PART 4

Prayer and Meditation

Creating Domestic Sacred Space: Religious Reading in Late Medieval and Early Modern Italy

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Ogni volta che io parlo, o odo parlare sopra materie che non sieno molto materiali finito tal parlare & raccozomi con meco, parmi la detta materia meglio intendere che quando la practicava. Partita che tu fusti, ne' ragionamento che facemo sopra il leggere & ritornandomi il detto ragionamento per la memoria, mi parve comprendere che quante volte sopra ciò n'abbiamo ragionato già mai nonn'è inteso l'un l'altro & però seguita che ogni volta ne siamo da capo. Io ti lodo il legere nelle cose utili, io nonn'ò saputo dimostrare qual chiamo veramente utile, ne' penso sapere dire, ma pure me ne sforzerò. Dico che l'utile leggere chiamo quello che è cagione di ricogliere la mente dalle cose inutile & farla sospendere nelle cose utili & non dico badare nelle cose utili [...] Il vero & necessario acto utile della mente intendo che sia quando si diriza nel conspetto della divina maestà con cognoscimento di sè & infiammamento di desiderio di lui, delle quali due cose mi pare che seguiti, humile & fervente orare, in quella brevità del tempo che la mente nel divino conspetto dirizata.¹

1 Florence, Biblioteca Riccardiana, MS Riccardiano 1414, fol. 249r (transcription by Lisa Kaborycha, <http://www.lisakaborycha.com/bartolomea-degli-obizzi-alberti>). The text is translated by Kaborycha L., *A Corresponding Renaissance. Letters Written by Italian Women, 1375–1650* (Oxford: 2016) 185–188, at 186–187: 'Every time that I speak or hear someone else speak about matters that are not very well defined, I gather myself together and consider the material until it seems that I understand it better than when it was being discussed. After you left, going over in my memory our conversation about reading, I seemed to comprehend that which, no matter how often we discussed it, neither of us had grasped until then, each time going over it from the beginning. I praise you for reading things that are useful; [at the time] I did not know how to explain what I really meant by "useful", nor am I entirely sure that I can tell you [now], though I will try. What I call "useful reading" is that which causes the mind to collect itself, drawing away from useless things, and suspends it among those that are useful. [...] The true and necessary act of the mind – that which I mean by "useful" – is when it rises

So begins a letter by the Florentine noblewoman Bartolomea di Tommaso degli Obizzi (d. 1426), in which she shares her thoughts on religious reading with an unknown female correspondent.² According to Bartolomea, during the performance of religious reading ('scripture del vecchio & del nuovo testamento') the mind engages in three different possible actions while focussing on the written text: it can 'sospendere' (suspend), 'badare' (concentrate) or 'exultare' (rejoice).³ The act of 'suspending' implies that when the reader finds a word that 'la detta mente facesi levare' (raises up the mind), she is supposed to stop the reading process and stand still in silence, in order to not be distracted. Pausing from reading will unleash the salvific power of words, transforming the written words into a 'remedio della purgatione de' viti' (cure for purging of vice): indeed, 'dirizare la mente a chi adiutare la può' (raising the mind to Him, who has the power to heal it) is the only possible remedy for the 'inferma anima' (infirm soul).⁴ The impact of this reading technique, focussing on one single word or expression, is very much preferable to 'concentrating' and 'rejoicing'. By concentrating, the reader is not specifically directing her attention to one specific point but attentively skimming through the text, while the act of rejoicing finds its origin in retrieving 'nel nostro leggere molte cose utili' (many useful things while reading) and letting the soul experience the delight of the discovery. In any case, it is imperative that the emphasis lies on 'piuttosto compunctivo che 'l ralegrativo' (compunction rather than self-congratulation) in order to avoid a 'bestiale reputazione & vanità' (bestial reputation and

up in the presence of Divine Majesty with self-awareness and burning with desire for Him; from these two things it seems to me fervent and humble prayer will follow during that brief time that the mind has addressed itself to the Divine'.

