

KNIGHTS OF CHRIST: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE RESISTANCE IN THE
POOR CLARE CONVENTS OF NUREMBERG AND GENEVA

by

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ABSTRACT

Knights of Christ compares two convents in Reformation Europe to understand the role and impact of resistance on communal identity. These two convents are the very well-known and well researched Poor Clares of Nuremberg, and the lesser known Poor Clares of Geneva. This convent, unlike the Nuremberg sisters, has not received the same amount of scholarly attention. To bring these two convents, one well researched and the other not, into a conversation to understand the impacts of resistance, is a key part of the genesis of this thesis. The historiography of religious women often discusses resistance and its role in a convent's survival, but there has never been a study of resistance in its own right. This thesis uses a social and theological approach to argue that there was a set system of themes in the convent's resistance that these women used to their advantage and that they relied on a unique aspect of Christian identity to bolster their resistance, and their survival. The aspect of their identity is Knights of Christ. This thesis addresses the questions of how these women carried out their resistance and its effectiveness. These women became Knights of Christ, and in both their cities were major bulwarks to the Reformation. Their resistance was an avenue for them to use their agency and maintain control of their lives.

For Momma and Graham, my love always.

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CHAPTER ONE: BRIDES, AND KNIGHTS OF CHRIST: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FEMALE MONASTIC

If one were to describe the sixteenth century in one word, it would be conflict. This era saw religious, political, and social conflict. Amid the unrest caused by the Protestant Reformation, a small group of women was fighting their own battles. This group was nuns. For the Reformers, both Catholic and Protestant, single women became a problem that needed a solution.¹ These women are the topic of this paper. We are focusing on Nuremberg and newly independent Geneva to look at the fight of two convents of Poor Clares. These women fought against the Reformers to live their chosen lives; they defied their families and their communities; they looked powerful men in the eye and endured. The strength to do this came from many different avenues, but the strongest was the belief that they had God's support and guidance in this struggle against religious change. These two convents manifested the identity of Knights of Christ in two very different ways, but they stepped boldly into that identity and let it bolster their resistance. I argue that these women resisted the religious changes of the sixteenth century by relying on different modes of resistance. This resistance allowed these women to view themselves as Knights of Christ in defense of their lives and the traditional faith.

There are many scholarly works on nuns and the Reformation. Some tell us how they survived as convents; others how they disbanded and converted to Protestantism. When reading the texts on survival, I found myself wanting to know less about the ultimate outcome, though it is essential, and more about how they got there. I wanted to investigate in detail the struggle of these women against the Protestant tide. I chose these two convents

¹ L. Roper, *The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg* (New York, 1989), p. 225.

because they offered the ability to compare two groups with similar belief systems and organizational structure but with different outcomes, to better understand the role resistance played in the communal identity, and see if there was an underlying pattern to resistance.

Knights going to Battle

Resistance is mentioned throughout this discussion. Resistance is defined here as exerting ‘force in opposition’.² That is what these women were doing; they were opposing the Protestant force that was dismantling their lives. Scholars who discuss the concept leave many questions wanting answers. If one spoke with any of the scholars found in this work, they would all agree that nuns resisted the religious changes in the sixteenth century. Some use it as examples in their text to further their arguments. Ulrike Strasser’s, Amy Leonard’s, and Merry Wiesner’s texts all use resistance to support their arguments. In her work on the women of Nuremberg, Strasser tells us how the nuns physically resisted as their families dragged them from the convent.³ Strasser’s article, ‘Bones of Contention’, is primarily about how nuns resisted enclosure by creating space.⁴ Leonard gives us an extraordinary story about the nuns of a Strasbourg convent dressing up statues in habits and leaving them in the choir to hear Reformers preach.⁵ Leonard also lays out many ways in her book how the nuns resisted the council’s efforts to make them Protestant institutions, and how they got around the rules imposed on them.⁶ Wiesner tells us of nuns burning old slippers to smoke the preachers out of the church.⁷ Leonard and Wiesner both agree that the Observant reforms of the fifteenth-

² ‘Resist’, Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

³ U. Strasser, ‘Brides of Christ, Daughters of Men: Nuremberg Poor Clares in Defense of Their Identity (1524-1529)’, *Magistra*, 1, (1995), pp. 193-218.

⁴ U. Strasser, ‘Bones of Contention: Cloistered Nuns, Decorated Relics, and the Contest over Women's Place in the Public Sphere of Counter-Reformation Munich’, *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 90 (1999), pp. 255-288.

⁵ A. Leonard, *Nails in the Wall: Catholic Nuns in Reformation Germany* (Chicago, 2005).

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-106.

⁷ M. E. Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State in Early Modern Germany* (London, 1998), p. 51.

century set the convent up to resist the Protestant Reformation. These examples are perfect additions to their works for the furthering of their arguments.

In Catholic cities, the government started to implement strict enclosure decreed by the Council of Trent. Nuns also resisted this change as it cut them off from their traditional modes of production and limited the life; they had grown accustomed. Simone Laqua-O'Donnell says that for the nuns not to resist the reforms being instituted could have harmed the convent's reputation. Contemporaries often interpreted enclosure as a punishment for moral failings.⁸ The authorities that implemented enclosure failed to explain the introduction of these measures as bringing the religious closer to God, to the nuns, as well as the public.⁹ This perception impacted the sisters' financial situation, as they were reliant on the support of the public for survival. This also affected the convent's prestige, which directly affected recruitment.¹⁰

Other scholars mention resistance in passing, Ulrike Strasser did this when discussing the Catholic Reformation and enclosure in her text *State of Virginit*y.¹¹ Some scholars' whole argument is about resistance, but they do not give details about how they actually resisted, Paula S. Datsko Barker's text on Caritas Pirckheimer shows this most glaringly.¹² Though Barker does not fully lay what Caritas's resistance was out, her resistance finally culminates in a meeting with Philip Melanchthon, Luther's right-hand man.¹³ After conversing with Caritas, Melanchthon was so impressed by her that he recommended that the council let her

⁸ S. Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation in Early Modern Münster* (Oxford, 2014), p. 25.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ U. Strasser, *State of Virginit*y: *Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State* (Ann Arbor, 2004).

¹² P.S. Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (1995), pp. 259-272.

¹³ L. Roper, *Martin Luther: Renegade and Prophet* (London, 2017), p. 1.

continue in the religious vocation.¹⁴ This whole article leaves the reader wondering what Caritas actually did to be so renowned.

Scholars have reached a consensus that nuns resisted the religious changes thrust upon them, but what forms did that resistance take? Was it physical, theological, symbolic, small, quiet acts, or big, bold statements? And what determined which tools the nuns used? Were some modes more successful than others? These are the questions I examine in my work. There are many discussions on why nuns resisted religious change. However, I will answer the question of whether patterns of resistance form and draw conclusions about resistance and its impact on their identities. The theoretical concepts that drive this thesis are a mix of theological, exegetical, and social history. I use the Bible and religious belief to outline why the sisters chose a given form of resistance. I then look to the written record of these convents in detail to extract the modes of resistance, and along with that, I take a social-historical approach because, above all, these are women living in and reacting to communities and the societies that they are born.

The analysis in this thesis will follow the framework below to answer these questions. There are two major modes of resistance that will structure this analysis. The first is physical, defined as any act that affects the physical body or space. This could be a hunger strike, fighting, or barricading doors, or even just refusal of entry. The second mode is rhetorical, meaning any act presented through the medium of verbal or written discourse, things like writing letters, verbal altercations, anything to do with the formulation of an argument, or discourse. Then after these two primary modes, there are different degrees or kinds. The three primary ways that the modes of physical and rhetorical resistance will be broken down are

¹⁴ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer', p. 271.

theological, symbolic, and practical. Theological is any aspect or factor having to do with Christian theology. Symbolic resistance is any act that can be viewed or interpreted in different ways or with underlying meaning. Practical resistance is when an act of resistance has a useful application. Of course, any act can have all three of these aspects at once. For example, a hunger strike is physical resistance that can be both theological and symbolic. This analytical framework will help us better understand the nature of the sisters' resistance and facilitate analysis and comparison.

My analysis will rest on two main primary sources. These two documents are the *Journal of the Reformation Years* or *Denkwürdigkeiten*; the other is *The Short Chronicle*. The hallmarks of a chronicle are straightforward; they are organized by year, with entries called annals, and they are generally written by a member of a religious organization.¹⁵ These documents also acted as regional record keeping. They would include anything pertinent to the geographical area where the monastery resided, especially anything that affected the house itself.¹⁶ These hallmarks make chronicles appealing for today's historians as primary sources, but like most sources, they have their drawbacks. Chroniclers saw themselves as writing history and preserving truth. These documents represent a type of understood truth or truth as the writer saw it.¹⁷ Part of that understood truth was the active presence of the divine and the belief that God was ultimately in control. Another part of the understood truth was the inherent bias of the writer.¹⁸ These authors were committed to communicating the truth as they saw it. For the historian today, this is a challenge; one, of course, must keep these biases in mind when working with these documents. However, these documents also offer a wealth

¹⁵ A. Gransden, 'The chronicles of medieval England and Scotland: Part I', *Journal of Medieval History*, 16,2 (1990), pp. 129-150.

¹⁶ Gransden, 'The chronicles of medieval England and Scotland: Part I'.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

of information. They were laid out clearly to allow the reader to gain a picture of the happenings in a given year and geographical area.

The *Denkwürdigkeiten* has received scholarly attention by many in the past; three of these scholars make up the discussion in this chapter. Scholars use this source to better understand how the convent women and, in particular, Abbess Caritas Pirckheimer, responded to and survived the Reformation. Though scholars have often attributed the documents to Caritas and commonly interpreted it as a memoir, the writer gives no personal information about their origins. Charlotte Woodford points out in her text, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany*, that it was common practice for nuns who wrote journals or memoirs to give the reader a brief autobiographical introduction.¹⁹ The emphasis of the document was the convent's struggle, not one woman's.²⁰ Strasser illustrates in her article 'Brides of Christ' that there is debate over the authorship of the document.²¹ Barker and Strasser use the *Denkwürdigkeiten* as the source for deciding what was happening inside the convent. Barker, though, is using the *Denkwürdigkeiten* as a source says very little about the document and its contents in her article. She argues that the document written by Caritas was the cumulation of her resistance as a humanist thinker.²² Strasser, on the other hand, gives a thorough examination of the document and its value as a historical source. She tells us that the document is not laid out as one would expect a chronicle to be, but made up of letters and narrative sections that follow a more traditional style.²³ Strasser credits this as a communal document, where Barker uses it as a personal journal of the Abbess.²⁴ Strasser's estimation that this document is communal comes from the fact that there are multiple voices present in

¹⁹ C. Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford, 2002), p. 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

²¹ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

²² Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer'.

²³ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', pp. 198-199.

²⁴ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'; Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer'.

the narrative, not just Caritas's.²⁵ For Barker to see the document this way would undermine her argument that the text was a work strictly by Caritas that highlighted her Humanist learning.

Though the document does not fit firmly into the chronicle genre, it still has many major hallmarks. The structure may be different, but the writer laid it out chronologically, and its primary goal is to record a moment in the convent's history. The text covers the years 1524 to 1528. The majority of the document was written in that period at St. Clare's convent in Nuremberg.²⁶ I understand this document to be, like Strasser, a collective endeavor by the Poor Clares for the future generations. Woodford states that there is some evidence to suggest that it might have been composed to be an educational tool for other convents in their struggle with Protestantism. Woodford also tells us that there is no evidence to suggest that this ever happened.²⁷

The document was transported to the Poor Clare convent in Bamberg when the Nuremberg convent was closed in 1596.²⁸ Four manuscripts exist of this document, two from Caritas's own time, and two copied and added to by the convent in Bamberg in the seventeenth century.²⁹ The Bamberg sisters were committed to saving the Nuremberg story. They even added to the document from oral histories from their own elderly sisters to try and give the Nuremberg Poor Clares narrative and long history some closure.³⁰ The documents were housed in Bamberg until 1803, when the convent was secularized. Constantin Höfler,

²⁵ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', pp. 198-199.

²⁶ C. Pirckheimer, *A Journal of the Reformation Years, 1524-1528*, Translated by Paul A. MacKenzie, (Cambridge, 2006).

²⁷ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 94.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 88; 104.

who became the document's first editor, discovered the text there.³¹ The document allows for a window inside the convent during the time of upheaval that was the Reformation.

The Short Chronicle, like the *Denkwürdigkeiten*, has received scholarly attention, though not as much.³² This attention is more centered around the document as a literary piece than a source for the study of the Reformation.³³ This document fits very firmly into the genre of chronicle writing. It is organized chronologically and was written by the convent's secretary, Jeanne de Jussie, for the community.³⁴ Some scholars say that Jussie was the Abbess, but others are less clear about her status in the convent. This disagreement about Jussie's status highlights how little work has been done on these sisters. The document covers the years from 1526 until 1536. This included the sisters' flight to France, like the Nuremberg chronicle, this document was written for future generations to recount this era of upheaval. Jussie saw herself as writing a work of history. In the prologue, Jussie situates the document in its historical framework. That she saw herself as writing history is also supported by the fact that she was recording events taking place outside of the convent and even outside of Europe. There would be, unlike in Nuremberg, future generations for the Geneva Poor Clares, and this document would allow them to better understand their history.³⁵ I analyze this document to understand the sisters' resistance to the Reformation and understand its impact on their identity.

Some scholars postulate that Jussie wrote the chronicle after the sisters had fled to France, so there was no chance of the document being lost in the flight.³⁶ The community in

³¹ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 88.

³² J. Jussie, *The Short Chronicle*, Translated and edited by Carrie F. Klaus (Chicago, 2006).

³³ See *Teaching French women writers of the Renaissance and Reformation*, edited by Colette H. Winn.

³⁴ C.F. Klaus, 'Volume Editor's Introduction' in Jeanne de Jussie, *The Short Chronicle*, Translated and edited by Carrie F. Klaus (Chicago, 2006), pp. 1-33, p. 13.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

France used the document regularly; they often read it at mealtimes. The sisters used the original so often that they had to prepare a copy as the original was becoming worn.³⁷ Errors often occur when manuscripts were copied, but the fact that the sisters retained the original lends legitimacy to this copy. The sisters also included instructions that the document was not to be removed from the convent.³⁸ Clearly, the sisters' insistence that the document stay in the convent show how important it was to their identity and foundational myth.

The years before 1789 saw four editions of the chronicle published.³⁹ These were mostly used as polemical texts against Protestants. None of these editions were exact replicas of Jussie's text.⁴⁰ This was common for early copies of texts. Other editions came in 1853, 1865 and 1913, again none completely true to their original source. Only in 1996 did a full version of Jussie's work appear using the convent's manuscripts. Helmut Feld published the document in both French and German.⁴¹ Though this document has had a long history in print, it has not been the focus of scholars.

The *Denkwürdigkeiten* and *The Short Chronicle* allow for the analysis of discreet moments within the text, to extract the modes of resistance, and analyze their success or failure. After I have analyzed the modes of resistance, I will compare the outcomes in the sources and discuss why the Nuremberg Poor Clares managed to stay in their homes but died off, and their Genevan cousins had to flee but survived for centuries more.

Brides and Knights of Christ

³⁷ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 24.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 25-28.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 28.

Nuns, the community around them and even scholars today often use the phrase Bride of Christ to describe the female monastic. What, though, is the meaning of this term? As many secular women would have identified as wives; a nun saw herself as being married to Christ. The Bible has many different examples of wedding imagery that grounded this identity. The writer of the book of Isaiah depicts Jerusalem as the bride of God. Revelation also uses this metaphor, calling back to Isaiah as both are discussing the restoration of Israel.⁴² Jesus, in the Gospels, used the wedding metaphor throughout, often with Jesus as the bridegroom, and the brides as the followers that have heard the good news, and the wedding is the moment of the second coming.⁴³ This symbolism permeated the female religious identity. Female religious were mystical in their devotions to Christ and often described that devotion in physical terms.⁴⁴ Margaret of Oignt saw herself caring for the broken body of the crucified Christ, and then laying him down in her bed and kissing his wounds.⁴⁵ This devotion channeled into the socially acceptable imagery of marriage. Wedding symbolism and the continuation of the virginal state layered the rituals around entering the convent. When a sister died, her fellow nuns' consolation was that she and her heavenly groom were united.⁴⁶ Their shared commitment to Christ and their way of life forged the identity of a Bride of Christ. Ulrike Strasser in her article, 'Brides of Christ, Daughters of Men: Nuremberg Poor Clares in Defense of Their Identity (1524-1529)' depicts the nuns using the overarching communal identity as a Bride of Christ, as opposed to individuals. Brides of Christ is used as a descriptor in many of the historiographical works on the topic of religious women.⁴⁷ The way of life and the choice of that life are the defining features of a nun; she is the Bride of Christ. Here I

⁴² Isaiah 61-63; Revelation 21-22 (NRSV).

