

BOOK REVIEWS

Cistercian Stories for Nuns and Monks: The Sacramental Imagination of Engelhard of Langheim

By **Martha G. Newman**. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2020. Pp. x + 302. Cloth \$59.95. ISBN: 978-0812252583.

Lena Vosding

University of Oxford

Martha Newman's monograph is one of the valuable studies that bring little-known medieval figures and texts into the focus of modern research. It considers the Cistercian monk Engelhard, who lived until about 1210 in the monastery of Langheim in south Germany and left behind a vita of Mechthild of Diessen, a few letters, and a collection of thirty-four exempla. These texts, especially the exempla, provide considerable insight into Engelhard's spiritual concepts, which Newman explores and places into the social and theological context of the late twelfth century.

The book begins by consolidating the fragmentary information that can be gathered about the person of Engelhard. In the context of the history of Langheim and its social network, he appears as a writer who is interested not so much in formal theology but in the transmission of Cistercian spirituality to his particular social network. As a filiation of Ebrach Abbey, Langheim was one of the first Cistercian monasteries in the German-speaking lands. The convent was in close contact with the noble family of Andechs-Meranien, who counted Mechthild of Diessen and other saintly women among their members. Furthermore, there must have been close interaction with convents of other orders and especially with women's convents which wanted to live a Cistercian monastic life but were not officially incorporated into the order before 1190. One of these convents was Wechterswinkel, founded before 1140 and probably the oldest Cistercian nuns' convent in the region. The convent apparently never sought incorporation but received spiritual guidance from Langheim during the last decades of the century. Of the five manuscripts that transmit Engelhard's texts, four contain the exempla together with a dedicatory letter and a writers' apologia to the sisters of Wechterswinkel, clearly showing that Engelhard addressed his collection primarily to them. The appendix of Newman's book details the manuscript witnesses, of which unfortunately none can be localised with certainty in Langheim or Wechterswinkel.

Newman then contextualises Engelhard's writings within the framework of other theological texts, especially those by other Cistercians. In doing so, she focuses on three aspects: Firstly, Engelhard's notable blending of gender attributes, which admits weakness and strength in spiritual growth for both sexes. Thus, the exemplary stories about male and female characters become relatable to both nuns and monks. Secondly, Newman accentuates the oral and immediate qualities of the stories, which arise not only from Engelhard's recurring emphasis on his oral sources but also from a rhetoric oriented to a lecture situation. From this, the study turns to a more abstract aspect, namely the question of the definition of visible (i.e., earthly) signs of the divine, as well as the sacraments of the eucharist and penance. Through close comparison with the ideas of leading (Cistercian) theologians, Engelhard's positions are analysed: For the most part, they take up established ideas and yet deviate in individual elements. Engelhard

seems to oppose the clericalization that in the twelfth century was adapted to monastic life, by seeing the human relationship to the divine as not limited to the sacraments alone. In his texts, he shows that all things in life and monastic routine can have a sacramental quality, which, however, is not effective by itself. Rather, the inner attitude and the inner reflection on hidden sins of the faithful is decisive, which in turn has to be constantly exercised. For Engelhard, the Cistercian lifestyle is not an immediate guarantee of perfection and divine grace; on the contrary, he repeatedly presents Cistercians who stumble and show weakness. Only through joint effort and mutual care does the Cistercian community succeed in overcoming human weaknesses.

This detailed examination reveals the multiple levels on which Engelhard's texts can be made to speak. Newman shows how a monk on the periphery of the Cistercian order incorporates theological concepts into his edifying work, how he shapes and reworks circulating topoi for the purpose of instruction. Moreover, Engelhard's writings are not only a manifestation of the theological discourses of his time concerning the institutionalisation of the mediation of grace. His efforts to balance the spiritual aspirations of exemplary men and women without crossing established boundaries gives further insight into the development of female devotion around 1200. This is an important voice for the era of intensified negotiation of competences and authorities.

It has to be said, however, that these significant observations are not always as easy to recognize. Several repetitions in the argumentation have an obscuring effect; more editing and clarification would have been useful. In addition, the book assumes profound knowledge of Engelhard's collection, as in some cases it is difficult to recognise which text passage is being referred to. Occasionally, there is also the risk of overlooking some important points or results. For example, without a concise survey of sources, editions, and research, Newman's contribution to our knowledge of Cistercian exempla unfortunately remains somehow implicit, as does the fact that she herself discovered the fifth manuscript witness of Engelhard's writings. Against the background of only partial and outdated editions, it would have been very helpful if this manuscript had been discussed in more detail, especially as Newman often quotes from it.

In summary, Newman's work provides an important analysis that emphasizes the significance of Engelhard's writings to the theological and social innovations of the twelfth century. The questions that Newman poses to Engelhard's texts demonstrate the importance of such devotional writings, complementing the well-known doctrines. Her study will certainly inspire further works on medieval theology, monastic writing, and the interaction between male and female religious communities.

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Economics of Faith: Reforming Poor Relief in Early Modern Europe

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Tiffany A. Ziegler

Midwestern State University

According to Esther Chung-Kim, the poor needed care during the Reformation but providing that care was challenging given the circumstances of the period. Plagues, harsh winters, crop