



Isabel de Villena: Prayer and Franciscan Spirituality
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Abstract: This essay examines traces of the oral in the prayers written by Isabel de Villena (1430-1490), abbess of the Santa Trinitat convent in Valencia. The essay compares the prayers of Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane in the *Vita Christi* with St Francis's Office of the Passion. It finds that whilst there are some similarities between St Francis's Office and Villena's *Vita Christi*, this is because of technique in using phrases from the Psalms rather than direct influence.

Keywords: Franciscan prayer techniques – Orality – Franciscanism – Passion – Middle Ages.

Resumen: Este ensayo examina los rasgos de lo oral en las oraciones escritas enfocándose en las que redacta Isabel de Villena (1430-1490), abadesa del Convento de la Santa Trinitat de Valencia. Se comparan las oraciones de Cristo en el Jardín de Getsemane de la *Vita Christi* de Villena con las del Oficio de la Pasión de San Francisco de Asís. Aunque se pueden destacar algunos ejemplos de oraciones paralelas en ambos autores, más bien se debe dicha similitud a la técnica en que se enredan versos de los salmos, un estilo de rezar que es promulgado por los franciscanos.

Palabras-clave: Técnicas empleadas en la oración franciscana – Oralidad – Franciscanismo – Pasión de Cristo – Edad Media.

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I. Introduction

Prayer is part of the phenomenon of religious experience, yet it has two features which distinguish it. First, its essential orality must be emphasized. All prayer is

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“worded”, for the ontological basis of prayer is language (HEMMING 2001: 445).² Yet, the spoken word, evanescent, of an individual’s prayers can only be retained and studied by being recorded in writing and this raises the question of the relationship between the original words spoken in prayer and the words which an individual then decides to commit to paper. How does an individual hone the words that he or she intends to transmit in an office or written prayer and how are these words different from the passionate, importunate, outpourings of an individual’s soul?³ When prayers are written and transmitted via a manuscript, how far can they be seen as an accurate record of oral prayer?

In St Francis of Assisi’s writings, there is preserved what amounts to a version of the saint’s own oral practice, written down as prayers or offices during the saint’s life time. In the case of the Clarian abbess, Isabel de Villena (1430-90) and the prayers in her *Vita Christi*, the reader is at a further remove from any prayer the abbess may or may not have uttered, since such prayers have not been specifically recorded as corresponding to her own practice.⁴ It is, however, logical to presume that, in her *Vita Christi*, she wrote down rituals and words, placing them in the mouths of the various biblical characters, and that these words in some way matched her own prayer and that of her community.

In second place, account must be taken of prayer’s dialogic nature, for prayer is a conversation between the personal praying and the immanent Other, from whom response is ever expected but not recorded (COHEN & TWOMEY, 2015; REINBURG, 2015). For this reason, attention must be paid to what has been called “the focus” of the prayers (SMART, 1973: 62). Prayer is spoken by a human being and directed at God. All prayer is a person’s “being inscribed into the Word of prayer, which through the Spirit returns to the Father”

² Words in prayer may of course be reduced to a minimal expression, such as the short cry written for occasions when the England team play by the Bishop of Leeds: “O God”. Prayer may also be reduced to non-verbal vocalized sounds, such as groans or tears, of which Hemming takes no account. St Francis’s prayer was “interlaced with tears, groans, and supplications” (VAUCHEZ, 2012: 254).

³ The issues are not much different from those which have long exercised Hispanists, following the work of Lord (1960) and Parry (1971), as they reflect on the relationship between epic poetry and possible, but lost, versions of epic poems. See, for example, Bayo (2005: 13–18); Duggan (2005: 51–63); Bailey (2010). Foley (1971: 2–6) summarizes the debate which raged more generally throughout the twentieth century on oral formulaic versus written composition of poetry.

⁴ HAUF VALLS (2006: 30–41) explores the equally thorny question of Villena’s preaching and possible sermons embedded in her *Vita Christi*. His work on the transfer of the oral to the written sermon provides further foundations for the present essay (HAUF VALLS 2004).



(HEMMING, 2001: 445), in a veritable Trinity of communication with the divine. The word of prayer has as its aim to bring the human into contact with the divine and lifts the mundane into the realm of the eternal. This may or may not hold true for words written in the form of prayer within a narrative, although we should presume that they would.

In studies of phenomenology of religion, prayer is often not mentioned and, when it is, it is subsumed within the religious rituals and practices into which all practical manifestations of religion falls (SMART, 1973: 45). Nevertheless, from these studies, it must be deduced that prayer is a communal activity: “a person praying conceives himself not merely to be individually praying to God but as joining with others in a collective prayer to God” (SMART, 1973: 55). This raises another question about the oral nature of prayer. When prayers are vocalized, read aloud before others, as they would be in a community, then they take on a certain number of features of performativity. The words of prayer in the *Vita Christi* become incarnate in the voice of the nun reading them to the others in what then becomes a collective, communal prayer.

St Francis’s setting down his prayers for the friars in his Order to use in their own practice has been seen as ‘responding to God’s love in prayer’ (NAIRN, 2013: 17) and, in a different, more indirect way, Isabel de Villena, when she recorded words of prayer within the life of Christ, expected them to be shared by others, even if this were only because the words of prayer in the *Vita Christi* were intended to be read aloud from the manuscript of the *Vita Christi* for the edification of all present.

