

Chapter 1**Space: A Garden of Virtues in Which to Delight:
The Spatial Environment****Female Dominican Monasteries**

This investigation of spirituality and the female Dominican sensual environment begins with the most obvious part of that environment, the actual physical or spatial area in which Dominican women lived.¹ Recent work by scholars of archaeology and art history has pointed to the importance of space and physical environment in the structuring of religious women's lives. These scholars have sought to understand the ways in which monastic women might have given their environment spiritual significance or understood physical structures that were imposed upon them. Such scholars have observed that the ways in which space was gendered influenced the spiritual activities within it. What was male space, what was female space, and how these spaces were created through sacred activities and spiritual expectations have become important questions when talking about the female monastic environment. Caroline Bruzelius has pointed to the ways in which Franciscan women's piety may have been influenced by the development of their choir space and the visual and aural accessibility or inaccessibility of the host and altar.² Roberta Gilchrist has shown how women's understanding of their place within the history of western monasticism, and their spiritual role within a larger society, may have shaped and been shaped by the architectural placement of various monastic buildings, such as the refectory.³ As Gilchrist says, "[T]he architecture of the nunnery was active in constructing images of female spirituality. Observers would have been drawn into a process of interpretation, in which a building's form or spatial orientation was given meaning. . . The perceived meaning of an architectural form may have altered over time, and certainly differed according to the social identity of the observer."⁴ And these observers included the women who lived within the monastery. How they interpreted and perceived the spaces around them, and hence how they used them, will be issues addressed in this chapter.

1

The architecture of Dominican women has received little attention from scholars. Most of the information concerning the Order's architecture comes from studying male houses and the legislation concerning structures enacted by the Dominican General Chapter.⁵ As far as men's houses are concerned, it has been observed that mendicant communities during the thirteenth and into the fourteenth century were most often built just outside city walls in the proximity of city gates. This is also the case for the nuns of Unterlinden, St. Maria Magdalena,

2

and St. Agnes. By the end of the fourteenth century, houses for men were constructed inside the city fortifications, usually along one of the walls or rivers that bordered many medieval cities.⁶

"Dominican thinking, at least initially and for most of the thirteenth century, was conditioned by the concept of architectural poverty."⁷ The original Dominican constitutions called for "modest and humble" buildings. Between 1228 and 1235, this vague statement was qualified by specific guidelines.⁸ The walls of the buildings were to measure no more than 12 feet (*pedum*) high and with balcony, garret, or second story, no more than 20. The church's height was not to exceed 30 feet, and vaulting was to be used only over the choir and the sacristy.⁹ In 1263 these restrictions were supplemented with the directive that "in our buildings nothing notably enticing or superfluous in sculpture, paintings, pavements, or other such similar things should be made that would defile our poverty."¹⁰ Building materials were to be from local sources and inexpensive, reflecting the Order's commitment to poverty. In 1300 the Order's General Chapter deleted the specific size restrictions from its constitutions, but maintained the 1263 ban on excessive decoration. But as Sundt has pointed out, the General Chapter did not try to enforce this ban after 1276.¹¹ The actual form of the monastery and its church, as well as the style in which it was built usually reflected the architectural practice of a local area. Hence the Dominican churches of Italy and Southern France were for the most part hall churches, while those in German-speaking countries tended to favor a Germanic elongated choir.¹² Most thirteenth-century Dominican churches had more in common architecturally with local parish churches than with the great cathedrals or abbey churches.¹³ Both the scale of the churches and the decoration program were less elaborate. The Dominicans, especially those in Germany, embraced the ribbed vaulting of the French gothic style and used it aggressively in their churches, helping to spread what had begun as a local French style.¹⁴ 3

The Dominicans did not construct houses that always resembled traditional monastic communities or those of regular canons, although in theory those communities served as the model for cenobitic living for the Dominicans. Like most medieval churches, those of the Dominicans faced east. However, since the houses were built in urban areas, often on land acquired piecemeal by gift and purchase, the claustral buildings had no standard form, but were built to fit the space available.¹⁵ Moreover, from their inception, the male Dominican houses did not have open dormitories, but rather individual cells for each friar, emphasizing the somewhat individual nature of the Dominican lifestyle, in which community and communal activity were not the driving force of the Order's religious experience.¹⁶ Individual cells also allowed the friars to read, study, and pray without disturbing their neighbors. 4

Much of the architectural research and documentation from the thirteenth and fourteenth century deals only with the men of the Dominican Order and remains woefully silent about the structures and requirements of the Order's women. However, the Order did make some provisions for the communities of women affiliated with it. The Dominican constitutions for women of 1259 prescribed the following: 5

[B]uildings of the Sisters will be humble, not remarkable for their elegance of style or superfluity. Great care must be taken to have them arranged throughout so as to further religious observance as much as possible.¹⁷

The constitutions take a practical approach, seeing structures as a function of the women's religious activities, in which the ideal of poverty espoused by the Order was to be reflected in the buildings themselves. The very vagueness of the passage allowed for many possible configurations.

Important to the arrangement of monastic buildings was that they establish the enclosure of the religious women. But the extent to which Dominican women were enclosed is a difficult question, and one still debated by scholars. How permeable were the walls surrounding the monastery, and how easily could the women move out of their space? These are questions to which we may never know the exact answers. But in terms of actual physical remains and ideology, I come down on the strictly enclosed side of the argument, though I do not believe it was a total enclosure. In addition to the number of locks, gates, grates with nails in them, keys and bars that Humbert of Romans' constitutions call for, the impression given by the Sister-Books themselves is one of strict enclosure. The Weiler Sister-Book describes the community as enclosed, as opposed to a hospital.¹⁸ In other texts, the incursion of outsiders into the narrative is negligible and the women show no signs of actively moving between the monastery and the outside world, except in the case of a few visions. In fact, the texts proudly point to sisters who display their strict following of the monastic Rule by never glancing out the window at the secular world surrounding them, not once in their entire lives.¹⁹ For example, at Töss, Margaret Willin is described as paying no attention to the parlor windows; in fact, she practiced a studied avoidance of them. Some of the younger nuns used to tease her and pretend that they saw some kind of miracle at the window, but Margaret never turned her eyes in that direction.²⁰ 6

At places such as windows, the border between the enclosed space and the greater world thinned. These places—windows, grilles, and turns—allowed non-members of the community limited access to the religious environment while granting monastic inhabitants limited and usually supervised access to the outside world. The constitutions specified and regulated these access points. There was to be a parlor window where one could speak with outsiders, but always accompanied by one or more of the other nuns. There were also to be two confessional windows, to be used only for that purpose. Thirdly there was to be a turn, through which 7

things were given into and sent out of the monastery. Only those sisters who had access to the turn through their duties and offices could speak there, and then only about that which pertained to those duties and offices. Lastly there was to be in the church a sermon window, through which the women could hear the sermons preached in the church. The constitutions demanded, "[A]ll these windows, large or small, are to have a double grating, or else one grating having sharp nails, so that there can be no possible contact with those outside or in."²¹

An early document for St. Agnes, written by the German Provincial Prior, Herman of Minden, in 1284, elaborates upon the windows to be found in a female Dominican house. He specifies their size and configuration: **8**

The Constitutions diligently establish regarding walls, precincts, turns, and likewise enclosed areas, who may enter temporarily into these openings and control them. However, as the Constitutions do not define the size of the windows and appurtenances, I establish that the larger double window should have a length of six feet, a space or a bench between the two grilles of one foot and a palm, and that the double iron grilles and the squared bars should be so narrow that a chicken egg can not be passed between [the grating]. The family window,²² which is called the friars' and lay brothers' window, should be three feet in dimension and be similar to the larger window and also be barred. The little confession windows shall have a length of one foot and the grilles should not be nevertheless too distant because of the deaf; the openings in the grilles may be narrower. The windows should be built above stone or oak foundations and lock from the inside. The windows on the outside should be shuttered at night, lest the laity be able to carry on conversations at inopportune times.²³

The careful attention given to the security and seclusion of nuns in the constitutions is reiterated by Herman. The size of the grating to be used, the space between the two sides of the windows, and the shutters on both the inside and outside of the openings, all maintained the distance between the secular and religious worlds, limiting the possible contact that the windows and other openings implied and allowed.

No female Dominican monastery survives intact with all of its medieval fabric, not even the six of the monasteries under consideration in this study. The houses of Adelhausen, Maria Magdalena, St. Agnes, and St. Katharina were all torn down to make way for the construction of the seventeenth-century city fortification in Freiburg. Of the two surviving examples in this study, most of the remaining buildings at Unterlinden were gutted after the French Revolution when the structure was used as a barracks for soldiers and St. Katharinenthal has undergone **9**

extensive rebuilding. However, from drawings, textual references, and archeology, we can reconstruct some aspects of the claustral buildings from the two houses of Unterlinden and St. Katharinenthal.

