

Speaking the Truth:

God's Law and Prophecy in *Seinte Katerine*

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The early thirteenth-century *Seinte Katerine*, of the “Katherine Group” of anchoritic works, readily lends itself to comparison with two groups of texts. The companion saints’ lives of Juliana and Margaret provide an obvious starting point: the three legends are associated in several manuscripts, they share a common genre, and they even have a number of themes and plot elements in common. Secondly, this version of the legend of Saint Katherine of Alexandria is one of many extant accounts of that saint’s martyrdom, each of which varies from the others in details, but also in major elements. Jacqueline Jenkins has recently observed that “the ability to adapt, and in so doing represent or reflect contemporary social, political or religious trends, is an important feature of the St Katherine legends, and must account for a large part of the saint’s enduring popularity.”¹ A number of scholars have noted that Katherine stands apart from Juliana and Margaret as much as she shares common features with them.² However, the distinctive features of *Seinte Katerine*, relative both to *Seinte Juliene* and *Seinte Margarete* and to other versions of the Katherine legend, warrant further attention. Foremost among these features is the thirteenth-century author’s emphasis upon Katherine’s learnedness in, and fidelity to, God’s law. While this feature is present in the stories of Juliana and Margaret, and in various portrayals of Katherine, it achieves prominence uniquely in the *Seinte Katerine* legend. Two related themes in that legend appear to be inextricable from its focus on God’s law: the author’s emphasis on his heroine’s “true belief,” and her association with the great prophets of Holy Scripture. This multi-faceted focus results in a text which fashions Katherine (an alleged fourth-century Alexandrian saint who probably never existed) into an embodiment, in a single life, of the principles which were central to the lives of its

anchoritic readers³—even though Katherine's actions would not have served as literal models for their own.

The earliest known narrative of the martyrdom of Saint Katherine appears in the Greek *Menologium Basilicum*, a collection of legends compiled for the Emperor Basil the First (d. 886).⁴ Comprising only a dozen or so lines, this simple narrative is elaborated upon in various Greek, Latin, and vernacular versions. The early thirteenth-century *Seinte Katerine* survives in three manuscripts: British Library MS Cotton Titus D. xviii, in which the anchoritic guidebook *Ancrene Wisse* also appears; Bodleian MS Bodley 34; and British Library MS Royal 17. A. xxvii, where it is found with the legends of Saint Juliana and Saint Margaret. It is a translation and adaptation of an eleventh- or early twelfth-century Latin version, conventionally referred to as the Vulgate, and later abbreviated in the Shorter Vulgate.⁵ There has been speculation that the English author may have been working from a manuscript which was intermediate to these two.⁶ While different aspects of the legend are emphasised in each, the Latin and the Katherine Group English version vary little in overall plot and structure. In the Middle English version,⁷ Maxentius, a heathen, is overcome in battle by Constantine, flees Rome for Alexandria, and sets himself up there as king. He begins to wage war on Holy Church and to draw Christians into heathendom. When he issues a decree for all to come to the temple and worship his heathen gods' idols, the citizens obey. Only one, the eighteen-year old maiden Katherine, refuses. In fact, she boldly confronts Maxentius, exhorting him to abandon such vain worship and turn instead to the One True God. Maxentius does not take kindly to this criticism of his ways, and continues to assert their validity. He promises Katherine royal rewards if she will only change her misguided notions, which she refuses to do. Maxentius cannot himself debate the assertions she makes, but summons fifty of the allegedly wisest men in the land to do so. Katherine and one of the fifty debate key points of theology, especially the humanity and divinity of Christ, and the maiden leaves the men utterly speechless. In fact, they are so convinced by what she has said that they convert to Christianity, after which they are thrown into a great fire by Maxentius. He again summons Katherine, and offers her more rewards if she will worship his gods. She refuses, and is stripped, beaten, and imprisoned. Meanwhile, Maxentius' Queen, Augusta, and the leader of his knights, Porphirius, are curious about Katherine, and they pay her a visit in prison, where she is able to convince them of the joys of the heavenly kingdom. Porphirius in turn converts over two hundred knights. Maxentius gives Katherine an ultimatum: worship his gods or die, but she remains steadfast, and an instrument of torture is prepared—the now famous four-

wheeled device designed to tear her apart. At Katherine's prayerful bidding, however, an angel intervenes and the machine breaks apart, killing four thousand pagan bystanders instead. By now, Maxentius is completely crazed. His queen, having kept her new faith silent until now, confronts him, and he responds by having her tortured and killed—her breasts ripped from her body, and her head chopped off. Porphyrius, against the tyrant's express orders, buries her body, and he continues the verbal assault on Maxentius. He and his now-Christian men are brutally beheaded, and Maxentius finally commands Katherine's execution, a martyrdom to which she calmly submits. Milk mingled with blood flows from her, and angels carry her body off to be buried on Mount Sinai, where healing oil is said to flow unceasingly from her tomb.