⁴³ Matthew 9 (NRSV).

⁴⁴ C. Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Baltimore, 2012), pp. 86-87.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.

⁴⁶ Strasser, 'Bones of Contention', p. 265.

⁴⁷ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

argue that along with their identity as brides, these women when it came time to resist drew on identity that was present though not usually highlighted in a female; that identity was a Knight of Christ.

This identity too has biblical precedent; the Judeo-Christian religions are rife with war imagery and conflict. The Christian message is, in some ways, a message of war, war against evil. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes, ‘For our struggle is not against enemies of blood and flesh, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.’⁴⁸ The sisters saw themselves in this battle. They believed that Protestants had perverted the message to which they had dedicated their lives and that the ‘spiritual forces of evil’ had driven this perversion.⁴⁹

In their texts, the sisters referred to this role themselves; the Nuremberg sisters called one another ‘...the brave knights of Christ...’ and the Genevans extolled one another to be ‘...a valiant servant of our Lord...’ the word that the sisters used was *Chevalliere*, which can be translated as a female knight.⁵⁰ These women had access to the same weapons, but they chose to wield them in very different ways. They were sure that the reward for their perseverance would be great. The Bible has countless passages about the reward for those that withstand persecution.⁵¹ We see examples of this in the book of Matthew, ‘And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. But anyone who endures to the end will be saved. And this good

⁴⁸ Ephesians 6:12-13 (NRSV).

⁴⁹ Ephesians 6:12-13 (NRSV).

⁵⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 90.; Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 143.; C.F. Klaus, ‘Footnotes’ in Jussie de Jeanne, *The Short Chronicle*, Translated and edited by Carrie F. Klaus (Chicago, 2006), Footnote 306, p. 143.

⁵¹ See Mark 10:30 and Acts 14:22 for further examples of this belief system.

news of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.’⁵² As one can imagine, a passage like this would have enhanced meaning to a group who saw new preachers popping up daily with new ideologies. This self-image as knights fits into their belief system, just like the identity as Brides of Christ. These women were finding a way to be both obedient Brides committed to their bridegroom, and valiant warriors coming to his and the true faith’s defense against ‘false prophets’.⁵³ These Knights were unique, and this thesis highlights their unique natures.

The self-image of a Knights of Christ is a common image used by Christians throughout time. One can look to Paul's letter to the Ephesians where he tells the community to ‘Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.’⁵⁴ For the women living in these communities, they would have taken this decree to heart as they saw the Protestants dismantling their religious identities. For one to be a Knight of Christ is to believe oneself in the battle against evil and to, in the traditional sense, be a knight in the service of one's lord, in this case, Christ.

Resistance and the self-image of Knights of Christ frame this discussion by one circularly facilitating the other. The act of resisting allows the sisters to see themselves as the Knights of Christ, and then once they see themselves in that light, they undertake acts of resistance as Knights of Christ. These two ideas build one another up, and every success is seen as God's favor, and every set back seen as a rallying cry to resist with greater vigor.

Surviving the Fight

⁵² Matthew 24:11-14 (NRSV).

⁵³ Matthew 24:11 (NRSV).

⁵⁴ Ephesians 6:11 (NRSV).

These women resisted a full-scale attack on the monastics' shared identity and way of life launched by the Protestant Reformation. How convents survived this attack on their identity is another primary topic discussed in the historiography, and as we have seen some scholars highlight resistance in this struggle to survive. Leonard's monograph, argues that the nuns' survival was built on their relationship with the city that they found themselves and that city's government.⁵⁵ To achieve her goals of explaining how convents survived, Leonard looks at Strasbourg and its three surviving Dominican Convents. Leonard gives two main reasons for the survival of these three convents, first is the fifteenth-century reforms. The four convents that accepted the Observant Reforms, out of the eight total convents in the city at the time, were the ones that eventually survived the Reformation. Leonard credits this reform with centering these nuns on their religious journey and identity, making them better suited to withstand the Reformation.⁵⁶

The second reason for survival and Leonard's main argument is that they made themselves useful. Leonard states that the Reformers' principal problem with the convents was not theological. Leonard argues that the Reformers and city officials did not see the convents as useful. The Reformers saw convents as places that were draining the common well and doing nothing to replenish it.⁵⁷ This idea is the hinge of Leonard's argument. The convents found a way to make themselves useful, which happened to be their traditional purpose in the secular view, as a place for the elite young women of the city to be educated. This was not just a phenomenon that happened in Strasbourg. In her article 'Ideology Meets Empire: Reformed Convents and the Reformation', Wiesner writes about other convents that

⁵⁵ Leonard, *Nails*, p. 8.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6; 24-29.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

were also turning to young girls' education as a means of survival.⁵⁸ This form of survival led early historians of the Reformation to assume that post-Reformation convents were not convents, but schools with no religious vocation.⁵⁹ Being schools for girls continued convents' traditional purpose as landing grounds for elite daughters. It allowed them to remain enclosed as an all-female community living with very little male interference.⁶⁰

Leonard finishes her text by showing that eventually, the symbiotic relationship of the council and the convent was pushed too far. The council disbanded one of the three convents; due to mismanagement and moral impropriety. Though Leonard argues that this relationship was the bases for survival, she shows that it had its limits by illustrating that the council did close one of the convents.⁶¹

Wiesner's argument is similar to Leonard's concerning convents' survival. The local community and the links to the elites in their areas made it hard to oust them; this was how the convents survived. According to Wiesner, Abbesses, especially the Abbesses of the three imperial abbeys in Germany, were powerful women linked tightly to the ruling elite. Thanks to their social status and places in the communities, these convents remained open into the nineteenth century.⁶² Even though these houses remained open, many did convert to Protestantism. The women in these communities saw their way of life and identity as a female community as more important than what religion they followed. Some houses did convert out of sincere conviction, although many houses lived on with a mixture of Catholic and

⁵⁸ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State*.

⁵⁹ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State*, p. 56.

⁶⁰ Leonard, *Nails*, p 57.

⁶¹ Leonard, *Nails*.

⁶² Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State*, p. 50.

Protestant inhabitants.⁶³ These women survived and remained powerful because they were well connected, but also, as Wiesner tells us, due to indifference on the part of men.⁶⁴

Barker's article, 'Caritas Pirckheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation', centers on the Abbess of the Nuremberg Poor Clares, Caritas Pirckheimer. She argues that the reason the Poor Clares survived the initial flood of Protestantism in Nuremberg was Caritas and her humanist education, not the community as a whole.⁶⁵ Unlike Leonard and Wiesner, Barker argues that survival had more to do with Caritas's connections to the outside world, especially her education, than her relationship with her fellow nuns.⁶⁶ Barker's article gives a brief biography of Caritas. Telling us, she was well educated and chose to enter the convent and profess at an early age.⁶⁷ This article spends the bulk of its time talking about Caritas's reputation among influential Humanist scholars. Caritas saw her scholarship and relationships with these men as a furthering of her religious vocation.⁶⁸ Barker says that Caritas effectively used theology to argue and that her humanist training gave her an effective way to express herself.

So, Caritas Pirckheimer single-handedly saved the Nuremberg Poor Clares, or at least that is what Barker's argument would have one believe. Barker's support of her argument is thin. She spends much time telling the reader what men thought about Caritas and very little time on how Caritas thwarted the tide of the Reformation with her humanist learning. Barker's whole argument depends on the fact that these men praised Caritas. She argues that this praise gave Caritas the confidence to stand up to the council.⁶⁹

⁶³ Wiesner, *Gender, Church, and State* p. 53.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶⁵ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer', pp. 259-272.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 269.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

⁶⁹ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer'.

These three authors ground survival of convents on their connection with the outside world. This is a valid conclusion. All three spent very little time discussing the convents' internal factors and more on how they were interacting with the secular world. In her work, 'Brides of Christ', Strasser grounds the survival of the Nuremberg Poor Clares, unlike Barker, inside the walls of the religious community.⁷⁰ Strasser argues that the relationship and identity between the women living in the convent were stronger than the link between family and the secular community. Strasser lays out a discussion of how the sisters used both their spiritual ties and blood kin to preserve their collective sense of identity in the face of overt attacks.⁷¹ Strasser places the agency within the convent walls and the nuns' ability to use their familial connections to their benefit.

So as one can see, there are many different interpretations of how the survival of convents was achieved, with the agency finding different outlets among the arguments. Leonard, Wiesner, and Strasser place the agency with the community as a whole, while Barker places it in one woman. What is clear is that these nuns were acting and resisting. Now we must discuss the construction of the identities and values that these women were defending.

Women Exerting Power

In all the volumes of literature written on women, in general, and religious women, in particular, there is a universal theme in the historiography. This theme is agency. Merriam-Webster defines agency as 'the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power'.⁷² This theme shows how religious women exerted power over their situations.

⁷⁰ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', pp. 193-212.

⁷¹ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

⁷² 'Agency', Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster, 2020).

Agency might not be the overt argument in every text, but inherently it flows beneath the surface; this is also true for this thesis.

Silvia Evangelisti's *Nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450-1700*, has many examples of nuns' agency. She argues that nuns have received much attention in recent years.⁷³ Nuns lived in a very diverse world. As Evangelisti argues, Nuns entered into convents for various reasons: social identity outside of marriage, education, family pressure, social solutions for women with disabilities, and finally, a refuge for displaced women. Evangelisti highlights women like Catherina Benincasa (1347-1380), who threw herself into boiling water to avoid marriage and join a convent, exerting force on the direction of her life, though through extreme means.⁷⁴ Evangelisti gives many different reasons why a family would pressure their daughters into monasticism. However, the overarching reason was that it offered a safe and legitimate home for daughters, that freed the family from the financial burden of caring for an unmarried daughter.⁷⁵ Convents also functioned as places of refuge for women of lesser means and prostitutes.⁷⁶ Evangelisti illustrates many reasons for women joining convents, but they often found places of education, art, limited independence, and a new spiritual family when they arrived.⁷⁷ Some of these reasons for entering show how much agency that women had, and some just how little they possessed, but once in the confines of the convent, nuns were usually able to find positions and lives that suited them.

In Anne Winston-Allen's *Convent Chronicles: Women Writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* and D. Jonathan Grieser's 'A Tale of Two Convents: Nuns

⁷³ S. Evangelisti, *Nuns: A History of Convent Life 1450-1700* (Oxford, 2008), p. 1.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

and Anabaptists in Münster, 1533–1535’, agency is the overt theme.⁷⁸ These two scholars are both making the same argument, but for two different reform movements. That argument is women acted. Winston-Allen’s text focuses on the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. She looks at the effects of the Observant reform movements in the German-speaking lands of Europe, mainly focusing on the literary output of female religious houses.⁷⁹ Grieser studying the mid-sixteenth century outlines how, two convents, Überwasser and Niesing, reacted to the Anabaptist reform movement in Münster. Grieser argues that women were often understood to be victims of the Anabaptist program, an assumption that he views as not wholly accurate.⁸⁰ Grieser states that the nuns of Überwasser left their convent to join the reform movement of their own volition and that Niesing used their agency to flee the city and maintain their community elsewhere. In her text, Laqua-O’Donnell supports Grieser’s argument that women were more involved than previously thought. She states that women, especially nuns, were heavily involved at the beginning of the Radical Reformation.⁸¹ Laqua-O’Donnell tells the reader, ‘The Überwasser sisters were among the first to eschew their habits and be baptized, thereafter becoming actively involved in almost every stage of the radical reforms taking place in the city.’⁸²

Winston-Allen and Grieser are both of equally strong opinions that these nuns were making their own decisions.⁸³ They were not just blindly following orders of those in charge. They were involved in what was happening around them. They resisted and made decisions that would affect their communities for years to come. As we will see, this was also true for

⁷⁸ A. Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles: Women writing about Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa., 2004).; J.D. Grieser, ‘A Tale of Two Convents: Nuns and Anabaptists in Munster, 1533-1535’, *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (1995), pp. 31-47.

⁷⁹ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.

⁸⁰ Grieser, ‘A Tale of Two Convents’.

⁸¹ Laqua-O’Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, p. 7.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁸³ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.; Grieser, ‘A Tale of Two Convents’.

the convents in Nuremberg and Geneva. For the convents explored by Winston-Allen, we see women on an active reforming mission, sending their sisters to other places and convents to spread the observant reforms of their given orders. These reforming women saw themselves as being actively involved in the movement.⁸⁴ They were writing about the reform, and when writing, they would portray themselves as being actively involved.⁸⁵ In Münster, Grieser shows, women who, despite the commitments they had made to the established order and church, chose to convert and became active members of the Anabaptist community, and even fought to support it.⁸⁶ Grieser also shows us the flip side of the coin in the convent of Niesing, a group of women who fled to avoid living a life they did not want or agree too.⁸⁷ This same spirit of resistance can be seen in Winston-Allen's text, as she gives examples of women fighting against the Observant reforms.⁸⁸

As this section has shown, agency is a topic that attracts attention. The scholars mentioned here have set about giving these women back their voice and reinserting them into their narratives. They have attempted to clear up the misconception that women were just being acted upon, especially religious women. Women had agency and were active in the communities and world around them, and the religious changes that they encountered.

Image in the World and the Convent

When it comes to identity, religious women would have identified themselves in various ways, such as what order they belonged to, similar to how a secular person would have identified with a guild. This identity would have been discernible by their choice of habit

⁸⁴ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, p. 100.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁸⁶ Grieser, 'A Tale of Two Convents', p. 37.

⁸⁷ Grieser, 'A Tale of Two Convents'.

⁸⁸ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, pp. 129-161.

and the rules they kept. This sense of identity would have spread beyond the immediate community to forge bonds with other women's and men's houses of the same order. The fifteenth-century Observant reforms went a long way in re-emphasizing the communal identity of the convent.⁸⁹ The fifteenth-century reforms caused convents of different orders to form stronger bonds than with non-reform convents of the same order.⁹⁰ This is the communal identity in which a nun finds herself. Nuns built a communal identity by eating together and, one of the most interesting ways, by writing texts that embodied the community, as Woodford points out.⁹¹ Woodford tells the reader that through these texts, there was the creation of identity, but also legitimacy. These texts created a moral ideal that built up the congregation.⁹² Ulrike Strasser's primary source the *Denkwürdigkeiten*, in her article 'Brides of Christ', is explained as a collection of letters meshed with narrative sections with a more traditional chronicle style.⁹³ Scholars have traditionally attributed this text to Caritas Pirckheimer, the Abbess of the convent. However, the letters contained are from many sisters, and the document even continues after Caritas's death, which makes this a collective work that Strasser attributes to their communal identity.⁹⁴ This work was probably written for those women in the future to remember their sisters before, creating a bond.⁹⁵ Works like the *Denkwürdigkeiten* were acts of myth-building; they immortalized a particular moment in a convent's history. This moment was then passed down with reverence and became part of that convent's identity, as seen above in Woodford.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 155.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-32.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 45;71;41.