In order to explore the nature of prayer in work of the two Franciscans, one, the founder of the Order, a leader, and a saint, known the world over, the other, a woman and an abbess, little known, though important locally, I will focus on a small series of prayer sequences, part of the Passion narrative. I will particularly examine Christ’s prayer in the garden of Gethsemane. I have chosen this scene in Villena’s *Vita Christi* and its Gethsemane prayers because it best corresponds to one of St Francis’s devotional prayers, his so-called Office of the Passion (GALLANT, 2011: 254) and I will compare the two. However, in order to distinguish Villena’s contribution to the tradition, I will examine Villena’s version as well as compare it to other *Vitae Christi*, including Francesc Eiximenis’s *Vida de Jesucrist*, the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, possibly by John of Caulibus, Joan Roíç de Corella’s *Vita Christi*, and Ludolph of Saxony’s *Vita*

Christi.⁵ In this essay, my intention is again to compare Villena's version with other versions of the narrative, although by so doing I do not intend to demonstrate in any way that her work was derivative, but rather the opposite, to show how there were no antecedents for much of the way in which she chooses to set out her narrative.⁶ However, I also examine how prayer in Villena's work can be situated in a longer tradition of Franciscan focus on Christ's prayer at the Passion, stretching back to the founder of the Order.⁷

II. Christ's prayers at the Passion in St Francis's Office of the Passion and in the *Vita Christi* tradition

St Francis's Office of the Passion consists of a series of verses from the Psalms, woven together to act as Christ's prayer at the Passion. Of the Passion prayers, it has been said that these represent St Francis's own prayer as he wrestles with faith: "interiorizing and fleshing out the word of God is in essence the life that Francis envisioned" (ARMSTRONG, 2004: 72). The Office of the Passion, in any case, is testimony in its re-evangelizing of the Psalms to his "reverence for the words of Scripture, regarded as it were as physical objects, precious elements of ink and parchment sacramentally consecrated by the articulation of their divine author" (FLEMING, 1977: 23). St Francis's devotion to the Passion acknowledges that it was whilst praying in front of the cross that he experienced

⁵ Recently, I have adopted the methodology of comparing aspects of the *Vita Christi* of Isabel de Villena with other *Vitae Christi*, which has proved fruitful in order to distinguish Villena's contribution to the tradition (TWOMEY 2013b; 2013c; 2014; 2015). It proves a useful way of pointing to how Isabel de Villena's approach to the Life of Christ differs from other versions. The methodology follows that employed by Albert Hauf Valls (1987, 2006). He parallels certain scenes from the life of the Virgin (HAUF VALLS, 1987: 105–64), including the scenes from the Passion (HAUF VALLS 2006: 82–92). Hauf Valls mentions the Gethsemane scene only briefly (2006: 83) to trace the presence of St Michael in Villena's versión back to the *Meditations* or to Eiximenis's *Vida de Jesucrist*. In previous study of Villena and prayer, I have shown how she incorporates Franciscan prayer traditions into her *Vita Christi*, such as the *stellarium* or rosary of twelve stars and, also, how she incorporates liturgical prayer. These are embedded into her narrative, although I have argued that they are intended to be extracted for contemplation (TWOMEY 2013a: 179–203, 204–229). The vernacular tradition of the *Vita Christi*, equally applicable to Villena's *Vita Christi*, Roïc de Corella's translation of Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, and Francesc Eiximenis's *Vida de Jesucrist*, is how they bring the words of the Gospels into the hands of lay people, as discussed by Hauf (1990: 151–184).

⁶ Villena is the only author of a *Vita Christi* in which Mary Magdalene touches the risen Christ (TWOMEY, 2013b: 321–48).

⁷ The Franciscan context of the *Vita Christi* has already been documented and this essay intends to build on that seminal work (HAUF VALLS 2006: 39–47).

conversion (VAUCHEZ, 2012: 30). The first hours of St Francis's Passion, compline, matins, and prime correspond to the holy *triduum*. The later hours correspond to the period between the Resurrection and the Ascension. However, the Office is intended for use throughout the liturgical cycle. St Francis's devotion to the Passion becomes manifest later in his life when, after praying and fasting on a mountain in La Verna, the stigmata appear on his hands and feet (HAMMOND, 2004: 162). Stigmatic spirituality can be categorized as an extreme form of "mimesis", manifest devotion to the crucified Lord (MUESSIG, 2013: 68).

Already, in St Francis's time, Passion offices had become extra-liturgical and were being developed as private prayers, whilst, by the late fifteenth century when Villena was writing Passion prayers, narrative, or poetry, which often corresponded to the hours, they had become one of the best-known types of religious writing across Europe (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 139).⁸ For example it was the fourth book of Roïc de Corella's translation of Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, which was the first to go to press in 1495. In the same period at the end of the fifteenth century in Valencia, Bernat Fenollar and others wrote poetry on the Passion, *Cobles de la Passió* (GARCIA SEMPERE 2002).⁹

The prayers in the Office of the Passion correspond to the renewed emphasis on individual prayer in St Francis's early Rule, which, in a radical departure from the Rule of St Benedict, contains prayer embedded with it.¹⁰ They also testify to Francis's experience of relationship with God as "crucified Redeemer" (VAUCHEZ, 2012: 258). However, St Francis's Office of the Passion appears to be a patchwork of prayers, verses from the Psalms in combination, rather than a coherently devised Office, and it is probable that he never thought of it

⁸ On this matter, Robinson (2013) separates Castile from the rest of Europe, including the kingdom of Valencia, arguing it is a separate case. She does this on the basis of extant manuscript and other evidence. However, as Deyermond (1995) shows, numerous works have been lost. Account might be taken of the close ties between other parts of Europe and Castile through alliances, religious houses and orders, and royal marriages which brought European influence into the heart of the kingdom. Robinson does not take any account either of evidence from the Kingdom of Aragon, or of Portugal, both bordering Castile.

⁹ Another Passion narrative, the *Istòria de la Passió* has been compared with Villena's *Vita Christi* (HAUF VALLS, 1989). Hauf argues that relationship between the two is evident in the descriptors used about Christ, such as captain and shepherd. Hauf does not, however, compare the words used for the garden prayers.

¹⁰ A short study of chapter 23 of the early Franciscan Rule (HAMMOND, 2004: 119–29); prayer and the Rule of Benedict (STEWART, 1998: 31–52).

as such (ARMSTRONG, 1995: 177–84; ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 139–57; GALLANT, 2011: 254).¹¹ Benedictine spirituality, like Francis’s own, centred on Scripture, particularly on *lectio divina*, sacred reading which “nourishes and deepens” the communal liturgy (STEWART, 1998: 32). The Benedictine Rule emphasized a communal liturgy, whereas Francis’s prayer was for personal use. He then wrote it down for the friars to use, not in corporate acts of worship but to nourish their own individual praise and worship of God. Apart from the Office of the Passion, Chapter 23 of St Francis’s early Rule, entitled “Prayer and Thanksgiving” contains Francis’s longest prayer. In it, he centres everything on praise of God:

Therefore,
 let us desire nothing else,
 let us want nothing else,
 except our Creator, Redeemer, and Savior,
 the only true God,
 Who is the fullness of good,
 all good, every good, the true and supreme good,
 Who alone is good,
 merciful, gentle, delightful, and sweet,
 Who alone is holy [...]. (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 85)

Francis addresses praise of God to him as Father and Son: “Creator, Redeemer, and Saviour”. Because of its position in the Rule, he calls on the monks to place God at the heart of everything they do, for from God and to him, all goodness flows.