- 2 The letter is one of fifteen written by Bartolomea to unknown female correspondents (fols. 245r–272r). No autographs of this epistolary exchange have survived, but the letters were copied in 1518 by a nun (fol. 79v: 'Compiuta per me Suora N. del monasterio di Santa Lucia di via di San Gallo compiuta a di 27 di Settembre 1518') at the convent of Santa Lucia in Florence (fol. 273v: 'Questo libro sta nello Armario'). MS Riccardiano 1414 contains, besides the letters by Bartolomea, two treatises (*Regola del governo di cura familiare* and *Trattato delle dieci questioni*), twenty-two letters and five sermons by the Florentine Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici. The two treatises and the first six letters were directed to Bartolomea, spiritual daughter of the Dominican preacher. See Gagliardi I., "Ruoli e spazi destinati alle donne secondo la predicazione e la trattatistica dei frati osservanti e relativi conflitti nella realtà concreta delle città del tardo medioevo", *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 7, 2 (2010) 65–83; Paoli M.P., "S. Antonino 'vere pastor et bonus pastor': storia e mito di un modello", in Garfagnini G. – Picone G. (eds.), *Verso Savonarola. Misticismo, profezia, empiti riformistici fra Medioevo ed Età moderna* (Florence: 1999) 83–139; Kaborycha, *A Corresponding Renaissance* 186.

- 3 Kaborycha, *A Corresponding Renaissance* 187.

- 4 Ibid., 187.

vanity).⁵ Reading is described as a way to embark on a mystical itinerary and to reach a state of union with the Divine.⁶

The reading guidelines Bartolomea degli Obizzi is sharing with her anonymous female correspondent are strongly influenced by the instructions that she in turn received from her spiritual advisor, the Dominican preacher Giovanni Dominici (1356–1419), who instructed her how to raise her children and how to combine motherhood with a fulfilling spiritual life through treatises, letters and conversations. In fact, after the exile of her husband Antonio degli Alberti (1363–1415) in 1401, she was left alone in Florence with four children to care for and Dominici offered her guidance and support in spiritual and worldly matters, which were very often conflated.⁷ Writing, for example, about the education of children in the *Regola del governo di cura familiare*, Dominici suggested that Bartolomea have her children build one or two small altars in the house and make garlands of flowers and greenery with which to crown Jesus or decorate the picture of the Blessed Virgin. They might also light and extinguish candles, incense, clean and prepare the altars by cleaning pieces of wax and dusting off the candlesticks and ringing a little bell at all hours as is done in church.⁸

Dominici encouraged Bartolomea to dedicate herself, next to her parental tasks, to her spiritual groom, for whom she should build

una dipinta camera di virtù santa, nella quale non entri altri che il celeste sposo, e ciascun altro amore sia di fuori di quello sbandito. Appresso a quella farai uno portico con molte finestrelle, per le quali entrino gli splendori di quella camera, nel quale coabitino tutti gli amori da queglii

5 Ibid., 187–188.

6 Paoli, “S. Antonino ‘vere pastor et bonus pastor’” 21. Bartolomea’s terminology to describe the act and the performance of reading shows strong resemblances with that used by the fifteenth-century preachers, see Corbellini S., “Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit and Awakening the Passion: Holy Writ and Lay Readers in Late Medieval Europe”, in Gordon B. – McLean M. (eds.), *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation. Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century* (Leiden – Boston: 2012) 15–39.

7 Giovanni Dominici wrote his *Regola del governo di cura familiare* (1401–1403), the *Libro d’amor di carità* (1402–1404; printed in 1513 with the title *Trattato della Sanctissima charità*), and the *Trattato delle dieci questioni* (1404) for her. Bartolomea shared strong spiritual concerns with her husband: Antonio degli Alberti, a refined man of learning, founded a Brigidine monastery in 1390 on his land at the Paradiso. On the Paradiso convent, see Mirello R., *I manoscritti del Monastero del Paradiso di Firenze* (Florence: 2007).

8 On this topic, see Morse M.A., “Creating Sacred Space: The Religious Visual Culture of the Renaissance Venetian *casa*”, *Renaissance Studies* 21, 2 (2007) 151–184. About the combination of moral and religious teaching in Dominici’s treatise, see Gagliardi, “Ruoli e spazi destinati alle donne” 66.

splendori non cacciati via [...] e di e note soggiorna [...] gustando l'anima dolcezza dell'amato.⁹

