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THE LEPER IN THE MASTER BEDROOM: THINKING THROUGH A THIRTEENTH-CENTURY EXEMPLUM

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This article focuses on a single story about an encounter between a charitable noblewoman and a male leper. The tale, which was told as an exemplum, or illustrative story for preaching purposes, was repeated in a number of preaching texts of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries.¹ As far as we know, however, the early thirteenth-century cleric, Jacques de Vitry, was either the author of the story or the first person to write it down, sometime between 1227 and 1240.² Later authors of exempla collections who included the story often cited Jacques de Vitry as their source, and even in those collections without explicit citations,

¹ Frederic C. Tubach, *Index exemplorum: A Handbook of Medieval Religious Tales*, FF Communications 86, no. 204 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1969), 237 (no. 3020); Thomas Frederick Crane, *The Exempla or Illustrative Stories from the Sermones Vulgares of Jacques de Vitry* (London: D. Nutt, 1890; repr. New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 174–75. In Stith Thompson's index of folk motifs this story falls under K 2112.2, "Lep-er (beggar) laid in queen's bed. She is thus incriminated": *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 6 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955–1958), 4:475. See also Harriet Goldberg, *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Folk Narratives*, MRTS 162 (Tempe: MRTS, 1998), 110; eadem, *Motif-Index of Folk Narratives in the Pan-Hispanic Romancero*, MRTS 206 (Tempe: MRTS, 2000), 59.

² For the dating of Jacques' "Sermones vulgares" see Alberto Forni, "Giacomo da Vitry, Predicatore e 'sociologo'," *La cultura: Rivista trimestrale di filosofia, letteratura e storia* 18 (1980): 34–89. There is no complete edition of the "Sermones vulgares." For the two sermons "Ad hospitalarios et custodes infirmorum" I have used: Bibliothèque Nationale de France (henceforth BNF), ms. lat. 3284, fols. 101v–107v. The Latin texts of the exempla stories in Jacques' sermons were published separately by Crane, *The Exempla*. Unless otherwise indicated, all English translations are my own.

the textual influence is evident.³ Jacques recounted the story in the first of two model sermons for hospital workers, which he included in his collection of *ad status* sermons, sermons, that is, that were to serve as models for preachers who wished to address people from various walks of life.⁴

Jacques' exemplum is arresting because it offers up as a positive example a story about a pious matron who allowed a male leper (and lepers were often portrayed as sexually rapacious)⁵ to enter her husband's bed. Jacques' framing of the story also seems curious, on first examination, because it sets up a married noble laywoman as a role model for hospital workers—caretakers and administrators who generally led a semi-religious life within the institutions that they served. The underlying logic behind Jacques' telling of a story that integrated sexual danger into the role of pious matronliness, and his inclusion of that story in a sermon exhorting and encouraging semi-religious hospital workers, point to two aspects of marriage in the high and later middle ages that require further examination. On the one hand, clerics often represented pious wives as brides of Christ, but that image was highly ambiguous and unstable, both for the clerics and for the women they

³ Texts that attribute the story to Jacques de Vitry: *La scala coeli de Jean Gobi*, ed. Marie-Anne Polo de Beaulieu (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1991), 259–60 (no. 223); *An Alphabet of Tales: An English Fifteenth-Century Translation of the Alphabetum Narrationum of Etienne de Besançon*, ed. Mary MacLeod Banks, 2 vols., Early English Text Society, o. s. 126 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1904), 117 (no. 167); *Recull de Eximplis e miracles, gestes e faules e altres ligendes ordenades per A–B–C*, ed. Marian Aguilo y Fuster, 2 vols. (Barcelona: A. Verdager, 1881), 1:130 (no. 138). On Stephen of Bourbon, who also cited Jacques de Vitry, see below at note 13.

⁴ Consistent with Jacques' intention of assisting preachers who wished to address particular audiences, the manuscripts of his sermons group the sermons for each audience—hospital workers, married persons, male and female servants, etc.—together. We have no direct evidence that Jacques' model sermons for hospital workers were ever preached to hospital workers. Indeed, Jacques' *ad status* sermons were probably too long and complex for lay audiences—Jacques probably intended for other preachers to draw on the sermon materials, rather than copying them verbatim. We do know that Jacques was himself an impressive preacher, that he himself visited hospitals, and that his sermons and exempla were copied down many times in the later middle ages—so it is possible that the story and parts of the original sermon in which it was embedded were heard by hospital workers. Fifteen medieval manuscripts contain the entire collection of Jacques' *ad status* sermons; another eleven contain excerpted collections of all or some of his exempla: Monica Sandor, "The Popular Preaching of Jacques de Vitry" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Toronto, 1993), 39–41, 289, 303–9.

⁵ Saul Brody, *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 177–99; Katherine L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 173–77.

were trying to influence. On the other hand, as Jacques was well aware, married persons played an important role in high and late medieval hospitals.

A prominent cleric of the early thirteenth century, Jacques de Vitry was an admirer and narrator of the so-called evangelical awakening of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, which had resulted in the rise of the mendicant religious orders, the beguine movement of the low countries, and the foundation of new hospitals and hospital orders. His descriptions and comments about hospitals and hospital workers—which we encounter in his life of the beguine Mary of Oignies, in his *Historia Occidentalis*, and in his sermons—were often based on first-hand observation. Such, however, was not the case with the story about the leper in the master bedroom, which was informed, instead, by hagiographical topoi, such as the story about Saint Martin kissing a leper.

Since the details of the narrative are significant for my analysis, it is necessary to begin with a translation of the entire exemplum:

I know of a certain noblewoman who had great compassion for the sick, and especially for lepers. However, her husband, a powerful knight who was also noble in God's eyes, abhorred lepers to such an extent that he was not able to look at them, nor would he allow them to enter the enclosure of his house. One day, when a certain leper clamored outside her door, the lady asked if he wanted something to eat or drink. The leper replied, "Behold, the heat of the sun is torturing me; I can't eat or drink or receive any service from you unless you bring me inside your house." She replied, "I can't. Don't you know how much my lord abhors lepers? He's due to return soon since he's been out hunting a long time. If he found you in his house he might kill both you and me." But the leper would not relent. He continued sighing and crying so that finally she, who could not bear to listen to his wailing, carried him with her own arms into the house. But when she asked him again if he wanted to eat, he would not accept, unless she first carry him to her husband's bed, because he wanted to rest there before he ate. Finally, overcome by his pleas and tears, and utterly filled with a spirit of piety and compassion, she made him lie in her husband's bed and placed the pillow under his head and the fur blanket over him.