II. Villena’s words of prayer at the Passion

Isabel de Villena, like other religious writers of her time, shows a heightened interest in the Passion. She dedicates five chapters of her *Vita Christi* to the prayers of Christ at the Passion. Chapter 151 deals with Christ’s departure from the Upper room and his arrival at the garden of Gethsemane. In this chapter, she narrates how he leaves the disciples and moves a little way away from them to pray for the first time. Chapter 152 relates the second prayer of Christ in Gethsemane. Chapter 153 contains the third prayer in the garden and how Christ sweats blood. Chapter 154 includes the visit of Archangel Michael to comfort him in his agony. Chapter 155 shows how Christ sets out to meet his captors and Judas. Within these five chapters are three scenes in which Christ

¹¹ The Office of the Passion was one of the principal pieces of St Francis’s undated writing and the longest of his prayers.

prays and one which represents an answer to prayer. These chapters with the prayers of Gethsemane are key, as they are in the Gospels, to understanding the example of Jesus when he prays.¹² Villena also includes three short disquisitions on Christ praying to which I will return.

Villena begins the first of three prayers in her *Vita Christi* with an adaptation of a verse from Psalm 55:

“Ecce, *elongavi, fugiens, et mansi in solitudine.*” Volent dir: “Pare, meu gloriós: veu que’m só lonyat de aquella mia caríssima mare e de tots los altres amichs meus. Açí stich en solitud per raonar-vos la extrema dolor de la humanitat mia, car çircuít só de moltes dolors. Són a mi presents tots los peccats dels elets, del començ del món fins a la fi, per los quals tinch a satisfer largament, e la pena de aquells tota justada dóna a mi turment tan excessiu que la humanitat mia és ara en extrem de mort. Per què, pare excel·lentíssim, vós, qui sou saviesa e potència infinida e totes coses són possibles a la Majestat vostra, hajau pietat de la tanta dolor mia! *Si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste: verum amen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu.*” (VILLENA, 1916: II, 261–262)

Villena’s reference to the Psalm (55.7) is glossed to give it a personal feel quite different to other medieval commentaries on the verse.¹³ The words of the Psalm become Christ’s. When Villena glosses this Psalm, she has Christ refer to how he is alone, how he feels “lonyat” far apart from his mother and acquaintances. She has Christ emphasize relationships from which he is now separated, in a very intimate manner, whereas the original Psalm has a different purpose. It shows the desert place as a refuge: “how far I would escape and make a nest in the desert”. In the original context, the desert is a place far from the “storm of abuse” being poured out on the psalmist (Ps. 55.8).

Villena chooses rather to emphasize those personal relationships which are left behind when Christ goes and begins praying, perhaps because they fit better

¹² Marshall (2001: 116) points to how Christ is an example of how to pray in the synoptic Gospels. In Villena’s *Vita Christi*, the prayers at Gethsemane serve much the same purpose.

¹³ See for example Ludolph of Saxony’s commentary in his *In Psalmorum expositio* (fol. 74r) in which he interprets Christ as distant from sinful desires and thoughts: “in quo docebat nos in deserto conscientie qu(i)escere: cum a malis premimur. Vel ecce habitis pennis elongavi me distantia corporali vel saltem dissimilitudine fugiens a malis vel a terrenorum desideriorum ac carnalium cogitationum tumultibus et turbis et sic elongatus mansi in solitudine corporis vel saltem mentis. In quiete mentis delectabitur requiescens. Et solitudo loci et corporis que quoque est vtilis sed parum prodest sine solitudine mentis. Est etiam solitudo mentis ab amore mundi et inquietatione vitiorum que semper etiam sine procedente est vtilis.

with the experiences the Clares had. She intends to encourage her nuns in their chosen way of life, for they, like Christ, had left behind relationships to enter the convent and begin a life of prayer. In the nuns' case, it would have particularly been mothers and friends whom they left behind.

St Francis too brings together a number of Psalm verses which emphasize Christ's feeling of abandonment. Particularly at the hour of sext, the hour of the Crucifixion, when he hung on the Cross, St Francis had Christ cry out how he had no comfort from any of those with whom had previously had relationships, whether brothers or neighbours: "I looked to my right and saw/ there was no-one who knew me" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 145). Again, at the same hour, he cries, "I have become an outcast to my brothers/ a stranger to the children of my mother" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT 1999: I, 145). At terce, Christ had called out "I have been made despicable to my neighbours" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 143).

After speaking of abandoned relationships, Villena then focuses on another interpretation of "*in solitudine*" (1916: II, 261). She now places Christ at the axis of human suffering from the beginning of time to the end. The sins committed from the beginning of the world cause him torment, causing him "extrem de mort". The suffering of humanity, "pena", has been totted up, it is weighing down the scales, and leads inexorably to Christ's own suffering. Once she has built up the suffering both present and forthcoming, Villena turns to St Mark's and St Luke's Gospels (14.36; 22.43). Villena's first prayer in the garden ends with the words from Scripture which are part of Christ's prayer in Gethsemane: "*Si possibile est, transeat a me calix iste: verum amen non sicut ego volo, sed sicut tu*" ["If you are willing, take this cup away from me. Nevertheless let your will be done, not mine"] (VILLENA, 1916: II, 262; Mk 14.36). Villena places the New Testament words at the end of the first prayer for maximum effect. Despite her usual desire to relay Latin verses in the vernacular, she leaves the well-known Gospel words about the chalice in Latin without a gloss.