⁹³ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', p. 198.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 44.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

The religious women who shape this discussion belong to one order, the Order of Saint Clare. The Poor Clares are the bases for this discussion because I saw an opportunity to bring two convents facing the same struggle into conversation with one another. These two convents offer the ability to learn about how resistance worked. The fact that they are both Reformed Clarian convents brings a level of similarity that allows for a more direct comparison. The Clarian world view was the basis of their identity. The founding of the order plays a large part in the building of the Clarian identity. The Poor Clares are the Franciscans' female branch, but it is a little more complicated than that, especially when it comes to creating identity. Francis of Assisi (1181/2-1226) founded the Franciscans, recognized in 1209.⁹⁷ Francis was approached by an eighteen-year-old girl named Clare (1194-1253), who, along with other like-minded women, wanted to follow Francis's path. Francis cut Clare's hair, installed her and the other women in the Church of San Damiano in Assisi, and so the Poor Clares were born.⁹⁸

However, before we can delve into the more nuanced aspects of the Poor Clares' origins, the role of legitimacy, and how it relates to identity must be addressed. Legitimacy is how shared myths are created and maintained.⁹⁹ Legitimacy plays a significant role in the creation of the Clarian identity. There are plenty of groups that materialize out of nowhere, Christianity itself was a new religious movement; most new religious movements look to link themselves back to an authority for the culture as a whole. Jesus's and his message's legitimacy were created in the Gospels by his genealogy, the unbroken line from Abraham to

⁹⁷ G. Melville, *The World of Medieval Monasticism: Its History and Forms of Life*, Translated by James D. Mixson and Giles Constable (Collegeville, 2016), pp. 156; 159.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁹⁹ V. Volkan, 'Large-Group-Psychology in Its Own Right: Large-Group Identity and Peace-Making', *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, 10, 3 (2013), pp. 210-246.

Jesus.¹⁰⁰ Christian society created legitimacy by linking back to the Bible, the life of Jesus, the first-century church, and church fathers.

Monastics were looking to create an unbroken line as well. Communities born from the ancient lines of Benedict or Augustine found that unbroken tether in the connection to the church fathers and the imitation of the life of Christ. New orders like the Franciscans, had to connect themselves somehow back to that tradition, and authority. Francis was unambiguous; his legitimacy came from God. Francis saw himself as speaking and eventually writing the word of the Lord in the prophetic sense, and that was all the legitimacy needed for him. He also looked only to the Bible and its example for how to order and live his life. If one were to look at the Vita of Francis, there would be many places where one could draw direct lines between Jesus and Francis. This act of myth-building by those who followed Francis was generating more legitimacy for their order. Francis also tied his order tightly to the church hierarchy, creating another pillar of legitimacy.¹⁰¹ Regardless of the validity of the foundational myths or associations, they were creating a story unique to a given group, which allows the followers to band together and feel secure in their shared identity.

The female Franciscans created legitimacy through their links to Francis and Clare. Clare's identity has many facets. Lezlie Knox argues in *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy*, that there were three versions of Clare's identity, the historical Clare, Saint Clare, and finally, the Clare that was rediscovered by the fifteenth-century reforms.¹⁰² The historical Clare's story started in 1211 when she came to Francis, wishing to follow him.¹⁰³ Clare was committed to Francis's insistence on poverty.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38 (NRSV).

¹⁰¹ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 159-160.

¹⁰² L.S. Knox, *Creating Clare of Assisi: Female Franciscan Identities in Later Medieval Italy* (Boston, 2008).

¹⁰³ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 160.

She and her convent refused any financial help and lived only off alms and followed strict enclosure.¹⁰⁴ After Francis's death, Clare engaged in a struggle with the Papacy regarding the convent's renunciation and poverty. Clare and her sisters nominally won this struggle. They were allowed to follow the rule written by Clare just before her death in 1253.¹⁰⁵ The Rule of St. Clare was the first rule written for women by a woman. It remained committed to Francis's ideal of extreme poverty and closely aligned the sisters with the friars.¹⁰⁶ These were the events that surround the historical Clare. With these brief glimpses, we see a woman unafraid to uphold her convictions and to lead those entrusted to her care.

Knox's second identity of Clare was the papal identity. Shortly after her death in 1255, Pope Alexander IV canonized Clare.¹⁰⁷ Canonization led to a co-opting of Clare's name, but not necessarily her identity or values. St. Clare lost Clare of Assisi's fiery and charismatic nature; she became the ideal monastic virgin.¹⁰⁸ This version would become the Medieval precedent for the female monastic.¹⁰⁹ The version of Clare that the church created emphasized her commitment to her charges, and her devotion to God. This version smoothed over the more defiant aspects of Clare's identity to mold her into a meek virgin committed to God's service. This is not to say that Clare was not obedient and dedicated to God, but the canonization process stripped her agency. In 1263, Pope Urban IV created the Order of Saint Clare, and wrote a rule for this community, often called the Urbanite rule.¹¹⁰ This order and rule completely distanced itself from extreme poverty, and also did not guarantee the order links to the Franciscans, which caused problems. Though Clare's name was on this rule, and

¹⁰⁴ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 166.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁶ Knox, *Creating Clare*, pp. 58-59.; Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 168.

¹⁰⁷ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, pp. 168-169.

¹⁰⁸ Knox, *Creating Clare*, p. 57.

¹⁰⁹ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 160.

¹¹⁰ Knox, *Creating Clare*, p. 77.

she was the image, her community living at San Damiano was not a part of Urban's order, or under his rule, as they had maintained their privileges to follow the rule written by Clare.¹¹¹ Knox argues that St. Clare was the version of Clare passed down through official channels.¹¹²

The rediscovered Clare is an amalgamation of both of the previous versions, according to Knox.¹¹³ Clare's identity survived through oral history and her writings, which the congregation at San Damiano kept.¹¹⁴ As the reform movements of the fifteenth century swept most monastic orders, it also impacted the Clares. There was a push by the Observant Franciscans to bring the male order back under the values laid out by Francis, and they also installed a reform program for women's houses. Knox tells us that this meant that women's houses started to gain interest in the life of Clare and her Rule.¹¹⁵ The leaders of the Observants declared if a female house had not professed the 1253 Rule of St. Clare, then they would not receive Observant pastoral care, and had to rely on the non-reformed brothers, who were less likely to tend to the sisters' needs.¹¹⁶ Many houses did profess the Rule, including the houses in Nuremberg and Geneva. While the sisters now knew about the historical Clare and her commitments to poverty and the other details that the Church tried to smooth out, they still held on to the canonized version, creating a unique identity that was both historical and constructed.

These different versions of Clare illustrate why the foundational myths of the Order of St. Clare can be complicated. At one-point Clarian houses all over Europe lived under four different rules: the 1218 Cardinal Hugolino's rule, Pope Innocent's 1247 rule, Clare's 1253

¹¹¹ Knox, *Creating Clare*, p. 78.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 128-152.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

rule, and a rule written in France by Isabelle of France.¹¹⁷ This prompted Urban to write his rule, though it still did not bring uniformity. As one can see from above, there is no clear-cut identity within the Order of Saint Clare. When convents started to write about Clare, they actively used both versions, and which one they leaned toward said a lot about their identity and how they viewed their legitimacy and relationship to their namesake's complicated history.¹¹⁸

Along with this group identity, there is also individual identity to be considered. Individual identity is defined here as how one distinguishes themselves within a larger whole. Nuns would have done this in many ways. One of these was the status they entered the convent with. One would like to imagine the convent as a microcosm for the perfect egalitarian society. That once a woman enters the convent where she came from and whom she was, no longer mattered. Alas, this was not the case. Convents were institutions found in a socially stratified society, and so they too were, in some ways, shaped by questions of status. A nun's social status corresponded to the place she held in the convent's religious hierarchy, with the Abbess often being of an elite family, as an example.¹¹⁹ Even if a sister was in a convent from firm religious conviction, she still might have ties to her family in a very real and secular way.

Individual identity was usually formed for religious women by those who came after them. Women distinguished by their holiness were often looked up to by the convent's other women. In her text, Woodford states that chronicles were used to list names that would create an individual identity for one person and then often create bonds with the current sisters.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Knox, *Creating Clare*, p. 78.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹¹⁹ M. E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, Fourth edition* (Cambridge, 2019), p. 233.

¹²⁰ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 44.

This is not to say that women did not cultivate these personas on their own, sometimes these personas were created through negative means. There are cases of women faking extraordinary religious experiences to gain notoriety. Sharon T. Strocchia's article, shows this through suicide and demon possession.¹²¹ This was a way for women to create identity. Some religious women saw themselves in the struggle between good and evil. They viewed their suicidal ideations as a part of this war; it was the devil literally tormenting them.¹²² As one can see, the battle gives the suicidal nun a unique mission, as they are the only ones that can attest to their torments. Demonic possession also found its way into the communal identity, possession leading at times whole convents into a mass hysteria, where they all believed they were possessed.¹²³ Martyrdom is also a way that a community or individuals can create identity. The act of dying for one's cause elevates that person in the collective mind.

However, there were also those that, during their time, were renowned for other reasons. Barker tells us about Caritas Pirckheimer's education and contact with humanist thinkers, including the humanist superstar Erasmus in her article about the Nuremberg Poor Clares.¹²⁴ This is an individual identity; it has nothing to do with her vocation as a nun. In this description, Margaret Roper's, Thomas Moore's daughter, name could easily be substituted for Caritas's.¹²⁵ Roper was brilliant, educated, and in contact with the leading male thinkers of her time, including Erasmus. These two women were contemporaries and two sides of the

¹²¹ S. T. Strocchia, 'Women on the Edge: Madness, Possession, and Suicide in Early Modern Convents', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 45 (2015), pp. 53–77.

¹²² Strocchia, 'Women on the Edge', p. 61.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer', pp. 259–272.

¹²⁵ P. A. MacKenzie, 'Introduction: The Life and Times of Caritas Pirckheimer of Nürnberg' in *Caritas Pirckheimer, A Journal of the Reformation Years, 1524–1528*. Trans by Paul A. MacKenzie, (Cambridge, 2006), p. 5.

same coin.¹²⁶ Barker even credits Caritas's identity and education as the reason that her convent survived the first wave of the Reformation, as seen below.¹²⁷

Women like Teresa of Avila had a renowned reputation and individual identity. Teresa entirely on her own will, and without a male order to blaze the trail, created an order called the Discalced Carmelites.¹²⁸ Of course, many female saints' piety created a persona of holiness that set them apart from their fellow nuns. Their choice of vocation set them apart from their fellow Christians, and their talents at certain aspects of monastic life set them apart inside their communities. If these people were exceptionally talented, they might become names known outside their walls, such as Caritas and Teresa. These identities, both communal and individual, makeup how monastics viewed themselves and how the community that surrounded them viewed them. For this thesis, individual identity is important because there are sisters in the narratives that stand out from the rest. These women in their discreet moments stand out for enacting the identity of Knights of Christ.

The Sacred and the Profane: The Importance of Monastic Space

Monastics differentiate themselves from the secular Christian in various ways. The first and most basic way that monastics create identity is space, both physical and spiritual. Because of this, it is also one of the major themes in the historiography of religious women. The physical space of the monastery sets the religious apart from the masses. Early monastics

¹²⁶ M. Bowker, 'Roper [née More], Margaret (1505–1544), scholar and daughter of Sir Thomas More', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004) <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24071> (Accessed 26 Dec. 2019).

¹²⁷ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer'.

¹²⁸ Evangelisti, *Nuns*, p. 176.

took to the desert to create their space to emulate the actions of and connect to Christ and the Apostles.¹²⁹

Monastic communities started to emerge in Europe around 350 CE, and by the thirteenth century, there were many different orders following various rules.¹³⁰ There has been even more space created by this point, not just between monastic and non-monastics, but between different orders. The individual communities built their physical spaces to fit their unique needs.¹³¹ They were also structured to meet the priorities of the order as a whole.¹³² The mendicant orders separated themselves not with a physical building, but by extreme renunciation and poverty. The mendicant orders were grounded in preaching and being connected with the world. This physical separation was the first stage in creating a monastic identity separate from the greater community.

The Protestant Reformation called that separation and space into question. There were two types of female-run institutions that the Protestants were questioning: the convent and the brothel.¹³³ These seem to be juxtaposed, but in the public's eyes, they were both places that house unmarried women. Their sexuality defined these institutions, according to Ulrike Strasser in *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State*.¹³⁴ These institutions were run by women with little male interference and generated their own incomes. Both of these houses had their place in pre-Reformation society, one as a safety valve for male lust and, at times, a necessity for the poor women of the city. The convent was a place for the daughters of the elite and those that could afford it, which

¹²⁹ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 232.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23; 156.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹³² S.J. Davis, *Monasticism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2018), p. 92.

¹³³ Strasser, *State*, p. 57.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57; 21.

protected their reputation and relieved the family from caring for them.¹³⁵ Strasser explains, that the Reformation and its uncompromising ideas about marriage and marital sex called into question the traditionally understood use of the brothel and the convent. In Catholic areas, one had displaced women from brothels, as the movement to close them in Protestant areas also led Catholic leaders to follow suit. Strasser tells us that in Bavaria, some of the displaced women went to convents, and others were given government-funded dowries to marry.¹³⁶ In Protestant areas, displaced women came from both of the women's houses.

As one can see, physical space was significant to how the secular world viewed religious women. Protestant Reformers made use of this similarity between brothels and convents. The polemical rhetoric around nuns as whores and convents as monks' personal brothels abound.¹³⁷ Leslie Tuttle points out that nuns also resorted to this rhetoric when desperate enough. So as one can imagine, this created problems around identity.¹³⁸ Tuttle uses a convent in France and their search for a resolution to an internal conflict to illustrate this desperate act. The environment within this convent was extremely volatile, almost violent.¹³⁹ The convent's affair reached its zenith, when one group may have had a pamphlet published that accused the Franciscan Friars of being sexually inappropriate with the nuns.¹⁴⁰ This pamphlet went along with a court case. The nuns were searching for protection from the corrupt friars, or at least that is how they presented their case.¹⁴¹ As Tuttle points out, the real problem here was the lengths that these women had to go to have their stories heard. The pamphlet makes accusations that would ruin the reputation of the whole convent. However, it

¹³⁵ Strasser, *State*, p. 57-68.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

¹³⁷ Strasser, 'Bones of Contention', p. 262.

¹³⁸ L. Tuttle, 'From Cloister to Court: Nuns and the Gendered Culture of Disputing in Early Modern France', *Journal of Women's History*, 22 (2010), pp. 11-33.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

also achieved the goal of ousting the Franciscan overseers and got the court's attention enough to intervene.¹⁴² Tuttle argues that these women sacrificed the carefully maintained communal identity to fix the convent's internal discord. The only way to fix this disruption was to have the secular courts intervene, but the civil authorities had ignored the nuns before. The sisters jeopardized their identities to heal the divide inside their convent. This was made easier because of the rumors surrounding convents.

The most prominent marker of the monastic lifestyle and another way to create physical separation for monastic men and women is celibacy. Although celibacy is a physical act, it is not discernible in one's outward appearance. Monastics rely on the physical separation and the other physical hallmarks to define their communities in an outwardly visible way. Sexual purity in the form of chastity is one of the three major vows that characterize monastic life, the other two vows being poverty and obedience. Celibacy and chastity are essential to the lifestyle of the monastic.¹⁴³ The role of space in the monastic identity is to set apart physically, virginity/chastity take that separation one degree further.

This idea around virginity and chastity as purer ways to live are not unique to the Medieval or Early Modern periods. These are as old as the Christian tradition. The premium placed on marriage by Hellenistic and Jewish culture made Jesus's and Paul's perceived choice to remain unmarried a distinguishing factor in their characters as religious leaders.¹⁴⁴ Paul and the early followers of Jesus had an apocalyptic worldview. They thought to see the end of the world in their lifetime.¹⁴⁵ Paul continues this apocalyptic message, pressing the

¹⁴² Tuttle, 'From Cloister to Court' p. 28.

¹⁴³ K. Cheatham, "'Let Anyone Accept This Who Can'" Medieval Christian Virginity, Chastity, and Celibacy' in C. Olson (ed.), *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (New York, 2007), pp. 85-101, pp. 85-86.

¹⁴⁴ G. Holland, 'Celibacy in the Early Christian Church' in C. Olson (ed.), *Celibacy and Religious Traditions* (New York, 2007), pp. 65-81, pp. 65-66.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

idea of chastity.¹⁴⁶ Christians began to live their lives following that perception so that they would gain entry into the Kingdom.¹⁴⁷ As people began to die and the years passed, without the second coming, daily lives resumed and fell into the broader cultural norms.¹⁴⁸ Marriage and procreation once again became the path of the average Christian. The path of the celibate Christian fell to those called by God. This is not to say that all early Christians lived celibate lives, but there was this bridge built between celibacy, chastity, and the Kingdom of God. This bridge led to the exaltation of those who abstained, as in some way closer to God. This made virginity a powerful asset for women, giving them independence and status if they chose to enter religious life. It also created links to the spiritual space.