A nineteenth-century reconstruction of eighteenth-century Unterlinden shows an extensive set of buildings. The nuns had resettled at the site in 1252. Their new choir was consecrated in 1269, a precinct wall was completed in 1278, as was the cemetery, and about a third of the monastic buildings, which, according to the Colmar chronicler, were completed at great expense, were standing by 1289.²⁴ The compound walls rose roughly 20 feet and were bordered on the north and east by a canal called the Mühlbach or Mill Brook. The cloister lay to the northeast of the church and formed a square with structures jutting out from the east and west of the north range. Garden plots lay on the east side of the precinct while at least four outbuildings occupied the western and northern area (although there is no indication that these are remnants of medieval buildings). The monastery's cemetery was to the south and east of the church's choir. Across the Mühlbach to the north was the Ackerhof, which was first mentioned in 1299. This annex served as domestic space, housed *conversi* (lay-brothers) and *conversae* (lay-sisters), and was the center of the monastery's economic network of rural land.²⁵ 10

At St. Katharinenthal, the medieval cloister arcade and other buildings fell victim to the rebuilding and remodeling efforts of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. Knoepfli has reconstructed the layout of the early community. He estimates that the precinct measured 38 meters from north to south and 49 meters from east to west.²⁶ Just south of the precinct walls the land ascends steeply up a hill. 11

Gilchrist has suggested a symbolic meaning for the placement of cloisters on the north side of women's monastic churches in northern Europe where it was not an issue of providing shade from the Mediterranean sun. Traditional monastic plans usually situated the cloister arcade to the south of the church, allowing the inhabitants to then use the cloister range adjacent to the church as a *scriptorium* or *lectorium* which took advantage of the southern sun. In her study of English communities, Gilchrist found that approximately one third of women's houses voluntarily placed, or had placed, their cloister to the north. She posited three reasons for this architectural arrangement. The first concerns medieval cultural ideas of gender and space. In medieval churches the left or north side was associated with women. This was the side of the church in which women most usually sat. It was through the north transept door that women came to be churched after the birth of their children. By extension this leads to Gilchrist's second reason. The north side was associated with the Virgin Mary, the divine woman. The north transept door of churches often had a portal dedicated to her, as at Chartres. Depictions of Mary always show her on the right-hand side of Christ, which as Gilchrist notes, places her on the left hand side of the church when viewed by the observer. 12

Gilchrist also found that north-cloistered monasteries were more often dedicated to female saints.²⁸ The third influence that she finds concerns remnants from a pre-Norman tradition of double, often royal, monasteries that placed the women's cloister on the north side.²⁹ While the last suggestion does not concern south German monasteries, the first two could conceivably have influenced the building at Unterlinden and St. Katharinenthal. For "it is clear that the northern parts of churches were associated not only with female saints and female worship in general, but more specifically with the Virgin Mary at Christ's right hand."³⁰

Both Unterlinden and St. Katharinenthal had north-facing cloisters, but we may never know if this iconography influenced the construction at these two houses, for the sites themselves logically call for north-facing cloisters. In both cases, the monastery's water source was located to the north of their precinct. At Unterlinden the Mühlbach ran on the north side and at St. Katharinenthal the Rhine River formed the northern boundary of the monastic enclosure. This water source was of most use to the north range of the cloister, which housed the kitchen, the washroom, a fountain, and the latrines. However, a symbolic meaning is not necessarily ruled out by pointing to the practical reasons for the placement of the cloister on the north side of the church. The women may have interpreted the architectural necessity as fortuitous for their spiritual understanding of themselves as women and devotees of the Virgin Mary. **13**

Within a monastery it is somewhat difficult to define what was sacred space and what was not. By definition the entire monastery was sacred consecrated space, but some parts were more sacred than others. When talking about spaces within the monastery, there is sacred space, that which had direct connection to the divine, such as the choir through its altar or altars, and there is semi-sacred space, that which was sacred as part of the monastery, but which had a more tenuous association with the divine. The semi-sacred spaces were the spaces around the cloister, excepting the church and any chapels. These spaces could also be considered more female, because they were rarely entered by anyone other than females.³¹ **14**

By following the cloister arcade around the monastery, we can stop at each of the spaces and examine the spirituality that Dominican nuns practiced in each area. We begin with the most significant of these spaces, the church, and then examine the other places within the monastic precinct: the cloister walk, the chapterhouse, the infirmary, the refectory, the kitchen, the dormitory, the workrooms, and the gardens. **15**

The Church and Choir

The churches of female Dominican monasteries in Germany tended toward one of two types. Although there was a wide variety—and no architectural plan was imposed upon them as it was among the Cistercians—the women's churches were either aisleless hall churches in the **16**

shape of a rectangle as at Töss, Au bei Stein, and St. Katharinenthal, or a usually aisleless nave with a Germanic *Langchor*, as at Klingenthal, Oetenbach, and Unterlinden. The Langchor was an elongated, narrow choir, usually aisleless, that extended about five bays, although in some case it could be up to seven bays. It was either as long as or longer than the nave of the church. The traditional explanation is that the Langchor churches and the rectangular churches of Dominican women lacked transepts because there were no priests among the community's residents. Hence there was no call for extra chapels with attendant altars where Mass had to be said. But as nuns' churches did celebrate Masses for patrons, such explanations must eventually be re-examined. In this part of Germany, the churches of male religious often were chapelless as well, conforming to the Langchor ground plan. The women's' churches then reflect a regional development in architecture that tells us little about liturgical practice.

The monastic church is the most prominent space described in the Sister-Books, being the site of much of the women's spiritual and visionary activity. In the texts it is the space most often indicated by name. But the Sister-Books rarely concern themselves with the entire church, rather they focus on the part of the church that was accessible to the nuns, the nuns' choir, or gallery. Carola Jäggi has argued for the flexibility of liturgical space in female mendicant churches. Her examination of German-speaking houses of Poor Clares and female Dominicans found that the nuns' choir had no consistent placement, and often moved within the monastery church over time. In addition, nuns might follow Mass in one place and celebrate Divine Office in another.³² For example, the monastic church of Kirchberg had "an upper choir" for the nuns where they heard sermons.³³ This may represent a western nuns' gallery or another sort of raised gallery. But because they heard sermons there does not necessarily mean that was where they also observed the Mass or even sang the Office. 17

Of the monasteries under consideration, only the church at Unterlinden retains any of its medieval structure. The entire structure is 65 meters long and 12 meters wide.³⁴ The church was built in the gothic style, beginning in 1252 with the four-bay nave. Only one side-aisle was ever constructed, on the south side of the nave. The remains of its arcade have been incorporated into the current south wall. The vaults appear to be early Gothic because the elongated arches are not very pronounced. The capitals topping the pillars are of a simple foliate style. There was probably a choir screen between the nave and the choir. In 1269 the choir may have been completed, for in that year the altar was consecrated by Albert the Great.³⁵ The elongated choir, a common feature of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century German monastic churches particularly among the mendicant orders, had seven bays, making it one of the longest in the region. It is 38 meters long and oriented to the southeast.³⁶ The choir bays are supported by four-part ribbed groin vaults with central bosses and are delineated by ribbed arches descending into half capitals. The apse consists of a five-part ribbed groin vault, with the ribbing descending to half capitals and then continuing to the 18

floor as half piers. The windows on the south side of the choir and in the apse are narrow double lancets topped by a small rose all within a rather small lancet. The windows, especially the three windows in the apse, are very similar in form to the arches in the cloister arcade. The windows do not even reach the tops of the wall buttresses on the outside of the choir. The interior walls were probably painted, but today only a fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century wall painting survives.³⁷ On the roof, a spire over the rood screen once marked the division between the nave and the choir, a change of space also marked by a change in the roof level.

In the westernmost two bays of the nave a gallery was constructed, creating a second floor above the nave. This nuns' choir was in existence by the beginning of the fourteenth century, but may have been built along with the rest of the nave and may have been accessible by stairs near the chapterhouse in the west range of the cloister. Such a gallery often served as the choir space for nuns in Cistercian and Dominican monasteries. From a position elevated above the nave, the nuns could view the high altar in the apse clearly during Mass and Divine Office. At Unterlinden the gallery appears to have been much too small to have contained the sisters' performance of the daily prayers. Art historian Jeffrey Hamburger has noted that the gallery appears to have been used for private devotion and not for congregating the entire community.³⁸ The gallery space there served as a chapel and from the mid-fourteenth century housed the "icon" of the Virgin Mary, to which were attributed miraculous occurrences.³⁹ The image stood on an altar which was dedicated in January 1348 to the Virgin, the Archangel Michael, other angels, Bishop Erhard, Saint Dominic, and Saint Thomas Aquinas.⁴⁰ The nuns, it seems, celebrated Office in the choir. The church itself was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, and had additional altars in honor of Saint Catherine, Saint James the Major, the 11,000 Virgins, and Saint Margaret.⁴¹

Unterlinden was, however, in an urban area populated with many other religious institutions, and its architecture reflects this fact. Its church was intended chiefly for use by its members, choir nuns, lay-sisters, lay-brothers, and male clergy. The local parish church was St. Martin's in the center of town. But there is no indication that the laity were forbidden entrance into the nave at Unterlinden. In fact, according to the vita of the Unterlinden prioress Hedewig of Gundolzheim, indulgences were granted to all who visited the monastery's church on the feast of the Beheading of John the Baptist. The male Dominicans of Colmar had written the pope on behalf of the nuns, asking for the indulgences, but the women did not need to wait for their brethren to bring them a reply. John the Baptist appeared in the nuns' choir to assure the sisters that the indulgence had been secured.⁴²