This narrative shares some elements with *Seinte Margarete* and *Seinte Juliene*. Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne note the common features of the three legends, pointing out that “[e]ach is a reinforcement of the others, with exactly the same type of saint selected in each case and strong similarities of treatment in structure, themes, and style.”⁸ *Hali Meidhad*, another of the Katherine Group texts, presents all three saints as exempla of chastity.⁹ Nonetheless, Katherine is differentiated from Margaret and Juliana, particularly by the far greater emphasis placed on her wisdom and intellect, and rather less attention paid to her corporeality.¹⁰ Both *Seinte Margarete* and *Seinte Juliene* contain sensational battles with demons, against whom maidenhood is one of the greatest weapons: “O þe mihte of meidhad as þu / art iweþnet to weorin agein us.”¹¹ *Seinte Katerine*, while including the torture of Queen Augusta, the foiled torture of Katherine, and the beheading of many of the converts, places comparatively little emphasis on the body and temptations thereof.¹² There is somewhat more attention paid to Katherine's role as virgin bride of Christ in this version than in the Latin,¹³ but far less than in several other English versions.¹⁴ Any attention paid to things of the flesh is carefully placed in a spiritual context, with a focus on reading all that happens in the created order as either a reflection or a denial of the divine order.

In *Seinte Katerine*, this correspondence between the two orders is developed most fully in terms of notions of law. According to John Alford, the predominant view of law in the Christian Middle Ages was that all law, divine, natural, and positive (legislated), is one law,¹⁵ and that any positive law “not in conformity with these higher laws...is by definition not law at all but an abuse of law.”¹⁶ The authority of Maxentius' positive laws is given an air of illegitimacy by the legend's frame concerning the emperor Constantine, whose Christian rule had been driven out by

Maxentius, but who would eventually be restored to power. Still, Katherine's refusal to obey Maxentius' decree of idol worship places her in contravention of the existing law of the state, and this legend stages a confrontation not only between its two central characters, but also between the laws each espouses: Maxentius' laws are revealed for what they really are—vain pronouncements with no divine or natural law to support them—and Katherine's are vindicated. The unseen divine laws which she upholds are inextricably linked to the positive laws which govern her behaviour, and to natural law, over which God has control (as Katherine insists that he does, and as we see by the miracles he performs for and through her).

Maxentius' decree comes into direct conflict with what would be for Katherine the first of the most important of all positive laws—the Ten Commandments. That first commandment states “you shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3), and it is the foundation of the other nine; if it is disobeyed, then the others will not even be heard. The Judeo-Christian God, however, does not ask for a blind following; significantly, the first commandment is preceded by the reason for which it and all the others should be heeded: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). God's positive laws are explicitly based upon his divine will and power to direct natural laws in such a way as to maintain a covenantal relationship with his people. Katherine's adherence to God's positive law is not based upon blind faith, coercion, or mere opinion, but rather upon her knowledge (largely through her exemplary familiarity with God's written law, Scripture) of what God has shown of his true power and love throughout history.

There is nothing that more succinctly summarises these acts of power and love than the creeds of the Christian faith, which play an important role in Katherine's confrontation with Maxentius. Frances Young explains that, while “controversy undoubtedly contributed to the formation of the creeds, and also to their adaptation as ‘tests of orthodoxy,’”¹⁷ the creeds originated “as summaries of faith taught to new Christians by their local bishop” (3). The creeds are in many ways “the natural successors to the summary passages of proclamation and acclamation of God and his saving action found in the Jewish scriptures” (12). While asserting that his own faith and law have a legitimate source, Maxentius claims that Katherine's are unfounded. The argument he employs, however, ironically sets out the main points of the second section of the Apostles' Creed,¹⁸ which pertains specifically to the person of Christ:

Me, hwet / is mare meadschipe þen forte leuen on him, ant seggen he is / Godes sune, þe þe Giws demden ant heaðene ahongeden, ant þet / he wes akennet of Marie, a meiden, buten monnes man ant iboren / of hire bute bruche of hire bodi, deide ant wes iburiet, ant herhede / helle, ant aras of deað ant steah into heouene, ant schal eft o / domesdei cumen ba te demen þe cwike ant te deade? (117-23)¹⁹

This is precisely what Katherine does believe, and the bulk of her own argument with the spokesman for the fifty scholars rests on an elaboration of the nature of Christ. While Maxentius' words bear a striking resemblance to the Apostles' Creed, Katherine's sophisticated theological explanations about the dual nature of Christ and about the Trinity suggest the more elaborate Athanasian Creed, careful as it is about defining these very doctrines. John Capgrave's fifteenth-century rendition of the Katherine legend asserts that Athanasius, the fourth-century Alexandrian bishop thought to be the writer of the Creed bearing his name, was the original author of that legend, and was converted to Christianity by Katherine herself.²⁰ Capgrave's framing device is almost certainly fictitious,²¹ but the interesting point is that he thought Athanasius a fitting author for such a legend, characterised as it is by Katherine's credal orthodoxy and her theological sophistication.

Just as the second section of the Creed follows naturally from the first, Katherine's discussion of Christ builds on an argument for the power and love of God the Father. To the pagans it seems illogical and contrary to every natural law that God could die, mortals could become immortal, and God could be both divine and human:

Alle wise / witen wel þet hit is agein riht ant agein leaue of euch cundelich / lahe þet Godd, þe is undeadlich, mahe deað drehen, ant deadlich / mon mahe deað ouercumen; ant tah hit mahte nu beo þet he ba / were, soð Godd ant soð mon efter þet tu munnest, an he mahte / inohreaðe of þeos twa þinges, ba somet nanesweis. (354-59)²²

Katherine replies that God made humankind in his own image out of the clay of the ground; if he was capable of this, he was capable of other miracles, including the incarnation and resurrection. It was his goodness and justice that prompted him to save humanity in the precise manner he chose, though in his power he could have done it any other way. The listening scholars, allegedly the wisest men in the East, recognise the wisdom and power of the triune God in Katherine's words, and they tell Maxentius

that they will abandon his law and beliefs: “we leaued þi lahe / ant al þi bileauc ant turned alle to Crist” (491-2). They have learned from Katherine “treowe bileauc” (505), and desire to be baptised. The credal elements of Katherine’s argument have in effect served as catechesis for these men²³ who, in the fire in which they die by Maxentius’ order, will be kindled and baptised with “þe halwende lei of þe Hali Gast,” the purifying law of the Holy Ghost (513).

The *Seinte Katerine* author repeatedly focuses on Katherine’s fidelity to “true belief” (art. 30).²⁴ While she fulfils one standard criterion for a heroic young maiden—beauty, being “feier ant freolich o wlite ant o westum” (24)—the author insists that her true belief is far more important: “[ah] zet— / þet is mare wurð—steadeluest wiðinnen of treowe bileauc” (24-25). The Latin Vulgate version calls Katherine “religiosa fide” (72), pious or scrupulous in faith, but the English author’s phrase, with its variants “soðe bileauc” and “riht(e) bileauc,” occurs no fewer than eleven times in his text,²⁵ giving it emphasis not present in the Latin (nor in any other English version of the legend I have encountered). Katherine’s belief, like that exemplified in the creeds, does not reflect mere abstract theological reasoning, but develops from the embodied history of what God has done, and promised yet to do. One detail in *Seinte Katerine* may serve as an example of what its author means to suggest in the notion of “true belief.” Both the Latin and the English versions tell us that Katherine refused to partake of childish entertainments and songs of love, devoting herself instead to the study of the Scriptures. The English author adds a further comment that she had either her eyes or her heart, and often both together, on Holy Writ (39-40). This evocative image suggests that faithfulness is a matter of both letter and spirit, intellect and will, theory and practice.

