ownership inscriptions are seldom mentioned in (online) catalogues of early printed books.

Interestingly however, Santen's sermons on contemplative life also circulated in manuscript before they were put to the press and continued to do so thereafter, and at least two — but most probably three — manuscripts that contain the cycle (or part thereof) stem from female modern devout communities. The oldest manuscript, Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 895 — dated in 1500 (fols. 61r-291v) and 1503 (fols. 1r-60v) —

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Santen, d. 1493'), in: Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, 'Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th century. A Catalogue in Progress' [<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>; accessed 11 July 2022].

- 25 This first edition by Jan Seversz has been preserved in at least two copies: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 228 G 11 and Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, Maatschappij Nederlandse Letterkunde (KL), 1497 G 35. See *Netherlandish Books. Books Published in the Low Countries and Dutch Books Printed before 1601*, ed. Andrew Pettegree and Malcolm Walsby, 2 Vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), no. 27368.
- 26 *Die collacien vanden eerverdigen vaders broeder Henricus van Santen, Gardiaen van Mechelen* (Antwerp: Henrick Eckert van Homberch, s.d.). The edition that was probably printed around 1510 is preserved in five copies: Antwerp, Minderbroeders (shelfmark unknown); Antwerp, Museum Plantin-Moretus, Preciosa A 2250; Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, INC A 1.529; London, British Library, C.110.a.18; and Washington D.C., Library of Congress, BV4830.H4 [<https://www.loc.gov/resource/rbc0001.2021rosen1119>; accessed 14 April 2022]. See *Netherlandish Books*, ed. Pettegree and Walsby, no. 27369 and <https://www.ustc.ac.uk/editions/410067> [accessed 14 April 2022]. (The information in the Universal Short Title Catalogue is not entirely identical with the data given in Pettegree and Walsby. I follow their inventory here). The 1515-edition is also preserved in five copies: Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BIB.ACC.005782/3; Darmstadt, Technische Universität, Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, W 3196/110; Cologne, Universitäts- und Stadtbibliothek, AD+S836; and Xanten, Stiftsbibliothek, shelfmark unknown. *Netherlandish Books*, ed. Pettegree and Walsby mentions a 1515-copy in the British Library in London as well, but I cannot find any traces of that in their online catalogue.
- 27 The ownership inscription on the title page of Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, BIB.ACC.005782/3 reads: 'Dit boexken hoort toe zuster Maria' ['This booklet belongs to Sister Maria']. See <https://books.google.be/books?vid=GENT900000058535&printsec=frontcover#v=onepage&q&f=false> [accessed 14 April 2022].

was owned by the canonesses regular of Sint-Luciendal in Sint-Truiden (located in what is nowadays the province of Limburg in Belgium). Most likely it was (partially) copied there as well.<sup>28</sup> Hendrik of Santen's *collacien* on contemplative life — here divided into two parts — occurs at the end of the codex on fols. 273r-288v.<sup>29</sup> The much younger manuscript The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 73 F 28 (dated around 1550), contains only an excerpt of Hendrik of Santen's sermon (on fols. 12r-14v) and belonged to the canonesses regular of Sint-Agnes in Maaseik who also owned the two manuscripts with Brugman's sermons that were discussed before.<sup>30</sup> That Brussels, Stadsarchief, MS 2915 (dated ca. 1500) also most probably originates from modern devout circles can be deduced from the further contents of the codex. Santen's sermons (fols. 262r-276r) are preceded by two sermons by Alijt Bake (d. 1455) who was the prioress of the convent of Galilea in Ghent, one of the thirteen houses of canonesses regular that officially belonged to the Chapter of Windesheim.<sup>31</sup> The codex also contains sermons and excerpts from treatises by the famous authors Jan of Ruusbroec (d. 1381; *Die geestelijke brulocht* [*The Spiritual Espousals*] and *Vanden seven sloten* [*The Seven Enclosures*]), Thomas a Kempis (d. 1471; *De imitatione Christi*, book II, ch. 12), and the Observant Franciscan friars Dirc Coelde of Münster (ca. 1435-1515) and Hendrik Herp (d. 1477; *Spiegel*