On the other hand, St. Katharinental near Diessenhofen, Switzerland, was both a monastery and the local parish church. As such, a different arrangement was called for because the church structure was shared by the enclosed women, their male and female helpers, and the local population. While there is still a church on the monastery's original site, which is now a

nursing home, the structure is a Baroque building constructed on the site of the medieval church. But visual and anecdotal evidence provides information on the monastery's earlier church. On March 3, 1242, the monastery's early patrons, the counts Hartmann of Kiburg along with the Constance bishop Heinrich of Tanne, granted the women the right to construct a church, cloister, and work buildings on their site outside Diessenhofen.⁴³ An initial church was begun around 1250. It seems to have been small and simple. The altar in the nuns' choir and possibly in the outer choir was consecrated by Albert the Great in 1269. As the convent and its finances grew, the women were able to build a new church whose altars were consecrated in 1305. The old church seems to have been in great disrepair. A large part of the new building campaign came from donations made by Eberhart of Cruzelingen, a citizen of Constance.⁴⁴

Although separated by half a century, the two medieval versions of the church had a similar plan, although the second was more elaborate and contained more altars. The Sister-Book from the monastery of St. Katharinenthal makes reference to a nuns' choir, and Albert Knoepfli suggests that the church had three sections or distinct areas: a nuns' choir divided by some type of wall, an outer choir with chancel, and a nave for the laity sectioning off from the outer choir by a rood screen.⁴⁵ The structure followed a simple hall church design plan with no aisles. The nuns' choir faced east and originally contained an altar dedicated to the Virgin Mary and Saint John the Evangelist. After the rebuilding, the dedication of this altar was reconfirmed. **22**

The outer choir, first consecrated by Albert the Great in 1269, contained two altars on the north and south sides of the east end. The northern altar was dedicated to Saint Dominic and Saint Peter Martyr, the south altar to Saint Catherine and Saint Nicholas. In 1305, the donations of Eberhart of Cruzlingen paid for four additional altars in the outer choir. Three were located in the chancel, of which the middle or main altar was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, and Saint Dominic. This altar was flanked by two side altars. The one on the south side was dedicated to the Virgin Mary, Saint Catherine, Saint Nicholas, Saint Agatha, and Saint Thomas (Martyr) of Canterbury. The north-side altar was dedicated to Saint John the Evangelist, Saint James the Major, Saint Peter Martyr, and Mary Magdalen. The fourth altar seems to have been placed atop the chancel, or perhaps as part of the rood screen between the nave and the outer choir.⁴⁶ It honored the Virgin Mary, the angels, and all the saints. **23**

This three-part church, with nuns' choir, outer choir, and nave, was fairly common among women's monastic churches. The exact layout differed from house to house, but the division of sacred space between the nuns and the public was often an essential element in the **24**

church's construction and use. The women's constitutions provided for church configurations such as those at St. Katharinenthal, so sharing liturgical space in a partitioned manner was accepted, and perhaps even expected by the members of the Order:

In the church, between the Sisters and the persons in the outer chapel, there is to be an iron window of appropriate dimensions provided with gratings where sermons may be given. In a suitable place there must also be two small windows with iron gratings for the hearing of confessions.⁴⁷

This passage from the constitutions calls for an inner sanctum for the women and an outer space for male clergy.

The actual fabric of the medieval St. Katharinenthal church and monastery does not survive and its vestiges provide no clear evidence of the original buildings. But the Sister-Book gives a verbal description of the choir space. In the west end of the nuns' choir, a metal grill allowed visual access to the outer choir and altars, a space physically denied to the women. As mentioned above, the nuns' constitutions provided for such grills, or windows as they were called. But the grill in place at St. Katharinenthal was to allow the women to see the elevated Host during the Mass in the outer choir. This was in fact one of the other reasons for the early fourteenth-century building campaign. In the original plan, the placement of the altars in the outer choir hindered the viewing of the event. The new configuration rectified this problem. The Sister-Book's author attributed the new window to the generosity of their patron Eberhart.⁴⁸ **25**

Eberhart also provided the church with cut and finished Rorschacher sandstone for its windows and tuff for the rest of the building.⁴⁹ On the south side of the church were five single-pointed tracery windows with one similar window on the east end and the easterly north-side of the nuns' choir. On the north side of the church most of the wall space was occupied by the cloister arcade. However, a small row of highly placed late Romanesque double windows provided some light on that side. The roof was topped with a ridge turret that most likely marked the division between the nave and the two choirs, and possibly the placement of one of the altars. **26**

We know little about the churches of the four remaining monasteries in this study. All of the Freiburg houses were torn down in the construction of urban fortifications in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At Adelhausen the building of the choir was under the supervision of the *kusterin* or sacristan, Gertrut of Nufera, and the Sister-Book says the structure cost one hundred marks. Because the *kusterin* had only thirty pounds to begin the building, she prayed to the Virgin Mary for help, saying that the choir was to be built in her honor. When the building was half-complete, Gertrut suffered a crisis of faith, decided to stop building and sent all the workmen home. Then she prayed to the Virgin, asking why she had been abandoned, **27**

since she had begun the work in her name. When she finished praying, she found money on the altar and was able to commence building again.⁵⁰ Adelhausen's Sister-Book indicates that the choir walls were painted.⁵¹ In addition to the church with its choir, the cloister had a bell-tower, a dormitory, cells, corn buildings, cellars, and other buildings, all of which were damaged in the fire of 1410. The damage to the entire monastery was estimated by the city council to be at least sixty thousand florins; the damage to the choir, the church, and their contents was assessed at sixteen hundred florins.⁵² The Penitents of Maria Magdalena had patrons buried in their church, some with elaborate monuments.⁵³

Although Gilchrist suggests that the church and sacristy architecture "signaled the liturgical passivity of the nuns,"⁵⁴ among German Dominican women this was certainly not the case. While this claim might be true of the sacristy, a space rarely mentioned in the Sister-Books, such a statement certainly does not apply to the churches utilized by these women. Here the women were anything but liturgically or paraliturgically passive. **28**

Called to the choir eight times between midnight of one day and sundown of the next, the nuns spent a good part of their life there. The Sister-Books inform us about the performance of Divine Office and attendance at Mass, feast days, and communion. The nuns also spent time outside these required rituals in the choir. They used the space to pray and meditate, and they often kept vigil there in the hours between Matins and sunrise. The majority of visions that occur in the Sister-Books happen in the nuns' choir. In the choir-narratives of the women's visionary experiences there are two focal points between which an almost constant connection is maintained. The first focal point is the altar. The second is the nuns' choir. Let us turn first to the women's use of the choir space during liturgical rituals and look at their interactions with the altar and the area around it. **29**

The nuns used the altar or altars as a landmark in their devotional activities. Their lives describe their approach to it or how they prostrated themselves before it. The altar could be a reference point that indicated the exact location of a woman during her mystical experience. For example, some women sat behind the altar, an unusual place to be as it was distant from the nuns' choirstalls. This sometimes happened when the choir was overcrowded.⁵⁵ The women also saw persons or things at or on the altar. Not surprisingly, they saw Christ with the most regularity. And this was not only during communion, although Eucharist visions did occur with some frequency.⁵⁶ In most of these visions, Christ, Mary, or the saints are seen first at the altar. The people in these visions did not remain in a fixed location, however. For example, Saint John the Evangelist escorted the St. Katharinenthal nun Ite of Kloten from her choirstall to the altar for communion and then back again, while the Adelhausen nun Metzi of Walthershoven saw Christ leave the altar and wander through the choir.⁵⁷ Sometimes in these examples, the priest is mentioned, often when he raised the Eucharist or when he intoned a liturgical text that was meaningful to the nuns. At other times the priest is not mentioned, but **30**

rather implied. Some choir-narratives either take his presence for granted or they erase him. The elevated Host is described, but not the one who elevates it.⁵⁸ More than half the times the altar is mentioned, the priest is absent from the narrative.

The other focal point in the choir-narratives is the choir nuns themselves. The narratives about the nuns' choir space often elicited comments from the authors about proper behavior within that space. They also detailed how the sisters, through their prayers there, achieved a greater spirituality, visionary gift, or mystical union with God. The nuns are often described as being in their choirstalls, although like their visions they too move around. In fact, one might call the spirituality of the choir *active*, for the women are not portrayed as passive observers in liturgical and paraliturgical activities, but rather as enthusiastic participants in all that occurs around them. Nuns are forever standing up, sitting down, approaching the altar, retreating from the altar, or walking around the altar.⁵⁹ In one instance, a group of nuns wander through the choir trying to decide whose choirstall smells like roses.⁶⁰ At other times they watch those who appeared in their visions walking around the choir and conversing with them,⁶¹ or they observe their sisters receiving special graces signifying their holiness.⁶² And of course eight times a day the nuns processed in and out of the choir in an orderly fashion as called for by the Rule and constitutions. **31**

Without a doubt, choirs and chapels were the most sacred spaces within a monastery. If we think of them only as housing the altars, which served as the focal points of the Mass, they can too easily be thought of as the most male-dominated spaces. It was at altars that men, not women, said Masses. It was at altars that men, not women, elevated the Host. But while their male supervisors may have expected the women to be passive in the liturgical space of the choir, the women used that space to actively signify their religiosity in ways that were understood by the other female inhabitants of the community. The women enthusiastically participated in these liturgical events, especially through their visions which conferred on them tacit permission to do more than they were officially allowed to by the Church. Their spirituality within the choir can be seen as an attempt to feminize the space, to imprint it with their own actions or interpretation of proper religious behavior. **32**