The Catholic Church, the families of women in convents, and the local government became very concerned about the Protestants' derogatory rhetoric. A nun's virginity and chastity were her greatest asset, and it formed a useable commodity. This commodity was a spiritual one, Strasser likens it to a talisman against dishonor for the society and state.¹⁴⁹ The new ideology around virginity also emphasized male control of that asset. As a daughter's virginity was and had always been a father's commodity, convents' virginity became the city's.¹⁵⁰ In Augsburg, Lyndal Roper tells us that nuns' virginity was a civic commodity.¹⁵¹ The Council of Trent decided to solve the problem of perceived promiscuity by enforcing strict enclosure.¹⁵² As will be seen, the Protestant Reformers chose to solve the problems by removing the corrupting influence of the male pastoral caregivers. In the first chapter of her book, Laqua-O'Donnell, describes the effects of the Reformation on convents. This chapter

¹⁴⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:7 (NRSV).

¹⁴⁷ Holland, "Celibacy in the Early Christian Church", p. 66.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁹ Strasser, *State*, p. 120.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 10-11; 3.

¹⁵¹ Roper, *Holy Household*, p. 230.

¹⁵² Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, pp. 20, 23-4.

discusses the implementation of enclosure and its effects on the communal identity of the convent. She discusses how this mandate cut the nuns off from the outside, but the nuns were not just cut off from the community; their reputation also could be damaged by giving into enclosure.¹⁵³ Laqua-O'Donnell tells the reader that enclosure could be viewed as a form of punishment for moral failings.¹⁵⁴ One can imagine how this could, along with the rhetoric around the convent's amoral nature, be used as ammunition in Protestant attacks. The public was already skeptical about what actually went on in convents, and then for the establishment to come in and take stern measures only fed the rumor mill. The Council of Trent also cut the religious women off from society in general, and the income that the secular world afforded.¹⁵⁵

Spiritual space also plays a role in the creation of identity. Christianity is a religion based on the promise of a time to come and the Kingdom of God. Though this Kingdom will become, as Jesus promises, a physical reality, it is still as yet for early Christians and Christians today, in the time to come. Jesus and his ministry's message focused on the salvation of the soul and entrance into that everlasting Kingdom. The promise of this spiritual space is essential to the identity of Christians. Monastics have a unique connection to that space in the public psyche. Their acts of renunciation and penance place them closer to the Kingdom and salvation.¹⁵⁶ The creation of sacred space is universal in religions, but for monastics, they live and function inside that sacred space. They are continually bringing the profane into the sacred. Monastics must endeavor to maintain and recreate that divine nature through rituals.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-30.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁶ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 16.

¹⁵⁷ Davis, *Monasticism*, p. 93.

The rituals that cement the sacred space vary in style and function within different orders, and depending on if the house is female or male. Monastic life ran on a liturgical schedule, not a secular one. In this schedule, the monastics sing the liturgy, pray, and celebrate the Mass.¹⁵⁸ Even when the tasks turned to taking care of bodily needs, there was a focus on keeping the mind heavenward. At mealtimes, one of the sisters or brothers read from religious texts.¹⁵⁹ When a member was doing any task, they were encouraged to pray or ruminate on God.¹⁶⁰ In some convents and monasteries, there were lay brothers and sisters, who looked after the menial task of daily life, leaving the professed religious to focus solely on devotions.¹⁶¹ This constant attention on God reinforces the sacred nature of the monastery.

The best exploration of how nuns created space and identity both inside the convent and connections to the secular community is Ulrike Strasser's 'Bones of Contention: Cloistered Nuns, Decorated Relics, and the Contest over Women's Place in the Public Sphere of Counter-Reformation Munich'.¹⁶² This text discusses how nuns defined their own space and side-stepped enclosure to maintain their place in the communal psyche.¹⁶³ In this article, Strasser looks at how religious women defined their space, specifically the Püttrich Sisters of Munich. Strasser's article uses the case of gathering saint's bones and relics to subvert the cloister's enforced space and create a larger space by connecting to the spiritual world.¹⁶⁴

Strasser argues the Counter-Reformation threw nuns into turbulence, along with most people in the early modern period. The seventeenth century saw a restructuring of the ideal norms that surrounded daily life. There was no longer a place for a single woman or women

¹⁵⁸ Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² Strasser, 'Bones of Contention'.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

living without a male head's guidance in this new ideal.¹⁶⁵ The appropriate way of life was in a male-headed household. Along with the strict enclosure decreed by the Council of Trent, these factors cut nuns off entirely from the newly defined public world. Strasser illustrates this by using the etymology of the word *öffentlich*. This word in German means public it comes from the word *offen*, meaning open.¹⁶⁶ So the idea of the convent being open literally was not part of the post-Tridentine regime.

Nuns were now enclosed, cut off from all of their traditional modes of contact and income. These women used their traditional role as intercessors for the souls in Purgatory to create a larger space for themselves after enclosure, albeit a spiritual one. Nevertheless, they also sought ways to remain connected with the public world.¹⁶⁷ Strasser uses the Pütrich sisters' procurement of St. Dorothea's bones to illustrate how the gap of both the spiritual space and the physical public was bridged.

Strasser uses this moment in the history of the Pütrich house to show how space was created and connected. Saints' bones were powerful currency in releasing souls from Purgatory, as they allowed the saint to act as a representative for a person. This connection was what bridged the gap. The public came to see the bones and pray for them to intercede, drawing the public into the nun's private world, while also keeping the nuns in the foreground of public thought because they gave the public access to the remains. The nuns used the saint's intercessory powers to strengthen their connection to the spiritual realm; this enlarged the space that they were allowed. It also gave them a much-needed source of revenue. Strasser's article outlines the struggle for identity and space.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Strasser, 'Bones of Contention', p. 264.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

¹⁶⁷ Strasser, 'Bones of Contention'.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 268-273.

Space played a significant role in the construction of a nun's identity, both positively and negatively. The examples above show nuns' agency in their quest to create a viable place for themselves. It also shows that they saw themselves as a vital part of the spiritual ecosystem. Their way of life had imbued them with a unique link to spiritual space, and they were actively engaged in keeping their position visible to the public, and their connection to the spiritual alive. This link is one that is only available to the monastic. The monastery is one kind of 'geographic realities', seen in Vamik Volkan's definition of group identity, that connects monastics, and informs their identity by creating boundaries and segregation from the world.¹⁶⁹

Psychoanalyst Vamik Volkan's definition of group identity is the grounding definition for this thesis. Volkan defines group identity as '... the end-result of myths and realities of common beginnings, historical continuities, geographical realities, and other shared linguistic, societal, religious, cultural and political factors.'¹⁷⁰ In essence, communal identity is how a group chooses to represent themselves to the outside world.¹⁷¹ Volkan's definition is the basis for the representation of shared elements. Identities are built and created through shared experiences, and once those identities are created, they are passed down to future generations.

The information provided above is just the basics of the collective identity; different monastic orders would identify themselves based on the values that their religious organization holds. The monastic identity focused on the aspect of being separated from the everyday Christian. This separation was physical and spiritual. Their lives were, in theory,

¹⁶⁹ Volkan, 'Large-Group-Psychology', p. 210.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ L. Giorgi, 'Travelling concepts and crossing paths: a conceptual history of identity', *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research*, 30, 1,(2017), pp. 47-60. p. 58.

wholly devoted to the worship of God. The secular world was a distraction in their ongoing conversation with the divine.

The Convents

Space, image in the world, how the foundational myths were viewed, and agency culminated in the creation of two communities with unique identities, that would aid them in their resistance and struggle with the Reformation. The Nuremberg convent of St. Clare was established in the year 1279.¹⁷² Nuremberg was a free imperial city and answered to no external power other than the Emperor.¹⁷³ A council consisting of local elites governed the city's inhabitants. Nuremberg was a center of education and culture; the leading artists and thinkers of Germany lived and rubbed elbows here. This brought the city into early contact with Martin Luther's writings.¹⁷⁴ This early contact led to a swift conversion to Protestantism.

The council and the city's elite had strong ties to the convent. A decree passed in the late fifteenth century stated that only the daughters of the Nuremberg patriciate could join the convent.¹⁷⁵ Almost every member of the city council had a relative living in the convent. This connection complicated the dealings between the convent and the council during the Reformation. These connections made the convent a place of familiarity for the women in it. The women knew each other; some had grown up together and were often related through blood or marriage. The women were members of well-respected families who grew up linked to one another, and then forged even deeper bonds once they entered the convent, as sisters.

¹⁷² R.D. Small, "“Everyone wants to pull us to heaven by our hair”": Caritas Pirckheimer's Perception of Martin Luther", *Footnotes: A Journal of History*, 1 (2017), pp. 89-110.; F.P. Lane, "“Not for Time but for Eternity”": Family, Friendship and Fidelity in the Poor Clare Monastery of Reformation Nürnberg", *Franciscan Studies*, 64 (2006), pp. 255-279, p. 267.

¹⁷³ G. Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century: City Politics and Life between Middle Ages and Modern Times* (Bloomington, 1976), p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer', pp. 261-263.; Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', p. 196.

¹⁷⁵ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 158-159.

The Poor Clares followed their city's reputation as a place of learning and culture. The convent had long been a well-respected girl's school.¹⁷⁶ Writing and learning seem to have been a hallmark of the sisters' community, as it was for many of the women's religious houses of the period. The convent's identity was interwoven with their families and the city. One cannot sever these connections and look at the convent on its own. These women would have been very conscious of the status they were born with; they belonged to the same strata of society as the men they would oppose, which informed how each party handled the situation.

The Franciscan Friars had seen to the community's religious needs since 1279. This linked the sisters tightly to the Friars.¹⁷⁷ The convent reformed during the fifteenth-century.¹⁷⁸ The Nuremberg sisters were on the front lines of this reform. They would send out convent members to help other religious women's communities transition to the reformed way of life. The theory put forth by scholars like Anne Winston-Allen in her text, argues that the Observant reform movement of the fifteenth century helped reconnect religious women with their shared identity as Brides of Christ.¹⁷⁹ These reforms refocused the sisters on their religious purpose, allowing them to weather the coming storm of the Protestant Reformation.¹⁸⁰ The Poor Clares of Nuremberg community and commitment to one another built their identity. These women knew they had status, both individual and as a group. The women living in the convent of St. Clare during the Reformation would use this status and family connection to their advantage. The examination in later chapters will illustrate this

¹⁷⁶ MacKenzie, 'Introduction', p. 3.

¹⁷⁷ Lane, "Not for Time but for Eternity", p. 271.

¹⁷⁸ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, p. 100.

¹⁷⁹ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

more fully as their fight against the council and Protestantism unfolded. Their faith and connections to one another bolstered them.

The Genevan Poor Clares are the second of the two convents analyzed in this thesis. The Clarian house in Geneva was established in 1473, by Yolanda of Savoy (1434-1478), during the reforming zeal of the fifteenth century.¹⁸¹ This founding linked them to royalty and the reforming St. Colette of Corbie (1381-1447).¹⁸² The sisters followed strict observance and were devoted to their religious tasks.¹⁸³ This, like in Nuremberg, would help them stay connected to each other and the wider order. This observance galvanized these two convents for their coming fight. After the sisters fled Geneva, for the safety of France, they would for the next two hundred years call themselves the ‘Sisters of St. Clare of Geneva in refuge in Annecy’, showing that the legacy created in Geneva stayed essential to the community.¹⁸⁴

Less is known about the convent of St. Clare in Geneva; they did not have a long-established history in the city and were in refuge in France longer than they were in Geneva. Scholars have also not dedicated as much attention to their plight and chronicle. Their fundamental identity was that they were devoted sisters in strict adherence to the Rule and tightly bound to one another, just like the sisters in Nuremberg. They were involved in the city’s politics, as far as they could be as enclosed nuns. These were women who used the tools at their disposal to ensure survival. As the continuing conversation shows, they were just as dedicated to defending their way of life as Nuremberg was.

Conclusion

¹⁸¹ Klaus, ‘Introduction’, p. 9.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 2; 7; 9.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

As one can see from the preceding discussion, many arguments surround the study of nuns in the early modern period. Nuns were a group made up of the social elite, who were active in their congregations and with the world around them in most cases. These women created strong bonds and communal identity. The historiography has passed the point of value-based judgments on the effects of the Protestant Reformation on women's lives. In the realm of religious women, scholars are starting to write about how these women viewed themselves and how they created that self-image.

This thesis will further that vein by analyzing these two groups of women, the convents of St. Clare in Nuremberg and Geneva. These two groups were unique, but they share a basic set of identity markers that embody their lifestyle. The discussion above has sought to lay those markers out systematically so that they will be easily identifiable in the analysis to follow. The Poor Clares of Nuremberg were well educated and well-connected women. They had a long well-respected history. The Protestant Reformation threw them into limbo, and they were allowed to live out their lives in their home, but by the end of the century, their community was gone and with it their unique identity.¹⁸⁵ The Geneva Poor Clares were new and vibrant, still feeding off their founders' charisma and vision. They boldly made their political affiliations known and fought to maintain the sanctity of their sacred space. Their lack of connection to the city made their battle very different than what their Nuremberg sisters faced. The sisters of Geneva were driven from their home, but their legacy continued for another two centuries, only ending with the French Revolution.¹⁸⁶ Though these two convents have very different stories and were in very different geopolitical situations, they shared an overarching identity as Brides of Christ. Their devotion linked them

¹⁸⁵ Small, "“Everyone wants to pull us to heaven by our hair”", p. 107.

¹⁸⁶ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 12.

to God. In the chapters that follow, we will look at the battles faced by these women, and try to understand how they resisted and fought for their identities, and how these fights had such different outcomes bringing them to see themselves as Knights of Christ. These women were knights battling to maintain their beliefs, identity, and, ultimately, the families that they had created in the convent.

CHAPTER TWO: THE NUREMBERG POOR CLARES

The Poor Clares of Nuremberg have received considerable scholarly attention over the last fifty years. Most of that attention has focused on their Abbess, Caritas Pirckheimer, a well-known figure in her time. Scholars with different areas of expertise have studied Caritas, ranging from studies to tell her story, to studies that discuss aspects of the Pirckheimer family as a whole.¹⁸⁷ This chapter and, indeed, this thesis looks once again at the women who lived in the convent of St. Clare. This work investigates an aspect of their lives that has been addressed but has never been the focus of a dedicated study; that aspect is resistance. This chapter analyzes the acts of resistance within the convent, how the sisters carried out their resistance, its effectiveness, and its impact on the sisters' collective identity.

Early modern Nuremberg was on the outside a well-organized city. A council made up exclusively of the city's wealthiest burghers, who had long made their fortunes in trade and other manufacturing, governed the city.¹⁸⁸ These men were the authority in the city, and they had accumulated that authority through careful negotiations over centuries.¹⁸⁹ Their influence also stretched into what we would see today as the private sphere; they regulated behavior for the city's moral well-being. This regulated behavior included dress, deportment, marriages, and funerals.¹⁹⁰

The council's oversight included the religious organizations of the city. Based on a fifteenth-century bull from Pope Sixtus IV, the council regulated who was allowed to join a

¹⁸⁷ See P. S. Datsko Barker, 'Caritas Pirckheimer: A Female Humanist Confronts the Reformation', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (1995), pp. 259-272.; C. Woodford, *Nuns as Historians in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford 2002).; F. P. Lane, "'Not for Time but for Eternity": Family, Friendship and Fidelity in the Poor Clare Monastery of Reformation Nürnberg', *Franciscan Studies*, 64 (2006), pp. 255-279.; M. Ryan, 'A German Nun at the Reformation', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, 2, 8 (1913), pp. 384-401.