The desired union of the letter and spirit of God’s law lies at the core of the message from the author of the *Ancrene Wisse* to the women who were the intended audience of the anchoritic guidebook. The author plays with notions of religious rules as he points out to his readers the importance of a correspondence among outer dictates, the inclinations of the heart, and behaviour. This spiritual advisor was likely well aware of the contemporary demand that religious houses submit themselves to a recognised formal Rule,²⁶ but he hopes that his charges will live by a rule *de corde puro et consciencia bona et fide non ficta*,²⁷ “of a pure heart and a good conscience and true faith (literally a faith not fictitious).” Challenges to faithful Christian life come not only from the blatantly heathen, but also from those who profess religiosity, but are like whited sepulchres (11). The anchoritic life is characterised as the highest

Christian vocation, and its practitioners are expected to embrace the way of the cross (180), the perfect fulfilment of the self-sacrificing law of love. The legends of Katherine, Juliana, and Margaret, then, “are ‘passions’ of their respective protagonists,” allying them with the central anchoritic image of martyrdom or crucifixion.²⁸

In *Seinte Katerine* especially, however, this martyrdom is associated not only with that of Christ himself, but also with that of the biblical prophets, who risked (and in some cases gave) their lives because of their zeal for God’s law. Katherine’s fidelity to, instrumentality for, and suffering because of God’s word and the incarnate word, Christ, link her to the prophets of Holy Scripture. Jesus himself links his own suffering both to that of the faithful prophets of old and to that of those people who chose to follow him during his own lifetime and after. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells the persecuted that they are blessed when they suffer because of him, for “in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matthew 5:11-12). Similarly, John 15:18-23 and 16:3, and Hebrews 11:35-40 catalogue the fates of many who suffered for remaining true to the faith.

Explicit and implicit references to various prophets appear throughout *Seinte Katerine*. Katherine’s argument against idols and vain sacrifices at lines 81-110 draws heavily upon the biblical prophets. For example, God’s words through Isaiah,

I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats....Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! (Isa 1:11-14, 16-17)²⁹

are echoed by Katherine’s:

Des heouenliche lauerd lueð treowe bileauc, / ant nowðer blod ne ban of unforgult ahte, ah þet me halde ant / heie his halewinde heastes. (*Seinte Katerine*, 81-83)³⁰

Her denunciation of idols gives the same arguments the prophets use: idols are worthless, and worship of them mere folly, because they are inanimate objects formed from matter which God himself created.³¹ Katherine also quotes the very similar argument of David, who is often classed with the prophets, as she explains further to Maxentius why she will not worship his idols:

*Deus autem noster in celo omnia quecumque / uoluit fecit. Simulacra gentium
argentum et aurum et cetera usque / ad Similes illis fiant, “Vre Go[dd] is in
heouene þet wurcheð al / þet he wule. Deos maumez beoð imaket of gold
ant of seoluer al / wið monnes honden—muð bute speche, ehnen bute
si[h]ðe, / earen buten herunge, honden bute felunge, fet bute gonge; þeo
þet ham makieð mote beon ilich ham, ant alle þe[t] [on] ham / trustede.”
(180-87)³²*

Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18:18-39) constitutes a suggestive parallel to Katherine's confrontation with Maxentius and his hired scholars. Katherine is also compared to the prophet Daniel at lines 662-66 (Dan 14:33-39), and by her burial on Mount Sinai she is associated with Moses, who received God's law there (ll. 903-4). Although the *Seinte Katerine* author does not explicitly call Katherine a prophet, the force of these allusions, scattered throughout other versions of the legend but given such prominence and consistency only in *Seinte Katerine*,³³ invite us so to characterise her.

Capgrave, in his *Life of St. Katharine of Alexandria*, refers to Katherine as a prophet, suggesting that she foretold Maxentius' defeat and death.³⁴ But the heroine of the thirteenth-century *Seinte Katerine* is no seer; in fact, biblical prophecy is not primarily a predictive activity. As Theodore Steinberg writes,

The focus of [the Prophets'] revelation was not what would happen in the future but rather that their people were behaving badly, were violating the ritual or, more often, the moral teachings of their religion and that unless they repented and reformed, returned to the practices that had been prescribed for them, they would be punished. Their point was reform, not prediction.³⁵

The link between biblical law and prophecy is permanent: because God's people “have forgotten the Torah, the five books of Moses, and the other scriptures,” prophets are called “to carry the fragmenting memory of Israel back to its roots in that source.”³⁶ The prophets often must call their people away from the religious beliefs and practices of neighbouring nations of idol-worshippers, and pagans become linked with unfaithful Israelites by their alleged disregard of the one true God.