The choir, however, was not merely visited for the celebration of the liturgy. Dominican women used the space for their individual devotions. They would prostrate themselves before the altar in a prayer position made popular by Dominic known as a *venia*.⁶³ In the quiet hours between Matins and sunrise, many nuns and lay-sisters used the choir for personal prayer and meditation. The time indicator "after Matins" opens the descriptions of some visionary or mystical experiences, many which took place in the choir.⁶⁴ **33**

The Cloister and Chapterhouse

Beside the church was the cloister arcade, which connected the semi-sacred spaces for working, eating, and resting. Modeled on the ideal Jerusalem or Paradise, it joined together all the rooms that surrounded it, providing a covered walkway for ritualized processions and general monastic traffic as well as serving as monastic living space. **34**

The cloister arcade at Unterlinden consists of four ranges, each composed of thirteen gothic arches, and totaling fifty-four in all.⁶⁵ Each pointed arch is divided by tracery into two lancet openings, flanked by columns topped with trefoil arches. At the top of these lancets is a small quatrefoil oculus or rose. This is the form of the arches on all four ranges, but near the middle of the west arcade there is a larger arch composed of four short lancets. Each pair lies beneath a trefoil oculus. The arch is topped by a large tracery rose and backed by a trough on the interior side (within the cloister walk) that probably once marked the entrance to the chapterhouse. This trough may have been used at Easter for ritual foot washing. The St. Katharinenthal cloister arcades were not vaulted until the sixteenth century.⁶⁶ Earlier they were covered by a wooden roof supported by posts. **35**

While its physical configuration suggests that the primary function of the cloister was to serve as a hallway—a place one walked through to get someplace else—the Sister-Books show that it was often the desired destination for many Dominican women. It was a site of contemplation and prayer, as well as mystical experiences. At Adelhausen, Luggi Löscherin was in the cloister arcade shortly before Prime when a shining ball appeared before her and explained to her the pain and suffering she would endure as a sign of her holiness and piety before her death.⁶⁷ The women often knelt before the statues and crucifixes that decorated the arcades and inner walls.⁶⁸ The nuns at Engelthal had a tradition of praying together in the cloister after Matins on Easter day, reciting the Psalter, as a vigil for the Resurrection. When the lay-sister Elizabeth joined them, kneeling before one of the church windows that depicted the Last Judgment, she fell into a trance in which she saw Christ in majesty upon his throne flanked by the Apostles, his face shining. When she came to herself again, she reported that she had seen the cloister arcade full of little children who ran around clapping their hands together in joy at the Resurrection. They said to her, "Give it to us as well." Elizabeth understood that these were the souls who wanted her to pray for them by reciting the Psalter.⁶⁹ **36**

Opening from the cloister, the chapterhouse usually held a privileged position next to the choir of the church in the east range. Here the entire community would gather for readings, announcements, monastic business, and the chapter of faults.⁷⁰ The chapterhouse of St. Katharinenthal had a chapel incorporated into it with a crucifix before which many of the women did their devotions.⁷¹ There the Christ Child was observed teaching the St. Katharinenthal prioress Williburg of Hünikon what to say during Chapter.⁷² At Unterlinden the chapterhouse seems to have been in the west range. At Adelhausen the chapterhouse may **37**

have been in the church itself, for the Sister-Book refers twice to "the chapter in the right choir."⁷³ However, a more logical explanation is that the chapterhouse was on the outside of the church and shared a wall with the right side of the choir. Dominican friars visited this space in the course of their visitation of the monastery. It was there that they accused Adelheit of Breisach of heresy.⁷⁴ The nuns of Töss sometimes flagellated themselves in front of the monastery's chapterhouse.⁷⁵

The Infirmary, Refectory, and Kitchen

Central to many vitae in the Sister-Books are the illnesses the women suffered. These events tell us about the infirmary or sick house where they went during periods of ill health. Illness, both chronic and short-term, was an important element of female spirituality in the later Middle Ages. As Weinstein and Bell have shown, fortitude in illness was a specifically female characteristic among medieval saints.⁷⁶ Illness played a pivotal role in the lives of many sisters, as shown in the Sister-Books. While some women seemed to have remained in the dormitory during illnesses, the elderly and the chronically ill were housed apart from the rest of the community. One of the most difficult spaces to reconstruct from archeological remains, the infirmary had no prescribed placement in the main cloister buildings, but was in principle located in a separate structure with its own chapel and kitchen.⁷⁷ Among English houses, the infirmary was usually located to the east or southeast of the other buildings, accessible through a passage in the east range of the cloister.⁷⁸ At St. Katharinenthal the infirmary may have been located north of the cloister along the Rhine wall, near the kitchen and latrines. However, there is no firm evidence for this.⁷⁹ 38

According to the Order's constitutions, the infirmary was the only place in the monastery that was allowed mattresses, and the only place where meat could be served. Except for the choir and the sacristy, it was the only place that allowed some frequency of male entry.⁸⁰ The constitutions deal at some length with the possible necessity of male entrance into the female environment of the claustral buildings. Visits by Dominican officials, local ecclesiastics, members of the papal court, royalty, patrons, and even workmen are all provided for with the advice that such events should not occur too frequently. The prioress, her officials, and a small group of mature sisters who accompany her dealt with visitors, and the remaining members of the community hide from sight.⁸¹ In a similar vein: 39

[I]f a Sister becomes so ill that she is not able to come to the accustomed place of Communion, and she wishes to receive Communion, the priest . . . reverently bearing the Body of Christ, with two Sisters preceding him with candles, and one with holy water and the other with a little bell, goes to the infirmary, being

joined by some of the more mature Sisters, and he will give Communion to the sick one, observing the customary ceremonies.⁸²

Having left the male space of the outer choir with its accompanying altars, the priest enters into the feminine space of the cloister buildings. Illness did not prevent an infirm woman from receiving communion, if she wished it. But the presence of men, even in the form of the priest in the infirmary area, was an issue of some concern. And so he was chaperoned by older women, who perform, witness, and assist with the ritual. Moreover, his presence was marked by the ringing of a bell, which warned all those within hearing range not only of impending death, but more importantly of the presence of a man in the inner area of the monastery. The small group of women stood in for the entire community who would have been present had the infirm sister received communion in the choir. However, this may not have occurred with any frequency at all, for many of the Sister-Books tell of women lying in the infirmary unable to receive communion. The Constitution goes on to say:

[I]f a Sister is sick enough to be anointed, then the priest . . . will bring the holy oil for the anointing. One Sister, carrying a cross and preceded by two with candles, goes to the Infirmary and all the community precedes him in procession. The priest entering into the infirmary says, *Pax huic domui*, and carries out the customary ceremonies as stated in the Ordinario. Likewise, the Prioress, or some other Sister designated by her, will wipe the places where she has been anointed with balls of tow. Great care should be taken not to multiply these entrances too easily, whether for Communion or for anointing, without serious reason. Both should be done at the same time. When it is necessary to give Communion or to anoint anyone, one Sister carries the cross and a priest and his companion will carry the holy oils. Communion will be given first and anointing afterwards, and in this case the community remains in the infirmary until the end of the ceremonies.⁸³

In face of death, the entire community is brought in to participate in the rituals, and the infirmary becomes infused with the sacred power of the priest, transforming it into a sanctuary.

Despite the arrangements drawn up in the constitution, priests are rarely mentioned as being in the sickroom. Whether this reflects a very strict enclosure or a lack of *cura monialium* is unclear. The authors of the Sister-Books do not say that the priests could not or would not come to the infirmary, only that the women could not come to communion or that on a non-communicating day they longed for the Eucharist. The former was the case in the life of Adelheit Ludwigin, whose desire for the body of the Lord was very great. But it was not the priest who gave her the Eucharist, but rather a visionary bishop who turned out to be Saint Martin.⁸⁴ Some sisters were visited in the sick house by other saints and angels, and the Virgin Mary often put in an appearance. In the St. Katharinenthal infirmary, for example,

40

Kathrin of Überlingen was observed being nursed by Saint Catherine, the monastery's and Order's patroness.⁸⁵ Some women, like Gute Tuschelin of Adelhausen, used the infirmary to fulfill their idea of the mixed or active life, which was embodied by their devotion to caring for the sick.⁸⁶

For some sisters, the infirmary was a permanent home, one they rarely left, and then usually only to join the other sisters in the choir. The visionary visits that many of the nuns received allowed the authority of the male priest to be supplanted, as in the case of Adelheit Ludwigin. Although in that instance it was another man, the bishop Saint Martin, who fulfilled her wishes for communion with Christ. Other sisters received verification of their religiosity from their visions, or promises of reward in the next life for their suffering in this one. **41**

The participation of the community in the rituals accompanying communion in the infirmary or the anointing of a dying sister gave the women of these Dominican houses an active role in the events of their lives and especially deaths. This was a metaphorical space in their lives—at the moment of their death—where medieval Christianity called for male guidance in the form of the priest. Through their visions in the infirmary, and their joining in the last rites, the women reclaimed the space as their own, not subverting the priest's power, but reestablishing the space as a female space. Only at life-threatening moments was the priest, and the rituals that brought him, admitted. **42**