¹⁸⁸ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 78-79.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 230; 109.

religious order, both male and female.¹⁹¹ The council's oversight crafted the convents into extensions of elite burgher society, but behind a cloister wall. The city had a total of eight monastic establishments, six male and two female.¹⁹² The council installed superintendents to oversee the houses' operations.¹⁹³ The council also had its hand in facilitating any reforms they felt the orders might require, such as the fifteenth-century Observant reforms discussed in Chapter One.¹⁹⁴ These men, too, were heavily involved in the Protestant change. Gerald Strauss argues in his seminal text, *Nuremberg, in the Sixteenth Century* that the council backed the Lutherans because religious governance was the only aspect of the city where the council did not have complete control.¹⁹⁵ This may well be true, but what is known is that the men on the council were aware of and responded quickly to the message coming out of Wittenberg. Several of the city's governing members, including Kaspar Nützel, whom we will meet momentarily, were members of a group surrounding the Observant Augustinians' leader.¹⁹⁶ This man was named Johann Staupitz, he was Luther's confessor and mentor and, in many ways, primed Nuremberg for Luther's message.¹⁹⁷ Once Luther's message reached Nuremberg, the city quickly assimilated and started to install preachers that were teaching Luther's version of the Gospel.¹⁹⁸ This quick and thorough change to the new theology would affect the religious institutions in the city.

When the Reformation came, the sisters of St. Clare tested the council's control by pushing back methodically against the implementations of Protestantism. The discussion below surrounds a document that has traditionally, as seen in the last chapter, been presented

¹⁹¹ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 157-159.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Roper, *Martin Luther*, pp. 67-68.

¹⁹⁸ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 163-165.

as a private journal of the Abbess, Caritas Pirckheimer. Ulrike Strasser challenged this understanding in her 1995 article.¹⁹⁹ Strasser argues that the document was a collective work written and formed around the sisters' central identity as Brides of Christ.²⁰⁰ This is the interpretation that I agree with and function under in this analysis. Strasser elaborates on this document's collective nature by saying that the letters of other sisters were included and that it carries on after Caritas's death are indicators that it was not her personal journal.²⁰¹ For the document to be strictly a personal journal undermines the communal nature of the constructed narrative. This, along with Strasser's analysis, are why I agree with her interpretation. Looking at the document as a chronicle, not a personal journal fits the narrative presented throughout by the Clares, and their fight. The fight did not rest on one sister's shoulders; they were a community.

Letters and narratives from the years 1524 to 1528 make up this document. The letters contained within are those written and received by the sisters. As with all documents written or transcribed by an invested party, the sisters constructed a narrative around their struggle. Like most chronicles, this document was a work of history, but that does not make what was included impartial or unbiased. The letters contained from people outside the convent may have undergone editing to suit the sisters' agenda. This editing could have been intentional, leaving out aspects of the truth that went against the strong united front that the sisters were constructing. These edits also could simply have been errors in copying. There was a long period when nothing was recorded in the chronicle, almost a year. This again could have been because nothing happened that the sisters felt was worth recording or that whatever did happen did not fit the narrative the sisters were creating, so the texts were left out. The sisters'

¹⁹⁹ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', pp. 193- 212.

²⁰⁰ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

²⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 196-197.

bias is important to keep in mind as one reads the analysis below. Here we interpret the sisters' resistance and discuss how it informed their identity. It is necessary to understand their presentation of events, it is their version of the truth, that helped the sisters maintain a collective identity for the future.

In the last chapter, there was a brief introduction to the Nuremberg Poor Clares. This overview of the Reformation years, below, will provide the necessary background to understand the series of events when reading the analysis. This chronicle began in 1524, with the sisters having concerns over the Franciscans' removal as their pastoral caregivers.²⁰² By this point, the city had started to have serious Lutheran leanings, and from what one can glean from the chronicle, the Franciscan friars were putting up some resistance to the Protestant changes. The city wanted to remove the Franciscan influence from the Clares.²⁰³ The issue surrounding the removal of the Franciscans remained a sore spot for the sisters for years. Soon after the convent registered their concerns with the city council regarding the friars, the city's Protestant sentiments began to heighten.²⁰⁴

In February of 1525, Frau Tetzl, the mother of sister Margaret Tetzl, came to the convent and demanded the removal of her daughter for the good of her soul. This started a rather drawn-out ordeal in which the council was involved.²⁰⁵ On the 19th of March 1525, three men came to the convent to deliver the council's decision regarding their recent petitions.²⁰⁶ The City council decreed that the convent was to no longer receive pastoral care from the Franciscans. Then, the men informed the sisters that they should let any women

²⁰² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 11.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-23.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-34.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34-38.

leave the convent if they wished.²⁰⁷ The argument surrounding the release of sisters would be a central theme to the chronicle. These decrees led to many letters back and forth between the convent's superintendent, Kasper Nützel, a newly converted Lutheran, and the Abbess, Caritas Pirckheimer.²⁰⁸

At this point, the conflict between the convent and the city was reaching its pitch. In June, more representatives came to the convent with the council's five-point plan. The points in this plan were: 1) the sisters should be released from their vows; 2) no sister should be held in the convent against her will; 3) they must transition to secular clothing; 4) the speaking grille was to be removed and replaced with a more transparent apparatus; 5) total inventory of all convent goods should be undertaken.²⁰⁹ The convent had four weeks to implement this plan.²¹⁰ Three nuns were forcibly removed from the convent, just days after the council introduced this plan.²¹¹ This removal was critical to the sisters' narrative and offered many different examples of both physical and rhetorical resistance. Things did not calm down for the convent, even after the removal of the three nuns. They, from their view, were continually being harassed by people wanting to convert them.²¹² In this period, there were many changes in the way the city regarded the convent. The women's importance in the community diminished. Their life choice had no place in the new Protestant world view. The city's change in policies regarding the convents illustrated this change in status. The convent was from that point on required to pay taxes, where before the Reformation, the religious houses and clergy were exempt from paying taxes because of their status. This change put a financial

²⁰⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 34-38.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-59.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 77-82.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-94.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 121.

burden on the sisters, causing them to fear how they would support themselves.²¹³ This fear set off a series of negotiations between the convent and the council.

In 1526 the convent was informed that Philipp Melanchthon, Luther's second in command, was to visit the city.²¹⁴ Nützel arranged a meeting between Caritas and Melanchthon.²¹⁵ In this meeting, the convent found its greatest ally, albeit in the least likely person. The chronicle describes this visit and its outcome: 'Afterwards he [Melanchthon] spoke emphatically to the superintendent and the other men about many things, especially concerning their having forbidden the Franciscans from holding divine service and having removed the children from the cloister by force. He told them openly and frankly what a great sin they had committed by doing this.'²¹⁶ From this moment on, the actions taken to convert the nuns stopped, they were left in relative peace; at least that is the perception given from the chronicle.²¹⁷ Other than a tax dispute, there was no interference for over a year. On the 1st of November 1527, there was a visitation by the council, where they demanded to speak with the sisters alone to gauge how they felt about living in the convent.²¹⁸ This episode was one where the sisters showed the power of their collective identity by choosing to speak with a unified voice to the council's queries.²¹⁹ The sisters, one by one, gave the same answers.²²⁰ Whether they prearranged this action or not, the sisters achieved their goal. The men grew weary and left without interviewing all the sisters or getting the dissenting opinion they so longed for.²²¹ And then soon after, the convent had their only apostate, Anna Schwarz. The

²¹³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 98-100.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-127; 141-142.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145-152.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 145-152.

chronicle writer does not dwell on Anna's leaving. The writer makes the case that it had less to do with her religious convictions and more about her failed attempt to usurp the office of Abbess.²²² This was the end of the chronicle's narrative section; the rest of the document concerns the conflicts over taxes, written several years later.²²³ These later additions were made on the basis that the document was a chronicle. Chronicles are living works of history; they are added to as events happen that the community feels need to be recorded. For the Nuremberg community, the fact that they had to pay taxes was a significant shift in their status in the city. It was a shift caused by the Reformation, so they felt it was important to include it. This also could be viewed as a mundane act of record-keeping, which is also a function of a chronicle.

The convent survived but was no longer allowed to take in novices. In 1595, the last sister died.²²⁴ The sisters' story was kept alive through their chronicle, which was rediscovered in 1852 by Constantin Höfler.²²⁵ Höfler discovered all four versions of this document in the Poor Clare convent of Bamberg after the convent was secularized. He then compiled them into what he titled the *Denkwürdigkeiten*.²²⁶ This episode is just a moment in the convent's three-hundred-year history; unfortunately, it was also the moment that delivered its death blow.²²⁷

The Dispute over Pastoral Care

As seen in Chapter One, the sisters' connection to the Franciscan Friars was one of the pillars of their collective identity. This connection was the authority in which they based their

²²² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 153-156.

²²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-172.

²²⁴ Small, "“Everyone wants to pull us to heaven by our hair”", p. 107.

²²⁵ MacKenzie, 'Introduction', p. 1.

²²⁶ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p 88.

²²⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 36.

founding and legitimacy. There was also the theological importance of receiving pastoral care from the friars. The care from the male order upheld the convent's religious beliefs. The first generations of Poor Clares were not guaranteed this care. They fought hard to ensure that the Friars would be their pastoral caregivers.²²⁸ The early Franciscans saw this connection to the women as burdensome, according to Lezlie Knox.²²⁹ Eventually, the brothers were induced by the Pope to take up their obligation to the sisters. In 1279, the Papal Bull, *Exiit qui seminat*, guaranteed the sisters care from the Franciscans.²³⁰ Pope Benedict XII made this relationship a legal requirement in 1336. The early Clares underwent an eighty-five-year struggle to secure this relationship.²³¹

The sisters of St. Clare in Nuremberg were established and started receiving pastoral care from the Franciscans in 1279, as Pope Nicolas III's bull required.²³² The sisters received care from the Franciscans since their founding. They may have even experienced some of the turmoil that surrounded guaranteeing that right. In 1525, when the council decided to remove the Franciscans from the sisters, this struck a blow to their identity.²³³ It appears from the chronicle that the Franciscans were the main male order resisting the council's shifting loyalties; thus, it was imperative to remove their influence from the convent. The council hoped that removing the friars' influence would help the sisters to convert. The sisters had to decide what was more important for their survival, fight for their right to have the Franciscans, or fall in line with the council's decrees. They chose to fight.

²²⁸ Knox, *Creating Clare*, pp. 58-59.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 73; 83.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84.

²³² Lane, "Not for Time but for Eternity", p. 271.

²³³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 18-23.

The beginning of this fight also happened to be where their account of the Reformation began. This was because the Franciscans' removal was the council's first action that directly affected the sisters' identity and way of life. The sisters sent the letters and the petition below before a formal decision was made regarding their pastoral care. The sisters were trying to preempt any changes to their lives. This act of rhetorical resistance has the hallmarks of all three subcategories; it has theological arguments, practical concerns, and symbolic language. In the text, it is unclear whether the Clares were operating on a rumor about the friars' removal or if they had concrete facts. Either way, they came across the information that the city council intended to remove the Franciscan friars from their commitment to the sisters. Ostensibly, replacing them with men that the sisters found less than suitable for the task.²³⁴

The narrative states that the sisters had a meeting regarding the Franciscans' removal. They decided to petition the council to reconsider this action.²³⁵ The chronicle shows the importance of the communal decision-making process to the sisters in several places; this process was a part of the sisters' core identity.²³⁶ Along with the petition to the council, the sisters also decided to have the Abbess Caritas write letters to Kasper Nützel, the convent's superintendent, Hieronymus Ebner, a patron to the convent, and Martin Geuder, Caritas's brother-in-law.²³⁷ All three men were among the "first old families" holding high positions on the city council and had relatives living in the convent.²³⁸ Many rhetorical motifs occurred in all four documents. The dominant tone of all was humble and servile. There was also the

²³⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 16.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²³⁶ St. Clare of Assisi, *Forma Vitae* in J. Mueller, *A Companion to Clare of Assisi: Life, Writings, and Spirituality* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 275-286.

²³⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 12-13.; P. A. MacKenzie, 'Footnotes' in Caritas Pirckheimer, *A Journal of the Reformation Years, 1524-1528*, Trans by Paul A. MacKenzie (Cambridge, 2006) Footnote 6, p. 13.; Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 79.

²³⁸ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 79.

recurring symbolism of father/child, shepherd/lamb/wolf. These references to father/child created a sense of sympathy and connection, though, in Nützel and Ebner's case, their children were actually in the convent. This language may have even functioned to infantilize the sisters, to give the perception that they could not function without a father's guidance. Since they argued that they need to keep their pastoral care, this father could be read as secular or spiritual. The shepherd/lamb/wolf, analogies were common in the chronicle. This was a universal trope used by both Protestants and Catholics when describing one another, and it is also familiar imagery found throughout the Bible.²³⁹ The opposing side always the wolf stalking the lambs of God, looking to wreak havoc.²⁴⁰ This dichotomy creates a sense of disconnection and othering. All of the documents also address the convent's long relationship with the friars; and their longevity in the city, which reinforced the convent's legitimacy.

The first letter was to Nützel. Caritas begged the superintendent to intercede on the convent's behalf, telling him that to lose the pastoral care of the friars would be both spiritually and temporally harmful.²⁴¹ The letter repeatedly asked for Nützel's advice, reminded him that he had guided the sisters well before and should do the same this time.²⁴² Caritas used the symbolism of father/child relationships; she calls the nuns in the convent his children to guide and protect. She also referred to the nuns as her children and, at the end of the letter, told Nützel that it was their job as parents to protect their children. Nuns often saw themselves in familial terms with the Abbess as mother and the rest of the members as her children, and also as sisters.²⁴³ Caritas showed Nützel the importance of them working in tandem to achieve the best possible outcome for the convent. She was also acknowledging the

²³⁹ For examples of this type of imagery in the Bible, see John 1:29; 1:36; 10:12; 1 Peter 1:19; Jeremiah 5:6.

²⁴⁰ A. Linton, 'Hans Sachs's Reformation Broadsheets: Landscapes, Cityscapes, Dreamscapes', *Past & Present*, 234, 1 (2017), pp. 237–261, pp. 243-246.

²⁴¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 13-14.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

council's authority by saying that Nützel was their father. In this letter, Caritas was asking Nützel to intercede, by flattery, and sympathy, she said over and over that they could not proceed in the matter without his advice. Then she emphasized the detriment to the convent. Caritas made use of the fact that the convent was poor, and they were defenseless women to invoke sympathy.

The next letter was for Ebner. Caritas emphasized the convent's longevity by reminding Ebner that his ancestor Friedrich had helped establish the convent in 1295, and after he became a Franciscan was also the convent's confessor and superintendent.²⁴⁴ She used this connection to her benefit; most of her letter to Ebner reminded him of this connection. She also told him very practically that getting to know new confessors would be tedious and disrupt their lives.²⁴⁵ Caritas's tone changed slightly; she told Ebner that he would see the folly in this plan if he had as much experience with the convent as she did. She then went back to the humble and subordinate language. At the end of the letter, she attaches greetings from his daughter Katherina.²⁴⁶ For the most part, this and Nützel's letters contents were similar, both aimed for the same resolution to keep the pastoral care as it was. However, in this letter, the rhetoric, and methods used to persuade were different. Caritas was playing on Ebner's familial connections to the convent, both past and current. One could interpret Caritas as saying that the convent was Ebner's family legacy. The Nuremberg Clares' foundational myth also emphasized that connection, as the male order helped found their convent. Caritas showed the importance of that connection in the next letter when, she told Martin Geuder that the Franciscans could survive without the Clares, but the Clares could not

²⁴⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 14-15.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

survive without the Franciscans.²⁴⁷ Yes, she could have been talking about the loss of confession and the Eucharist, but the council was not taking away all their access to pastoral care, just the Franciscan offered care.

The third letter and the longest in the set of personal correspondence, was to Caritas's brother-in-law, Martin Geuder.²⁴⁸ This letter lacked the more formal nature of the others.²⁴⁹ Caritas's more candid tone might be because she was writing to a family member. She did not show the same sense of reserve in this letter, but the central motifs were still there. She again asserted the longevity of the convent; and emphasized her experience. And then she made an interesting argument about how removing the Friars would make the public believe that the sisters had committed an indiscretion and that the council was punishing them. Laqua-O'Donnell illustrates how convents in Münster made a similar argument regarding the acceptance of enclosure during the seventeenth century. The public perception of moral failings in both cases could have been disastrous for the convent.²⁵⁰ After this comment, Caritas states that the sisters would be in actual danger if the council replaced the Friars with 'fat, drunken, immoral priests'.²⁵¹ Also stating that '... our cloistered abbey would soon become an open house where one can come and go as he likes...'.²⁵² In *State of Virginity*, Ulrike Strasser argues that openness was the fine line that separated the convent from the brothel in the public perception. Strasser argues that openness of the nuns' physical space was read as openness of the sexual space.²⁵³ This argument fits well with the evidence provided by the sisters of St. Clare in their chronicle. The sisters argued that opening the convent would

²⁴⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 16.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-18.