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28 The ownership inscription at the first (unfoliated) page of the book reads: 'Dit boeck hoert toe den cloester van Sinte Luyciendaele gheleghen buyten der goeder stadt van Sintrude' ['This book belongs to the cloister of Sint-Luciendal, located outside the good town of Sint-Truiden']. The manuscript is a composite volume, written by several scribes. The colophon on fol. 250r mentions a female scribe: 'Ghescreven inden jaer xv' van eender religioeser wies naeme ghescreven moet wesen in den boeke des levens JH, rusten moet sij inden ewigen vrede' ['Written in the year 1500 by a religious person whose name must be written in the book of life JH; may she rest in eternal peace']. She was also the one who wrote the ownership inscription at the beginning of the manuscript. Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, no. 1147 suggest that the scribe was a man, and possibly the confessor of Sint-Luciendal. They are most likely drawing — wrongly in my opinion — on the colophon on fol. 60v which refers to Petrus Dorlandus (d. 1507), the author of *de Historie van S. Joseph* (fols. 1r-60v) and the *Historia perpulchra de Anna Sanctissima* (fols. 62v-110r).

29 Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* V, 246-247.

30 Stooker and Verbeij, *Collecties op orde* II, no. 812; Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* II, 852-853.

31 R. Th. M. van Dijk, *De constituties der Windesheimse vrouwenkloosters vóór 1559*, *Middeleeuwse Studies*, III, 2 Vols. (Nijmegen: Centrum voor Middeleeuwse Studies, Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen) I, 29; Wybren Scheepsma, *Deemoed en devotie. De koorvrouwen van Windesheim en hun geschriften*, *Nederlandse literatuur en cultuur in de Middeleeuwen*, 17 (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1997), 20 and especially appendix I, 222-231.

*der volcomenheit* [*The Mirror of Perfection*], ch. 1-12), who were all highly influential within the *Devotio moderna*.<sup>32</sup> Although the colophon makes it abundantly clear that the manuscript was written by a man, which could indicate a male provenance as well,<sup>33</sup> an epistle intended for a religious sister indicates that the book indeed was written for use in a female convent.<sup>34</sup>