And behold! Just then her husband returned, exhausted, from the hunt, saying to his wife, "Open up the bedroom so that I can sleep and get rested," for indeed, it was the height of summer. Stupefied and trembling and fearing more the death of the leper than her own, the woman did not know what to do, so she delayed a bit. Greatly indignant, the husband then entered the bedroom. After a moment, though, he returned to his wife, saying, "How wonderfully you have prepared my bed, but I wonder where you found that aromatic with which the whole room has been suffused with a perfume so agreeable that it seems to me that I am in paradise." Hearing this, the woman, who had expected only her own death, entered the room and found it thus, but she did not find the leper.

Led by the wonder and magnitude of the miracle, the woman then narrated the whole set of events to her husband. And he, who had formerly been like a lion, was made contrite, so that now he began to be tame like a lamb. Thus, converted to God by the merits of his wife, he began to lead a life no less religious than hers.⁶

This was one of several stories in which Jacques tried to press home the point, in his first sermon for hospital workers, that those who dedicated themselves to the seven works of corporal charity—bringing food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, providing hospitality, visiting the sick and incarcerated, and tending to the dead—would receive heavenly rewards.⁷ The scrip-

⁶ "Novi quandam nobilem dominam que valde compatiebatur infirmis et maxime leprosis. Vir autem ejus miles, potens et nobilis a Deo, abhominabatur leprosos, quod eos videre non poterat nec eos infra septa domus sue intrare permittebat. Quadam die, cum leprosus quidam extra domus ambitum ante portam clamaret, quesivit domina si manducare aut bibere vellet. Cui ille: 'Ecce hic crucior vehementissimo solis ardore, non manducabo neque bibam nec aliquod a te servicium recipiam, nisi tuleris me in domum tuam.' Cui illa: 'Numquid nosti dominum meum quantum abhorreat leprosos et ipse redire debet, quia diu est quod ivit venatum. Si te inveniret in domo sua forsitan et me et te occideret.' Illo autem non acquiescente sed gemente et plorante, mulier nobilis non potuit planctus ejus sustinere sed propriis brachiis ipsum in domum suam portavit. Cumque rogaret ut refectionem reciperet, nullo modo acquiescere voluit, nisi prius in propria camera viri sui et in lecto ejus domina ipsum ferret, ibi enim desiderabat quiescere antequam manducaret. Cumque illa sicut tota spiritu pietatis et compassionis affluebat gemitus et lacrimas leprosi ferre non posset, tandem victa precibus eum in lecto suo quiescere fecit, pulvinar suum sub capite ejus subponens et coopertorio grisio corpus leprosi tegens. Et ecce vir ejus de venatione fatigatus rediens ait uxori: 'Aperi cameram illam ut dormiam et requiescam.' Estus quidem magnus erat. Cumque illa stupefacta et tremens, et de morte leprosi magis quam de sua metuens, nesciret quid faceret et aliquantulum tardaret, dominus cum magna indignatione thalamum ingrediens, post modicum tempus ad uxorem regressus ait: 'Modo benefecisti que lectum meum optime preparasti, sed miror ubi tales species aromaticas reperisti quibus tota camera ita respersa est odore suavitatis quod visum est mihi quod fuerim in paradyso.' Quo audito mulier, que non nisi mortem expectabat, ingressa camera ita invenit, sed leprosum non reperit. Que pre ammiratione et miraculi magnitudine cuncta per ordinem marito suo narravit. At ille valde compunctus, qui prius velud leo fuerat, mansuescere cepit velud agnus, et meritis uxoris sue ita ad Deum conversus ducere cepit vitam non minus religiosam quam uxor." Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 44–45 (no. 95).

⁷ The first six of the works of mercy were based on Matthew 25:35–36. Burial of the dead was a medieval addition.

tural theme text for the sermon—"Blessed is the one who considers the poor; on the day of trouble the Lord will deliver him (Ps. 40:1)"⁸—made just such a connection between charity and heavenly reward, as did a number of other scriptural passages that Jacques cited.

The story also illustrated the scriptural promise, to which Jacques pointed again and again in the sermon, that in providing assistance to those in need, pious believers helped God himself: "Whoever therefore through these works [of corporal charity] shows charity to his neighbor applies that charity to God . . . as the Lord said, 'I was hungry and you gave me food [Matt. 25:35].'"⁹ Hospital workers, Jacques asserted, had already chosen to follow this path by giving up their worldly lives in order to help the poor: "You have renounced the world and taken on the habit of religion so that by giving not only your possessions but also yourselves, through works of mercy, every day you refresh Christ in his members."¹⁰

Jacques apparently sensed at least two reasons why hospital workers needed to be reminded that their work would receive heavenly rewards. First, as I discuss below, he perceived that some hospital workers were not faithful to their calling of helping the poor. And second, the work itself was extremely demanding and repugnant. Jacques, who himself had visited hospital inmates during his tenure as bishop of Acre, in the Holy Land,¹¹ stated, in his *Historia occidentalis*, that the work of caring for the afflicted was equivalent to martyrdom:

They have endured so great and so many impurities of the sick, and such intolerable stench, bringing violence upon themselves, that I judge that no other form of penance is able to be compared to this martyrdom, which is holy and precious in the eyes of God.¹²

Jacques went on, in this passage of the *Historia Occidentalis*, to promise that God would reward hospital workers by transforming the excrement and stench of hospital work into precious stones and sweet odors. In the story of the leper in

⁸ "Beatus qui intelligit super egenum et pauperem: in die mala liberabit eum Dominus": BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fols. 101^v–102.

⁹ "Qui igitur predictis modis miseretur proximo accommodat Deo . . . dicente Domino, 'Esurivi et dedisti michi manducare': BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 102.

¹⁰ "Ad hoc autem mundo renunciastis et habitum religionis assumptistis ut non solum vostra sed vos ipsos operibus misericordie impendatis ut scilicet Christum in membris suis omni die reficiatis": BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fols. 102–102^v.

¹¹ Sandor, "Popular Preaching," 55.

¹² Jacques de Vitry, *The Historia Occidentalis of Jacques de Vitry*, ed. John Frederick Hinnebusch, *Spicilegium Friburgense* 17 (Fribourg: University Press, 1972), 148.

the bedroom he offered a concrete example confirming this promise. The woman not only endured a metaphorical martyrdom by taking the leper into her arms; she also risked literal martyrdom at the hands of her husband. The stench of the leper, moreover, was transformed into the sweet perfume of paradise. The woman was reminded—through the leper's disappearance and the perfume that he left behind—that in the person of the leper she had actually encountered Christ, who had promised in the Gospel of Matthew, "whenever you have done this for the least of my brethren, you have done it to me [Matt. 25:40]." To further illustrate the point that physical ministrations to the physically ill poor could, and indeed would, result in heavenly rewards, Jacques emphasized that the woman's husband was converted from a lion to a lamb.