Another of the semi-sacred spaces that receive attention in the Sister-Books is the refectory. This eating hall was housed usually in the north or south cloister arcade, parallel to the church. At St. Katharinenthal, the refectory is in the north range, but juts out to the east. This reflects the geography of the site, because a refectory extending to the north would have been threatened by high waters from the Rhine. The east end was capped by a stepped gable.⁸⁷ The Engelthal Sister-Book notes that its community's refectory was built of stone.⁸⁸ The site of communal meals, common readings, and food asceticism, the refectory's spirituality can sometimes be seen as place-specific. Many of the visions have to do with food. For example, the Virgin Mary gave milk to the Adelhausen nun Metze die Kramerin while she sat in the dining room.⁸⁹ When the Töss sister Ita Sulzerin had no appetite, Christ appeared to her one night in the dormitory, from there he brought her into the refectory, sang grace, placed food in front of her, and asked her to eat. After protesting that she had no hunger, Christ thanked her for the food she had earlier left uneaten. Ita was then able to eat.⁹⁰ This woman's vision, although it took place in the dormitory, focuses on the important role food played in the spirituality of the refectory.⁹¹ Other vitae describe the meager fare consumed by the sisters, especially during the early years of the houses. In the early years at Adelhausen the women supposedly prayed for their food. When the cellaress told the women there was nothing to eat, the nuns sang in the choir, praying for food. When they returned to the refectory and after the table blessing, a mysterious youth appeared with beautiful bread, more than enough for the **43**

women to eat.⁹² Even when the houses had moved beyond the reputed poverty of their earliest beginnings, many women continued to practice food asceticism on a daily or at least ferial basis.⁹³

But not every association with the refectory has to do with food. The lay-sister Belli of Schalken loved to cook for the sisters, and seems to have looked upon the refectory and the kitchen as her choir. When she was free from duty during mealtime she would go into the refectory and eagerly listen to what was said to the sisters. If she was not free, she would pray fiercely and cry as copiously "as if she were standing in the choir."⁹⁴ **44**

The kitchen was usually in proximity to the refectory, most often adjacent to it, as indicated in the vita of Belli of Schalken. At St. Katharinenthal it was in the north range, near the fountain and washroom. Such sites allowed the kitchen to have some kind of running water or access to drainage. Many sisters did service in the kitchen, either on a rotating basis or in the case of some lay-sisters for their entire lives. Especially for the lay-sisters, the kitchen was a space with spiritual context, as can be seen in the life of Ite of Hallau. She saw the infant Christ in the Christmas crèche, and when she went to work in the kitchen, she found that he had followed her there.⁹⁵ A similar occurrence is recorded as happening to Adelheit die Huterin, who served as cellaress at St. Katharinenthal. One day after Nones she went into the choir to pray and had a vision of Christ as a child. After a while the portress came through the choir looking for her and told her she was needed in the kitchen. Adelheit bade farewell to the Christ Child and went about her duties. But when she arrived in the kitchen, there in front of her was the holy child as he had been in the choir.⁹⁶ For Adelheit, the sanctity of the choir was extended into the semi-sacred space of the kitchen by the presence of the Christ Child. Work was thus something that was rewarded in the lives of the lay-sisters, much as obedience was in the lives of the choir nuns. Ite of Hallau's Christmas vision of the Christ Child was augmented by another experience that she had while chopping herbs for dinner. Again the Christ Child appeared to her, this time as a small child rather than an infant. Ite made a ball of the herbs and proceeded to play with the child until mealtime. Then she realized that she had neglected her work and the meal would not be prepared in time, but the Christ Child told her not to worry. The food was miraculously ready when the other sisters sat down in the refectory.⁹⁷ In such examples, especially for the lay-sisters, investing their primary work area with spiritual meaning, either by seeing the infant Christ or by acting as if they were in the choir, gave their mundane work spiritual overtones and rewarded their service. **45**

The Dormitories, Workrooms, and Gardens

The dormitory was traditionally a large room where all members of the community slept. Located in the east range of the cloister arcade, the dormitory was often in its upper story. This hall was usually connected to the nuns' choir by night stairs, a configuration that is hard to establish with so little physical evidence. The monastery of Töss does seem to have had such an arrangement.⁹⁸ 46

The Cistercians had introduced a separate sleeping room for *conversi* and one for *conversae*. However, the Dominicans, male and female, never embraced an architectural hierarchy for sleeping rooms that placed the lay-brothers or sisters in a specific place within the monastery. The friars always had separate cells because of the Order's emphasis on study. That the women did not have separate rooms shows how much Dominican women owed to traditional monasticism (Benedictine) for their form of life. The use of communal sleeping rooms seems to have passed its heyday among female monastics of many orders by the early fourteenth century when many houses began to provide individual rooms or cells for the nuns. This trend can be seen in many English houses over the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although prominent, it was not universal. Some communities maintained a common sleeping room, whereas other monasteries were broken up into smaller units based on the upper class *familia*—small households which mimicked the secular clustering of women's quarters in manor houses and castles.⁹⁹ Still others provided individual cells for the nuns. In most communities the house's leader—the abbess or the prioress—had separate sleeping quarters as well as her own workroom. 47

At St. Katharinenthal there was originally a large dormitory on the upper floor of the east wing—over the chapterhouse, warming room, and bathhouse. The prioress's quarters were located in the west range, possibly over the workroom and parlor, while the southern end of the west range housed female boarders. The community's rising population in the late thirteenth century necessitated the building of an additional dormitory. The nuns referred to the earlier one as the large dormitory, and the smaller one as the red dormitory.¹⁰⁰ By the early fifteenth century the larger dormitory had been broken up into individual cells.¹⁰¹ The Dominican monastery of Kirchberg appears to have had cells from its inception in the mid-thirteenth century and Engelthal had a *schlafhaus* with divided cells.¹⁰² 48

The dormitory was a site of varied and active spirituality. The Sister-Books record some of the dreams and visions nuns had when sleeping there, like Kathrin Brümsin's mastery of the liturgy for Saint John the Evangelist. In another case, St. Dominic appeared to Guta of Hohenheim in a dream and offered her a golden robe.¹⁰³ Other women experienced visions or practiced their piety while awake. Anna of Klingenuau worked and prayed in her bed, while Mechtild die Huserin recited prayers by her bed for the souls in purgatory.¹⁰⁴ The Christ Child appeared to Wilburgis of Weiler and cuddled on her lap.¹⁰⁵ The vitae make frequent 49

references to the infant Christ in the dormitory. This may indicate the use of holy dolls by the women of these houses. For instance, Cecili of Winterthur observed Anne of Ramschwag in a state of grace in her bed. Cecili saw a little child cradled in Anne's arms, pressed against her heart. According to the vita, what Cecili could not see was the Virgin Mary sitting at the end of the bed, supervising Anne's care of her child.¹⁰⁶ Other women's visions were eucharistic in nature, showing the prevalence of this strain in their spirituality. As Adelheit of St. Gallen lay sick in her dormitory bed, Christ appeared to her and fed her a little piece of meat, saying the words that accompanied the transubstantiation of the Eucharist.¹⁰⁷ These instances show the types of spirituality practiced in the dormitories of Dominican women. It was a place of prayer, work, sickness, communion, holy play, dreams, and visions.

In these monasteries there were also workrooms. Dominican nuns often did textile work, and sometimes produced manuscripts. Neither at St. Katharinenthal nor at Unterlinden do we know the exact location of such a room, but generally these activities took place in the west range of the cloister, furthest from the choir and chapterhouse.¹⁰⁸ The Sister-Books make reference to the *werkhaus*, *werkhuss*, or *werkgaden*. Work was given spiritual significance in these rooms. Sometimes the women practiced ascetic behavior as they worked. Mechtild Büglin seldom sat while she was in the workhouse, a practice that was a continuation of her comportment in the choir.¹⁰⁹ The vita of Margaret Willin records, "when they were called to work by the bell, then she went quickly into the workhouse and spun diligently, and no matter what occurred around her, she did not turn her eyes to it, and tears of great devotion ran frequently over her cheeks."¹¹⁰ At other times the women experienced mystical phenomena or visions while they worked in the room. In the St. Katharinenthal workroom, Elsbeth Hainburgin participated in a mystical union with God. "As she sat with work one day in the workhouse, God accomplished great miracles in her which she could not fully describe, but she said this, 'God gave to me such perception and such great grace, that I thought I had certainly enough to give to the whole world.'"¹¹¹ At the same house, Anne Hettin "had at one time much suffering in her heart. And one day as she sat with her work in the workhouse, Our Lady appeared to her and wore a wonderful cloak on which stood written with golden letter *Ave Maria*. And Our Lady took her under her cloak and comforted her and promised her eternal life."¹¹² In the Töss workroom, the women often spun while praying or singing religious songs. Such manual labor was linked to the work of God that the nuns performed in the choir. Mezzi Sidwibrin became so entranced as she spun that she spoke to Christ as if they were the only two people in the room. She asked Christ to enlighten one soul for each thread she spun.¹¹³ Her threads became prayers, so that her labor was a source of salvation for others. Mezzi also sang about God while she worked, as did her fellow nun Sophia of Klingnau.¹¹⁴ Both kinds of work—prayer with singing praise and manual labor—saved souls.