Refusal to acknowledge Christ's lordship and his true nature constitutes an analogous, yet even more grievous, offense than Israel's refusal to acknowledge Yahweh.

As Jesus himself points out (in Jo 15:18-23 and 16:3), those who hated God the Father also hate him and will hate his followers, and he berates even his disciples for not recognising the continuity between Father and Son (Jo 14:7-10). The prophecies of Isaiah are especially useful in understanding this continuity, both because Isaiah attempted to call his people to account for their lack of true belief and practice of God's law, and because Isaiah later became the "prophet with much to say on the suffering and martyrdom of Christ,"³⁷ the one who recognised most clearly how Christ would fulfil God's law. There is also a well-established, though apocryphal, tradition of the martyrdom of Isaiah.³⁸ Katherine twice links these prophetic roles in the Middle English text: "*Perdam sapientiam sapientium et intellectum intelligentium reprobabo,* / 'Ich chulle fordo þe wisdom of þeos wise worldmen,' he seið, / 'ant awarpen þe wit of þeose world-witti'" (177-79, cf. 324-27).³⁹ In this particular form the words are Saint Paul's in 1 Corinthians 1:19, where he is quoting Isaiah 29:14. The context of the passage in Isaiah is the promise of the destruction of the unfaithful and the redemption of the faithful; that of the Pauline passage is an appeal to the paradoxical power of the cross, through which God has "made foolish the wisdom of the world" (1 Cor 1:20). In both instances in which Katherine quotes this passage she links true wisdom to love, in the person of Christ. Though she refuses earthly marriage, and appears to lose her life, she is shown to gain true love and life in her ultimate union with Christ in the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Central to prophecy, then, is a speaking forth of God's word and an acknowledgment of, and recalling to, all that he has set out in his providential law, including the fulfilment or embodiment of that law in the person of Christ. Any attempt to contravene the terms of that law is doomed to failure, just as the words that assert anything contrary to God's law are empty and ineffective. Both Maxentius and Katherine claim that their words are true, but the former can claim no divine law behind his pronouncements which, appropriately, came to be ignored. Although the Alexandrian Christians made sacrifices to his idols for fear of death, all those who heard Katherine recite her beliefs were convinced of their truth, and disobeyed Maxentius. Despite his forbidding it, the bodies of the converts were given decent burials (822-24). Even though the ruler has the power of life and death over his citizens, Maxentius' supposed power is shown to be no power at all, just as his idols are powerless. The swords his executioners wield possess only temporal might, while the Word of God, "sharper than any double-edged sword,"⁴⁰ carries with it the eternal power of truth.

The confrontation between Katherine and Maxentius even resembles a trial by battle, in which the truth of the oath(s) of one or both parties to a legal dispute is “proven” in combat. Although there was considerable debate over whether this and other trials by ordeal should be sanctioned by the church—and the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 decreed that they should not⁴¹—the principles behind such methods of proof are consistent with the claims, made by Katherine’s words, to validity or to authority. To some, ordeals seemed to require “the miraculous intervention of God into the regular affairs of judicial procedure and [to] constitute a flagrant tempting of God,”⁴² but Katherine claims that God does intervene miraculously in human affairs. Most saints’ legends of course set up their protagonists as mediators who can help expedite this process. Through her victory over the scholar debating for Maxentius—pyrrhic though it may seem by worldly standards—Katherine vindicates not only her argument but also God, for whom she acts as something of a champion.⁴³ The “oath” which is proven true is none other than the basic creed of Christian faith, and the victory is Katherine’s only insofar as God has won it for her. A parallel may be drawn, perhaps, with the famous story of Constantine’s own victory in battle, which he attributed to God and most specifically to the power of the cross. Katherine is, after all, the sole faithful citizen of Constantine’s Christianised Alexandria, and we are encouraged to make the connection between these two valiant “warriors” as Katherine “wepnede / hire wið soðe bileauc, ant wrat on hire breoste ant biforen hire / teð ant te tunge of hire muð þe hali rode-taken...” (67-9).⁴⁴ The cross leads Katherine as it led Constantine.