There is nothing like Villena's long prayer in one strand of the *Vita Christi* tradition because brevity is the watchword. Joan Roïç de Corella's *Vita Christi*, the Valencian translation of Ludolph of Saxony's *Vita Christi*, keeps to a scriptural basis for the prayers of Christ: "E orant de cor ab la boca deya: 'Pare: si és possible, salva emperò la redempció humana e la mort, yo no morint, pot èsser morta. Transporta de mi aquest càlzer'" (ROÍÇ DE CORELLA, 1998: fol. 8r). Whether or not he knew this part of Villena's *Vita Christi*, Roïç de

Corella does not choose to include any of the Psalms in his prayer at Gethsemane. He merely adds “yo no morint, pot èsser morta”. This same citation of Christ’s Gospel prayer referring to the chalice is found in all the other *Vitae Christi*, both in Latin and in the vernacular. Francesc Eiximenis, much like Ludolph of Saxony, has Christ enter the garden and then begin three extremely brief prayers in direct speech none of which include verses from the Psalms: “O pare meu, si es cosa possible plau’t que no hague a sofferir aquesta passió’. E après que hac orat, vui que los dexebles dormien, tornà a ells, e enrexà la paraula a Sent Pere” (EIXIMENIS, n.d., fol. 198v). Eiximenis adapts Mark 14.35, which is in indirect speech: “he [...] prayed that, if it were possible, this hour might pass him by”. In a way similar to Ludolph’s *Vita Christi*, he opts to give Christ a short scriptural prayer in Gethsemane. In Eiximenis’s version, immediately after speaking a briefest of prayers, Christ returns to the sleeping disciples, as in Mark’s Gospel. John of Caulibus’s version, although a far longer Gethsemane prayer, takes the words of Christ from Mark’s: “Therefore I beseech you, my Father, to *take away this chalice from me* (Mk. 14.36). But if you deign otherwise, then *your will be done not mine* (Lk. 22: 42)” (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 240).¹⁴

John of Caulibus’s prayer is far lengthier than the Gethsemane prayers in Ludolph’s, Eiximenis’s, or Roïc de Corella’s version: “Orat ergo Dominis Iesus Patrem prolixè” (2000: 240). The author of the *Meditations* – here for ease referred to throughout as John of Caulibus– had begun the Passion prayer sequence differently, with an encouragement to the reader to meditate on Christ’s suffering (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 238).¹⁵ He then opens to the scene in the garden by commenting on Christ at prayer: “For what was he praying? Certainly he prayed to the Father: he was willing to carry out this mission, but did not wish to die doing it [...]” (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 239).¹⁶ This commentary on prayer is not present in Villena’s *Vita Christi*, nor is the exhortation, for, as she does on other occasions, she omits any commentary on events in her source materials and, for the most part, uses the narrative alone to embed any commentary or extra-liturgical material (TWOMEY, 2013a: 204–229). The *Meditations* then move to Christ speaking

¹⁴Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 25–78): “Rogo te igitur Pater mi, ut transferas a me calicem istum. Si autem aliter tibi uidetur, fiat uoluntas tua sed non mea”. Mark 14.36: “Take this cup from me. But let it be as you, not I, would have it”.

¹⁵ For a discussion of the authorship of the *Meditaciones*, see McNAMER (2009: 905–55); Flora (2009: 27–47), and Ragusa (1997).

¹⁶ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 256): “*Quid enim orat? Certe orat Patrem: habet hoc expedire negocium ut non moriatur si ei placet.*”

directly to the Father: “The Lord Jesus then *poured out his prayer* to the Father: ‘My most kind Father. I beg you to hear my prayer and not spurn my plea’” (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 240).¹⁷ The prayer, which Christ delivers in the *Meditaciones* is highly developed one, which draws on scriptural sources. It is lengthy, as Villena’s is. John of Caulibus focuses particularly on the evil being done by others: “them” and to do so takes Psalm 31.14 as his basis: “You see the enormities they are contriving against me, how many great falsehoods they are imputing to me, and *are conspiring to take my life*” (2000: 240).¹⁸

At the second prayer in the garden, Villena’s *Vita Christi* shows some consonance with the opening of John of Caulibus’s first Gethsemane prayer. She, as he does, has Christ pray about the enemies who stand against him:

dix: “*Contristatus sum in exercitatione mea: et conturbatus sum a voce inimici et a tribulatione peccatoris.*” Volent dir: “O, excel·lentíssim pare meu! Vós sabeu quant só contristat e tribulat en lo exercici de aquesta mia negociació, e dóna·m gran torbació e angústia lo parlar dels meus enemichs, e só molt tribulat per la desconexença dels peccadors [...]”. (VILLENA, 1916: II, 263)

She begins the second prayer again with a verse from Psalm 55, which she cites in full (Ps. 55.3; Vulgate Ps. 54.3-4). Here Villena uses some of the same texts as John of Caulibus in his long first prayer. John of Caulibus begins: “Turn to me and hear me, for I mourn in my complaint, my spirit is in anguish within me, and my heart is numb with fear within me”. He does not include the entire verse of Psalm 55 but he recalls the remainder of the verse, when he combines the words “*contristatus*” and “*conturbatus*”.¹⁹ “*Contristatus sum in exercitacione mea*” is combined with a verse from Psalm 143: “*et anxiatu est super me spiritus meus et cor meum conturbatum est*” [my spirit is faint and within me my heart is numb with fear] (Ps. 143.4 [Ps. 142.4]).

This means that Villena, if she used John of Caulibus’s *Meditations* as her source unpicked his combinations of Psalms to go back to the Psalter. Nor did she use as her source any of the other authors of *Vitae Christi* for none of them include much that equates to the second of her three prayers in the garden. For the

¹⁷ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): “Orat ergo Dominis Iesus Patrem prolixè, dicens: ‘Mi Pater clementissime, rogo te ut audias oracionem meam, et ne despexeris deprecationem meam’”.