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32 Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I, 731-734. Hendrik Herp and Dirk Coelde of Münster were also important figures in the Franciscan Observant movement. Herp was the founder and first guardian of the Observant convent of Boetendael in the Foret de Soignies near Brussels, that came into being in 1467 under the auspices of Isabella of Portugal, duchess of Brabant. Coelde of Münster was the convent's guardian between 1502 and 1508. Both were eminent and prolific preachers and authors. Herp's most famous work is the mystical treatise *Spiegel der Volcomenheit*, and Dirc Coelde is particularly known for his highly popular *Der kerstenen Spiegel* [*The Mirror for Christians*], which was published multiple times after 1477. The *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* mentions only one vernacular sermon by Herp (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902, fols. 17r-23v), which actually has to be attributed to Michael of Lyra (see below). Of Dirc Coelde of Münster only three sermons are mentioned in the *Repertorium*. Two of them are preserved in the codex that is discussed here (Brussel, Stadsarchief, MS 2915, fols. 71r-88v). The third sermon can be found in San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, 103597. The *reportatio* was written 'uytten monde van' ['from the mouth of'] Dirk Coelde of Münster by an anonymous scribe at the flyleaf at the back of *Tboeck vanden leven ons heeren Jhesu Christi* (*Book on the Life of Jesus Christ*), printed by Gheraert Leeu in Antwerpen in 1487. Dirk Coelde of Münster preached it on Good Friday 1488 (o.s. 1487) in St Gudila's church in Brussels: 'Dit was aldus bescreven te Bruesselle uytten monde van brueder Dierick van Munster, minderbruer vander observancien van Bootendale, int jair ons heren dusent cccc lxxxvii opten goeden vrydach voir den paesschen lxxxviii des nachts int predecken vander passien in sentthe Goedellen kercke' ['This was thus written in Brussels from the mouth of Friar Dirc of Münster, friar minor of the Observance of Boetendaal, in the year of our Lord 1487 [n.s. 1488], on the Good Friday before Easter 1488, at night during the preaching of the Passion in the church of St Gudila']. The sermon deals — not very unexpectedly given the occasion — with Christ's crucifixion. Very interestingly it is written from the perspective of Christ himself. The sermon is presented as a letter written by Christ to 'redelijcken creaturen' ['reasonable creatures']. For Hendrik Herp, see De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* I, 108-123, 'Henricus Herpius/Harpilus (Hendrik Herp, ca. 1400 near 's-Hertogenbosch-1477 Mechelen)', in: Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, 'Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th century. A Catalogue in Progress' [<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>; accessed 11 July 2022], and especially Anna Dlabáčová, *Literatuur en observantie. De Spiegel der volcomenheit van Hendrik Herp en de dynamiek van laatmiddeleeuwse tekstverspreiding*, *Middeleeuwse Studies en Bronnen*, 149 (Hilversum: Verloren, 2014) and the bibliographical references therein. For Dirk Coelde van Münster, see De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* i, 196-245, and 'Dietrich Colde/Kolde/Koelde (d. 1515)', in: Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, 'Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th century. A Catalogue in Progress' [<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>; accessed 11 July 2022].

33 Fol. 234v: 'Spect om gods wille enen Ave Maria voer die gheene die dit van minnen scref, want hi noch arm van doechden bleef' ['For God's sake, speak an Ave Maria for the one who wrote this out of love, for he remained poor in virtues'].

34 'Dese epistel waert eender suster te Dyepeven' ['This epistle was for a sister in Diepenveen'] (fols. 102v-109v). The same epistle occurs in Amsterdam, Universiteitsbibliotheek UvA, MS I G 35, fols. 139r-141v [see <https://bnm-i.huylgens.knaw.nl/tekstdragers/TDRA000000002244>;

As is clear from the previous, Hendrik of Santen's *collaties* on contemplative life were quite successful and circulated relatively widely, especially in the southern part of the Low Countries. However, 'die vader ende gardiaen van Mechelen' ['the father and guardian of Mechelen'] also preached on other topics and occasions. These sermons are only preserved in manuscript. To what extent they circulated within the female branch of the *Devotio moderna* is not so clear. The provenance of the manuscripts containing Hendrik of Santen's sermons for the Feast of Corpus Christi (*Sermones de Sacramento Altaris*) — Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MSS 1268-69 (fols. 196r-232v) and 2805-09 (fols. 128r-171r) — is nowhere to be found.<sup>35</sup> The sermon on St Barbara that likewise can be attributed to him in The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 75 H 17 was copied by Sister Anthonnie of Burgundien. Although Anthonnie mentioned that she had been in her convent for over seven years at the moment that she finished her work on St Anna's Eve (25 July) in 1503, she unfortunately did not reveal in which convent she lived.<sup>36</sup> The last manuscript containing sermons by Hendrik of Santen, however, can be attributed to a modern devout female community. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, MS Series nova 12847, belonged — according to its seventeenth-century ownership inscription — to the Brussels convent of Sint-Elisabeth op de berg Sion (canonesses regular).<sup>37</sup>

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accessed 28 June 2022] and The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 133 F 12, fols. 33r-66v [https://bnm-i.huygens.knaw.nl/teksten/TEXT000000007892; accessed 11 July 2022]. See also *Jan van Ruusbroec 1293-1381*, ed. Albert Ampe et al. (Brussels: Koninklijke Bibliotheek Albert I, 1981), no. 70.