Clearly, though, there was more going on here than just a reminder that God encouraged and would reward works of corporal charity. Indeed this is an extremely bizarre story, given the fact that at its core is a leprous beggar who insinuated his way into the husband's bed when the husband was not at home. If Jacques himself stopped short of actually stating that the woman put herself at risk both of sexual danger and of the suspicion of sexual transgression, those aspects of the story nevertheless impressed themselves on his thirteenth-century audience. We see this in the way that Jacques' story had been transformed by the time the mid-century Dominican preacher, Stephen of Bourbon, wrote it down. Stephen attributed his version of the story to an oral account that had been recounted by Geoffrey of Blével, the director of the Dominican school of St.-Jacques in Paris; but he also attributed the written version of the story to Jacques de Vitry. Stephen's reference to the oral transmission of the story may explain the differences between his version and that of Jacques. An alternative reading could be that Stephen's reference provided him with the excuse that he needed for transforming the story himself:

I heard from brother Geoffrey of Blével (and master Jacques de Vitry wrote this) that a certain noblewoman was in the habit of receiving poor people and serving them with her own hands and washing their feet, against her husband's will. Wondrously, she found a poor man before her door, who was apparently afflicted and covered with ulcers. Filled with compassion, she led him into her house while her husband was absent, and when he asked for a bath she prepared it for him. Afterwards, when he said that he could only rest in a soft bed, she placed him in her bedroom. However, soon after that her husband returned and came into the same bedroom. Entering his wife's bed and finding the sick man there, the husband thought that the man was an adulterer and wanted to kill him there in the bed. But the Lord appeared to him nude and in the form in which he hung on the cross, saying, "Why do you persecute me, who suffered this for you?" Prostrating

himself on the ground, the husband raised his eyes, but he found nothing, and was converted to God.¹³

By adding the detail about the bath and allowing the husband both to discover the sick man in his bed and to suspect that he was an adulterer, Stephen made clear what Jacques de Vitry had only implied: that the matron in the story placed herself and her reputation at extreme risk.

Jacques de Vitry went to great lengths, in his life of Mary of Oignies, for instance, to endorse the practice of sexual abstention, even among the married.¹⁴ In the story about the leper in the bedroom, however, he constructed a positive example about a pious woman who carried her charitable deeds to such an extreme that she came close to subjecting herself both to sexual danger and to accusations of sexual transgression. How, then, do we interpret this outrageous story, within the context of the writings and thought of its first storyteller, and within the context of his intended audience of hospital workers?

Pious Wives as Brides of Christ

Four points about the wife in Jacques' story are especially notable: she disobeyed her husband's wishes; she employed, or intended to employ, her husband's property in a manner that would have consumed or ruined that property; she invited

¹³ "Audiui a fratre Gaufrido de Blevex (hoc eciam scripsit magister Jacobus de Vitri) quod, cum quedam mulier nobilis consueta esset recipere pauperes et servire eis manibus propriis et abluere pedes eorum, invito viro et inhibente, et invenisset ante domum suam pauperem mirabiliter, ut videbatur, afflictum et ulcerosum, compassa duxit eum in domum suam, viro ejus absente, et, cum peteret balneum, paravit ei; post, cum diceret quod non posset quiescere nisi in molli lecto, posuit eum in camera sua. Cum autem subito vir ejus, cameram dictam veniens, intrasset in lecto uxoris, invenit dictum infirmum; quem cum crederet adulterum et vellet eum occidere super lectum ejus, apparuit ei Dominus nudus, in ea forma in qua pependit in cruce, dicens: 'Quid me persequeris [Acts 9:4, 22:7, 26:14], qui pro te hoc passus sum?' Cum autem ad terram prostratus oculos erigeret, nil invenit, et conversus est ad Dominum": *Anecdotes historiques, légendes et apologues tirés du recueil inédit d'Étienne de Bourbon dominicain du xiii^e siècle*, ed. A. Lecoy de la Marche (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1877), 132 (no. 154).

¹⁴ *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, Prologue, par. 3, ed. Joannus Bollandus et al., in *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur* (Antwerp and Brussels, 1643–) (hereafter AASS), Iunius IV, 637.

a second man into her husband's bed, thereby associating herself with adulteresses or with widows who remarried; and in the end she became outspoken about events that should have displeased her husband.

In each case, the ultimate message of the story—that the wife's behavior was commendable—contradicted points that Jacques made elsewhere in his *ad status* sermons. Concerning disobedient wives, for instance, Jacques was adamant, in his first sermon for married persons, that “as far as she is able, a wife should be obedient to her husband.”¹⁵ To underscore this message, he told three exempla about disobedient wives who came to a bad end: one was thrown into a body of water by her husband; another, who disobeyed her husband by poking her finger into a hole, cut her finger on nails that he had placed there; and a third was injured by falling stones when she entered a bakehouse after her husband had forbidden her to do so.¹⁶

Like other clerical authors, Jacques de Vitry linked women's squandering of men's goods with the act of adultery. In giving her body to another man, an adulterous wife was already engaged in the act of giving away property—her own body—which was not hers to give away.¹⁷ And, of course, the underlying fear for propertied men was that their material goods would be misdirected if the offspring of a wife's adultery inherited their property.

Jacques underscored this association of female adultery with the squandering of the husband's property in a number of ways. In one story, he told of an adulteress who, in order to please her lover, went so far as to convince her husband that he needed to extract one of his teeth, which she then gave to the lover.¹⁸ In another story, a demon told a man that only one of his sons was his own—the other was the son of a priest.¹⁹ Finally, in one of his sermons for male and female servants, he wrote of the “intolerable evil” that occurred when maidservants supplanted their mistresses, stealing the affections of their masters and thus gaining control of the households and property that they were supposed to serve.²⁰

¹⁵ “Uxor enim marito, in quantum secundum quod potest, obedire debet”: Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 95 (no. 228).

¹⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 92, 95, 98–99 (nos. 221, 228, 236).

¹⁷ See Sharon Farmer, “Feminine Folly, Burgher Calculation, and Anti-Communal Rhetoric in Medieval Tours,” *Studies in Iconography* 17 (1996): 143–76, here 159.

¹⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 104–5 (no. 248).

¹⁹ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 97 (no. 233). Cf. Goldberg, *Folk Narratives*, 104 (no. K1518.1.1).

²⁰ Jacques de Vitry, “LXV, sermo ad eosdem,” ed. Jean Longère, “Deux sermons de Jacques de Vitry (†1240) *Ad Servos et Ancillas*,” in *La femme au moyen âge*, ed. Michel Rouche and Jean Heuclin (Maubeuge, France: Ville de Maubeuge, c.1990), 261–296, here 294.