50

The importance and sanctity of work was understood by the women in other ways too. While Mezzi's work aided unknown souls, other Dominican women found that work also blessed those closer to home. When the old widow but rather new nun Edelkint die Kugelerin entered the Adelhausen workroom one day, the room itself was dark, but she saw all the sisters who sat inside in a wonderful light that was more beautiful than the sun. She recognized that light to be a divine radiance.¹¹⁵ At Kirchberg the dying nun Heilweige of Rothenburg spoke of a vision she had received while in the infirmary. She was passing the workroom when she looked in and saw the other sisters working with pious devotion. Then she saw a great number of angels inside as well. They were very joyful about the work and devotion of the sisters. Then Christ appeared and gave each sister a rose and a sweet kiss. Heilweige asked for the same for herself, but she was refused. Christ told her that only those who were in the room could receive his gifts. Because of this vision, the nuns of Kirchberg set up beds and pillows in the workroom so that the entire community, healthy and sick, could be together to share the grace that Heilweige had seen.¹¹⁶ At Töss, Beli of Liebenberg sat one Friday in the workhouse praying together with the other sisters. She wished to know how many souls had been saved by the community's prayers that morning: "Then she saw four beautiful lights which went out the window. And it was said to her, 'Those are four of your sisters who were redeemed by your prayers today. But the souls that are redeemed by your prayers everyday, that is an uncountable many.'"¹¹⁷ In these three examples, the communal aspect of work together in a designated place makes the work and the space worthy of miraculous occurrences. **51**

Monastic compounds also had gardens, but what space is meant by the word is ambiguous. It could refer to the green space framed by the four ranges of the cloister arcade or the larger gardens and orchards within the monastic precinct where the women grew their own herbs, vegetables, and fruit. But the cloister garden also served to grow produce. That the practical space of the monastic garden also had an aesthetic appeal for the women can be seen in the vita of Beli of Winterthur: "She had also a practice of never going into the orchard, and when the trees bloomed so beautifully, no one could ever notice that she turned her eyes in that direction."¹¹⁸ Thus, the nun denied herself the sensual pleasure that the orchard with its flowering trees could give. This was part of Beli's ascetic discipline, a practice that went along with her fasting, bodily mortification, and other forms of renunciation. **52**

More often, miraculous occurrences were attributed to the cloister gardens. When Adelheit of Ossingen, as required by her office of cellaress, reluctantly but obediently, left the choir to provide food for the convent's guests, she halted in the cloister's garden to kneel in the snow when the bell signifying the elevation of the Host rang. That spot became green with summer grass although it was the middle of winter.¹¹⁹ Adelheit's obedience imbued the garden with miraculous qualities. **53**

At Adelhausen, the lay-sister Metze had several mystical experiences in the gardens. Once she was meditating under a tree when a divine voice spoke to her.¹²⁰ Another time she went to the garden to gather herbs when she experienced a mystical union with God, which lasted from Nones to Vespers. As she returned to herself, God said to her, "What I have now told you is tiny in comparison to that which is in me, and that which God did to me; so tiny as if the Bromberg [the local mountain Quellenberg] were a heap of wheat, and a dove carried off a little kernel from it. Just as this is of little effect, so is everything that I have told you small compared to that which is in me."¹²¹ One time as Alheit of Trochau and some other sisters were walking in the Engelthal cloister garden after the evening meal, one of them spoke a sweet (*suzez*) word about Christ which caused Alheit to go into an ecstasy. She ran through the garden, embracing the trees and pressing them against her heart. When the others asked her what she was doing, she replied, "It seems to me that each tree is our Lord Jesus Christ."¹²² Alheit's ecstasy, brought on by conversation about Christ, allowed her to sense divinity in all that surrounded her. If the simple trees within the community's garden could be imbued with the presence of Christ at the speaking of a sweet word, then the entirety of the monastic precinct could justifiably be seen as sanctified, not in the sense of having been blessed by an ecclesiastical official, but by the actions of holy Dominican women.

Female Space / Sacred Space / Sensual Space

No female German Dominican monastery was exactly the same as any other, but there were similarities because of the expectations of the Order's legislation and the architectural traditions of the Upper Rhine. The women's churches tended to be aisleless but divided in some manner. Balconies, walls, grills, and windows partitioned the spaces within the sanctuary and separated the religious women from the male priests and the lay public. There are occasional hints that there were chapels in the monasteries, but their locations remain uncertain. Some may have been located in the outer church or off the main body of the church to which the nuns had access, while others were possibly in balconies near the nuns' choir, in the chapterhouse, or in the nuns' cemetery. The site of the monastery usually determined the layout of the monastic buildings, whereas the requirements of plumbing and outer walls as well as gardens molded the finished claustral precinct. North-facing cloisters appear to have been used when necessity dictated it, despite the monastic tradition of south-facing ones. The nuns built and rebuilt their churches and monastic compounds as funds allowed, adding new dormitories as their membership increased or the fashion in monastic sleeping arrangements shifted from common rooms to individual cells. Architectural elements—altars, sculptures, and stained glass windows—were incorporated when their patrons or the house's income provided for them. And in this setting, which varied from house to house, the women lived their lives, spiritually and physically, in ways that they considered holy, but that were occasionally at odds with the behavior expected of them.

The spirituality of Dominican women went beyond the confines of the choir, the liturgy, and the presence of the altar or altars, and was found in all corners of their monastic community. Cloisterspaces were given a spiritual context by the women who used them. Through the use of visions, ascetic behavior, and devotional activities, the women created strong spiritual significances for the semi-sacred spaces of their cloister, thereby extending sanctity beyond the male-dominated main altar of the choir. They perceived—or at least the authors of the Sister-Books perceived—their spirituality as without boundaries, not confined to specific spaces or events, but rather permeating their entire existence, going hand and hand with their constant contemplation of the divine. The women's spiritual activities infused their entire lives, redefining male space with female spirituality and creating communal spaces that carried sacred meaning for the women. The architecture in which the women lived their lives was not merely a shell to house them or confine them, but rather an essential part of their daily spiritual activities and devotions, always a part of their sensual perceptions. **56**

In the attempts of male advisors and Dominican officials to regulate the female space of the monastery is a desire to impose order and a male / clerical interpretation of the proper use of space on the nuns and lay-sisters. The legislative documents of the constitutions, as along with the introduction of population limits, sought to contain, control, and direct the women, as well as bribe or co-opt them with comfort and security into abandoning begging and poverty. Appropriate religious behavior, as understood by these men, called for the utilization of space as set forth in the directives of the Order. The choir was for praying and singing the praises of God. The cloister and the dormitory were places of silence. The refectory was for eating and listening to the daily readings in silence. The infirmary was to house the sick. The workroom was where manual labor was done. Each space had a designated function and an expected conduct within it. But Dominican women blurred these lines, using their actions to give the spaces importance or functions never intended by the authors of the constitutions and other documents. **57**

There are many examples of female Dominicans subverting the specific officially designated functions of monastic spaces: the visions of Episcopal saints who gave nuns communion in various rooms, virgin martyrs who nursed the ill in the infirmary or the dormitory, and an infant Christ who cuddled and played with women in the choir and refectory. As the women's visions were brought on by prayers or other devotions, the boundaries and requirements of the spaces were transgressed, and the functions expected in a particular place were reassigned or rewritten. The sacred nature of the choir was sometimes reinforced by the visions and actions of the women, as when signs of grace such as golden ropes or red roses were observed attaching themselves to devout sisters as they performed the Divine Office. At other times, however, the women's visions stole the attentions of the nuns away from the focus intended by the Order. Priests were erased from the Mass, leaving only Christ or the saints. **58**

Workspaces, whether the kitchen or the actual workroom, became places of sanctity and divine revelation, and were treated with a reverence not prescribed by the legislative documents.

Notes

Note 1: The title for this chapter comes from the Unterlinden Sister-Book, in which the author describes the monastery as a garden under the watchful, diligent, and loving eye of the Virgin Mary. "Unde et nos pie credimus, confidimus et speramus, quod Theothocos, sancta polorum terreque potentissima imperatrix, inter alia loca dominacionis sue ortum sibi deliciarum preuiderit, elegerit et constituerit istud sanctum monasterium ex antiquo, in quod libenter perambulauit et frequenter, clausum Dei custodia circumdedit et protexit diligenter, ex quo orationum feruencium et uirtutum omnium spirauit odor suauius habundanter. In hunc ergo ortum uirtutum floribus decoratum, pia Dei genitrix ad deliciandum libenter progressa, extirpauit uiciorum germina, plantans uirtutum semina, rigando fecundauit interiora cordium, perfundendo ea profusiori ymbre graciaram, stillante indesinenter Dei munere super terram." USB, 346.

Note 2: Caroline A. Bruzelius, "Hearing is Believing: Clarissan Architecture, ca. 1213–1340," *Gesta* 31/2 (1992): 83–91.

Note 3: Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 116–17.

Note 4: Gilchrist, 191.

Note 5: For a list of mostly German works dealing with male mendicant architecture see Georges Descoedres, "Mittelalterliche Dominikanerinnenkirchen in der Zentral- und Nordostschweiz," *Historischer Verein des Kantons Schwyz* 81 (1989): 39–77. Some of these works do occasionally address the female branch of the Order. Recently the architecture of medieval and early modern Poor Clares has also received attention, focused chiefly on Italian communities. In addition to the work by Bruzelius, see also Jerydene Wood, *Women, Art, and Spirituality: The Poor Clares of Early Modern Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

Note 6: Günther Binding and Matthias Untermann, *Kleine Kunstgeschichte der mittelalterlichen Ordensbaukunst in Deutschland* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985), 330–31.