- 35 Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* I 167-169 and 349-351. Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 1268-69 contains six sermons whereas Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 2505-09 only has four.
- 36 'AB. Item dit boeck was volscreven int jaer ons heeren xv<sup>e</sup> ende iii op sinte Annen avent, ende het heft ghescreven suster Anthonnie van Borgundien ende si wasser over seven jaer. Amen' ['AB. This book was completed in the year 1503 on St Anne's Eve, and Sister Anthonnie of Borgundien has written it and she was there for over seven years'; The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 75 H 17, fol. 126r].
- 37 Fol. 268v: 'Desen hoort toe de library van Sinte Elisabeth op den bergh Sion in Brussel' ['This belongs to the library of Sint-Elisabeth op de berg Sion in Brussel']. According to the *Repertorium*, four sermons (on fols. 221r-224r, 229r-236v, 245v-248v, and 267v-268v) can be attributed to Hendrik of Santen. See Sherwood-Smith, Stoop, Ermens and Van Dijk, *Repertorium of Middle Dutch Sermons* VII, 530-535. De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* I, 151-153 attributes seven sermons to him.

## Observant Franciscans preaching in female communities

Another Observant friar whose sermons were printed, which implies that there was a larger audience for them, was Lucas of der Hey (*fl.* 1508-1520).<sup>38</sup> About him even less is known than about Hendrik of Santen. In 1508 he finished a Middle Dutch translation of James of Milan's *Stimulus divini amoris* (*Dat boeck van den prickel der minnen*) which was printed by Jan Seversz in Leiden on 25 August 1511 and reprinted by Hendrik Eckert of Homberch in Antwerp on 22 January 1519, so by the same printers who published Hendrik of Santen's sermons on contemplative life (and particularly Eckert of Homberch put far more work by Observant Franciscans into print).<sup>39</sup> In 1515 Lucas of der Hey preached two sermons for the canonesses regular of Mariëndal in the Brabantine city of Diest. A few years later, on 24 February 1518, he preached on indulgences for the canonesses of the convent of Sint-Agnes (alias the 'Grote Convent') near Emmerich, just across the border in modern-day Germany.<sup>40</sup> In response to this sermon, one of the sisters asked for a more extensive explanation on indulgences:

'Int iaer ons heren dusent vijftien hondert ende achtyen op sinte Mathijs dach was ic broeder Lucas vander Heyde begheert van die deuote ioncfrouwen ende maechden des grote convents binnen Embrick van sint Augustijns oorde dat ik hen | doen woude een sermon vanden aflaten, want in dien tijt waren in die eigen stat grote aflaeten tot hulp ende reparacie van die kerck van sinte Peters binnen Romen. Ic dede hair een sermoen ende naet sermoen so quam een deuote joncfrou tot mijn vanden selfden conuent dye noch grot

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38 De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* i, 25-26.

39 Jan Seversz's 1511 edition is extant in nine copies. Of Homberch's 1519 edition six copies have been preserved. See *Netherlandish Books*, ed. Pettegree and Walsby, nos. 16383 and 16384. See also Dlabáčová, *Literatuur en observantie*, 219-224.

40 The Sint-Agnes convent was the most important monastery in Emmerich. For that reason, it was also called the 'Grote Convent'. See Archief St. Agnietenklooster in Emmerik en St. Ursulenklooster in Neder-Elten (Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, LTK 617:1-2) [<https://collectionguides.universiteitleiden.nl/repositories/2/resources/178>; accessed 1 July 2022]. See also *Schwesterbuch und Statuten des St. Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich*, ed. Anne Bollmann and Nikolaus Staubach, *Emmericher Forschungen. Schriftenreihe zur Stadtgeschichte*, 17 (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein, 1998).