Jacques told at least three disapproving stories about women—or female mates—who invited other men into their beds. The first concerned the adulteress and her husband's tooth. The second concerned a widow who betrayed her dead husband by disinterring his body, which she used as a substitute for the missing body of a criminal who had been publicly executed. In so doing, the widow was able to save her future second husband, who had been ordered to guard the body of the dead criminal, from the anger of the king.²¹ The third story touching on the theme of married men (or male mates) who were supplanted both in bed and out concerned a female stork that invited her lover into her nest. Her mate discovered her adultery, when, upon returning to the nest, he detected the smell of the other male.²²

Significantly, both the story about the stork and the story about the leper in the husband's bed involved an intruding male who left behind an odor that the husband later detected. The mirroring of these details worked to embed the one narrative in the other. Thus the leper's lingering perfume evoked not only the association of lepers with stench, which God could transform into perfume, but also the association of sexual intruders and adultery with strong odors.²³ The leper's presence in the husband's bed and the perfume that he left behind served as reminders of the widespread belief that lepers were sexually voracious, despite Jacques' explicit efforts to suppress such beliefs in his sermons for lepers.²⁴

Jacques told two stories about husbands who punished outspoken, litigious wives. In the first story, which he recounted in his second sermon for male and female servants, the husband threw his argumentative wife into a body of water. In the second story, which he included in the same sermon, the husband cut out his wife's tongue.²⁵ In a third story, which Jacques recounted in his first sermon for married people, a husband insisted on going upstream to search for his wife who had fallen into a river, because, he said, she was so contrary.²⁶

Jacques was not alone among clerics in speaking out against women who disobeyed their husbands, squandered their property, argued with them, and violated

²¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 96–97 (no. 232).

²² Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 97–98 (no. 234). Cf. Goldberg, *Folk Narratives*, 4, 140 (nos. A 2497.2, Q241.4).

²³ For the association of adultery with a perfumed bed see Proverbs 7:17.

²⁴ Jacques declared in the first of his sermons for lepers that because of their disease lepers did not suffer from strong sexual appetites: Jacques de Vitry, "Sermo ad leprosos et alios infirmos," ed. Nicole Bériou and François-Olivier Touati, in "*Voluntate dei leprosus*": *les lépreux entre conversion et exclusion aux XII^e siècle*, Testi, studi, strumenti 4 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull'alto medioevo, 1991), 112. See also p. 60 for Bériou's discussion of this passage.

²⁵ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 92 (nos. 221, 222).

²⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 94 (no. 227).

their marriage beds. But for all of these clerics there was an important distinction between *bad* wives who misbehaved and *pious* wives who did so. In the latter case, all normative rules—including those concerning the marriage bed—could be inverted. I have written elsewhere about clerics who promoted pious wifely persuasion and the secretive or disobedient distributions of alms. Thomas of Chobham, a near contemporary of Jacques de Vitry who wrote an important manual for confessors, brought those two activities together in the following passage:

In imposing penance, it should always be enjoined upon women to be preachers to their husbands, because no priest is able to soften the heart of a man the way his wife can. For this reason, the sin of a man is often imputed to his wife if, through her negligence, he is not corrected. Even in the bedroom, in the midst of their embraces, a wife should speak alluringly to her husband, and if he is hard and unmerciful, and an oppressor of the poor, she should invite him to be merciful; if he is a plunderer, she should denounce plundering; if he is avaricious, she should arouse generosity in him, and she should secretly give alms from their common property, supplying the alms that he omits. For it is permissible for a woman to expend much of her husband's property, without his knowing, in ways beneficial to him and for pious causes.²⁷

More striking than these clerical encouragements of the pious wife's use of argument and secretive expenditures are their positive descriptions of intrusions into the marriage bed. In the passage that I just quoted, Chobham encouraged the wife's use of moral intrusions into the marriage bed, but he did not go as far as to promote the intrusion of a second man into the bed. The clerical authors of several lives of married women saints, by contrast, did just that when they implied that Christ himself entered into these women's marriage beds, coming

²⁷ "Mulieribus tamen semper in penitentia iniungendum est quod sint predicatrices virorum suorum. Nullus enim sacerdos ita potest cor viri emollire sicut potest uxor. Unde peccatum viri sepe mulieri imputatur si per eius negligentiam vir eius non emmendatur. Debet enim in cubiculo et inter medios amplexus virum suum blande alloqui, et si durus est et immisericors et oppressor pauperum, debet eum invitare ad misericordiam; si raptor est, debet detestari rapinam; si avarus est, suscitet in eo largitatem, et occulte faciat eleemosynas de rebus communibus, et eleemosynas quas ille omittit, illa suppleat. Licitum enim mulieri est de bonis viri sui in utiles usus ipsius et in pias causas ipso ignorante multa expendere": Thomas de Chobham, *Thomae de Chobham summa confessorum*, ed. F. Broomfield, *Analecta mediaevalia Namurcensia* 25 (Louvain: Éditions Nauwelaerts, 1968), 375. See the discussion of this and other relevant texts in Sharon Farmer, "Persuasive Voices: Clerical Images of Medieval Wives," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 517–43.

between them and their husbands. Thus, as Rosalynn Voaden recounts in this volume, two friars reported that they saw Christ sitting at the head of the marriage bed of Elzear of Sabran and Delphine of Puimichel, between the virginal spouses.²⁸ Delphine, moreover, had been assured before her marriage to Elzear that she was already a bride of Christ. In the lives of Dorothea of Montau and Bridget of Sweden the saintly women were described as "brides of Christ" even while their earthly husbands were still alive and having sexual relations with them.²⁹ Indeed, according to Dorothea's hagiographer, God later told her that he "frequently seized (*rapui*) you from your husband when he still lived and thought he possessed you."³⁰ Hedwig of Silesia's hagiographer also set up a love triangle among Hedwig, her husband, and Christ. Christ, the intruding lover, protected Hedwig from her husband's wrath by miraculously hiding her ascetical practice of going barefoot.³¹

In his life of Mary of Oignies, Jacques de Vitry, like these other hagiographers, identified Christ as the spouse of his female saint, even during the lifetime of the saint's earthly spouse.³² In the prologue to Mary's life, moreover, Jacques underscored the idea that pious widows—of whom, he claimed, there were many in the beguine movement of the low countries—transferred their loyalties from their first husbands to their second, heavenly, spouse: "Just as they had previously tried to please their husbands in the flesh, so now the more did they attempt to please the heavenly bridegroom in the spirit."³³

In the story about the leper in the master bedroom, Christ, in the form of a leper, insisted upon taking his place in the husband's bed. The story thus gave concrete expression to an idea that Jacques de Vitry and other clerics frequently repeated: pious married women were wedded to—and caught between—two spouses. Significantly, the story also made use of a common stereotype concerning lepers—that they were impatient. Moreover, it skirted on the edges of

²⁸ Rosalynn Voaden, "A Marriage Made for Heaven: The *Vies Occitanes* of Elzear of Sabran and Delphine of Puimichel," in this volume, 101–16.