Note 7: Richard Sundt, "Mediocres domos et humiles habeant fratres nostrī: Dominican Legislation on Architecture and Architectural Decoration in the 13th Century," *Journal for the Society of Architectural Historians* 46 (December 1987): 395.

Note 8: Sundt proposes a 1232–1235 date for the change in legislation. Sundt, "Legislation," 399.

Note 9: Sundt, "Legislation," 398.

Note 10: Sundt, "Legislation," 401. "nec fiant in domibus nostris curiositates et superfluitates notabiles in sculpturis et picturis et pavimentis et aliis similibus que paupertatem nostram deformant." Sundt, "Legislation," 405.

Note 11: Sundt, "Legislation," 403 for lifting of size restriction. Sundt, "Legislation," 404 for non-enforcement of decoration ban.

Note 12: See Andrzej Grzybkowski, "Das Problem der Langchöre in Bettelordens-Kirchen im östlichen Mitteleuropa des 13. Jahrhunderts," *Architectura* 13 (1983): 152–68.

Note 13: Binding, 343.

Note 14: The Order's use of this style can be juxtaposed with that of the Franciscans who favored the flatroofed basilica and hall church. Some male Dominican examples of gothic architecture are Colmar (1278), Esslingen (1268), and Brandenburg (1311–1340).

Note 15: The Jacobin church of Toulouse is the best studied example of this practice. Richard A. Sundt, "The Jacobin Church of Toulouse and the Origin of Its Double-Nave Plan," *Art Bulletin* 71 (1989): 185–207.

Note 16: Binding, 356.

Note 17: Const., 33. "Edificia sororum sint humilia. curiositate uel superfluitate non notanda: et apponatur cura diligens. quod ordinentur officine. prout melius fieri poterit pro religione seruanda." Lat. Const., 346.

Note 18: "besloßen closter." WSB, 80.

Note 19: Given the hagiographic nature of these texts, such praise may silence the presence of those sisters who did not maintain such lofty behavior. But even if such non-exemplary women did exist, and I feel there must have been some, looking out the window or even talking at it, did not break enclosure.

Note 20: TSB, 26, 27.

Note 21: Const., 34.

Note 22: Most likely the sermon or preaching window.

Note 23: "Constitutiones diligenter attendant in muris, septis, rotis et cla[u]suris necnon et custodia eorum, qui pro tempore ingrediuntur. Verum quia non est expressum de quantitate fenestrarum, ordino, quod maior fenestra duplicata in longitudine sex pedes habeat, spacium sive banca inter cancellos unius pedis et palmi, cancelli duplices ferrei et quadratis virgis ita stricti, ut ne ovum galline possit transmitti. Fenestra familie, que fratrum dicitur et conversorum, tres pedes habeat in distancia maiori similis et eciam ferrata. Fenestrule confessionum unum pedem habent non distantibus cancellis plurimum propter surdas; verumtamen foramina possunt esse ceteris strictiora. Fundentur autem undique super bases lapideas vel quercinas et serentur intrinsecus studiose. Extra quoque diversoria fenestrarum claudantur de nocte, ne in locis huiusmodi possint seculares ad intempestiva colloquia convenire." *Freiburger Urkundenbuch*, ed. Friedrich Hefele (Freiburg: 1951), Band 2: #4, 7–9. Hereafter cited in text as FUB.

Note 24: "Sorores sub-tilia tertiam domum claustris sui perfecerunt magnis expensis." *Annales maiores*, 217.

Note 25: Auguste Scherlen, *Topographie du vieux Colmar* (Colmar: Association pour la Restauration des Edifices Historiques de Colmar, 1996), 400.

Note 26: Knoepfli, 121.

Note 27: Knoepfli, 121.

Note 28: Gilchrist, 139.

Note 29: Gilchrist, 138.

Note 30: Gilchrist, 140.

Note 31: For the ranking or zones of spaces within female monasteries and the ease of accessibility to these spaces by various gendered groups, see Gilchrist, 160 ff. "In nunneries, emphasis was on the construction of gender identity through the strict enclosure of nuns, and in demarcating male and female liturgical roles." She found that the dormitory was the most secluded space in female houses, while in men's houses, the sacristy held that position. Gilchrist, 166.

Note 32: Carola Jäggi, "The Nuns' Choir in Early Mendicant Nunneries: Königsfelden (Switzerland) and Other Cases with 'Langchor' and Western Gallery" (paper presented at the International Medieval Studies Congress, Kalamazoo, MI, May 1999).

Note 33: "Aufzeichnungen über das mystische Leben der Nonnen von Kirchberg bei Sulz Predigerordens während des XIV. und XV. Jahrhunderts," ed. F. W. E. Roth, *Alemannia* 21 (1893), 126. Hereafter cited in text as SSB (Kirchberg bei Sulz Sister-Book).

Note 34: Scherlen, 398–400.

Note 35: Obituaire, 4.

Note 36: Scherlen, 400. Of all the churches in Colmar, only the male Dominicans were oriented to true east. However, the alignment of medieval churches was not an exact science and had much to do with the size and condition of the land being used. Greene, 6.

Note 37: Louis Kubler, "Les Fresques d'Unterlinden," *Annuaire de Colmar* 6 (1956): 124–26.

Note 38: Jeffrey Hamburger, "The *Liber miraculorum* of Unterlinden: An Icon in Its Convent Setting," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 150–51.

Note 39: Hamburger, 151 ff.

Note 40: Médard Barth, *Handbuch der elsässischen Kirchen im Mittelalter* (Strasbourg: Société d'Histoire de l'Église d'Alsace, 1960), 254.

Note 41: Barth, 254.

Note 42: USB, 478. This may be a garbled reference to an indulgence granted in November 1284 by Bishop Theodore of Verona. It is a 40-day indulgence for those who visit Unterlinden on the anniversary of the church's dedication. Bibliothèque de la Ville, Colmar, France, I.Ch. 75-1. Hereafter cited in text as BVC.

Note 43: Thurgauischer Historischer Verein, ed., *Thurgauisches Urkundenbuch*, Frauenfeld, Switzerland, 1917 ff. TUB 2, #153.

Note 44: KSB, 145.

Note 45: For the nuns' choir, KSB, 122. And the arrangement of the church, Knoepfli, 25–27.

Note 46: The text of KSB is unclear.

Note 47: Const., 34. "In ipsa uero ecclesia. in aliquo loco intermedio inter sorores et exteriores aptetur aliqua fenestra ferrea competentis magnitudinis. in qua fiant sermones: et in aliquo loco apto due fenestre paruule ferrate ad confessiones audiendas." Lat. Const., 347.

Note 48: "Vnd der mittel alter, da er das venster hat gemachet, da wir vnsern herren sehen. . . " KSB, 145.

Note 49: "Vnd alle die grawen stein, die an den venstern sint, die sante er her ab gehowen vnd bereit . . . " KSB, 145. Knoepfli notes that use of these two building materials was common in the Lake Constance area during this time. Knoepfli, 25.

Note 50: ASB, 163–64.

Note 51: ASB, 175-76.

Note 52: Stadtarchiv, Freiburg, Germany, B1 107, f.228r-228v. Hereafter cited in text as SAF.

Note 53: SAF, B2 20, f. 8v–9r and 11r–11v.

Note 54: Gilchrist, 125.

Note 55: For overcrowding TSB, 20–21. The Sister-Books are full of passages that describe the women's action within the choir space. A few of these are ASB, 175; and KSB, 103, 127, 136.

Note 56: Once again the examples are numerous: USB, 356–357; and KSB 100, 101, 104–5, 118.

Note 57: KSB, 103; ASB, 177; and TSB, 21.

Note 58: I cannot find any indication in the texts that might indicate which houses had altars that were visible to the women and which did not.

Note 59: KSB, 125, 138.

Note 60: "und do sy aines in dem advent in den kor kam, do was der kor als fol guttes schmakes als in dem summer die rosen schmekent, so ir fil ist an ainer stat. Also gieng sy in dem kor hin und her, und wundret sy was es möchti sin, und do sy für schwester Elsbeten stül kam, do was der schmak da als stark das sy sicher was das er von ir kam . . ." TSB, 92.

Note 61: KSB, 103, 105, 106; ASB, 170–71.

Note 62: KSB, 101, 126; TSB, 45; USB, 360.

Note 63: "Der Nonne von Engelthal Büchlein von der Gnaden Überlast," ed. Karl Schröder, *Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart*, 1871, 10, 18, 26, 36. Hereafter cited in text as ESB (Engelthal Sister-Book); and ASB, 156, 160.

Note 64: See, for instance, TSB, 26; and KSB, 98, 101. The quiet time after compline receives a similar treatment. KSB, 105.

Note 65: Scherlen, 398.

Note 66: Knoepfli, 118–19.

Note 67: ASB, 168–69.

Note 68: TSB, 46–47; and KSB, 98.

Note 69: ESB, 39–40.

Note 70: ASB, 188.

Note 71: KSB, 102, 140.

Note 72: "Do die ze einem male dem couent capitel hielt, do sah ein swester, dú hiess swester Himlin, das vnser herr in das capitel gieng als ein kindli vnd sass zü der priorinnen vnd lert si alles, das si reden solt in dem capitel." KSB, 97.

Note 73: "vant sich selber ligende in dem cappittel in dem rechten chore in eime winckel." ASB, 157. "Do lag si in dem cappittel in dem rechten core an ir andacht." ASB, 185. It is possible that the word "cappittel" was substituted for "cappel."