verstant begeerde van den affaet te weten ende si badt mijn of si mijn mochte drie vragen vanden affaet vragen. Ick seyde haer ia. Neemt ghi die ghedaente van een dochter. Ick sal annemen dye form ofte ghedaente van een vader. Al ben ic dat onwaerdich ende vraecht mijn, ick sal u antwoert gheuen dat ick dese materien uitspreken mach tot gods eer ende tot profijt van alle mensen.’ (The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 228 G 17, fols. A1v-A2r)

[‘In the year of our Lord 1518 on Saint Michael’s day I, brother Lucas of der Hey, was asked by the devout ladies and virgins of the Grote Convent in Emmerich of the order of St Augustine, that I would do them a sermon on the indulgences, because at that time there were great indulgences for aid and rehabilitation in that city from the church of St Peter in Rome. I gave them a sermon, and after the sermon a devout lady came to me from the same congregation who wanted to gain great insights on the indulgence, and she asked me if she could ask me three questions about the indulgence. I told her yes. Take on the appearance of a daughter. I will take on the shape or appearance of a father. Even if I am unworthy of this, but if you ask me, I will answer you in order to utter these words for God’s honour and the benefit of all people.’]

Lucas of der Hey’s explanation resulted in the *Boecxken lerende hoe dat een mensche zijn ghebet ordineren sal om aflaten te verdienen* [*Booklet of how a man will ordain his prayer to earn indulgences*], which eventually was printed by Jan Seversz in Leiden.<sup>41</sup>

The two sermons Lucas of der Hey preached in Mariëndaal in Diest were published together, again by Jan Seversz in Leiden in 1517. The book is preserved in two copies: The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 228 G 20 and Heverlee, Abdij van Park, H125.<sup>42</sup> The title page already indicates the metaphors Lucas of der Hey used to stimulate the canonesses’

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41 The Hague, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, KW 228 G 17. See *Netherlandish Books*, ed. Pettegree and Walsby, no. 14824. For the digital copy, see <https://archive.org/details/ned-kbn-all-00003210-001/page/n12/mode/2up> [accessed 1 July 2022].

42 *Netherlandish Books*, ed. Pettegree and Walsby, no. 14823 only mentions the copy in The Hague. This copy has been digitized: <https://archive.org/details/ned-kbn-all-00003212-001/mode/2up> [accessed 30 June 2022]. The Heverlee copy is mentioned in Ernest Persoons,

spiritual life: ‘Hier beghint den spinrocken ghegeven voer een nyeuwe iaer den religiosen joncfrouwen van Mariendael binnen Diest mitten naycorf gegeven by broeder Lucas vander Hey minoer [sic] [‘Here begins the distaff given for a new year to the religious ladies of Mariendaal within Diest together with the sewing basket, given by brother Lucas of der Hey, friar minor’; fol. 1r]. The first sermon on the ‘spinrocken’ [‘distaff’] was preached on New Year’s Day in 1515 (o.s. 1514), the feast-day of the Circumcision of Christ. Drawing from Luke 2. 21 — ‘postquam impleti sunt dies octo, etc.’ [‘after eight days were accomplished, etc.’]<sup>43</sup> — Lucas of der Hey aimed to teach his readers how they could circumcise themselves spiritually and conform their souls to Christ. The text that is discussed more extensively by Anna Dlabáčová, is divided into three main parts: first, the perfect way in which the distaff that forms a figure of the crucified Christ is made; secondly, the way the thread is drawn from the distaff — eluding on how to follow Christ; and, thirdly, the way the cloth is made from the yarn which symbolizes the perfection of those who are engaged in following Christ’s example.<sup>44</sup>

The second sermon was preached to the sisters of Mariëndaal on the occasion of Candlemas (2 February) 1515 (o.s. 1514) and supposedly ‘van dye selue broeder Lucas overgeset vanden latijn in duyts te profijt van alle menscen’ [‘translated by the same brother Lucas from Latin into Dutch for the benefit of all people’; fol. 29v]. It explains the virtues of the Virgin Mary by the characteristics of a sewing basket in reference to Jeremiah 24. 1: ‘Die heer heeft mijn ghe-toont ende siet voer die tempel waren ii coruen vol vygen’ [‘The Lord shewed me: and behold two baskets full of figs, set before the temple of the Lord’]. Again, by laying out three aspects of the basket that should be observed — first, the matter or substance of which the basket is made; second, its shape; and third, the fact that it is wide and round — the sermon explains how the ‘devote herten’ [‘devout hearts’]