²⁹ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 237.

³⁰ "Frequenter a viro rapui te, quando adhuc vixit et estimavit te possidere": *Vita Dorotheae*, 3:45, AASS, Oct. XIII, p. 524; trans. Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 238.

³¹ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 232.

³² *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, bk. 1, chap. 5, par. 15, AASS, Iunius IV, 639.

³³ "Sicut maritis suis prius placere nitebantur in carne, imo ita amplius sponso caelestis placere studebant in spiritu": *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, prologue, par. 3, AASS, Iunius IV, 636; trans. Margot H. King, *The Life of Mary of Oignies* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1986), 3–4.

another commonly held idea—that they were sexually dangerous.³⁴ The sexual tensions in the story and the ambiguous identity of the Christ/leper helped to highlight the dilemma that pious wives faced: while their pious polyandry sometimes worked to the benefit of their earthly husbands—as it did in this story—it also placed the women in an extremely precarious position because their behavior was always open to multiple interpretations. In the absence of a miracle, or of a cleric or husband who was willing to give the proper gloss to a women's actions, pious misbehavior was simply misbehavior. In such cases, the lady remained legally subject to one lord, and if that lord was also a lion, he might beat or brutalize her into submission.³⁵ Husbands who did so could cite the approval of clerics like Jacques de Vitry, and their actions were often upheld in court.

It is worth noting that while Jacques was willing to play on the idea that lepers were sexually dangerous, and while his story drew on a hagiographical tradition in which both male and female saints and near-saints—Martin, Radegund, Queen Matilda (the wife of King Henry I of England), Francis—not only embraced, but actually kissed, lepers, he stopped short of allowing his matron to kiss the leper.³⁶ Gender alone does not explain Jacques's hesitation, since Queen Matilda also kissed male lepers in her bedroom.³⁷ The significant difference seems to be that of sexual danger—for while the author of the story about Matilda, Aelred of Rievaulx, indicated that her sexual *appeal* to her husband was threatened by the fact that her lips had touched lepers, he did not at all suggest that her sexual *virtue* was ever in danger, or that she was ever alone with any one leper.³⁸ In Jacques's exemplum, the context of sexual danger—which was essential to the underlying message—placed limitations on how far the woman could

³⁴ See, for instance, Humbert of Romans, *De eruditione religiosorum praedicatorum*, bk. 2, tract. 1, chap. 93, "Ad leprosos," and bk. 2, tract. 1, chap. 41, "Ad fratres et sorores in domibus leprosororum," ed. Marguerin de la Bigne, in *Maxima bibliotheca veterum patrum et antiquorum scriptorum ecclesiasticorum*, 27 vols. (Lyon: Anissonii, 1677), 25:456–507, here 502–3, 476.

³⁵ Dyan Elliott argues that in all areas except those of almsgiving and pious persuasion, clerical authors and canon lawyers considered women to be subject to their husbands before being subject to God: *Spiritual Marriage*, 157, 185–88.

³⁶ For a discussion of Martin, Radegund, Matilda, Francis and others, see Catherine Peyroux, "The Leper's Kiss," in *Monks and Nuns, Saints and Outcasts: Religion in Medieval Society*, ed. Sharon Farmer and Barbara H. Rosenwein (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 172–88.

³⁷ Aelred of Rievaulx, the cleric who described Matilda's exemplary behavior, used the masculine plural *leprosis* (this could be masculine or feminine) and *eorum* to describe the lepers whom Matilda kissed. If the lepers had all been female, Aelred would have used the feminine plural, *earum*: *Genealogia regum anglorum*, PL 195:736.

³⁸ PL 195:736.

go, if she was still to be considered pious. Because the woman was alone in an intimate space with the leper, kissing was out of the question.

Married Hospital Workers

In order to understand Jacques de Vitry's reasons for recounting a story about a married laywoman to an audience of hospital workers, and his reasons for contrasting the wife's compassion with the husband's initial disdain for the afflicted, we need to take a closer look both at the personnel of high and late medieval hospitals and at the institutional arrangements defining the conditions of their service. While some hospitals—usually the larger ones—were administered by congregations of men and women who took formal religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, many were served and administered by lay people, some of whom entered hospitals with their spouses or married other hospital personnel after they had joined the hospital community.³⁹

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century records from the low countries offer glimpses of couples who gave themselves and their property to hospitals in which they intended to serve the needs of the poor.⁴⁰ Jacques de Vitry was well aware that married couples resided in hospitals: he tells us that Mary of Oignies began her religious life by joining the leprosarium of Willambrouk with her husband.⁴¹ Archival sources from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, when record-keeping became much more elaborate, suggest that the presence of married couples in hospitals was quite widespread.⁴² In the mid-fourteenth century, seventeen out of

³⁹ Léon Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu et léproseries du diocèse de Paris au milieu du xiv^e siècle," *Mémoires de la Société de l'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* (hereafter *MSHP*) 25 (1898): 47–177, here 146–47, 150. See also Charles de Miramon, *Les 'donnés' au moyen âge: une forme de vie religieuse laïque (v. 1180–1500)* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999), 364, for a discussion of Raymond Lull's late thirteenth-century Catalan story, the *Libre de Evast e Blanquerna*, which provided a role model of a married couple that entered a hospital so that they could lead a formal religious life while staying together.

⁴⁰ Anonymous, "Documents relatifs à la léproserie de Cornillon lez Liège," *Analectes pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique de la Belgique* 22 (1890): 149–54, here 149; P. Bonenfant, "Les hôpitaux en Belgique au moyen âge," *Annales de la Société Belge de l'Histoire des Hôpitaux* 3 (1965): 5–44, here 25; Pierre De Spiegeler, *Les hôpitaux et l'assistance à Liège (x^e–xv^e siècles): Aspects institutionnels et sociaux*, Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l'Université de Liège 249 (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres", 1987), 151.

⁴¹ *Vita Mariae Oigniencensis*, chap. 3, par. 14, AASS, Iunius IV, 640.

⁴² See De Spiegeler, *Les hôpitaux*, 150 for an example from the low countries.

sixty-four hospitals that fell under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Paris included married couples who had given themselves and their property to the hospitals so that they could live out their lives serving the sick and the poor.⁴³ Around the same time, the count of Roucy granted all of the personnel in the hospitals on his domain the right to marry and continue living in the hospitals.⁴⁴ Married couples also resided and worked in the hospitals of the lower Rhône Valley.⁴⁵

On one level, the married status of the noblewoman in Jacques' exemplum paralleled the position of all of these lay hospital workers, both male and female, married and unmarried. Hospital workers were expected to be faithful and obedient to the hospital in which they resided and worked. They had to obey the hospital's rules and its master, abstain from illicit sex, respect the hospital's property, and, in many cases, surrender themselves and their possessions, as a kind of dowry, upon entering the hospital.⁴⁶ In other words, when hospital workers joined hospital communities, they became wives to the institutions that they served.