Note 74: ASB, 154.

Note 75: TSB, 14.

Note 76: Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell, *Saints and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), 234–35.

Note 77: See, for example, the ideal and never realized plan for St. Gall: Walter Horn and E. Born, *The Plan of St. Gall: A Study of the Architecture and Economy of and Life in a Paradigmatic Carolingian Monastery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

Note 78: J. Patrick Greene, *Medieval Monasteries* (New York: Leicester University Press, 1992), 9, 158; and Gilchrist, 120.

Note 79: Knoepfli, 117–18.

Note 80: A doctor in the infirmary is mentioned in TSB, 42.

Note 81: Const., 35–36.

Note 82: Const., 36. "Item si aliquam itta infirmari contigerit quod ad locum consuetum communioni uenire non possit. si oporteat eam communicari: sacerdos . . . corpus chrisi deferens. reuerenter precedentibus eum duabus sororibus cum cereis, et una cum aqua benedicta. et alia campanellam deferente: associantibus nihilominus aliquibus de maturioribus sororibus ad infirmariam uadat. et infirmam communicet. prout in ordinario continetur." Lat. Const., 347.

Note 83: Const., 36–37. "Si autem aliqua soror infirmatur in tantum. quod eam inungi oporteat. tunc sacerdos . . . oleum sacre unccionis deferat; et una sorore crucem portante. precedentibus duabus cum cereis. ad infirmariam uadat. et totus conuenteus eum processionaliter antecadat. Intrans autem sacerdos infirmariam dicat pax huic domui. et cetera fiant sicut notatum est in ordinario: ita tamen quod abstersiones cum stupis fiant vel a priorissa. uel ab aliqua sorore. cui iniunxerit. *Leccio*. Cauendum est autem ne de facili multiplicentur ingressus. modo causa communionis. modo causa unccionis. sine magna causa. sed simul fiat utrumque. Cum autem simul communicari et inungi aliquam oportuerit. soror aliqua crucem portet. et frater socius sacram deferat unccionem: et primo fiat communio. deinde inunccio. et in isto casu semper remaneat conuentus in infirmaria usque ad complectionem officii." Lat. Const., 347–48.

Note 84: ". . . die lag öch ze einem mal in dem siechenhus vnd was als krank, das si nit moht ze mess komen. Vnd do eins tages war, do hatt si grosse begird únsern herren ze empfaen. Vnd do si in dirr andaht was, do sah si einen byschoff vor ir stan, vnd hatt der einen guldin kelch in siner hant vnd sprach zü ir: 'Enpfiengist du gern vnsern herren?' Do sprach si: 'Ja, von allem minen hertzen gern.' Do gab ir der byschoff vnsern herren. Vnd also hett si gern gewisset, wer der byschoff wer gesin. Do sprach er: 'Jch bin sant Marti.' Vnd do sah si sin nit me." KSB, 100. St. Martin also appears frequently in the visions of the nuns of Engelthal.

Note 85: "Ein swester dú hiess swester Kathrin von Vberlingen, der was sant Kathrin besunder lieb. Die lag vnd was gar siech vnd was als krank, das man ir alweg etwas satzt, ob ir in der nacht als we wurd, daz man ir denn ze essen gäb. Vnd do in einer naht ward, do wachet ir ein schwester, die hiesz swester Adelhait dú alt siechen maistrin. Die sach, das ein schöne lütseligú junkfrow in gieng, die was bekleidet mit luterm gold vnd hat ein guldin rad vor ir ze einem fürspan. Da bi verstünd si, das es sant Kathrin was, vnd gieng für die swester sitzen vnd gab ir milch ze essenn vss einer schüssel vnd dienet ir als ein junkfrow ir frowen." KSB, 103.

Note 86: ASB, 169.

Note 87: Knoepfli, 116.

Note 88: ESB, 6.

Note 89: ASB, 171.

Note 90: TSB, 81.

Note 91: On the role of food in women's religious life during the Middle Ages, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food for Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

Note 92: ASB, 162–63.

Note 93: Other instances of food asceticism and visions in the refectory can be found in TSB, 34, 18, 24, 48, 60.

Note 94: "Etwenn so sy die müs hat, so gieng sy in den refentar, so man zü tisch las, und loset begirlich. Wie fil sy unmüss hat, so bettet sy doch recht emssklich und wainet och als genuchtsamklich als ob sy in dem kor wer gestanden." TSB, 83.

Note 95: "Do müsst si in die kuchi gan. Vnd do si dar kam, do sah si aber das kindli, vnd wa hin si gieng, dar gieng es mit ir." KSB, 108. The Töss Sister-Book offers an explanation for such mobility of visions; Christ tells a wonderful nun that "one may find me in all places and in all things" ("man vindet mich an allen steten und in allen dingen."). TSB, 21.

Note 96: "Vnd do si in die kuchi kam, do sach si aber das kindli als vor jn dem kor." KSB, 104. This motif also occurs in the life of Adelheit von Spiegelberg. In her case, the Christ Child followed her from the choir (hiding under her robe) and then sat in front of her at the refectory table. KSB, 97–98.

Note 97: KSB, 107–8.

Note 98: TSB, 26. See Descoedres, 57-61 for a description of the church.

Note 99: Gilchrist, 123.

Note 100: A crucifix hung in the large dormitory. KSB, 122.

Note 101: Knoepfli, 116.

Note 102: ESB, 32, 28.

Note 103: Karl Bihlmeyer, ed., "Mystisches Leben in dem Dominikanerinnenkloster Weiler bei Eßlingen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert." in *Württembergische Vierteljahreshfte für Landesgeschichte*, n.s. 25 (1916): 80. Hereafter cited in text as WSB (Weiler Sister-Book).

Note 104: TSB, 37; and KSB, 135.

Note 105: WSB, 72.

Note 106: KSB, 130-31.

Note 107: "Dis ist min fleisch und min blüt." KSB, 105. Women suffering from illness were allowed to consume meat according to the Rule and constitutions.

Note 108: Knoepfli suggests that the workroom was in the north range, but there is no evidence to support that or any other placement. Knoepfli, 117-18.

Note 109: "man sie nymmer sahe gesitzen in dem chor und selten sitzen in dem werkhawß." WSB, 77.

Note 110: "Wenn man ze werk lut, so gieng sy bald in das werk hus und span denn flisklich, und was denn iemer da wer beschen, sy hett ir ogen nit dar kertt, und runnend ir die trächen von grosser andacht recht emschicklich über ir wangen." TSB, 26-27.

Note 111: "do si eines tages in dem werchhus sass mit werch, das got gross wunder in ir wurkte, da von si nit volsagen kundi, won das si sprach: >Got der gab mir sölich empfinden vnd als gross gnád, das mich dunkt, jch hett wol aller der welt gnüg geben.<" KSB, 126.

Note 112: "Die hatt ze ainer zit vil lidens an dem hertzen. Vnd do si eins tages jn dem werchhus sass mit ir werch, do erschein ir vnser frów vnd trüg einen gar schönen mantel an, an dem stünd mit guldinen büchstaben geschriben: >Ave Maria<. Vnd nam si vnser frów vnder ir mantel vnd trost si vnd sichert si des ewigen lebens." KSB, 137.

Note 113: "Herr, ich will dir sin getrüwen ds du mir umb ieklichen faden den ich spinn, ain sel gist." TSB, 29. The Töss workroom is also mentioned in the vita of Beli of Wintertur. TSB, 40.

Note 114: For Mezzi, TSB, 29; for Sophia, TSB, 59-60.

Note 115: "Also kam si einest in das werchgaden, do was vinster inne, aber si sach alle die swesteren, die do inne warent in einem schönen liechte. Das wz schöner denne die sunne. Vnd si lügete, wanne die sunne käme. Da margkte si ze jungst, das es von Gotte was." ASB, 160.

Note 116: SSB, 112.

Note 117: "Also sach sy iiii schöne liechter, und fürend die ze dem fenstter uss. Und do ward zü ir gesprochen: 'Dis sind iiii úwer schwestren die hüt von úwrem gebett erlost sind. Aber die selen die alle tag von úwrem gebett erlost werdent, der ist ain unzalichy menge.'" TSB, 31.

Note 118: "Sy hat och ain gewonhait, das sy niemer in den bomgarten kam, und so die bom als schön blügent, so kund man nit gemerken das sy ir ogen yemer dar gekerte." TSB, 40.

Note 119: "Vnd do si in die kuchi gieng (das was in dem winter vnd was ein grosse schne geuallen) vnd do si vff dem weg was, dört hort si das glöggli luten, das man vnsern herren hüb. Do knuwet si nider in den schne, vnd an der selben statt da ward als schön gras, als ob es in dem svmer wer gesin, so das gras aller schönest ist." KSB, 99.

Note 120: ASB, 165.

Note 121: "'Das ich dir nun geseit han, das ist also kleine wider dem, das in mir ist, vnd das mir Gott getan hett, als ob der Brunberg were ein huffe weissen, vnd eine tube je ein körnlin danna trüge, als lützel das erschusse, als klein ist es, alles das ich dir geseit han wider dem, das in mir ist.'" ASB, 165.

Note 122: "Da ist mir reht sam ieder baum unser herre Jesus Christus sei." ESB, 14.