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‘Prieuré de Val-Notre-Dame, à Diest’, *Monasticon Belge*, IV-5, ed. Andrée Despy-Meyer (Liège: Centre National de Recherches d’Histoire Religieuse, 1971), 1337-1343.

43 The full verse in the Douay-Rheims Bible reads: ‘And after eight days were accomplished, that the child should be circumcised, his name was called Jesus, which was called by the angel, before he was conceived in the womb.’

44 Anna Dlabáčová, ‘Spinning with Passion. The Distaff as an Object for Contemplative Meditation in Netherlandish Religious Culture’, *The Medieval Low Countries* 5 (2018), 177-209, especially 187-192.

should follow Mary's purity, humility, obedience, steadfastness and other virtues, including her suffering and her choice to be in poverty with her child instead of in abundance.

For his sermons, Lucas of der Hey chose two metaphors that were very visual, and therefore could be remembered well, which will have made it easier for the nuns to meditate and contemplate on the sermons' content as well as to reminisce their message.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, by using images with which the nuns were very familiar — the distaff and the sewing basket — were everyday tools used for manual labor in female monastic communities — the priest made an ultimate conjunction between the monastic device of *ora et labora*, prayer and handicraft, so that by reading and contemplating on these two sermons both would go literally hand in hand. Moreover, he put the *imitatio Christi* and the *imitatio Mariae* at the heart of the matter and made the values related to those the goal of the pure Christian life.

Just as Lucas of der Hey preached to the canonesses regular of Mariëndaal in Diest, his colleagues preached half a century earlier, in the 1460 and 1470s, in other churches and female monasteries.<sup>46</sup> Specifically the canonesses regular of the Brussels' convent of Jericho, which — like Boetendael — had been founded at the instigation of the Duke of Brabant Philip the Good (1396-1467) and his wife Isabella of Portugal (1397-1471) were interested in the preaching services of several prominent Friars Minor of the Observance of Boetendael near Brussels. Particularly struck by the sermons of Dionysius of Holland, who had been the leader of the house of Observant friars in Haarlem in Holland before he became Hendrik Herp's successor as second guardian of Boetendael,<sup>47</sup> Mergriete of Steenberg

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45 For the importance of strong images for meditative reading and mnemonic purposes, in particular in relation to Middle Dutch sermons, see Thom Mertens, 'Scripted Allegoresis and Inventive Reading of Middle Dutch *Jhesus Collacien*' (forthcoming), who refers to important publications by Barbara Newman, Mary Carruthers, and Niklaus Largier (footnote 20). Relevant for the relationship between *memoria* and sermons is also Kimberley A. Rivers, *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice. Memory, Images, and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages*, *Sermo: Studies on Patristic, Medieval and Reformation Sermons and Preaching*, 4 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).

46 See also footnotes 7 and 32.

47 M. Hoeben, 'Dionysius van Holland (1459-1475). Persoon en werk', Unpublished MA Thesis (Louvain: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 1969); Archangelus Houbaert, 'Minderbroederkloosters in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden. Kloosterlexicon. 9. Boetendael', *Franciscana* 30 (1974), 82-95 (there 83, 94). Five of Dionysius of Holland's sermons have been edited in Guido

(d. 1504), *conversa* in Jericho, decided to copy the seventeen sermons which Dionysius had preached in the Brussels convent between 31 January and 14 May 1475 and her fellow sister Elisabeth of Poyle (d. 1499) had written down:<sup>48</sup>