Interestingly enough, she was able to transform the teachings of her spiritual guide into lessons for a group of spiritual daughters with whom she engaged in oral and written conversations in and from her own domestic space.¹⁰ Daniel Bornstein has asserted that in the letters testifying to the discussions, Bartolomea 'offers guidance on the spiritual life, teaching other devout women with calm assurance'; [...] 'refers to the great figures of Christian spirituality, such as Augustine, Jerome, Benedict, Bernard and Paul'; [...] and 'moves easily through the technical terminology of contrition and compunction, *substantia* and *potentia*.'¹¹ This spiritual leadership was of course the result of the exchanges with Dominici, but also of her personal engagement with and active readership of religious texts. In one of the letters to her own disciples, she refers to the communal reading of the vernacular life of Isaac of Stella and to their common reflections on how to translate his example into their own lives as mothers and wives. She mentions how, starting from the reading of the text, she had reflected on her own social position and found similarities with the life of Jesus who had chosen a life free from the temptations of the world while he was still living with his mother.¹²

This conflation of worldly activities and spiritual life and the specific domestic setting of Bartolomea's meditations – strongly linked to reading activities – will form the starting point for a reflection on the relevance and the function of reading in the transformation of domestic spaces into sacred spaces – that is, into spaces where religious activities and exercises are taking place and where religious knowledge is practiced, produced, exchanged

9 'A painted room of holy virtue, in which no one else should enter besides the celestial groom, and every other love should be banned. And you should build a portico with many windows, through which may shine the brilliance of that room and which should live together all the affections that have not been driven out by the brilliance [...] and inhabit the room with him night and day [...] tasting the sweetness of your beloved'. Cited by Gagliardi, "Ruoli e spazi destinati alle donne" 72.

10 The letter cited at the beginning of this contribution refers to one of these conversations. Bartolomea's reflection is triggered by the meeting with her spiritual daughter ('partita che fusti'; after you left).

11 Bornstein D., "Spiritual Kinship and Domestic Devotions", in Brown J.C. – Davis R.C. (eds.), *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy* (London – New York: 1998) 173–192, at 189.

12 MS Riccardiano 1414, fols. 245v–248r. See also Paoli M.P., "S. Antonino 'vere pastor et bonus pastor'" 20–21.

and discussed.¹³ In order to take into account the intrinsic dynamics of the transmission of religious knowledge, this contribution will focus on treatises for instructing lay people in the performance of domestic devotional activities, on textual sources illustrating how lay people reacted to these stimuli and on strategies of dissemination and transformation of religious contents.¹⁴

1 Rules for Spiritual Life and Rules for Marital Life

As the case of Bartolomea clearly shows, the systematic process of the spiritual education of the laity performed by the regular clergy, and in particular by members of the Mendicant orders, has left many textual traces in the form of sermons, letters and treatises.¹⁵ While habitually written for a specific public and delivered to a particular addressee, this material was often widely and rapidly disseminated in manuscripts or printed books, thus reaching a very wide and diverse public and extending its impact and influence well beyond the limited reach of the intended first recipients.¹⁶ Cases in point of this practice are two treatises by the Franciscan preacher Cherubino da Spoleto, the *Regola della vita spirituale* (Rule for a Spiritual Life) and the *Regola della vita matrimoniale* (Rule for Marital Life). Both dedicated to the Florentine layman Iacopo Borgianni, the two treatises were written in the second half of the fifteenth

13 In this contribution I will use the term 'knowledge' in the definition given by Jacob Ch., *Qu'est ce qu'un lieu de savoir? Savoir et savoirs* (Marseille: 2014, <http://books.openedition.org/oep/423>), at 16: 'knowledge is a field of human experience, individual and collective. More specifically knowledge is the set of the mental, linguistic, technical and social processes, through which a society, the groups and the individuals who are part of it, assign meaning to the world around them and develop approaches to influence and interact with it'. Knowledge is moreover 'a dynamic process, as the result of practices and actions on the mental, linguistic, technical and social level'.

14 The sources discussed in this contribution have been studied in the framework of the research project *Cities of Readers. Religious Literacies in the Long Fifteenth Century* funded by NWO, Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research. The project consists of two PhDs and one postdoc and is co-directed by Bart Ramakers and myself.

15 Scholarly research on this theme is particularly rich and prolific. For a general overview, see Benvenuti A., *In castro poenitentiae: santità e società femminile nell'Italia medievale* (Rome: 1990); Catto M. – Gagliardi I. – Parrinello R.M. (eds.), *Direzione spirituale tra ortodossia ed eresia. Dalle scuole filosofiche al Novecento* (Brescia: 2002); Boesch Gajano S. (ed.), *Storia della direzione spirituale. Letà medievale* (Brescia: 2010); Zarri G. (ed.), *Storia della direzione spirituale. Letà moderna* (Brescia: 2008).