²⁵⁰ Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, pp. 25-26.

²⁵¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 16.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁵³ Strasser, *State*, p. 70.

ruin their reputations.²⁵⁴ The fact that they would not know the men that would be replacing the Franciscans worried the sisters. Without the connection forged in the Franciscan identity and familiarity, the sisters felt that they were not guaranteed safety or privacy.

Caritas told Geuder that the council were not pastors and honestly had no authority to dictate where the sisters received their pastoral care from, as long as they were behaving as they ought. According to the Rule of St. Clare, the sisters were only beholden to Francis and Clare's successors.²⁵⁵ Caritas again called attention back to her experience as the leader and member of the convent, she said, '... for they know as little about occupying my cloister... as I do about their houses.'²⁵⁶ This letter was one that better characterized how the women in the convent felt about the council's interference. The more candid nature of this letter allows the reader to understand the sisters' frustration and fear of being subjected to men who did not know and did not value their religious convictions.

The last document in this group was the petition to the council.²⁵⁷ Like the other three, the tone was humble. The sisters used many of the main themes found in the personal correspondence. They emphasized the convent's longevity and the relationship with the Friars, and the harm the loss of the Franciscans would cause the convent. They touched on the public perception of the convent. However, this time Caritas took this argument a step further. She told the men that the sisters' reputations were at stake and along with them the elite families that these women belong to, most of whom were on the council. Caritas told the council, 'Since all suspicion should be avoided wherever it is possible, it behooves your honors not just for the sake of those who are in cloisters but also for your sake to deliberate

²⁵⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 17.

²⁵⁵ St. Clare, *Forma Vitae*, Chapter 1, Line 5.

²⁵⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 17.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-23.

wisely because our disgrace can only mean dishonor for you too.’²⁵⁸ This was an example of symbolic and practical rhetorical resistance. The argument does not lay out what the dishonor would be exactly, but the sisters are practical in their choice to also lay it on the council as well. They emphasized their obedience to the council’s previous requests, unlike the other religious houses in the area.²⁵⁹ The petition does not tell the reader which requests the sisters had been obedient to, but they used their previous actions as a pillar for their argument. This illustration of their obedience was practical rhetorical resistance. The petition ended with the sisters pleading for the council’s protection and benevolence, based on their good behavior and loyalty.²⁶⁰

This whole episode ends with the council tabling the issue.²⁶¹ It is hard to say how effective the convent’s resistance was; they kept their confessors, but this was not a permanent victory. The arguments put forth must have, in some way, swayed the council, or the men just thought they had more significant issues to occupy their time and attention. After tabling the issue initially, the council later removed the Franciscans from their duties to the sisters. The sisters again petitioned the council and begged Nützel to intercede on their behalf.²⁶² Their petitions and pleading were ultimately unsuccessful, and they ended up without any pastoral care.²⁶³

The arguments surrounding pastoral care were some of the best to see the sisters’ practical and logical natures; they told the council that, in reality, they had no jurisdiction over the women’s spiritual care. It was an unlawful move to accept any confessor other than the

²⁵⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 19.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-23.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 34-46.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

one appointed by the bishop. It was against their rule to accept this mandate, and they could not comply.²⁶⁴ Their insubordination on this account led to outsiders having very negative interpretations of the convent's relationship to the Friars. Nützel accused them of thinking their salvation came through the Franciscans.²⁶⁵ The sisters fought to dispel these rumors by asking the council to investigate any charges of impropriety.²⁶⁶

This situation was critical to the sisters because of how the convent viewed themselves in conjunction with the male order. Pastoral care forged a link of legitimacy for the sisters. St. Clare's legitimacy was directly tied to Francis's; without the Franciscans, the sisters lost this connection. The loss of this pillar of their identity forced the sisters to look inward to bolster their identity. They also lost their connection to the sacraments when they refused the pastoral care offered by the council. The Eucharist forged the bond not only of the sisters' identity as Christians but was their link to the body of Christ. The convent's identity was predicated on their connection to Christ. The loss of the Eucharist was a crippling blow. The women had to find a way to uphold their identity as Brides of Christ without the main rituals reinforcing that identity. It is also worth noting that the sisters' decision to forgo the pastoral care offered by the council was in itself an act of symbolic and theological resistance. They were symbolically challenging the council's authority over the convent's religious life and theologically resisted by refusing to compromise. The challenge to the authority was a problem for the council as they prided themselves on their control of all aspects of life in Nuremberg.

²⁶⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 44-45.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

The Council's Five Point Plan

This episode began with members of the council coming to the convent to deliver the council's plan to usher the sisters into Protestantism. The council was attempting to change the sisters' physical world because they failed to impact their spiritual world. When the councilmen arrived, they demeaned the convent, saying that, '... the special sects... cloistered estate, were immoral, mistaken, sinful, and cursed...'.²⁶⁷ They told the women that the public could no longer tolerate the cloister.²⁶⁸ The rumors surrounding convents and monasteries had started to leak into the public psyche. The convent should have been a place supported by the public for the services it provided. However, with the rumors and the shifts in how Protestants viewed marriage, the convent became an unwanted den of Catholicism. The men threatened that if the sisters continued in their 'peculiarities', violence was inevitable.²⁶⁹ The council delivered the ultimatum that they could only protect the convent if the sisters submitted to the points; if they refused, they would be on their own.²⁷⁰ The nuns decided to resist. The chronicle states, 'Without exception, they all voted unanimously and each one separately that they would keep the rule which they had vowed to God and in no way obey the rule which the Council had given them.'²⁷¹ They were firm and only prepared to give in on two of the five points, the speaking grille, and the inventory. The inventory and the speaking window did not violate the sisters' rule. The council had already insinuated themselves in the convent's financial matters. The inventory was just a new step in that relationship. Making these concessions did not harm the sisters' identity because they were not violating their rule.

²⁶⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 77.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 82.

The sisters also resisted the points while the men were still at the convent. Caritas presented both practical and theological resistance to the councilmen upon being told to release the sisters from their vows.²⁷² She informed the men that she would be happy to release the women from their vows of obedience to her, but she could do nothing about their vows to God.²⁷³ She was logical because she could only release them from what she had power over. She told the men that she only had the power to govern the convent because the sisters allowed her to, so she, in essence, could not command them to do anything.²⁷⁴ This was a point that often came up in the chronicle. The writer was continually reminding the reader, and Caritas regularly reminded others that she only spoke, wrote, or communicated what the sisters allowed her to. The Abbess was an elected leader, and she spoke with the authority of the convent. This democratic way of life that existed in the convent was fundamental to the women. The Rule of St. Clare states that ‘... the Abbess must seek the consent of all the sisters.’²⁷⁵ During the pastoral care debacle, Nützel asked Caritas if the sisters would consider allowing a member of the council or an appointed preacher to take up the task of visitation. Caritas informed Nützel vehemently that this was against their rule and would never give up the power to appoint their leaders.²⁷⁶ Their identity was grounded in this self-representation.

Then there was the theological side to this resistance. Caritas told the men that she could not release the women from a vow made to God. She was not going to add their souls to her many sins.²⁷⁷ As they told the sisters many times, the Protestants did not believe that the

²⁷² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 79.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁵ St. Clare, *Forma Vitae*, Chapter 2, Line 1.

²⁷⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 49.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

monastic lifestyle or vows had any value or any Biblical justification.²⁷⁸ Caritas argued elsewhere in the chronicle that the religious life does have a Biblical precedent in the early church, which was, as seen in the last chapter, a tactic used by monastics to create legitimacy.²⁷⁹ This argument went back and forth between the different Reformers and Caritas. When Philipp Melanchthon visited Caritas, the chronicle tells the reader that the only aspect of theology that they disagreed on was vows.²⁸⁰ To capitulate to this aspect of the council's plan would invalidate their way of life completely. If the sisters had done this, then there would have been no reason for them to remain cloistered. The resistance was necessary and effective.

Another point that created resistance was the mandate that no sister be forced to do anything against their will, like pray, fast, or stay in the convent.²⁸¹ This mandate coming days before, three of the sisters were forcibly removed from the convent by their Lutheran parents.²⁸² The sisters had addressed this aspect earlier in the chronicle and would address it later again. Caritas informed the men that no woman was there against her will, and if she was, then she was free to leave.²⁸³ The writer shows the reader through the account of Anna Schwarz that the sisters meant this. If a nun was not committed to the lifestyle and the community, she was free to go.²⁸⁴ The general population did not believe that this was true. They thought that Caritas was holding the children against their will and acting against God by telling them to disobey their parents.²⁸⁵ The resistance to this can be seen best in the theological arguments, where Caritas argued that the women were free to go, but their souls

²⁷⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 77.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 88- 94.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-156.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

would answer to God. She saw their vows as binding, but this was no longer the belief of those living in the city and, she was battling to maintain the legitimacy of her beliefs.

However, the primary way the women resisted was by continuing to maintain their lifestyle.

The mandate to change to secular dress also caused the sisters to resist. Caritas speaking for the convent, told the council's representatives that it was simply not as easy as they made it seem, that the women made all their clothing, and it would be costly to re-clothe such a large convent.²⁸⁶ As the convent housed fifty-three women, this would have been an expensive endeavor. Of course, the men were indifferent, telling Caritas to use their whole clothing budget because they would not be remaining in the convent for much longer.²⁸⁷ This was pure speculation on the men's part, or wishful thinking, as the council had made no overt plan to close the convent. The men told the sisters that '...the kingdom of heaven is not made up of clothes.'²⁸⁸ The convent, we learn, later did not change their garments.²⁸⁹ They were confronted with this fact by a council member, and when asked why, Caritas simply replied that the council had decreed that she could not force the sisters to do anything against their will, and the sisters did not want to change clothes.²⁹⁰ This is one of the moments when the 'worthy mother's' wit was displayed best.²⁹¹ The councilman had no debate to offer back to Caritas's argument. This extreme practicality was hard to refute.²⁹² Physical appearance was important to the monastic identity; here, this importance is seen. The community outside saw that the sisters dress marked them as separate, and they believed that this was against God's commandments; as seen from the quote, there is no distinction in the Kingdom of Heaven.

²⁸⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 80.

²⁸⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 151.; MacKenzie, 'Footnotes', Footnote 154, p. 151.

²⁸⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 78.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 163; 96.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Dress was an important marker of social status for most early modern people. It was how people differentiated themselves on the streets; only burghers could wear expensive luxury fabrics, lace, or fur on their garments.²⁹³ Caritas used this to her advantage, in her resistance to the men, saying, ‘We also knew, however, that in heaven there was no inappropriate attire such as coats of camel hair.’²⁹⁴ Paul Mackenzie speculates in his notes that one of the councilmen might have been wearing such a coat.²⁹⁵ If this was the case, then Caritas was most certainly giving them a taste of their own medicine. She might also have been commenting on the extravagance of having such an expensive item of clothing, as in the Kingdom of Heaven, everyone was equal. Protestants interpreted the monastics’ insistence on stepping outside the ordained norm for society by marking themselves as different from any social station through their garments, negatively. Of course, the sisters saw their dress as another aspect of their commitment to poverty and God. They used practical resistance to say that they could not change quickly, and then that the sisters were refusing to listen to Caritas. This practical resistance of choosing not to obey and hoping they would get away with it was effective; they were left alone concerning their garments. Leaving them to their own devices regarding their clothes left them visibly different from the surrounding community. This beacon served as a form of physical, symbolic resistance to the Protestant changes, and their armor.

Here we see the council pushing to institute a new rule of life that they had created. This new rule or plan was against many of the direct legislations found in the Rule of St. Clare. The council attempted to usher the sisters into the secular Protestant world, but the sisters refused to follow the council’s plan. They resisted in many ways employing physical

²⁹³ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 113.

²⁹⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 80.

²⁹⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 80.; MacKenzie, ‘Footnotes’, Footnote 63, p. 80.

and rhetorical resistance, of all three kinds, and ultimately, they were successful. They maintained their identities and the aspects that represented that identity to the broader public regardless of the impact that it would have on their safety. They remained in their habits, they kept their vows both to Caritas and God and maintained the sacred space and their collective identities, by reaffirming their commitment to one another.

The Removal of Ebner, Nützel, and Tetzl

This episode is by far the most dramatic of the chronicle and has many examples of resistance, and the sisters fighting to keep their convent whole. This event took place over several days and had many moving parts; I will be discussing the most pertinent events to the analysis. This event centered around three nuns, Margaret Tetzl, Clara Nützel, Katherina Ebner, and their mothers.²⁹⁶ Frau Tetzl had previously tried to remove her daughter but was unsuccessful; this incident took place several months after the first.²⁹⁷ One morning Frau Ebner and Frau Nützel came to the convent and demanded their daughters. The women demanded to be allowed to enter the convent.²⁹⁸ Caritas did not allow this; she controlled the convent's sacred space, maintaining that core of identity and separation.²⁹⁹ This theological physical resistance to these women could have ended badly for the sisters. The women were the wives of council members. Again, Caritas used the council's mandates against them, stating that the council did not want people coming in and out of the cloister.³⁰⁰ Caritas told the women that if she made an exception for them that the number of people demanding entry would escalate.³⁰¹ Caritas was successful in her resistance; the women backed down, but then insisted that the girls come out to them in the church. Again, Caritas refused; she stated that

²⁹⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 85-94.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-86.

she would not let anyone out without the council's express permission.³⁰² Caritas was cloaking her resistance in obedience. The women relented, and Caritas offered to let them speak with their daughters alone through the communion window. The women did not want to do this, and they decided to leave, but not before they threatened to return with force.³⁰³ This offer to let the women speak with their daughters may have been a later editorial addition. The mothers took the case to the council with legal representation; one of their accusations was that Caritas would not allow them to speak with their children. The writer may have been trying to reinforce the later image of the mothers as liars and that Caritas was accommodating.

Upon hearing the mothers' accusations, two councilmen were sent to the convent to reprimand Caritas. Caritas relayed her version of events, the men seemed to believe her, but this too could be how the chronicle wished for the future reader to see God's favor for the sisters. The men told Caritas to release the girls to their mothers on the next day. Caritas accepted this mandate but told the men that the three nuns wished to speak with their fathers.³⁰⁴ This was an act of practical and symbolic rhetorical resistance. The women attempted to subvert their mothers by appealing to their fathers. This could be for a myriad of reasons; maybe the girls knew that they could get their fathers to relent, or maybe it was just a stalling technique to buy them time.³⁰⁵ Strasser, in her article, 'Brides of Christ', looks at the relationships of the nuns to their families. She looks at this episode in detail. She says that the girls appealing to their fathers was possibly that they genuinely felt that only their fathers had the authority to remove them from the convent. Strasser also says that it could have been a

³⁰² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 86.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

³⁰⁵ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

‘strategic move’, which is how I have chosen to interpret their insistence on speaking with their fathers.³⁰⁶ In trying to subvert their mothers, they also suggest that their mothers did not have the authority to remove them.³⁰⁷ Nevertheless, the reader soon sees that the women’s attempt at resistance through their fathers was ineffective, and the men tell them that their fathers would not come.³⁰⁸ Before the men leave, Caritas asked that they clear her name before the council. It was imperative that the reputation of the convent remained unsoiled, and as Abbess, Caritas’s reputation was a large part of that.³⁰⁹ The fact that they had not committed any transgression was one of the primary weapons in their resistance. Their reputations and the reputation of the convent was vital. If there was any hint of impropriety, the council could have found grounds to close the convent. The men kept their promise to tell the council Caritas’s side of the story. The chronicle tells us that the mothers ‘...were shown to be liars.’³¹⁰ This statement followed the propaganda of the whole incident.³¹¹ There is no doubt that the writers of this chronicle saw themselves and the convent as battling for good.