Because the subordinate position of hospital workers resembled that of wives, Jacques ascribed—in his two sermons to hospital workers—all of the same faults to bad hospital workers that he ascribed to bad wives: insubordination, litigiousness, misuse of property that did not belong to them, and sexual misbehavior.⁴⁷ Jacques also perceived that, like the lion of a husband, some hospital workers had hardened their hearts to charity, failing to tend to the physical needs of the sick inmates, or even worse, defrauding the hospital or its sick inmates of their rightful goods.⁴⁸ Like the pious noblewoman who, in the end, helped bring about the transformation of her husband into a compassionate and pious individual, pious hospital workers—both male and female—had the potential of working against

⁴³ Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu," 151, and see 57, 63, and 65 for some later examples; idem, ed., "Les Maisons-Dieu et léproseries du diocèse de Paris au milieu du xiv^e siècle, d'après le registre de visites du délégué de l'évêque (1351–69)," *MSHP* 24 (1897): 61–365. The register includes seventy-three hospitals, but I have not included in the total those that had been abandoned by hospital personnel.

⁴⁴ Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu," 150.

⁴⁵ Daniel Le Blévec, *La part du pauvre: l'assistance dans les pays du bas Rhône du xii^e siècle au milieu du xv^e siècle*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 265, 2 vols. (Rome, 2000), 2:691, 696, 712 n. 43.

⁴⁶ On obedience: Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu," 155; De Spiegeler, *Les hôpitaux et l'assistance à Liège*, 162–63. On surrendering themselves and all or part of their property: Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu," 149; De Spiegeler, *Les hôpitaux*, 150–151; Alain Saint-Denis, *L'Hôtel-Dieu de Laon 1150–1300* (Nancy: Presses Universitaires de Nancy, 1983), 91.

⁴⁷ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 42 (no. 92; stealing from poor), 46–47 (no. 100; sexual danger); BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fols. 105–105v (litigiousness, insubordination), fol. 107 (sexual danger).

⁴⁸ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 103.

such negligence, whether it originated with fellow workers, with the master of the hospital, or with their own spouses.

There is ample reason to suspect, however, that Jacques' own assumptions about gendered roles and his knowledge of the gendered division of labor within hospitals inclined him to tell a story about a woman's compassion, and to contrast it with the hardheartedness of her husband. Within hospitals that were staffed by both men and women, men predominated among the administrators, while women predominated among caretakers for the afflicted. Thus, among the sixty-four hospitals of the diocese of Paris that were visited by the bishop's representative in the mid-fourteenth century, only one was administered by a woman, while a second was under the care of a female custodian during an interim period between masters.⁴⁹ Hospital statutes also indicated that hospital sisters, rather than brothers, were frequently entrusted with nursing care.⁵⁰

Because of the gendered division of labor, some hospital founders and overseers preferred to staff their hospitals with married couples, because they could ensure, in that way, that both the administrative and the caretaking needs of the community would be met. Thus the mid-fourteenth-century statutes of the Parisian hospital for the blind, the *Quinze-Vingts*, which King Louis IX had founded in the mid-thirteenth century, stipulated that the minister of the hospital had to be married because his wife was expected to perform important services for the blind and sick members of the congregation.⁵¹ Similarly, on several occasions in the mid-fourteenth century the overseer for the bishop of Paris replaced absent or corrupt hospital masters with a married master whose wife entered the hospital and joined its staff along with her husband.⁵² Indeed, the visitation records of the same overseer reveal that twelve of the hospitals in the diocese had masters who were married. Significantly, in seven, or possibly eight, of those hospitals, the master and his wife were the sole workers residing in the hospitals that they staffed.⁵³

⁴⁹ Le Grand, ed., "Les Maisons-Dieu . . . d'après le registre de visites," 104–8, 141–44 (nos. 10, 24; Maisons-Dieu of Louvres and Chatres-sous-Monthéry).

⁵⁰ Léon Le Grand, *Statuts d'Hotels-Dieu et de léproseries: recueil de textes du xiii^e au xiv^e siècle* (Paris: Alphonse Picard et fils, 1901), 24–25, 47; Le Grand, "Les Maisons-Dieu," 146–59; Saint-Denis, *L'Hôtel-Dieu de Laon*, 90, 97–99.

⁵¹ Léon Le Grand, ed., "Règlement donné aux Quinze-Vingts par Michel de Brache, aumônier du roi Jean (1351–55)," *MSHP* 14 (1887): 154–64.

⁵² Le Grand, ed., "Les Maisons-Dieu . . . d'après le registre de visites," 142, 157–58 (nos. 24, 29).

⁵³ Le Grand, ed., "Les Maisons-Dieu . . . d'après le registre de visites." Master and wife are sole personnel: nos. 5, 21, 24, 25, 29, 40, 56, and possibly 69 (Maisons-Dieu of Argenteuil, Longjumeau, Chatres-sous-Monthéry, St.-Vrain, and Palaiseau; leproseries of Versailles, Villepreux, and possibly Palaiseau). Master and wife are not sole personnel: nos. 7, 10, 52, 67 (leprosarium of Juvisy; Maisons-Dieu of Louvres, Moussy-le-Neuf, and Lieusaint).

The gendered division of labors within hospitals helped to enhance a gendered division of virtues and vices. Because they controlled the accounts and incomes connected with the hospitals that they managed, administrators—who were usually men—were in a position to defraud hospitals on a much larger scale than were caretakers and servants. While caretakers and servants might appropriate a few items of clothing or linens intended for the poor, administrators could—and sometimes did—sell off all of a hospital's furnishings, or deflect landed incomes to their own private uses. In the mid-fourteenth century when the overseer for the diocese of Paris visited the Maison-Dieu of Palaiseau, he found that the master had recently fled after selling off all of the hospital's goods.⁵⁴

In addition to their greater opportunities to squander institutional property, administrators also ran the risk of falling out of touch with the afflicted inmates they were supposed to serve. Jacques de Vitry addressed this potential problem by warning hospital workers that they should provide physical care for the afflicted themselves, rather than through their subordinates, so that they would not lose their sense of compassion.⁵⁵

Although he expressed concern for hospital workers who lost direct contact with the afflicted, Jacques de Vitry identified no particular group of workers or gender with that problem. Indeed, on first consideration, Jacques's sermons to hospital workers seem to pay no heed to the gendered division of labors and of corruption within hospital communities. A superficial statistical analysis of the exempla that he employed in the sermons might even lead us to believe that he was more inclined to associate men rather than women with the responsibility of caretaking: in his sermons for hospital workers Jacques recounted seven exempla about charitable individuals, but only two of those stories concerned charitable women.⁵⁶ Moreover, Jacques's admonitions against those who appropriated goods intended for hospital inmates were addressed to all hospital residents, with no emphasis on men or women.