The *Seinte Katerine* author’s careful balancing of his heroine’s virtue and wisdom with the glory due to God strikes a chord which resonates within the context of the anchoritic spirituality to which this version of the legend belongs. Unlike the contemporary *vitae* of the continental *mulieres sanctae* such as Marie d’Oignies and Lutgard of Aywières,⁴⁵ aimed at winning “official approval for the beguines,”⁴⁶ the saints’ lives of the Katherine Group portray heroines far removed in time and place from their readers. They were written not to legitimise the saints’ lives, but to encourage and instruct. Beguines lived piously in the world, earning their keep by their own labours, while anchoresses were expected to consider themselves dead to the world and its concerns.⁴⁷ The former venerated the affective Eucharist, the latter the ascetic cross, as the central expressions of their relationship to God—though admittedly there is some overlap in the symbolism of these two objects of devotion. Notions of prophecy also differ between the *vitae* of the beguines and the *Seinte Katerine* legend. More concerned than their anchoritic sisters with the workings of this

world, the beguines delivered prophecies that were specific and predictive in nature, coming to fulfilment in the lifetimes of the prophetesses, and strengthening their claims to saintliness. Both Marie and Lutgard make accurate predictions about their own deaths,⁴⁸ as well as about many other events, while, as we have seen, Katherine's prophetic utterances are concerned more with articulating the larger plan of God's providential laws.

Both the beguines and the anchoresses were "practising life-styles which were very much on the edge of what was permissible and what was not permissible from the point of view of the Church,"⁴⁹ yet it would be difficult to find a more orthodox statement of belief than the credal formulations at the heart of *Seinte Katerine*. While Katherine was a favourite saint for the beguines,⁵⁰ the English were not quick to adopt the ways of their more enthusiastic counterparts,⁵¹ who may well have seemed quite heretical to them. Indeed, it is tempting to look for specific contemporary threats to orthodox belief in the early thirteenth century, and to suggest that *Seinte Katerine* was written as a wake-up call to would-be heretics, or as a rallying cry for the Crusades. After all, this version of the Katherine Legend was likely written within a very few years of the Fourth Lateran Council, which had as two of its chief aims the eradication of heresy and the recovery of the Holy Land.⁵² Whether this text was intended for or served such purposes will remain unknown. As reading material for its primary anchoritic audience, however, it provides an heroine who defends the laws of God by speaking them forth not only in words but in her self-effacing life. The anchoritic life was one not lightly entered upon, and its adherents were probably not in great need of persuasive arguments as to the truth and authority of God's laws. But they may well have craved comfort and assurance that their singleness of belief, while leading to isolation from the world, would also end in communion with God and in merciful judgment. Their lives, then, were in keeping with his divine laws which have been made manifest in natural law throughout the whole of salvation history.

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Notes

1 Jacqueline Jenkins, "*such peple as be not letterd in Scripture*: Popular Devotion and the Legend of St. Katherine of Alexandria in Late Medieval England." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Western Ontario, 1996), p. 15.

2 See, for example, Catherine Innes-Parker, "Fragmentation and Reconstruction: Images of the Female Body in *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group," *Comitatus* 26 (1995), pp. 27-52, p. 30; also Elizabeth Robertson, "The Corporeality of Female Sanctity in *The Life of Saint Margaret*," in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski and Timea Szell (Ithaca and London, 1991), pp. 268-87, p. 285.

3 For the view that *Seinte Katerine*, *Seinte Margarete*, and *Seinte Juliene* were meant particularly for anchoresses, see Nicholas Watson, "The Methods and Objectives of Thirteenth-Century Anchoritic Devotion," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Exeter Symposium IV*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 132-53, p. 139. Of course, as Millett and Wogan-Browne make clear concerning *Ancrene Wisse*, a single assumed audience was rare in the Middle Ages. See Bella Millett and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds., *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford, 1990), p. xii.

4 Eugen Eickenel, ed., *The Life of St. Katherine*. E.E.T.S. o.s. 80 (London, 1884), p. viii.

5 See S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne and E. J. Dobson, eds, *Seinte Katerine in The Katherine Group*. E.E.T.S. s.s. 7 (Oxford, 1981), pp. xvi-xix.

6 See d'Ardenne and Dobson, p. xxx; Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson, eds and trans. *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (New York and Mahwah, New Jersey, 1991), p. 261. The Vulgate is printed, alongside the Middle English Royal manuscript text, in Eickenel. All Latin quotations are from this edition, and references are to page numbers.