¹⁸ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): “*Vides enim quanta machinantur aduersum me, et quot et quanta falsa imponunt, propter hoc accipere animam meam consiliati sunt.*”

¹⁹ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): “*Intende michi et exaudi me, quia contristatus sum in exercitacione mea et anxiatu est in me spiritus meus, et in me conturbatus est cor meum.*” John combines verses from Ps. 142.4 and Ps. 85.1.

subsequent prayers, Roíç de Corella merely adds that Christ's prayers were the same: "Feu oració lo senyor de una mateixa sentència tres vegades per donar-nos exemple de continuar nostres plegàries hi que si tantost no atenyem lo que nostra oració demana" (ROÍÇ De CORELLA, 1998: fol. 9r). Here Roíç de Corella and Ludolph of Saxony echo the words of John of Caulibus: "But turn your attention as well to the fact that, in contrast to our impatience, the Lord prayed three times before he received an answer" (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 241).²⁰

Villena, however, cites the verse in full. She then glosses the Psalm and brings out "lo parlar dels enemichs" (1916: II, 263), together with the anguish this causes Christ. In John of Caulibus's *Meditations*, there are some references to Christ's enemies, although no reference to their voices. Later, in this same long prayer, he does refer to Christ's enemies, both in the words "adversariis meis" and "*ab inimicis meis inanis*".²¹ He of course, mentions the unnamed "they" who are imputing falsehood and conspiring to take his life which he adapts from Psalm 142: "Remove from me this great bitterness prepared for me by my adversaries" (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 240).²²

St Francis weaves verses into his office, however, which refer repeatedly to Christ's enemies. These are "plotting evil" in the prayer at compline in his office. At matins he writes "set me free because of my enemies" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 142). At prime, Francis also includes the verse from Psalm 57: "he has snatched my life from the strongest of my enemies" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 143). The enemies "who persecuted me unjustly" are included in the prayer at sext (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 145). Yet, despite all of these references to enemies, there is none specifically to their voices. There is, however, one reference to slander (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 140). In the Office of the Passion, St Francis mentions evildoers and wrongdoers: "a pack of evildoers closed in on me" (Ps. 22) (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 146), equivalent to Villena's "peccatoris", sinner in the Latin version, and her "peccadors", as she renders it in the vernacular gloss.

²⁰ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 259): "Sed et illud animaduerte contra impacienciam nostram, quia Dominus Iesus tribus uicibus orauit antequam a Patre responsionem acciperet."

²¹ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): "*si feci ea, si est iniquitas in manibus meis, si reddidi retribuentibus michi mala, decidam merito ab inimicis meis inanis*".

²² Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): "tolle a me tantam amaritudinem quanta michi parata est ab adversariis meis".

Villena's Christ then turns to lament for his people:

“O poble meu, singularment amat. E per què m’as axí desconegut? Què he pogut fer a tu que no u haja fet?” [...] *Magna enim velut mare contricio tua: quis me debetur tui.* O quanta serà la tua dolor quant te veuràs de mi separat e posat en captivitat de ton enemich lo diable, que no se adelitarà sinó en dar-te pena e turment, e no trobaràs qui-t haja pietat, car mereix-ho la desconexença tua!” (1916: II, 264)

Villena takes Lamentations 2.14, the lament over Jerusalem, as her source for this section of the Gethsemane prayer: “For huge as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?” She gives it a christological interpretation through her gloss when it, instead of referring to Jerusalem, refers to all people. John of Caulibus does not include any texts from Lamentations in his prayer in Gethsemane. In fact John of Caulibus does not include any words for Christ’s second prayer in Gethsemane but merely indicates there was one: “a second and third time he went back to pray, evidently in three different places, a stone’s throw (Lk 22:41) apart”.²³

Villena begins the third prayer in the garden on Maundy Thursday with “Incline your ear to the words of my mouth”. As Christ prays before his capture and death in Villena’s *Vita Christi*, she combines verses from Psalm 77.6 and Psalm 22.11 to construct his words:²⁴

dient a sa magestat, ab gran dolor: “*Pater sancte, inclina aurem tuam in verba oris mei: quoniam tribulatio proxima est, et non est qui adjuvet.*” Volent dir: “O, pare sanct e gloriós! Inclinau la vostra orella en les paraules de la mia boca, car la tribulació mia és molt prop e no y ha negú que en aquella m puga ajudar sinó sola la potència vostra!” E, stant lo senyor Jesús largament en sa oració, foren aquí presents a sa senyoria totes les dolors e penes que la sua delicatíssima humanitat havia de passar per rembre natura humana. (Villena, 1916: II, 266)

Psalm 77.1 begins “incline aurem uestram in verba oris mei” (Ps. 76.1) [bow down your ear to the words of my mouth] and Psalm 22.11 includes the words: “quoniam tribulation proxima est; et non est qui adjuvet” [for trouble is upon me and there is no one to help me]. Embedded within the longer of the two prayers which Christ speaks in his *Meditations*, John of Caulibus sets similar words, although he combines different verses: “*Turn your ear to me* (Ps.

²³ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 258): “Et de orando confortans, iterum secundo et tercio ad oracionem rediit, in tribus scilicet locis distantibus ab inuicem per iactum lapidis”.

²⁴ The words of the citation do not exactly match those of the psalm: “incline aurem tua mihi et exaudi verba mea” [turn your ear to me, hear what I say].

85:1[86.1]) *and listen to the voice of my supplication* (Ps. 85:6 [86.6])” (2000: 240).²⁵ Meanwhile at matins in his Passion office, among the chain of Psalm verses which St Francis includes, are verses from Psalm 86: “Incline your ear to my prayer” (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 142).

John of Caulibus includes the words which Villena also took from Psalm 22.11, close to the end of his longer first prayer in the garden: “*for trouble is very close at hand and I have none to help me*” (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 241).²⁶ If her source was John of Caulibus’s *Meditations*, then she combines the Psalms completely differently. However, by placing the verse about how trouble is close at hand in the third prayer, she sets the verse from Psalm 22 far closer to the point of capture that John of Caulibus had, giving it far greater poignancy and impact. St Francis also has Christ speak the verses from Psalm 22, setting them at compline, the hour which corresponds to Holy Thursday: “for trouble is near and there is no-one to help” (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 140, also n. b).