16 For exemplary studies of the dissemination of sermons and pastoral letters, see Girolamo da Siena, *Epistole*, ed. S. Serventi (Venice: 2004) and Serventi S., "La predicazione fuori dal pulpito: laudi e lettere di direzione spirituale tra XIV e XV secolo", *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo* 117 (2015) 317–337.

century (probably before 1 July 1464, according to a date mentioned in a manuscript of the *Regola della vita spirituale*) and enjoyed a significant dissemination in print: at least 41 prints of the *Regola della vita spirituale* between 1477 and 1583, in most cases followed by the *Regola della vita matrimoniale*.¹⁷

Although the treatises by Cherubino have been described as 'lacking in spiritual refinement',¹⁸ the wide dissemination of the treatises is testimony to the impact and success of his teachings in late medieval and early modern Italy, and to the relevance of his instruction for the reconstruction of the role of reading in the formation of a religious *habitus* for lay readers. In the *Regola della vita spirituale*, Cherubino invites his dedicatee to read his book often and repeatedly to ignite a process of religious development:

Priegoti figliuol mio benedecto delectate spesse uolte di leggere questo mio libro et dirizza la uita tua come in epsò ti s'insegna perche spero se così farai in ogni uirtu et perfection uerrai a poco a poco per camino ordinate [...] Transcorrendo la diuina scriptura trouo septe regole utilissime a ciascheduna persona la quale desidera uiuere spiritualmente. La

17 These figures are based on the online version of the ISTC (<http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/istc/index.html>) and on ICCU Edit 16 (http://edit16.iccu.sbn.it/web_iccu/ihome.htm). The geographical dissemination of the prints is also worth noticing: the texts were printed in Florence (1477; 1482; 1483; 1487; 1490; 1491; 1494; 1495), Naples (1477–1480; 1490), Ferrara (1481; 1487), Modena (1482; 1489), Lucca (1482), Milan (1485; 1569; 1572; 1575), Parma (1487), Bologna (1487–1489), Venice (1490; 1492; 1503; 1505; 1514; 1524; 1534; 1538; 1543; 1550; 1568; 1570; 1579; 1583); Pavia (1495; 1503); Pesaro (1510); and Rome (1542; 1553). See also Jacobson Schutte A., *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books 1465–1550: A Finding List* (Geneva: 1983) 132–134. About Cherubino da Spoleto, see Rusconi R., "Cherubino da Spoleto", in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani* 24 (Rome: 1980) 446–453; McCue Gill A., "Not as enemies, but as Friends": Sanctioned Sex in Frate Cherubino's *Regola della vita matrimoniale*, *Quaderni d'Italianistica* 30, 1 (2009) 27–44; Gagliardi, "Ruoli e spazi destinati alle donne" 75. On Iacopo Bongianini, see Kent F.W., "Lorenzo di Credi, his Patron Iacopo Bongianini and Savonarola", *The Burlington Magazine* 125 (1983) 538–541; Callahan M. – Cooper D., "Set in Stone: Monumental Altar Frames in Renaissance Florence", in Motture P. – O'Malley M. (eds.), *Re-thinking Renaissance Objects* (Hoboken: 2011) 33–55. The wool merchant Iacopo Bongianini rebuilt the entire convent church of Santa Chiara on the Florentine Via de' Serragli in 1490. He also installed two side altars in the new church, for which he commissioned impressive painted altarpieces by Perugino and Lorenzo di Credi. Gabriella Zarri suggests that the *Regola di vita spirituale* was originally written for a female monastic public and later, in the printed version, dedicated to Iacopo Bongianini, Zarri G., *Libri di spirito. Editoria religiosa in volgare nei secoli XV–XVII* (Turin: 2009) 79. An overview of the manuscript tradition, however, is still lacking, as well as a modern edition of the text. Nevertheless, it is clear that all surviving prints refer to Bongianini as the dedicatee of the treatise.