7 I am using d'Ardenne and Dobson's edition. All references to this text are to line numbers. Savage and Watson's translation in *Anchoritic Spirituality* is extremely readable, and I am heavily indebted to it, as well as to their notes and introductory material. I owe a further debt of gratitude to Nicholas Watson for his many helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

8 Millett and Wogan-Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women*, p. xxi.

9 Watson, "Methods and Objectives," p. 133.

10 Both Robertson, "Corporeality of Female Sanctity," p. 285, and Innes-Parker, "Fragmentation and Reconstruction," p. 30 n. 5, note this difference in emphasis, but both downplay the differences in the context of discussions about corporeality.

11 S.R.T.O. d'Ardenne, ed. *Pe Liflade ant te Passium of Seinte Juliene* E.E.T.S. o.s. 248 (London, 1961), ll. 476-77. Compare this arming of Juliana with virginity to the arming of Katherine with the cross, *Seinte Katerine*, ll. 67-69.

12 The body is not unimportant in this legend, as the emphasis on Christ's incarnation helps to point out; however, the author seems to want to suggest that it is of secondary concern. Like the author of *Ancrene Wisse*, who insists that any outward rules of conduct, dress, etc. must be subservient to the inner rule of the heart, the author of *Seinte Katerine* is careful to locate the true source of spiritual warfare in the heart, mind, and will, though its effects are clearly felt in the flesh.

13 Savage and Watson's notes to their translation (in *Anchoritic Spirituality*) of *Seinte Katerine* point out a number of similarities and differences between these two versions. See especially note 30, pp. 426-27 on Katherine as bride of Christ.

14 Capgrave's *Life of St. Katherine of Alexandria*, for example, contains a lengthy narrative about the Alexandrian court's attempts to find a husband for Katherine, and her adamant refusals to be wed (except to Christ). See John Capgrave, *The Life of St. Katharine of Alexandria*, ed. Carl Horstmann. E.E.T.S. o.s. 100 (London, 1893).

15 John A. Alford, "Literature and the Law in Medieval England," *PMLA* 92 (1977), pp. 941-51, p. 942.

16 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* 1a2ae.qu93, art. 3; qu. 96, art. 4; et passim, quoted as cited by Alford, pp. 942-3, from *Summa theologiae* ed. and trans. Thomas Gilby (London, 1966).

17 Frances M. Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London, 1991), p. 14.

18 Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, pp. 423-44 n. 10, note this similarity of Maxentius' words to the Apostles' Creed, and explain that this correspondence is a creation of the English author.

19 "Come, now! What is more mad than to believe in him and say he is God's Son, he whom the Jews condemned and the pagans hanged; and that he was born of Mary, a virgin, without means of man, and born of her without breach in her body; died and was buried, and harrowed hell, arose from death and ascended into heaven, and will come again on Doomsday to judge both the quick and the dead?" (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 265).

20 Capgrave, *Prologue*, lines 127-34, pp. 163-8.

21 See the discussion in Jenkins, "such peple as be not letterd," pp. 130-36. It is not known whether Capgrave used the early thirteenth-century version, but one detail suggests he may have: while the Latin Vulgate version, the *Golden Legend*, the *South English Legendary*, and the "Vita beate Katarine" all mention that Katherine's body was buried on Mount Sinai, none of these mentions, as do both *Seinte Katerine* and Capgrave's *Life* (as well as Bokenham, following Capgrave), that Sinai was the place where Moses received the Law (SK 904; Capgrave ch. 24, line 1917). The "Vita beate Katerine," a Middle English text extant in the early fifteenth-century "Red Book of Bath" (MS. Longleat 55), has been edited in Jenkins, "such peple as be not letterd," Appendix, pp. 244-75.

22 "All the wise know well that it is counter to the truth, and against the authority of every natural law, that God who is immortal can suffer death, and that mortals can overcome death; and even if it could be, now, that he was both, true God and true human according to what you recount, he could easily enough do one of these two things—but by no means both together" (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 270).

23 According to Frances Young, "the liturgical use of the questions at the moment of baptism survived alongside the development of the creeds and the custom of memorising a creed and reciting it back before baptism." *Making of the Creeds*, p. 6.

24 Compare the Athanasian Creed's emphasis on "right faith."

25 *Seinte Katerine*, lines 25, 68, 81, 259, 505, 523, 553, 601, 639, 870, 893.