The other less discursive *Vita Christi* tradition makes Christ’s prayers very different to the ones Villena sets down for him. At the third prayer Roïc de Corella repeats again the words from Mark 14: “Pare meu, si no pot passar aquest càlzer sinó que·l bega, sia feta la tua voluntat” (1998: fol. 9r) and Eiximenis adopts the same concept of repeating the prayer: “Pare meu, si no pot passar que yo no soffira aquesta passió, sia facta la tua sancta voluntat” (n.d.: fol. 199r). Villena repeats this same verse from St Luke as part of Christ’s second prayer and her gloss in the vernacular bear some similarity to Roïc de Corella’s:

Pater mi, si non potest calix hic transire a me nisi bibam illum, fiat voluntas tuam. Volent dir, “O pare meu eternal, si no pot passar aquest càlzer, que yo no·l bega, sia feta la tua voluntat, a la qual yo tostemps só conforme”. (VILLENA, 1916: II, 264)

The differences between Roïc de Corella’s and Villena’s versions lie in how Villena qualifies “pare meu” with “eternal”, adding a term of praise for God. One other detail which is different in the two Valencian renditions is that Villena adds: “a la qual yo tostemps só conforme”, which simply reinforces how Christ never wavers from the will of the Father. Her addition to Christ’s words

²⁵ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 257): “*Inclina ergo ad me aurem tuam et intende uoci deprecationis mee.*” I have added to the editors’ reference to the Vulgate, the Psalm verses from the New Jerusalem Bible.

²⁶ Johannis de Caulibus (2000: 257): “*quoniam tribulatio proxima est.*”



seems to capture the beginning of Ludolph of Saxony's commentary, translated by Roïc de Corella: "açí mostra que de tot ab la uoluntat de Déu es concorde" (1998: fol. 9r).

III. Structure of the Gethsemane prayers

If we compare the shape and purpose of the prayers which Villena has Christ utter at Gethsemane with St Francis's a certain number of similarities emerge. Her first Gethsemane prayer, when compared to St Francis's prayer at matins, which is about Christ's self-emptying in response to his Father and his prayer for deliverance in Gethsemane, as I will demonstrate, has more similarities than the other two.

Villena begins with a brief call on God, "Pare meu gloriós" and then moves to outline the reason for Christ's solitude and abandonment. She next opens to an account of the sorrows Christ faces on behalf of humankind and which he shares because of his humanity. Next she turns to words of praise of the Father: "Per què, pare excel·lentíssim, vós, qui sou saviesa e potència infinida". She includes a plea for mercy and ends on the words from Mark 14.

St Francis in his matins prayer opens on a longer call to God to hear him (4 lines). He moves to recognition of God's mercy in the events of his life. The next section of the matins prayer is a recounting of the abandonment Christ feels and he ends on words of praise to God and a very short plea for aid.

John of Caulibus's prayer has some, although not all, the same elements as the above. He begins like them with a call on the Father: "*Mi Pater clementissime*". The next section is one of deep sorrow, Christ's spirit is crushed. Christ next outlines his mission and then John has a plea for the "bitterness" to pass from him. There is a long section about the conspiracy of others, followed by a justification of Christ's righteousness. Then John includes the plea for the chalice to pass from him. The prayer ends, like Francis's on an appeal for aid. From this brief outline it can be seen that the elements of Christ's abandonment, his love for fellow human beings, praise of God for his mercy are not so clearly paralleled, as in Villena's *Vita Christi* and Francis's Office at matins.

The similarities and differences between the three versions which use Old Testament sources can be illustrated in the following tables:

IV. Structure of the first prayer in the Garden

Villena	St Francis, matins	John of Caulibus
Invocation: “pare meu”	Invocation: “Lord God of my salvation” Call on God to listen (Ps. 88.2)	Invocation: “My most kind father” Call on God to listen (Ps. 55.2-3; 143.4; 86.1, 6).
	Recognition of God’s actions (Ps. 22. 10-11)	
	Christ’s mission-ordaining (Ps.22. 10)	Christ’s mission (Ps. 40.8-9, 11; 88.16)
Christ’s abandonment/solitude	Christ’s abandonment/solitude	
		Christ’s acceptance of mission (Ps. 40.11)
Sorrows: own humanity and on behalf of all humanity	Disgrace, confusion, expectation of abuse and misery (Ps. 69.20)	
		Plea for bitterness to pass (Chalice)
	Wicked have risen against me (Ps. 69.21)	Conspiracy of others (Ps. 31.13)
Praise of God	Praise of God	
		Christ’s righteousness (Jn 8.29; Ps. 109.5)
		Betrayal (Zec. 11. 12-13; Mt 26.15, 27.9)
		Chalice (Mk 14.36; Lk 22.42)
		Appeal for God’s aid Ps. 35.22; 22.12)
		They have dug a pit (Wis. 2.20)
	Appeal for aid (Ps. 39.23)	Appeal for aid (Ps. 35.22)
		Trouble is at hand (Ps. 22.12)

The first prayer is the one with most synergy between the three versions.

Villena’s second prayer begins with the citation of Psalm 55.2-3, as noted above. The gloss, then adds an address to the Father: “excel·lentíssim pare meu”. She then turns in her gloss to Christ’s words about his distress, which has two root causes: the words spoken by his enemies and the lack of recognition afforded



him by the sinful. Because John of Caulibus has no second prayer in Gethsemane, in the table, I have paralleled again the first prayer but only the second section of it. I compare both again with St Francis' prayer at matins:

V. Structure of the second prayer

Villena	St Francis, matins	John of Caulibus
Invocation: O excel·lentísim meu” pare	Invocation: “Lord God of my salvation” Call on God to listen (Ps. 88.2)	(No second prayer) second half of first prayer
Vos sabeu	Recognition of God’s actions (Ps. 22.10-11)	
	Christ’s mission-ordaining (Ps. 22.10)	
Speech of enemies causes distress. Not recognized by the people	Christ’s abandonment/solitude (Ps. 69.21)	
	Disgrace, confusion, expectation of abuse from others and misery	Conspiracy of others (Ps. 31.13)
	Wicked have risen against me (Ps. 69.21)	
Lament addressed to the people. “Poble amat”		
Christ’s sorrow and suffering on behalf of the people		
		Christ’s righteousness (Jn 8.29; Ps. 109.5)
		Betrayal (Zec. 11. 12-13; Mt 26.15, 27.9)
Chalice (Lk 22.42)		Chalice (Mk 14.36; Lk 22.42)
		Appeal for God’s aid (Ps. 35.22; 22.12)
	Abandonment: “I am someone gone down into the pit” (Ps. 86.14)	They have dug a pit (Wis. 2.20)
		Appeal for aid (Ps. 35.22)
	Praise	Trouble is at hand (Ps. 22.12)



Villena’s third prayer in Gethsemane is based, as noted above on a combination of Psalms 17 and 22. St Francis combines a greater number of Psalms including verse from Psalms 90, 41, and 109. The Compline office moves from Invocation, to recognition of the plots and slander of enemies, and then to a need to continue to pray. Following a new invocation containing words of praise of the Father: “My holy Father, King of Heaven and Earth” (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 140), St Francis moves to a plea for God to assist in the words of Psalm 22. He then declares his faith in the Father: “Let my enemies be turned back [...] for now I know you are my God” (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 140).

VI. Structure of the third prayer at the Passion

Villena	S Francis, compline	John of Caulibus, Meditations
Invocation: “Pater sancte” Call on God to listen: “inclina aurem” (Ps 17.6)	Invocation: “God”	Invocation: “pater iuste”
	Plotting of enemies, slander (Ps. 41.8, 71.10, 109.5)	
		Your will be done (Mt 26.42)
	Persistence: “I continued to pray”	
	Praise	
Trouble is at hand (Ps. 22.12) and there is no-one to help	Plea for aid. Trouble is at hand (Ps. 22.12) and there is no-one to help	
	Faith	
		Commends mother and disciples to God. “Keep them from evil”
	Opposition/abandonment (Ps. 56.10, 38.12, 88.9)	
	Pleas for aid (Ps. 22.20)	
	Gloria	

There is in this third prayer little synergy between Villena’s, John of Caulibus’s, and Francis’s versions.

The shape of Villena’s prayers of Christ have some aspects which recall Francis’s own, although they are clearly not modelled on them. They also have some consonance, albeit somewhat less, with the structure of John of Caulibus’s

prayer in Gethsemane in the *Meditations*. John of Caulibus's third prayer includes a prayer commending Christ's mother and brothers to God. This prayer is translated into English by Nicholas Love in his *Mirror of the Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ*: "Bot I recomende to þe fadere my swete modere & my disciples, þe which I haue kept in to þis tyme, alle þe while I haue been duellyng with hem".²⁷ Villena does not include this element of the prayer. Indeed, Villena's prayers have very little to do with Christ's prayers in the other *Vitae Christi*, with the exception of one striking similarity between two Valencian translations of the Gospel words in Luke 22.42.

VII. Villena's commentary on Christ praying

Not only does Villena construct the prayers which Christ speaks but she reflects on him praying. After the second prayer in Gethsemane, she calls on the "ànima devota", devout soul, to observe Christ as he suffers and prays. The devout soul is to look: "mira". It is also to join him in sorrow and to weep over his suffering, "plora":

O virtuosa e devota ànima! Mira lo teu Redemptor e Senyor tan humiliat sobre la terra, e aquella humanitat sua tan cansada de dolor, que no's pot levar, ans dóna grans colps de si mateix per lo turment, dins e defora, per tota la sua persona passa. O, ànima piadosa! Hages-li compassió e no oblides tanta dolor! Plora ab sa senyoria, e no's cansen los teus ulls, ne vulles cessar per amor de aquell que per tu sofrir tanta dolor per delliurar-te de los penes infernals; e pren lo consell de Jeremies qui diu: "*Effunde sicut aquae ante conspectum Domini*". (VILLENA, 1916: II, 264–265)

This reflection on Christ's prayers of anguish and the way it encourages joining in a community of prayer is quite different to the approach of other *Vitae Christi*. John of Caulibus merely encourages the reader to "look" but not to weep along with Christ: "Now then, look at him, how great is the anguish of his soul" (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 241).²⁸ The women using the *Meditaciones* are, thus, at a remove from the emotions expressed, observing from the margins but not engaging in the emotions. Although, therefore, John of Caulibus encourages his female reader to contemplate the Passion, she is not to weep with Christ and share in his anguish, as Villena's reader is. Earlier in his lengthy introduction and disquisition on contemplation which opens the hour of the

²⁷ "But I recommend to the Father my sweet mother and my disciples, which I have cared for up to this time, all the time I have been living with them" (LOVE 1992: 165).

²⁸ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 259): "Considera nunc igitur eum: quanta est anime sue angustia".



Passion, John is rather dismissive of how women become easily distracted, their minds wander, and they lose focus through boredom:

A person who wishes to glory in the passion and cross of the Lord should persevere in earnest meditation on it. If you survey its mysteries and their surrounding events with full force of mind, you will I believe, have an entirely new frame of reference of meditating.

A person doing that would place herself in the presence of each and every thing that had a bearing on that lordly passion and crucifixion and she would do that affectionately, carefully, seriously, and perseveringly, not missing things as her eyes devour the words, and not skipping over things in boredom. (JOHANNIS DE CAULIBUS, 2000: 236)²⁹

The tone of this exhortation is patronizing and quite different to the tone of Villena's "ànima piadosa", which suggests a more positive reaction from the reader or auditor of the *Vita Christi*. She is not only to look but to take pity "hagues-le compassió". She too is to persevere but "per amor".

VIII. Approaches to God in his Word in St Francis and Villena

In Villena's prayer, nevertheless, there can be seen some key features of Francis's reflection about the nature of God, through his prayers and of these I note just three. She writes of God as infinite being, "potència infinida", celebrating his immanence, as St Francis does in his spiritual vision (OSBORNE, 2013: 56). Strikingly, she, rather than the author of the *Meditaciones*, who passed for so long under the name of Bonaventure, includes praise of God as knowledge and power, in her prayer, whilst St Francis praises God in each of his Passion prayers. He begins his Office with the words "O Our Father most holy". Each hour ends with praise of God:

Let us bless
the Lord God Living and true!
Let us always render Him
Praise, glory, honour, blessing, and every good.