18 Gagliardi, "Ruoli e Spazi destinati alle donne" 75.

prima si dice cogitazione. La seconda affectione. La tertia locuzione. La quarta operazione. La quinta conuersatione. La sexta oratione. La septima mondificatione.¹⁹

In short chapters, Cherubino illustrates how the reader should undergo a process of transformation to purge himself of the vanity of the world and clear his mind to prepare for the performance of devotional activities. In order to start this process, the importance of the presence of a good spiritual father is paramount: by building a relationship based on mutual trust, discussing successes and failures, and by following his rules and advice, it is possible to resist temptations and vicious appetites.²⁰ He furthermore explains that in order to expel vicious and negative thoughts, the reader should concentrate on the 'benefici di dio' (godly benefits) or on the life and death of Christ, which should be meditated on at a very slow pace, lingering on every episode and detail, from his first tears to his death on the cross.²¹

Cherubino describes in great detail how the reader should pray. If the reader is literate, he is advised to read the Hours of the Cross, the Hours of Our Lady and the seven penitential psalms, followed by 'paternostri della passione': five paternosters kneeling with folded hands, in memory of Christ's prayer in the Garden of Olives; five paternosters with hands folded behind the back, remembering how Christ was taken to Anna, Caiaphas and Pilatus; five paternosters with folded hands in remembrance of the crown of thorns; five paternosters kneeling with the hands forming a cross on the chest, thinking on how Christ was scourged at the pillar; and five paternosters with hands and arms spreading out to form a cross, in memory of the five wounds that Christ suffered at the Cross.²² A second set of prayers, the so-called 'corona della vergine

19 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita spirituale. Regola della vita matrimoniale* (Firenze, Bartolomeo de' Libri: 1495) (ISTC: ic00446000) fols. a2r-v: 'I beg you my dearest son to enjoy the pleasure to read this book often and to arrange your life as this book teaches you. If you will follow these instructions, you will step by step reach a state of virtue and perfection through a well-arranged path. [...] Skimming through the divine Scriptures I find seven rules very useful for everyone who wishes to life a spiritual life. The first is reasoning. The second affection. The third speaking. The fourth action. The fifth conversation. The sixth prayer. The seventh purification'.

20 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita spirituale* fol. b3v.

21 Ibid., fol. a6v.

22 Ibid., fol. c2r. The life of Christ is of course the most popular subject for a meditational theme in late medieval and early modern Europe, both in religious and lay circles. The formulaic character of the instructions in Cherubino's treatise show strong similarities with the chapter 'Della consideratione della vita di Cristo' ('On the meditation on the life of Christ') in Simone Fidati de Cassia, *L'Ordine della vita Cristiana*, ed. W. Eckermann O.S.A.

Maria' (Virgin Mary's crown), requires specific pieces of furniture. The reader is asked to arrange a small prie-dieu in his room and, while praying the Pater Noster at the words 'Sanctificetur nomen tuum', to kneel at his prie-dieu and to finish saying the prayer while kneeling. Then he is asked to stand up and to start reciting the Ave Maria and at the words 'Dominus tecum' to kneel again and to repeat the words three times, before standing up again until he reaches the words 'in mulieribus et benedictus fructus uentris tui Jesus'. He must then kneel once more and finish the prayer in this position.²³

The addressee is thus instructed, through the reading of the text, how to perform devotional activities in his own domestic space.²⁴ The focus on reading, however, is even more manifestly formulated in both treatises. The chapter on 'virtuoso parlare' (virtuous speaking) invites the reader to speak as often as possible with a 'persona spirituale' (religious person), because the conversations are necessary for progress in the acquisition of religious knowledge. Cherubino suggests, however, a further form of dialogue: between the reader and 'alcuno libro spirituale' (religious books) in the vernacular:

Perche dice sancto bernardo: quando noi legiamo alcuno libro spirituale sempre idio parla con noi. Quanto sara adunque ardente et innamorato il nostro cuore parlando con idio. Buoni libri a leggere per una persona non litterata sono questi: Climaco [Climacus, *Scala Paradisi*]: Specchio della Croce [Domenico Cavalca, *Lo Specchio della Croce*]: Il monte dell'orazione [possibly by Cherubino da Spoleto]: Il libro della patientia [Domenico Cavalca, *La medicina del cuore, overo Trattato della patientia*]. Trouate

(Rome: 2006), at 45–48. Simone Fidati recommends in his tract, probably one of the first catechetical works in Italian, a wide array of subjects for meditation and reflection, such as God's benefits, the fragility of humankind, the life of Mary, the lives of Apostles, martyrs, confessors and virgins, angels, the original sin, the afterlife and the struggle against sins and temptations. A similar meditation is described in the *Opera a ben vivere* by Antoninus of Florence. In addition to the description of the meditation on the life of Christ, Antoninus instructs the reader to perform it 'whenever she desire[s] in church or in [her] room, kneel[ing] before a crucifix'. For a complete description, see Flanigan T., "Art, Memory, and the Cultivation of Virtue: The Ethical Function of Images in Antoninus's *Opera a ben vivere*", *Gesta* 53, 2 (2014) 175–195, at 179.