The next day the mothers returned this time with Frau Tetzl in tow. By this point, rumors had spread around the city, and a large crowd had gathered to watch.³¹² The writer likened this to a public execution. Executions were a common form of entertainment for the early modern person; the writer called this into the reader’s mind.³¹³ The chronicle writer used the criminal rhetoric once before in the text when Frau Tetzl came to remove Margaret the first time. Margaret felt that her mother and the council treated her worse than a criminal, as

³⁰⁶ Strasser, ‘Brides of Christ’, p. 202.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 88.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

³¹¹ Ibid., p. 89.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 89.; Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, pp. 227-230.

criminals at least got to mount a defense.³¹⁴ The execution analogy illustrated that these women felt that they were being led to their death. This analogy also invokes the imagery of martyrdom. Martyrdom itself is an act of final physical resistance. Martyrdom also strengthens and impacts a group's identity; it acts as a rallying cry around the belief system. This was true for Catholics and Protestants, as both had large volumes on the martyrs of their denominations.³¹⁵ For the sisters of St. Clare, this imagery invoked symbolism of the final act of commitment to their way of life they were willing to take. The three nuns throughout the whole ordeal had felt anguish and fear.³¹⁶ They were so scared when their mothers came the second time that they begged Caritas to let them hide.³¹⁷ This is an example of practical physical resistance; the women do not want to lose their home or family in the cloister. Caritas denied this request because she feared that it would only cause the mothers to break down the doors.³¹⁸ This shows how important it was to maintain control of the sacred space; as much as Caritas wanted to protect her 'lambs', she could not risk the whole convent.³¹⁹

Because of the crowd, the mothers wanted to remove their daughters from a more private back entrance.³²⁰ We do not know if this was because they simply wanted to avoid the crush or, as the chronicle tells us, that they wanted to spirit the girls away without drawing attention. Caritas refused to let this happen; she said that she would not let them hide what they were about to do. If the mothers were acting justly and felt no shame, it should not matter what door the sisters exited through. She told the mothers that the girls would leave her the same way they came to her through the chapel door.³²¹ With this act, Caritas was asserting

³¹⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 27.

³¹⁵ F. Benedetto, and J. Duke, *The new Westminster dictionary of Church history* (Louisville, 2008), p. 415.

³¹⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 89.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

control over a situation that had caused strife for her and her charges. She was forcing the mothers to face what they were doing in public view. This resistance was symbolic physical resistance. She showed that the sisters had nothing to hide or be ashamed of, again protecting that reputation. She refused to let others twist the account that the mothers were removing their daughters because of impropriety.

The mothers and their entourage entered the church. Caritas lamented the fact that she had to open the door into the chapel.³²² The mothers wanted Caritas to accompany the girls out into the public church; she refused.³²³ Again, Caritas was maintaining her control of the physical space, which was maintaining the sacred. She again asserted control over the situation. Once Caritas refused to enter the church with the sisters, the mothers wanted Caritas to force them to exit. Caritas refused to do this, saying it was the sisters' choice. Caritas again used the council's mandates as a form of rhetorical resistance. According to the council, she could not force the sisters to do anything. The sisters refused to cross into the church.³²⁴ Caritas created a stalemate. This resistance was physical; the sisters were using their bodies to resist their mothers' attempts to remove them. The crowd outside started to grow restless, and the mothers and men sent by the council to witness the event were worried that a riot would ensue.³²⁵ The mothers asked the men to remove their daughters for them. Caritas let the councilmen enter the chapel, she said that she would not force the girls to do anything against their conscience, but the men could try to persuade them.³²⁶ Then something changed Caritas's mind, maybe the crowd was growing violent, or maybe she was unwilling to risk the mothers trying to enter the convent or angering the council.³²⁷ This is all speculation as the

³²² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 89.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Ibid., pp. 89-90.

³²⁵ Ibid., p. 90.

³²⁶ Ibid.

³²⁷ Ibid.

chronicle gives the reader no information about why Caritas changed her mind. Caritas decided to lead the girls out as the council had told her to do the day before.³²⁸ The chronicle tells us that the mothers ran into the chapel. The mothers tried to convince their daughters to leave but said that if they did not, they would remove them by force.³²⁹ The chronicle states what happens next; ‘Then the brave knights of Christ defended themselves by word and deed as much as they could with great weeping, screaming, pleading and begging, but there was less mercy there than in hell.’³³⁰ These women were physically fighting their mothers and people with them. Katherina told her mother, ‘... you did not give me my soul. For that reason I owe you no obedience in matters which my soul opposes’, after being told to obey her mother’s commands.³³¹ This was a powerful statement, the Bible commands children to honor their father and mother, and Katherina using symbolic rhetorical resistance threw that commandment in her mother’s face. Katherina saw her soul as a gift from God, and she was living the life that God had called her to, her mother wanted her to forsake that gift and life. A thought that Katherina disdained. Katherina defended herself and quoted scripture to lend legitimacy to her arguments. She challenged them when they contradicted themselves and told them that their actions and statements opposed the Gospel.³³² Katherina Ebner put up theological rhetorical resistance; she was using and proving the extent of her education. The chronicle tells us that those witnessing her resistance were astonished at her eloquence.³³³ Though these words are moving and paint a fascinating picture, the reader must also understand that an invested party wrote them. The happenings recorded in this episode may

³²⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 90.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

³³² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

³³³ *Ibid.*

have been much less dramatic. The writer of this chronicle made an argument about the mistreatment and injustices forced on the sisters of St. Clare, for future generations.

Finally, their mothers said the sisters had to leave, and that was the end of it. The mothers threatened to tie the girls' hands and feet and drag them out. The girls still did not relent.³³⁴ The ever-defiant Katherina Ebner responded to her mother's threats: 'Here I Stand and will not yield. No one shall be able to force me out.'³³⁵ As she was saying this, her mother's group was removing her from the chapel.³³⁶ One will notice the echo of Martin Luther's famous 'Here I Stand' speech delivered in 1521 at the Diet of Worms when he refused to recant his new theology.³³⁷ As we have established, the women at St. Clare were well-read and more than likely were aware of this speech. No one can know if Luther or Katherina Ebner actually spoke these words; however, what was important was its use in her acts of resistance. When Luther uttered his famous words, it was in defiance of the Emperor and the Catholic Church. This moment solidified Luther's break with Rome.³³⁸ Though Katherina's audience was not the ruler of the land and the high clergy, the point was the same, those in power were attempting to force her to do something against her conscience, in using Luther's words the writer or Katherina, was saying that the Lutherans had become what they were fighting against. The girls were physically removed from the chapel, each being carried over the threshold by four people.³³⁹ As the women were pulled from their home, their mothers blessed them using Lutheran rituals. Once the girls were in the church, their mothers tore off their habits. In doing so, ripped the girls away from the physical signs of their communal identity. The nuns were then dressed in secular clothing, returning them

³³⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 90.

³³⁵ Ibid., pp. 92-93.

³³⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

³³⁷ MacKenzie, 'Footnotes', Footnote 96, p. 92.; Roper, *Martin Luther*, p. 7.

³³⁸ Roper, *Martin Luther*, p. 7.

³³⁹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 93.

symbolically to their lives before the convent. The mothers then forced the girls into carriages.³⁴⁰ The sisters yelled into the crowds so all would know they were being removed against their wills. Even as Katherina was being led into her parents' home, she was still wailing and calling out the injustice.³⁴¹ Thus, the removal of Ebner, Nützel, and Tetzl ended, the chronicle tells the reader that what became of the girls was unknown.³⁴² We know that Kaspar Nützel and the other fathers offered to pay reparations to the convent, even though the council had decreed that the sisters were to pay those who left.³⁴³ Caritas and the sisters denied these payments. The convent was willing to take the girls back if their parents would let them. The traumatic loss of the sisters weighed heavily on the convent.³⁴⁴

The resistance of this episode is palpable. These girls saw themselves as fighting for their lives and, more importantly, their souls, the writer labeling them as Knights. This resistance was inevitably unsuccessful, the girls were removed, but their resistance may have been a cautionary tale for any other parents wanting to remove their children. These girls fought hard to stay in their home, and it required a substantial amount of force to remove them. One has to wonder if the mothers had not been councilmen's wives if they could have gotten away with using such extreme force to remove the girls. In the end, life resumed in the convent. However, Caritas never failed to send greetings to Clara Nützel when she wrote her father, always reminding him that he had taken away one of her children, saying 'Please give our friendly greeting to our pious little Clara from all the sisters'.³⁴⁵

³⁴⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 93.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ibid., pp. 93-94.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 95.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

Wenzel Link and Theological Debate

A corps of seven letters make up the theological debate between Caritas and a theologian named Wenzel Link, a Wittenberg Augustinian who had converted to Luther's teachings, with Kaspar Nützel as the intermediary. The leaders of the Lutheran movement in Wittenberg sent Link to Nuremberg to help with their Reformation.³⁴⁶ Nützel initiated this discourse between Caritas and Link in the hopes that Link could convince Caritas to convert. These letters give some of the best examples of theological resistance in the chronicle. From Nützel's letter to Caritas, it appeared that Nützel approached Link to help with converting the convent, Link obliged by writing a letter. Nützel said that this would be the last time that he attempted to convert them.³⁴⁷ Caritas addressed her letters to Nützel, not to Link, and she maintained that convention throughout the letters. The keeping of the convention could have many functions. She may have been following a societal custom as she had not been formally introduced to Link, or it may have been because the original letter was addressed to Nützel, not to her or the convent. She also could have been refusing to engage with Link; by addressing her letter to Nützel, she resisted by not engaging Link directly. She asserted that she was not worthy to enter into a discussion with Link, and even though Link wrote her directly in the second letter, she continued the conversation through Nützel. She said that she felt that arguing with a learned man does no one any good.³⁴⁸ Caritas and the sisters were not interested in entering into this debate that much was made clear by the tone of their responses, which, as we will see, Link did not appreciate.

Link began his first letter by stating he intended to tell the sisters where they had gone wrong. From the beginning, the reader can see that this letter might be received negatively by

³⁴⁶ MacKenzie, 'Footnotes', Footnote 114, p. 108.; Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 108.

³⁴⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 108-109.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 110;134.

Caritas and the convent.³⁴⁹ Link's letters are very much in line with Luther's 1520 work, *On the freedom of a Christian*, one can see that he was trying to use the standard set by Luther to direct these women.³⁵⁰ Link in both of his letters instructs the sisters to obey the council and do as they ask, because that was what Christ commanded, and not to worry about temporal things, because God would provide for them.³⁵¹ In addressing Link's accusations, Caritas told him that food does not cook itself and that though God does not want one to worry excessively, one must handle the mechanics of God's grace.³⁵² This argument showed Caritas's sense of humor; she was dry and sarcastic. It is also a great example of practical resistance; she was simply telling him that she knew that God would provide, but someone had to prepare the food provided.³⁵³ Caritas was discussing the practical aspects of God's grace. She was not doubting that he would provide for her and the convent, what she was arguing that someone must do the physical actions.

Link then attacked their lifestyle and accused them of worshiping the saints. Link states this in both letters, Caritas in her usual practical fashion rebuts, saying '... perhaps we mistakenly attribute too much significance to the saints, one should not hold that against us simple women, when, after all, great doctors have done the same, and doubtless Dr. Wenzel formerly thought much of St. Augustine.'³⁵⁴ This practicality in her argument could be two-fold, first because she was a practical and logical person. That was just how she thought about things, but also because she knew that if she started a grand theological argument, the men would probably ignore it. She knows that her perspective was likely to be overlooked because

³⁴⁹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 114-119.

³⁵⁰ M. Luther, *On the freedom of a Christian: with related texts*, Translated by Tryntje Helfferich (Indianapolis, 2013).

³⁵¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 114.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

she was a woman and a Catholic. She also addressed Link's accusations about how different they were by reminding Nützel/Link, that not so very long-ago Link was doing the same. In her second letter, she told the men that they honor saints as was appropriate for their commitment to God.³⁵⁵ She told Nützel/Link that the sisters knew that there is no other mediator than Christ. Link had suggested that they use him as an example of how to live their lives.³⁵⁶ Caritas said; next, he would want them to take husbands, a suggestion that she abhorred. She reprimanded Link, saying that Jesus Christ should be the only model for living.³⁵⁷ She later followed on this belief that Jesus was the ultimate model by saying that he showed in his life that living chastely, with God's grace, was superior. She used Biblical authority from John the Baptist and the early Apostles, to validate the choice to live in the cloister. She said that John the Baptist lived separate from people, and the Apostles lived only in a community that shared goods.³⁵⁸

Link told the sisters they could not show neighborly love because they were in the cloister. Link told the women that 'Christ will punish you for it, like the heretics, if you fail to do your duty to your fellow man because you live in a cloister.'³⁵⁹ Link was stating that he felt that the sisters could be of more use outside serving the community at large. In his Protestant view, that would have been as wives tending to their families. Link has a different view of what lived religion looks like for the women of St. Clare. He told them that they were committed to '...self-serving invented works...'.³⁶⁰ He told the sisters that separation was not right, that Jesus extolled Christians to let their light shine.³⁶¹ In a previous petition to the

³⁵⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 136.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-138.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

council, the sisters stated that they saw good works as sharing grace and showed that God had filled them with his grace. Link would have been hard-pressed to disagree with that statement, based on Luther's theology.³⁶² Caritas rebutted the accusations about the convent, not supporting the larger community by saying that they did help and could provide witnesses.³⁶³ Again she was practical and direct. The convent had been an institution in the city for two hundred plus years. It is simply impossible that they had lived that long without contributing in some way to the community at large. They were a place to send one's daughters that upheld their virginity, which was, in most cases, cheaper than marriage.³⁶⁴ They would have been active in production and purchasing. The convent also owned land which employed people and provided for others. In all secular aspects of life, they functioned like any other household in the city.³⁶⁵ In addition to this, Gerald Strauss tells us that the sisters of the convents of St. Clare and Katherine, were responsible for the rehabilitation of prostitutes, so again they were serving the broader good of the community here both temporally and morally.³⁶⁶ They also contributed to the community by offering different services that could only be performed by people in the religious vocation, such as prayers for the dead and intercession.

Link attacked monastic vows, telling the sisters that the vows were useless and not Biblical, stating that God had commanded all things necessary for salvation.³⁶⁷ In Link's view, they were living a delusion.³⁶⁸ Caritas informed Link that if her vows were wrong, then so must the vows taken at baptism.³⁶⁹ She told Nützel/Link that just because someone says something was wrong does not mean it was. Her example was that people said Luther was

³⁶² Luther, *freedom of a Christian*.

³⁶³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 122.

³⁶⁴ Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, p. 29.

³⁶⁵ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 154.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

³⁶⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 117.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

wrong, but the men still followed him.³⁷⁰ She told Nützel that she was not going to discuss vows because she was not able.³⁷¹ At this point in the letter, the reader gets the impression that Caritas was tired of repeating herself; she had made her views on vows clear to Nützel and the council. In his second letter, Link said that he wanted to discuss vows with her either in person or through correspondence and that if she could prove him wrong, he would admit his folly.³⁷² Link's request to speak with her on vows reads like more of a challenge; one can assume that he was aware of Caritas's reputation as an educated woman. He seems very confident that Caritas would not dissuade him from his views undermining her reputation. Caritas did not respond as she had refused to do so in her previous letter.

Link ended his first letter with a straightforward statement, 'No wonder that your faith and my faith are not the same when you bear such meaningless stuff in your heart and are founded upon false delusion invented by men, something that I detest. My foundation is solely on the pure Word of God.'³⁷³ As one can see, the tone of this letter was patronizing. The sisters disagreed with him; they believed that God's will was the basis for their salvation and faith. They had been called to their life of enclosure by God and intended to stay faithful to that call. As Link pointed out, God commanded all things necessary for salvation, and he had commanded these women to follow the life of enclosed nuns.³⁷⁴

In the first half of her second letter to Nützel/Link, Caritas was not responding to Link as much as making a statement about Evangelicalism. This section illustrates that Caritas and the convent were not shut off from the events happening and were avidly following them. In her usual style, Caritas had a biting wit and was not afraid to speak her mind. She told

³⁷⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 136.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Nützel/Link that the sisters had decided to watch and wait because the Lutherans could not even manage to agree among themselves. They were being careful, following the Bible, and letting the Holy Spirit be their guide. She made it clear to the reader that she knew what was going on with this statement, ‘Karlstadt, Zwingli, Puczer, Capito, Icolampadius, and others do not consider themselves false prophets, but true ones. I was also informed that Karlstadt has not yet recanted. Luther, he says, did not understand him correctly. At the same time, however, they reviled one another in the coarsest manner.’³⁷⁵ She told Nützel/Link that no one knows what was true, and for Link to not bother with a third letter, because they were following their conscience.³⁷⁶ She added to her argument by referencing a higher authority than Link. She argued that Melanchthon disapproved of pressuring people into conversion.³⁷⁷ She used this tactic two other times in the letter, another with Melanchthon as her authority. The second time using Luther and Wittenberg, with these statements, she expressed that Link did not have the authority to comment on the things that he was. Caritas did not recognize Luther or Melanchthon’s authority. However, she knew Nützel and the council did.³⁷⁸ This tactic also illustrated to the men that she knew what was happening outside the convent and the opinions of the major Reformers. In her first response, she said, ‘But everyone only wants to lead others to heaven and not strive for himself.’³⁷⁹ This statement shows how the sisters viewed those that had come and been relentless and even cruel in their conversion efforts.