If we take a closer look at the examples in the hospital sermons, however, it becomes evident that Jacques went to great lengths to create a sense of gendered equity with regard to physical care for the afflicted. Moreover, a deeper analysis of the content of his narratives suggests that when it came to discussing pro-

⁵⁴ Le Grand, ed. "Les Maisons-Dieu . . . d'après le registre de visites," 157 (no. 29).

⁵⁵ "Non solum enim per ministros sed per vos ipsos debetis visitare infirmos et eis ministrare manibus propriis levando portando et ad lectos reportando. Hec enim valde placent Deo . . . Hec enim, humilitatis officia multum provocant ad compassionem et ad infirmitatis vestre cognitionem": BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 103^v.

⁵⁶ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 42–46 (nos. 92–98).

longed physical contact with and care for the afflicted, Jacques associated women especially with this role.

We need to note, first of all, that three of the seven charitable exempla in the hospital sermons concerned the giving of property to the poor rather than the direct physical care that Jacques prescribed for hospital workers.⁵⁷ Men in medieval society, including male administrators in hospitals, had more control over property than did women. It is thus appropriate that the three exempla about giving goods to the poor concern men, and even more appropriate that one of those three concerns a hospital administrator.⁵⁸

The other four charitable exempla in the hospital sermons concerned corporal works of mercy. These were evenly divided between stories about men and stories about women. Jacques added to these stories examples drawn from the Bible, and he organized his examples around the various works of corporal mercy, which he discussed as five categories rather than seven (he grouped giving food and drink as a single category and visiting the sick and the captive as a single category). For one of these five categories—giving food and drink—Jacques provided no examples.⁵⁹ For three others, which I discuss below, he offered biblical examples and exempla stories involving both men and women. For the fifth category, however—caring for the dead—Jacques provided biblical examples involving only men.⁶⁰ This is somewhat surprising, since the Gospels provided the powerful example of the women who went to Jesus' tomb to care for his body. In any case, however, this one exception to the general pattern of gender equity in his discussion of the corporal works of mercy involves care for the dead rather than care for the living.

Regarding the work of clothing the naked, Jacques referred first, and only briefly, to the well-known story about Saint Martin, who had exceeded the biblical injunction to give your second tunic to the poor by cutting his one tunic down the middle and giving half of it to a poor man. Jacques then went on to narrate more fully a less well-known story about Saint Martin.⁶¹ Once, just before he was to celebrate the mass, Martin encountered a poor man whose garment was not only worn out, but also too short in the sleeves to cover his arms. Martin traded garments with the man, then went on to perform his liturgical duties. When he raised his arms during the mass, a miracle demonstrated divine approval of Martin's charity and divine concern for the proper performance of the mass: in

⁵⁷ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 45–46 (nos. 96–98).

⁵⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 45–46 (no. 97).

⁵⁹ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 102^v.

⁶⁰ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 104.

⁶¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 42 (no. 92). The discussion of clothing the naked begins in the sermon (BNF, ms. lat. 3284) on fol. 102^v.

order to prevent Martin's flesh from being exposed, golden sleeves appeared to cover his arms.⁶²

To balance this story about Martin, Jacques told a second exemplum about an event he claimed to have seen with his own eyes.⁶³ While attending church, a noblewoman took pity on a poor woman who was suffering terribly from the cold weather. Although she realized—and deeply regretted—that she would miss the mass if she acted right away, the noblewoman felt that the other's suffering required immediate attention, so she led the poor woman to the church tower and gave her the warm wrap that she was wearing. Later, the chaplain who had celebrated the mass asked the noblewoman why she had left the church, and he revealed to her that in her absence he had been unable to utter a single word of the divine service. A miracle thus enabled the charitable woman to attend the mass after all.

With two stories about the performance of charitable deeds that precipitated miracles during the celebration of the mass, Jacques thus created a diptych for the corporal work of clothing the poor, which created a sense of gender equity. After telling these two stories, moreover, Jacques briefly referred to the biblical example of the widow Dorcas in the book of Acts (Acts 9:29), who sewed many garments for the poor.⁶⁴ The accumulated evidence regarding men and women who had clothed the naked thus favored women's deeds over men's, since Dorcas' sewing helped many, while Saint Martin's two charitable deeds helped only two.

Concerning the corporal work of hospitality, Jacques narrated no exempla stories, but he did refer to four biblical individuals—two men and two women—

⁶² Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 42 (no. 92). The story was originally recounted in the twelfth century by John Beleth: *Summa de ecclesiasticis officiis*, chap. 163, ed. Herbert Douteil, 2 vols., *Corpus christianorum continuatio mediaevalis*, 41–41A (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976), 2:320–21. Beleth loosely based his story on two stories recounted by Sulpicius Severus: Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogi*, II:2:1–2 and III:10:6, ed. C. Halm, *Sulpicii Severi libri qui supersunt*, *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* 1 (Vienna: apud C. Geroldi Filium, 1866), 180–82, 202. Sulpicius' two stories are mentioned in passing by Clare Stancliffe, *St. Martin and His Biographer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 166, 371. Stancliffe points out that in telling these two stories Sulpicius' chief concern was to affirm Martin's sanctity, which was above all a matter of supernatural power and supernatural signs pointing to that power. John Beleth, by contrast, stressed priestly eucharistic miracles, while Jacques de Vitry stressed divine affirmation of Martin's charity. On the background and significance of Beleth's transformation of Sulpicius' original stories, see Sharon Farmer, *Communities of Saint Martin: Legend and Ritual in Medieval Tours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 241–44.

⁶³ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 42–43 (no. 93).

⁶⁴ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 103.

who offered hospitality: Lot, Job, the prostitute Rahab, and the Shunamite woman. He also mentioned Jesus' disciples, who had invited the resurrected Jesus, whom they did not yet recognize, to accept their hospitality, with the words, "Stay with us, Lord, for it is evening and the day is nearly over (Luke 24:29)."⁶⁵

Concerning the corporal work of visiting the sick and the captive, Jacques cited, briefly, a number of male examples: Saint Martin, who kissed a leper; Job's friends, who visited him in his infirmity; Tobit, who comforted his fellow captives; and Bishop Paulinus of Nola, who redeemed captives, even selling himself into captivity to free a widow's son.⁶⁶ At the heart of Jacques' discussion, however, was another diptych consisting of two exempla, one about a man and one about a woman. The woman in question was the noblewoman who allowed the leper into her husband's bed. The man in question was Count Theobald of Blois, who brought shoes and ointments to poor and sick people, even offering the ointment with his own hand "so that he was thus provoked to compunction and devotion and humility, and so that the poor would thus pray more affectionately for him."⁶⁷ Theobald, Jacques continued, was in the habit of visiting the home of one particular leper in the village of Sézanne. One day after Theobald believed that he had just visited the leper, he learned that this was impossible, since the man had recently died. When he returned to the leper's house to investigate, the leper could not be found. As was the case with the noblewoman, Theobald had encountered Christ in the form of the leper.⁶⁸

The story about the noblewoman and the leper in the master bedroom was more appropriate as an example of the corporal work of hospitality than of that of visiting the sick. By discussing it as an example of visiting the sick and the captive, however, Jacques was able to pair it with the story about Count Theobald of Blois, thereby creating a second diptych that enhanced the sense of gender equity in the arena of corporal charity. Nevertheless, the stories were not as well balanced as were the stories in the diptych about the work of clothing the naked. Theobald's encounter with the leper was not nearly as vivid or intimate as was that of the noblewoman. Both Theobald and the noblewoman gave of themselves in serving the poor, coming into direct physical contact with them. But in

⁶⁵ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 103.