23 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita spirituale* fols. c2v–c3r.

24 The *Regola della vita spirituale* also instructs the reader how to behave at church during Mass, but the overall focus of the treatise is on exercises of personal devotion to be performed in the domestic space.

adunque alcuno di questi libri et ogni giorno leggete alcuno secondo ui pare et piace.²⁵

Cherubino adds to this list in the *Regola della vita matrimoniale*, the ‘tractato che fe l’arciuescouo di Firenze sopra i peccati mortali’ (the *Trattato sopra i peccati mortali* by Archbishop Antonino of Florence) and the ‘quadrigo che fece il uenerabile patre frate Nicholao de Osimo del ordine de frati minori’ (the *Quadrigo Spirituale* by the Franciscan Nicolò da Osimo). In this second reference to domestic reading activities, he includes an indication of the possible communal setting (‘alcuno libro spirituale in lingua volgare per leggerlo alla famiglia tua’) and the rationale for the selection of the two treatises: they enlighten the reader about ‘ciò che e tenuto di fare la persona et ad che e tenuta la persona di guardarsi l’anima’ (what a person should be, that is to take care of his soul).²⁶ Both references to reading activities stress one fundamental point: it is the responsibility of the reader to search for books, to read on a regular basis alone or in a family setting and to engage in a process of religious acculturation, extrapolating moral and religious lessons from the reading material. This topic is particularly emphasised in the *Regola della vita matrimoniale*. The husband is required to instruct his wife on topics that are necessary for the salvation of her soul, as ignorance of the principles of faith can lead to sinfulness. The husband should take care of coaching her in learning the basic prayers (Pater Noster, Ave Maria and Credo), the Commandments, the mortal sins and how to confess.²⁷

A further recommended activity for the spiritual education of the family is to listen to sermons, as they disseminate ‘comandamenti di dio’ (God’s commandments) and other important religious instructions. In case not every

25 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita spirituale* fol. b5r: ‘Moreover enjoy the reading of religious books, because St Bernard says that when we read a religious book God is talking with us. How enflamed and passionate will our heart be while talking with God! Good books to be read by a non-Latinate person are: Climacus, the *Specchio della Croce*, the *Monte dell’Orazione* and the *Libro della Patientia*. Find thus some of these books and read every day some passages as and when you wish’. On the topic of reading as a dialogue between the book and the reader, see Corbellini, “Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit and Awakening the Passion” 30–32.

26 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita matrimoniale* fol. f2v–f3r. Cherubino adds that the readers of the *Regola della vita matrimoniale* should also read the *Regola della vita spirituale*, described as a book ‘buono da leggere et insegnare ad ogni persona di ogni stato’. All the books cited by Cherubino da Spoleto were widely available in late medieval Italy, both in manuscript and in print. See Jacobson Schutte, *Printed Italian Vernacular Religious Books* 42–49, 127–129, 129–130, 223–224, 279.

27 Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita matrimoniale* fol. f2v.

member of the family can be present at the sermon, at least one should participate and then re-narrate and re-enact it at home in order to transmit the necessary knowledge.²⁸ The time spent listening to the preacher should be considered as a religious exercise, even the fatigue of walking to and from the site of the sermon and the wait are valuable, in particular if the sermon is held by ‘persone spirituale di scientie illuminate’ (enlightened and learned religious persons).²⁹ Cherubino asks the father or other family members to share the sermon and its interpretation with their extended family, and thus to take on the role of cultural brokers, becoming intermediaries between the members of religious orders and lay people. Moreover, Cherubino’s instructions make particularly clear how public performance and domestic devotion could be conflated: sermons held in a public space and in a sphere of religious instruction are taken into private homes, testifying to a double process of domestication of religious content and sacralisation of domestic space.

2 From Public Performance to Domestic Devotion

The seminal significance of the process of domestication of religious knowledge – the transposition of religious oral and written materials to domestic space – becomes even more evident through the analysis of textual sources in which lay people put the teachings transmitted by preachers and spiritual advisors into practice. Cases in point of this practice are the miscellanies partly copied, but also re-arranged and owned, by the Sienese *lanaiuolo* Marco di Francesco Checchi (Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, I.V.31 and I.VIII.37, both dating from the second half of the fifteenth century).³⁰ Marco adds several personal notes in his miscellanies, linking the manuscripts to his own family and in particular to his son Francesco, and describing how through the performance of scribal activities he is fulfilling his parental task of providing his offspring with a religious education.³¹ Marco’s agency and engagement in the construction of his own, but also shared and communal, religious identity becomes clearest in his comments to two sermons by Cherubino, held in the cathedral of Siena during Lent 1477. Marco explains that ‘le dette prediche

²⁸ Ibid., fol. f3r.