‘Dese man was alsoe luter ende recht godminnende dat hi mijn herte wonderlijke zere bewechede ende recht raecte se, dat ic ghevoelde die woerde Davids daer hi seet: ‘Dat woert gods es als een vierich schielt’ (Proverbia 30. 5?), ende noch dat hi seet: ‘Lieve here, dijn woert heeft mijn herte verlicht ende het is een lanteerne minen voeten ende een claer licht minen toepaden.’’ (Psalm 118(119). 105; prologue Mergriete of Steenberghe, ll. 58-63)<sup>49</sup>

[‘This man was so pure and upright in his love of God that he moved my heart wondrously and touched it so directly that I felt the words of David when he says, ‘the word of God is as a fiery shield’, and again when he says, ‘Dear Lord, thy word has brought light to my heart, and it is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.’]

Dionysius particularly focused his sermons on the *vita activa*. He repeatedly stressed that working from a sincere intention and true faith aims to bring the soul to heaven after death. That this message appealed to a lay sister who spent most of her time working cannot be a real surprise.

The sermons are preserved in Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902, fols. 44v-171v and form the basis of a sermon collection which spans the

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Defloor, ‘Vijf onuitgegeven sermoenen van Dionijs van Hollant OFM uit het manuscript U.B. Gent, nr. 902. Een tekstuitgave met inleiding, aantekeningen en glossarium’, Unpublished MA Thesis (Ghent: Universiteit Gent, 1960).

48 Elisabeth was clearly interested in Observant spirituality. She also copied Hendrik Herp’s *Spiegel der volcomenheit* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, MS 2136). See Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 103 and 403-404. The manuscript as well as the relationship between Jericho and Boetendael is extensively discussed in Dlabáčová, *Literatuur en observantie*, 123-135.

49 The prologue of Mergriete of Steenberghe is published in Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 450-451. The line numbers refer to this edition. The prologue has also been published (followed by a translation in English) in Thom Mertens, ‘Ghostwriting Sisters. The Preservation of Dutch Sermons of Father Confessors in the Fifteenth and the Early Sixteenth Century’, in: *Seeing and Knowing. Women and Learning in Medieval Europe 1200-1550*, ed. Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Medieval Women: Texts and Contexts*, 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 121-141. The translation of the citations from Mergriete’s prologue have been taken from this publication.

full liturgical year, although that initially was not Mergriete's intention: 'Want ick en hadde maer voerghenomen te scriven die sermoene van den eerwerdeghen gaerdiaen brueder Dyonijs of Hollant, der welker ic hebbe xvii' ['For I had intended to write only the sermons of the reverend guardian, Brother Dionysus of Holland, of which I have done seventeen'] (prologue Mergriete of Steenberg, ll. 56-58). However, soon after completing the copying of Dionysius' sermons Mergriete decided to add the sermons by the provincials and guardians Michael of Lyra (a sermon which prior to Mergriete's copying was redacted by Barbara Cuyermans, the convent's writing mistress), Hendrik Berninck (ca. 1396-1492), brother Leo, and an anonymous friar.<sup>50</sup> She also copied twelve sermons by prominent Observant Dominicans as well as six by Jericho's confessor Jan Storm and his brother Willem, who was a canon regular in the convent of Bethlehem in Louvain.<sup>51</sup>

In the sermon for the second Sunday of Advent and the Immaculate Conception of Mary on 8 December preached by Michael of Lyra (Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902, fols. 17r-23v), we (finally) find one of the few explicit references to keeping the observance. The sermon that discusses the individual judgement after one's death ('particulaer oordeel') and the general judgement at the end of times ('generael oordeel'). It stresses the importance of confession and outlines the immense pain of hell and purgatory. By pointing out the risk of ending up in purgatory, the sermon encourages the sisters to keep to their rule, observance and vows, to take their duties in the choir seriously, and, above all, to observe the seven hours of prayer carefully and to avoid recklessness in that:

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50 For Michael of Lyra, see Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 274, and Defloor, 'Vijf onuitgegeven sermoenen van Dionys van Holland', 19. Hendrik Berninck was an influential enforcer of the Observance. He was involved in the foundation of several houses, in Gouda (1439), Leiden (1445) and Antwerp (1448). He was vicarius-provincial of the province of Cologne between 1456 and 1459, and guardian of Boetendaal between 1475 and 1477. See Houbaert, 'Minderbroederkloosters in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden', 83 and 94; De Troeyer, *Bio-bibliographia franciscana neerlandica ante saeculum xvi* I, 128-138; J.A. De Kok, *Acht eeuwen minderbroeders in Nederland. Een oriëntatie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007), 94, 103, and 105; and 'Henricus Berninck (Hendrik Berninck, ca. 1396-1492)', in: Maarten van der Heijden and Bert Roest, 'Franciscan Authors, 13th-18th century. A Catalogue in Progress' [<https://applejack.science.ru.nl/franciscanauthors/>; accessed 11 July 2022].

51 For a more extensive discussion of the manuscript and the sermons therein, see Stoop, *Schrijven in commissie*, 271-300, 340-345, and 456-458. For the sermons by the Observant Dominicans, see footnote 8.

‘Hierom moghen wij wel voer ons sien in tijts ende pinen ons re-  
gule, observancie ende belouften nauwe te houden, neerstich sijn  
ten chore ende bovenal sorchvoldich in onse ghetijden. Want van  
eenen persoen lesen wij dat hi XL jaer int vaghevier moeste berren  
omdat hi sijn ghetijden roekeloes plach te lesene.’ (fol. 18r)

[‘This is why we must look ahead in time and make efforts to keep  
our rule, observance, and vows closely, be steadfast in the choir and  
above all careful in keeping our hours. For we read of one person  
that he had to burn in purgatory for forty years because he used to  
read his hours recklessly.’]

Later in the same sermon Maria is set as an ‘exempel kerstelijcs levens’ [‘an example of Christian life’] for nuns, and it is stressed again how the women should uphold the convent regulations and observance. The sermon also encourages them to follow Mary by practicing virtues and focusing on humility, by repenting for their sins and maintaining abstinence, and by renouncing personal property and protecting their virginity. As in the sermon by Lucas of der Hey, the *imitatio Mariae* is a central point. Michael of Lyra’s sermon is — very much like the sermons by the other Observant Franciscans in Ghent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, MS 902 — focused on the practical aspects of monastic life. The observance of the monastic rule and thus the return to the essence of monasticism are high on his list of priorities.

### **Concluding remarks**

On the basis of sermons in the Dutch vernacular, we can conclude that the Franciscan friars of the Observance had quite some impact, especially in the Southern Low Countries. Particularly the Observant Friars Minor from the strongly interconnected friaries in Mechelen and Boetendael (situated a bit south of Brussels) had a large influence. Many of the sermons they preached were preserved from convents of canonesses regular, tertiaries, and sisters of the Common Life which adhered to the Chapter of Windesheim. In many instances, these were written sermons that — via manuscript as well as early printed books — ended up in those convents; in other cases, the friars actually visited those women’s convents. In all these

monasteries, the Franciscan sermon material is kept hand in hand with sermons and devotional texts from other religious orders. It is clear that the Franciscan Observant voice is amply preserved and valued, perhaps as an alternative, complementary tone with a stronger emphasis on observing the practical aspects and the everyday virtues of religious life than on contemplation and prayer, aspects that also were central to monastic life. Without doubt, it was seen as a valuable addition to the texts from Windesheim circles and the spirituality preached by their own confessors. Apparently, in the Low Countries, the spiritual values of the different Observant movements were, despite their own accents, the intensity with which they were preached, and the mutual rivalries, sufficiently close to each other to cross the boundaries of religious orders with the greatest of ease.