²⁹ Johannis de Caulibus (1997: 252): "Qui ergo in passion *Domini et cruce gloriari* desiderat sedula meditacione debet in ipsa persistere, cuius misteria et que circa eam facta sunt, si toto forent perspecta mentis intuit in nouum, ut puto, statum meditantem adducerat. Nam ex profundo corde et totis uiscerum medullis eam perscrutanti, multi passus occurrerent insperati ex quibus nouam compassionem, nouum amorem, nouas consolaciones, et per consequens nouum quondam statum dulcedinis susciperet, que sibi presagia et participia glorie uiderentur.

Amen, Amen. (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 141)

Embedded in each of Francis's hours are acknowledgements of God's might, such as at matins, where he praises God as "My king and my God" or at sext, where he acknowledges God as holy: "you are my most holy Father/ my King and my God" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 139, 140).

Villena also writes in her first prayer of Christ's generous self-giving. He looks on humanity from the beginning of time to the end and pays the price for them. This generosity of Christ in freely offering himself for others tells us about her concept of God as redeemer and it also echoes aspects of Francis's Office.³⁰ At prime, for example, Francis reveals Christ's generous heart through the words of Psalm 57.7. For even though his enemies prepare a trap for him, even though they have dug a pit for him, Christ cries: "My heart is ready, my heart is ready" (ARMSTRONG, HELLMANN, & SHORT, 1999: I, 141).

It has been said that the way to Francis's heart is through the words of his prayers. "Prayer was more than anything a work of the heart for it was the activity of love always striving to see the Beloved, the Friend, the Consoler face to face" (ARMSTRONG, 2004: 77).

IX. Conclusion

When she selects the words for Christ to pray in her *Vita Christi*, Isabel de Villena never slavishly copies the words of other *Vitae Christi* to which she had access. Unlike the brief Gethsemane prayers drawn purely from the Gospels, included in their lives of Christ by Ludolph of Saxony, Eiximenis, and Roïc de Corella, Villena prayers are longer, more complex, and draw on Old Testament sources. In other ways, her approach in creating the prayers is closer to John of Caulibus's. To construct Christ's prayers she combines verses from the Psalms, just as he does. However, this is also firmly set within the spiritual practice of St Francis, as revealed in his Office of the Passion. I believe her method, just like John of Caulibus's, inherits particularly from St Francis's use of the Psalms in his Office of the Passion. None of the other authors of *Vitae Christi* include these verses from the Psalms. Although it is not proven that she knew St Francis's Office, it is obvious that she diverged from the *Meditations* in significant ways, not least in including three long prayers of Christ.

³⁰ For a study of the concept of generosity in the writing of St Francis's followers, see Shannon (2013).

The way in which she constructs her prayers is also important to understand. Villena does not follow the sequence or structure of the prayer in John of Caulibus's *Meditations* nor does she follow her fellow Franciscan, Eiximenis, in the brevity of his prayers in the garden. What she does, however, is to follow St Francis, in a method adopted by the Franciscan John of Caulibus, she combines and re-combines words from the Old Testament to create prayers. Just as St Francis's own words of prayer have not been given the attention they deserve, because they merely seem to repeat words from the Psalms, so Villena's have not been recognized as radically different from the majority of the authors of *Vitae Christi*.

The construction of the prayers in the *Vita Christi* is also significant and recalls St Francis's Office of the Passion in another way. Villena, though the prayers of Christ, emphasizes key theological concepts, important to St Francis, such as the infinite majesty of God, Christ's generosity of heart, and the need to offer him praise.

Did Isabel de Villena have wished to echo the Office of the Passion in her prayers in the garden? This seems unlikely. However, what she does is to employ the precious word of Scripture, to "interiorize" those words, and to recast them as Christ's prayers as well as her own. She presents those sacred words as a gift to other Clares who cannot read or understand them in the original Vulgate version.

What she does, as I have sought to demonstrate, is to situate her prayers at the Passion of Christ within the tradition of prayer inherited from St Francis, where Christ is the pattern for prayer for all. Like Francis, she seeks a christological approach to the Scriptures. Even though prayer is an activity undertaken in solitude, as in the garden of Gethsemane, it is still a communal act. This is made visible in these prayers which recast the Scriptures into the words of Christ, making them incarnate. The prayers, then glossed into the vernacular, are re-spoken, and made re-incarnate, as they are re-enacted by the nuns reading from the narrative of the *Vita Christi*. In that way they revitalize the dialogue with God that the prayers assume. The sacred words, now completely comprehensible in the vernacular, voiced by a female reader, can be interiorized by the nuns and used as their own prayer in the way of Francis.

Finally, to explain the choices to develop significant sections of prayer about the Passion in her *Vita Christi*, Villena could have been inspired by the legends



of her Order, and St Clare's devotion to the Passion. The Legend of St Clare describes how Clare shared in the agony of the Lord as his Passion approached: Once the day of the most sacred Supper arrived, in which the Lord loved his own until the end. Near evening as the agony of the Lord approached, Clare, sad and afflicted, shut herself up in the privacy of her cell. While in her own prayer, she was accompanying the praying Savior and when saddened even to death she experienced the effect of His sadness, she was filled at once with the memory of His capture and the whole mockery and she sank down upon her bed. (ARMSTRONG, 2005: 307).

I believe that Villena sought to follow in the footsteps of the first Mother and to similarly inspire the hearts of her sisters through the creating words of prayer in which the sisters could accompany the Lord at his moment of agony in the garden, and this is particularly apparent in Villena's words of commentary on the second prayer in which she encourages her sisters to share in the emotions of Christ and weep with him. It has been said of St Francis that his penitential heart undertook "a journey of the heart, [...] begun by God's heart and continued by the one whose heart has been touched" (ARMSTRONG, 2004: 76). In their penitential response to Christ's prayers in the garden, the sisters of the Santa Trinitat, guided by their abbess, undertake that journey.

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