²⁹ Cherubino da Spoleto, *Regola della vita spirituale* fol. b5r.

³⁰ For a first discussion of the miscellanies by Marco di Francesco, see Corbellini S., “Beyond Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy. A New Approach to Late Medieval Religious Reading”, in Corbellini S. (ed.), *Cultures of Religious Reading in the Late Middle Ages: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion* (Turnhout: 2013) 33–53, at 39–41.

³¹ Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, MS I.VIII.37, fol. 160v.

sono necessarie d'ogni fedele cristiano a uolere essere buono' (the sermons are essential for every believer willing to be a good Christian) and that after having heard the sermons he had fallen in love with the text and had decided to have them copied 'bene intendere e gustare e per la grazia di messer domenedio metterle ad eseguzione' (to understand them better and to taste them and put them into practice with God's help).³²

Interestingly enough, the two selected sermons touch specifically on this theme: the sharing of acquired religious knowledge within families, and how to re-elaborate the ephemeral act of preaching into a stable and long-standing process of transfer of religious knowledge. Marco is entirely fascinated by the process sketched by Cherubino, which in his view leads to a satisfactory acquisition of religious knowledge. The process consists of seven steps: 'sollecitazione' (willingness to listen to the sermon and to engage in religious activities), 'attentione' (attentiveness during the sermon in order to better understand the explanation of the Scriptures), 'discrezione' (thoughtfulness), 'devotione' (devotion), 'ruminazione' (rumination, i.e. considering the words heard during the sermon again after having memorized the most important passages), 'comunicazione' (communication, i.e. retelling the central message of the sermon to those who did not attend) and finally 'operatione' (action, i.e. applying the lessons explained by the preacher to daily behaviours and deeds). The 'uditore' (listener) has to turn into an 'operatore della parola di dio' (agent in the transmission of God's word).³³ Marco evidently applies this process in his own miscellanies: after having been present at the sermon, he was struck by its contents and usefulness, and actively engages in the wider dissemination of the message in his family network.

The same process is visible in the spiritual diary kept by Margherita Soderini.³⁴ She briefly describes her life rules and introduces herself in her manuscript as a follower of the Augustinian friar Mariano da Genazzano:

Queste tre cose bisogna avere, vo' tu avere lo Spirito santo: la prima, pensa sempre di Dio; l'altra, aopera chose che piacino a Dio; l'altra astenerti de' cinque sentimenti del corpo. Ad operare in bene e vertuosamente, a chonosciere chi à lo spirito santo, bisogna questi 3 sengni: el primo si è essere innocente; e bisogna la penitentia e bisogna udire volentieri la parola di Dio e parlare volentieri di Dio [...] Questo ò ritratto

32 Siena, Biblioteca Comunale degli Intronati, MS I.V.31, fol. 126v.

33 Ibid., fols. 117v–124r.

34 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano xxxv 98. Margherita started writing her diary on 4 April 1484 and continued her note-taking until 4 March 1489.

a mia chonsolatione delle prediche di maestro Mariano romano, di quaresima, in Santa Maria del Fiore in Firenze. Se ci fusi manchamento sarebe mio difetto, non arei tenuto bene a mente. Io Margherita figliuola di meser Tomaso Soderini ò scritto questo di mia mano: chi lo legie preghi Idio per me. S'egli è scritto bene è stato dono di dio e lui ringratio; tutto el bene vien da Dio, tutto el male fo mio.³⁵

In her diary, Margherita summarizes the sermons of Mariano da Genazzano that she has attended, as well as extracts from personal conversations between her, her daughters and the friar. She remembers, for example, that during their last spiritual conversation, probably in her house, Mariano gave her some basic life instructions: 'ch'io caminasi dirita' (to walk the line), 'ch'io non dipregiasi persona' (to despise no one), 'ch'io non mordesì persona' (not to be aggressive), 'ch'io credesi ogniuno fusi buono' (to see goodness in everybody), 'ch'io avesi charità' (to be charitable).³⁶