26 See Margaret Deanesly, *A History of the Medieval Church 590-1500*. 9th ed. (London, 1969; rep. 1991), p. 148.

27 J.R.R. Tolkien, ed., *Ancrene Wisse*. E.E.T.S. o.s. 249 (London, 1962), pp. 5-6. All references to this text are to page numbers.

28 Watson, "Methods and Objectives," p. 142.

29 See also Mic 6:6-8 and Ps 50:7-15.

30 "This heavenly Lord loves true faith: not the blood and bones of guiltless cattle, but that people hold and honor his holy commandments." (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 264)

31 *Seinte Katerine*, lines 83-110; Jer 10:1-16; Isa 40:18-26, 44:6-20.

32 “Our God is in heaven, who does all that he wills. These idols are made of gold and of silver, all by the hands of humans—their mouths without speech, eyes without sight, ears without hearing, hands without feeling, feet without movement. Those who made them must be like them—and all those who trust in them” (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 266); see Ps 115:3-8.

33 Other versions contain some of the allusions to prophets, but none is so consistently and forcefully directed towards this characterisation of Katherine, and towards the association of law and prophecy as is the thirteenth-century *Seinte Katerine*. The Latin Vulgate version, the Legend’s probable source, contains almost all of these allusions; however, *Seinte Katerine*, with its greater emphasis on “true belief” and on the incarnation, gives a context to them that expounds the many dimensions of prophetic discourse.

34 Capgrave, *Life*, 5.18.1093-1110, pp. 374-75.

35 Theodore L. Steinberg, *Piers Plowman and Prophecy: an Approach to the C-Text* (New York, 1991), p. 11.

36 David L. Jeffrey, *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* (Grand Rapids, 1996), pp. 29-30. Jocelyn Price (now Wogan-Browne), in her discussion of *Seinte Juliene*, notes that the Middle English word “lahe” (pl. “lahen”) means both “law” and “lore,” and can refer equally to human custom and divine institution. See Jocelyn G. Price, “The *Liflade of Seinte Iuliene* and Hagiographic Convention,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 14 (1986), pp. 37-58, pp. 49-50. The freedom and responsibility of every person to choose to partake of God’s providential plan constitutes an important element of the prophets’ message and, as Price argues, of Juliana’s “hagiographic destiny” (p. 50). *Seinte Katerine* also makes this point, but seems equally concerned with the more fundamental question of discerning the authoritative basis for human laws and customs.

37 John E.A. Sawyer, *The Fifth Gospel: Isaiah in the History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 47.

38 Isaiah’s martyrdom is alluded to in *Seinte Juliene*, lines 360-61. For other written and pictorial references, see Athanasius, *De Incarnatione in Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, ed. and trans. Robert W. Thomson (Oxford, 1971), p. 225; John Lowden, *Illuminated Prophet Books: A Study of Byzantine Manuscripts of the Major and Minor Prophets* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1988), pp. 67-9 and figures 37, 116, 117; and Sawyer, pp. 7, 45, 98.

39 "I will destroy the wisdom of these wise worldly ones,' he says, 'and cast down the cleverness of these wise worldly ones'" (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 266).

40 Heb 4:12.

41 See Constitution 18 of the Fourth Lateran Council in Norman P. Tanner S.J., ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*. Vol. 1 (London and Washington, 1990), pp. 230-71.

42 John W. Baldwin, "The Intellectual Preparation For the Canon of 1215 Against Ordeals," *Speculum* 36 (1961), pp. 613-36, p. 628.

43 See *Seinte Katerine*, pp. 253-54.

44 "...she armed herself with true belief, and drew the holy sign of the cross on her breast, and in front of her teeth and tongue" (Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 263).

45 See Margot H. King, ed. and trans., *The Life of Marie d'Oignies by Jacques de Vitry* (Saskatoon, 1986), and *The Life of Lutgard of Aynières by Thomas de Cantimpré* (Saskatoon, 1987).

46 Brenda Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women in the Low Countries: A Special Case?" *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 61.1 (1981), pp. 6-29, p. 13.

47 Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women," p. 22.

48 See *The Life of Marie d'Oignies*, p. 100, and *The Life of Lutgard of Aynières*, p. 80.

49 Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women," p. 22.

50 Savage and Watson, *Anchoritic Spirituality*, p. 422 n. 3.

51 See Bolton, "Some Thirteenth Century Women," pp. 26-28.

52 See Deanesly, *History*, p. 146.