⁶⁶ BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 104; Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 43 (no. 94). The story about Paulinus had been recounted by Gregory the Great in his *Dialogues* (3:1:1–8), and was probably apocryphal: Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 11–12.

⁶⁷ "Ut sic ad compunctionem et devotionem atque humilitatem provocaretur et ut pauperes affectuosius pro ipso orarent": Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 43 (no. 94).

⁶⁸ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 43–44 (no. 94).

Theobald's case we learn about his physical contact only at a distance: that contact does not constitute part of the narrative about the particular incident with the leper, with whom he merely conversed. Nor did Theobald risk his life and his reputation in order to minister to the poor, as was the case with the noblewoman. Finally, the conclusions of the two stories underscored different points. That of the story of the noblewoman and the leper stressed the importance of intimate, face-to-face ministrations:

Behold how acceptable the office of visiting the sick and incarcerated is to God—visiting, that is, those who are detained in the prison of illness, or even in material prisons. For we ought to visit them bodily, going to console and to revive and, if we are able, to snatch them from prison and from death.⁶⁹

The conclusion to the story about Count Theobald, by contrast, merely indicated that pious and kind individuals rarely ended their lives badly; rather, they were visited by God.⁷⁰

Along with the reference to Saint Martin kissing a leper, Jacques' diptych concerning the corporal work of visiting the sick and the captive provided the only accounts, in the sermons for hospital workers, in which protagonists came into physical contact with the poor people they served. The evidence for and discussion of the noblewoman's physical contact far outweighed the evidence for and discussion of the nobleman, Theobald's, physical contact. The evidence concerning the saint, Martin, was, on one level, more impressive, since Martin's kiss cured the leper. However, Jacques mentioned this example only in passing. Moreover, the fact that Martin's kiss resulted in a miraculous cure rendered this assistance impossible to imitate. Implicitly, then, the diptych illustrating the corporal work of visiting the sick and the captive drew attention to women's special role as caretakers of the afflicted, a role that Jacques also highlighted in his sermons for widows and that fit the usual role of women within hospitals.⁷¹

⁶⁹ "Ecce quam acceptum est Deo officium visitandi infirmos et incarceratos, qui scilicet in carcere egritudinis detinentur vel etiam in carcere materiali . . . , quos visitare debemus corporaliter ad eos eundo consolando et reficiendo et si valemus a carcere et morte eripiendo": Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 45 (no. 95).

⁷⁰ Jacques de Vitry, *Exempla*, ed. Crane, 44 (no. 94).

⁷¹ Jacques de Vitry, *Vita Mariae Oigniacensis*, prologue, AASS, lunius IV, 637; Jacques de Vitry, "Sermo primus ad viduas," BNF, ms. lat. 3284, fol. 184^v. Jacques' association of widows with physical care for the poor drew on the passage in 1 Timothy 5:9–10 in which pious widows were said to "wash the saints' feet" and "help the afflicted." A number of thirteenth-century clerics took this passage very seriously as the model for pious widowhood: see for instance Gilbert of Tournai, "Ad viduas, sermo," ed. Carla Casagrande, *Prediche alle donne del secolo XIII* (Milan: Bompiani, 1978), 98–99.

The hardhearted husband, in the exemplum about the leper in the bedroom, stood in the position of those hospital workers who, according to Jacques de Vitry, lost their sense of compassion when they failed to work directly with the poor. It made sense, within Jacques' logic of compassion, that the wife was able to convert her husband to a greater sense of piety and compassion: according to Jacques, direct physical contact between the physically afflicted and those who cared for them aroused compassion in the caregivers; by extension, therefore, direct physical contact between a husband and wife could arouse compassion in the one who had none. By choosing to endow the wife in the story with compassion, and to portray a husband who initially lacked it, Jacques created a gendered binary of compassion and its absence which fit the gendered division of labors in hospitals.

Conclusion

The exemplum about the leper in the master bedroom opens a window onto two aspects of medieval marriage. The implicit sexual danger in the story and the ambiguous identity of the leper/Christ highlight the uneasy position of pious wives, and the ambivalent attitude that celibate clerics held towards them. Celibate churchmen were well aware that the sexual bond between a husband and wife had its advantages, especially in the moral sway that wives could hold over their husbands. But at the same time they were thoroughly convinced that women should be subordinated to men, and that those pious women who still engaged in sexual relations with their husbands were caught in a dangerous love triangle. Whatever her true intentions and whatever her standing before God, a woman's actions were subject to the judgment of men—husbands, judges, clerics. One, or several, of these men would decide whether a wife's defiant acts of generosity and outspokenness were done in the name of the heavenly bridegroom, or simply in the name of unjustified insubordination.

The exemplum also serves as a reminder that married lay people played an extremely important role in high and late medieval hospitals. Although there were some clerics in Jacques' time who felt that married lay people introduced problems into hospitals, because sexually active couples introduced sexual danger into a semi-religious setting,⁷² there were other men in power who recognized that the presence of married couples could work to the advantage of hospitals. Just as they did on the outside, wives who resided within hospitals could exercise

⁷² In 1213 ecclesiastical authorities in Ypres mentioned the presence of both married and unmarried individuals in hospitals as a cause of the lack of discipline within those institutions: Bonenfant, "Hôpitaux et bienfaisance," 25.

moral sway over their husbands who, because they were often the administrators of these institutions, ran the risk of losing contact with and compassion for the poor inmates they were supposed to serve. Moreover, the combined gender roles of the two could provide a hospital with just about everything that it needed by way of administrative and service labor. An administrator who came to a hospital with a wife could be far more valuable than a single male administrator. He might even be inclined to put down roots, which would bring the desirable quality of stability. It is not surprising, therefore, that Jacques created a positive image of a married charitable woman who converted her powerful husband into a more compassionate individual, and that he presented that woman as an appropriate role model for hospital workers.