The reconstruction of Margherita's *reportatio* techniques makes clear that she was writing down Mariano's sermons from memory once she had returned home. The passage 'from ears to hand', however, is not a passive transition: at some point Margherita changes the adjectives to feminine form, instead of using the masculine adjectives that were probably used in the original sermon as a form of 'general calling'. This is likely the result of a process of rumination, in which the words spoken for a general public are not just recalled, but also refashioned into a specific message directed to the individual believer.³⁷ She is moreover very keen in transforming the words of the preacher into lessons for herself (as is evident from her use of the pronoun *tu*), as part of a discipline

35 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano xxxv 98, fol. 2v: 'You need to have three things if you want to receive the Holy Ghost: the first, think always of God; practice things that please God; and the other, refrain from the five senses. To act well and have virtuous life in order to know the Holy Ghost, you should follow these three signs: the first is to be pure and innocent; and you should repent; and you should often listen to God's word and willingly speak of God. I have noted this from the sermons of Mariano romano, during Lent in Santa Maria del Fiore in Florence, for my consolation. If there is any mistake, it has been my fault as I have not remembered well. I, Margherita daughter of Tomaso Soderini, have written this in my own hand: those reading it should pray for me. If it is well written, it has been a gift from God and I thank him; all good comes from God, all evil from me'. On Margherita's manuscript see Zafarana Z., "Per la storia religiosa di Firenze nel Quattrocento", *Studi medievali* 9, 2 (1968) 1017–1113, at 1019; Oguro S., "From Ears to Hand, from Hand to Heart: Writing and Internalising Preaching in Fifteenth-Century Florence", in Muzzarelli M.G. (ed.), *From Words to Deeds: The Effectiveness of Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout: 2014) 47–64.

36 Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, MS Magliabechiano xxxv 98, fol. 3v.

37 Oguro, "From Ears to Hand" 55.

that can help her on her ascetic path. Her *reportatio* demonstrates her own method of internalization: by writing down the preacher's words, transforming their addressee into *tu*, and so creating a 'calling' to herself, she practices a discipline of words.³⁸ Moreover, the performance of writing, facilitating the process of rumination, is likely followed by the process of reading and re-reading, individually or together with her daughters, which ignites a continuous process of 'rumination' and 'communication'.

Margherita's domestication of Mariano's teachings likewise had a clear impact that went beyond the boundaries of the written pages. She was particularly successful in 'implementing' the preacher's lessons, as is clear from a letter written in December 1492 by Piero Pucci about the betrothal of his brother Roberto with Margherita's daughter:

La madre tu saj chi è Mona Maria de Soderini donna nella città nostra venerabile et honoranda quanto alcuna altra, si per le bellezze sue, si per la nobiltà del sangue suo si per la prudentia che [per Dio] quando l'ho udita parlare mi ha facto stupire, si per la sanctimonia della vita tua.³⁹

Her piety and her attitude in speaking, the qualities that Mariano had asked her to develop, had transformed her into a 'person commanding respect in the city' and had a clear impact on her familial and social network and capital.⁴⁰

3 Agency and Responsibilities

The sources presented in this brief overview demonstrate to what extent the process of formation of a religious *habitus*, but also participation in the dynamics of dissemination of religious knowledge, is not just a matter of possibilities but also – and foremost – a matter of agency and taking responsibility. Reading and discussing religious texts, extrapolating religious and moral teachings, and meditating on the texts are ways of performing religious life in a domestic setting and of engaging in a necessary process of individual and social transformation. Lay people were stimulated through sermons, letters and treatises to

38 Ibid., 56.

39 The text is cited and translated in Rubin P.L., *Images and Identity in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (New Haven: 2007) 238, 301–302: 'You know who the mother is, Mona Maria di Soderini, a venerable woman in our city, who is honored as greatly as any other, as much for her beauty as for the nobility of her blood and for her prudence and manner of speaking as well as for the holiness of her life. I was amazed when I heard her speak'.

40 Rubin, *Images and Identity* 239. See also Gagliardi, "Ruoli e spazi destinati alle donne" 75.

transform their domestic settings into sacred spaces, in which their religious education had to be refined, cultivated and put into practice in their daily, familial and social life. Reading activities, either performed individually or communally, played a fundamental role in this process: reiterating the messages conveyed through the sermon, inspiring the meditation, offering the possibility of starting a dialogue and teaching how to raise the mind to God.

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