Caritas’s response was theologically sophisticated, regardless of her insistence in several places that she could not answer Link’s letter, because of her lack of education. Even using the conventional literary device of the uneducated woman, she showed her intellect in

³⁷⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 135.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 136; 138-139.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

her rebuttal, she was practical and direct.³⁸⁰ The second letter was a statement of faith, identity, and resistance. The sisters were not going to be bullied or pulled ‘by [their] our hair’ to do anything against their conscience.³⁸¹

The last letter in this group was from Nützel; he asked Caritas to send Link’s letter back to him. Nützel explained that Link was angry with him for sharing his letters with the sisters, and Link said that Caritas was ‘spiteful’.³⁸² Link had also decided to let the matter rest and to leave it in God’s hands. With this, we can see that Caritas’s resistance was very effective, she might have offended the good doctor, but he would leave the convent alone. This letter also came after Melanchthon visited the convent. It seems that Melanchthon’s opinion of the convent had eased Nützel’s and the council’s urge to force the sisters into conversion.³⁸³ This letter, without saying it outright, acted as an apology from Nützel.³⁸⁴ After this, the tensions that had existed between the sisters and their superintendent seem to have dissipated.³⁸⁵ The disputation between Caritas and Link was one that shows us many things about the convent. The sisters though enclosed, were well informed. The walls of the cloister were permeable. Caritas uses this permeability to her advantage. It shows that they were theologically sophisticated and were not afraid to challenge the Reformers’ inconsistencies. As the sisters say many times throughout their chronicle, they would rather remain with the old faith than fall into sin with a new one.

³⁸⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 119-125.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 142.

³⁸³ MacKenzie, ‘Footnotes’, Footnote 145, p. 142.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, Footnote 147, p. 143.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Footnote 147, p. 143.

The Importance of Space

There was one overarching type of resistance that occurred in the convent of St. Clare. This was the act of controlling space. In the last chapter, space, both spiritual and physical, was discussed as identifiers of monastic identity. The control and maintenance of the cloister were critical to the women of St. Clare and one of their hardest fought battles. In Protestant theology, monasticism no longer had a legitimate place in society.³⁸⁶ This change removed the sanctity of the cloister for the general public.³⁸⁷ The Convent of St. Clare was confronted with this for the first time when Frau Tetzel came to the convent to remove her daughter, Margaret. Frau Tetzel arrived and demanded to enter and speak with her daughter.³⁸⁸ Caritas denied Frau Tetzel's demand to enter the sacred space. Caritas told Frau Tetzel that if she let her enter, people would soon run roughshod over the convent door, and there would be no stopping the coming and going.³⁸⁹ Caritas was controlling the sacred space and maintaining the identity based on that space. Frau Tezel's next tactic was to demand her daughter come out to speak with her. Caritas again refused the demand.³⁹⁰ The monastic was dead to the world, just as one cannot cross back over from death, one should not be able to cross the convent's threshold, if she left, she could not return.³⁹¹ After much back and forth, Caritas soon realized that this problem was not going away. She allowed Frau Tetzel to speak with Margaret at the communion window, **where** mother and daughter could see one another clearly.³⁹² The allowances made for Frau Tetzel were just a temporary solution.

³⁸⁶ Strasser, *State*, p. 70.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 23-34.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁹¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 33.; Melville, *Medieval Monasticism*, p. 235.

³⁹² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 23.

Soon after this incident with Frau Tetzl, the council came and demanded entry to address the whole convent. Caritas tried to prevent entry here as well, but the men were determined to enter.³⁹³ This set a precedent; whenever there was a visitation from the council, the men entered the controlled female space. This was an instance of ineffectual resistance, but the women knew that they had no real choice in the matter. At this point, they were more concerned with keeping a good relationship with the council. They used this positive relationship to bolster future arguments. An aspect of the council decrees was that parents should be allowed to remove their daughters and daughters should be allowed to visit their families. This can be seen in the attempted removal of Margaret Tetzl and, later, in the three girls' removal. This decree was unacceptable to the sisters of St. Clare, and they were unanimous in their refusal.³⁹⁴ The sisters made use of the brothel/convent dichotomy. Examples of the fine line between convents and brothels in the social landscape can be seen in Ulrike Strasser's *State of Virginity*; the sisters used this to their advantage.³⁹⁵ This argument was effective symbolic rhetorical resistance; they played on the families' reputations to which they belong. The sisters used their connections to the city's elite families by saying that free entry into and out of the convent would put not only the sisters' reputations at risk but also their whole families. It would look bad on the family if they allowed their sisters, daughters, and aunts, to live in a community where people were allowed to come and go. The council agreed that there should not be free entry.³⁹⁶ This argument was used in the debate over the Franciscans but was much more effective here.

³⁹³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 23.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

³⁹⁵ Strasser, *State*.

³⁹⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 84-85.

This brings the discussion to the decree about the removal of the grille from the five-point plan. The speaking window in the convent was not transparent; the speakers could not see one another or who else was listening. This was unacceptable to the parents and relatives of the sisters.³⁹⁷ The newly converted Lutherans wanted to speak with their family members clearly and alone to share the Gospel. Nevertheless, to show their nominal obedience to the council, the convent did replace the old grate. However, the nuns were very reluctant to use the new one.³⁹⁸ Their reluctance functioned as symbolic and practical physical resistance; they were still following the mandates of the council, also while maintaining their space and identity. Their family members could not force them to use the speaking window. When the sisters did use the new window, they resisted. The chronicle tells the reader that the nuns' relatives often left the convent frustrated and angry. The chronicle does not tell the reader what the resistance was, but it is clear that the women were putting up effective resistance to their families' preaching.³⁹⁹

The convent's boundary creates separation for religious identity, but it was also for the protection of body and reputation.⁴⁰⁰ At every turn as the changes in the city occur, more people started to demand entry into the convent, and the sisters argued vehemently that this would eventually turn them into nothing better than a brothel, and it could not be allowed.⁴⁰¹ The fight for control of space was one of the significant issues that the sisters faced according to their chronicle. The control of space and physical resistance, all occurred in response to the city's attitude toward monastics, and their need to rid the city of that 'scourge'. The city created mandates against outward signs of monasticism. They sought to remove the separation

³⁹⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 78.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ Laqua-O'Donnell, *Women and the Counter-Reformation*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁰¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 84-85.

and othering that found monastic identity. Changing clothes and installing windows can only change a person's outward identity; the city attempted to change the sisters' hearts, and the sisters resisted this assault.

Conclusion

The resistance found at the Convent of St. Clare played many varied roles, and had many different outcomes, some successful and others not as much. As seen in the previous chapter, the sisters had a strong internal identity. Vamik Volkan, in his definition of group identity, states that when an outside force threatens the group, this causes them to strengthen their group identity.⁴⁰² This happened with the Convent of St. Clare; they tapped into their alternate identity as Knights. As the chronicle informed us when Caritas met with Melanchthon, they agreed with many of the Lutheran theological points. However, their resistance was born from the fact that the new theology refused to accept their way of life, leaving them obsolete and alone. Their commitment to their religion had a lot to do with their commitment to their monastic lifestyle. Ulrike Strasser points out that the sisters were more concerned with their connections with one another.⁴⁰³ Strasser's supposition is correct; they were concerned about their connections. How could they not be; they had lived and cared for one another for years.⁴⁰⁴ This forged bonds that are unknowable to those on the outside, but they also were not afraid to rid themselves of someone disrupting their religious lifestyle, seen in the case of Anna Schwarz. Their identity was that of a Bride of Christ and relied on the alternate identity as Knights of Christ to bolster their resistance to protect that traditional identity.⁴⁰⁵ These women were highly practical in their resistance. They thought that the fact

⁴⁰² Volkan, 'Large-Group-Psychology', p. 213.

⁴⁰³ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ'.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

that the Evangelicals could not agree among themselves was a signal to keep away and remain with what they knew.⁴⁰⁶

All in all, it was the practical resistance that served them the best. The council and the other opponents that the sisters faced, were not going to listen to grand theological arguments, coming from a 'deluded' convent. However, they had a harder time ignoring cold hard facts and logic. The single biggest asset to the sisters' resistance and survival was the conversation between Caritas and Philipp Melanchthon.⁴⁰⁷ The chronicle does not tell the reader what the conversation consisted of, but one has to assume whatever Caritas said in defense of their convent, and life was enough to have Melanchthon tell the council to leave them alone. These women fought, some physically, to preserve their way of life, and they were, in the end, ineffective as the convent closed after the last sister died at the end of the sixteenth century, but their memory and struggle lived on. This chronicle was their ultimate act of resistance; it recorded their defiance and faithfulness to their collective identity.

⁴⁰⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 140.

⁴⁰⁷ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 141-142.

CHAPTER THREE: THE GENEVA POOR CLARES

The Geneva Poor Clares' account of the Reformation was more dramatic and centered on God's actions than the sisters in Nuremberg. However, regardless of these differences, the sisters resisted the changes happening around them. They rallied around one another, creating unity, and their belief that they had God's favor allowed them to access the identity as Knights of Christ, not solely Brides of Christ. This identity was born out of conflict with an outside force; they saw themselves battling with evil with God's support, again a part of Volkan's definition of group identity.⁴⁰⁸ The image of a Knight of Christ is one found in the New Testament. This heroic narrative would inform their convent's identity. Future generations saw themselves as linked to the original Genevan sisters even though they spent far longer in France than in Switzerland.⁴⁰⁹ This chapter contends that they formulated this identity as Knights of Christ for themselves through their resistance. This chapter outlines their journey, analyzes their resistance in detail following the methodology found in Chapter One. The document and this convent come up often in the historiography but usually just as supportive evidence.⁴¹⁰ Literary studies of female early modern writers use this source, but there is very little detailed academic historical research done on this convent.⁴¹¹ This work contributes to this small number by bringing this convent into conversation with a well-known and well-researched convent. It shows that these women resisted in very similar ways and relied on the alternate identity as Knights of Christ.

⁴⁰⁸ Volkan, 'Large-Group-Psychology'.

⁴⁰⁹ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 12.

⁴¹⁰ For an example of this, see Paul A. MacKenzie's 'Introduction' in *Caritas Pirckheimer: A Journal of the Reformation Years*. C. Klaus, 'Architecture and Sexual Identity: Jeanne De Jussie's Narrative of the Reformation of Geneva.' *Feminist Studies*, 29, no. 2 (2003), pp. 279-297.; C.M.N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴¹¹ See, *Teaching French women writers of the Renaissance and Reformation* edited by Colette H. Winn.

The chronicle recounted the convent's struggles from 1526 to 1535. Jeanne de Jussie, the convent's secretary, authored the chronicle. Though we know the name of the person who wrote the narrative and compiled the text, this does not detract from its collective nature. This was not the personal journal of Jussie; she acted in her role as secretary to record the convent's experiences. She recounted not only the convent's plight against Protestantism but also the city's struggles, which, as we have seen, was typical for chronicles. Even though Jussie gave a firsthand account, one must not assume that she was reporting the facts as they happened, she was an interested party. She was furthering her convent's interests and existence for future generations. She was writing a believed truth. For the discussion that follows this biased point of view is critical to keep in mind, as it colored the account of the convent's resistance. This document was how they interpreted what was going on around them; they used it to present the narrative that pushed and preserved their cause. This account became a part of the sisters' identity as they reestablished their community in France. The chronicle created a collective memory for the new community of whom they believed the Sisters of St. Clare in Geneva were.

The environment in Geneva on the eve of their Reformation was a tumultuous one. The Prince-Bishop, who held a large diocese that consisted of what is today most of southwestern France, governed the city.⁴¹² This Bishop was also for most of the Middle Ages, a son of the House of Savoy, putting Geneva inside the Dukes of Savoy's sphere of influence.⁴¹³ Councils made up of locals handled the city's daily affairs. The syndics represented these councils before the Bishop.⁴¹⁴ In 1519, the city began a struggle for

⁴¹² C.M.N. Eire, *War against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986), p.124; R. Kingdon, 'The Calvinist Reformation in Geneva' in R. Po-Chia Hsia (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Christianity* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 90-103, p. 90.

⁴¹³ Eire, *War*, p. 124.

⁴¹⁴ Kingdon, 'The Calvinist Reformation', p. 90.

autonomy from the house of Savoy and the Bishop. The Swiss cities of Bern and Fribourg aided Geneva in this struggle.⁴¹⁵ Bern, along with military aid, also brought Protestantism. For the next decade, Catholic Fribourg and Protestant Bern would pull at Geneva; each side would threaten to rescind their support if the city leaned too far either way. Eventually, Fribourg did terminate their alliance with Geneva, and the city became fully Protestant.⁴¹⁶

The Genevan Poor Clares' Chronicle started in 1526 with the alliance of Bern, Fribourg, and Geneva against the House of Savoy.⁴¹⁷ The sisters' account of this episode was biased to the Savoyard side. The house of Savoy established the convent a generation earlier. Because of this, the sisters remained fiercely loyal to the Duke.⁴¹⁸ The chronicle recounted the political unrest in the city as it attempted to throw off its Savoyard yoke.⁴¹⁹ During this unrest, the city billeted troops from Bern. While the Bernese were living in the city, Protestantism began to spread. This spread also started many violent conflicts and acts of iconoclasm.⁴²⁰ Throughout the chronicle, along with recounting the many violent acts against churches and Catholics, the sisters also record miracles and martyrdoms. The reader will see below how the rhetoric and symbolism around martyrdom affect the sisters' resistance.

In April 1534, the chronicle turned inward. Jussie started to describe what was taking place inside the convent and the actions against the sisters. The sisters experienced many different barrages against their way of life. Family members tried to remove nuns from the convent. The women experienced iconoclastic riots and threats against their persons.⁴²¹ The sisters disregarded these attacks and aided those in need and held secret services for

⁴¹⁵ Eire, *War*, pp. 123-124.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-136.

⁴¹⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 37-38.

⁴¹⁸ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 9.

⁴¹⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 39-46.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-60.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100.

Catholics.⁴²² The sisters were terrified of what was happening around them but were still receiving limited protection from the city council.⁴²³

The city's Protestant leanings started to affect the sisters and the Catholics of the city significantly in the year 1534. A disputation was held to attempt to bring religious unity to the city.⁴²⁴ This disputation was, according to the chronicle, biased in the Protestants' favor.⁴²⁵ Because of the anti-Catholic outcome of this disputation and the heightened danger for the clergy, the sisters' confessors fled, leaving them without pastoral care. In October of 1534, Protestants entered the church attached to the convent and tore down statues and crosses.⁴²⁶ August 15th, 1535, marked the last Mass to be said at the Convent of St. Clare.⁴²⁷ Several days later, the Protestants of the city stormed the convent, broke in and removed Sister Blaisine, who had converted to Protestantism.⁴²⁸ Blaisine petitioned the council to have her dowry returned to her plus a share of the convent's goods. This petition, along with accusations made by Blaisine about mistreatment, started a drawn-out affair. The breach of the convent's space also left the sisters open to possible attack, because of this the council posted guards at the convent, though Jussie recounted that this was more to protect the convent's goods than the sisters.⁴²⁹ This affair culminated in the sisters fleeing the convent and the city of Geneva on August 30th.⁴³⁰ The sisters went on an arduous journey to Annecy, a small town in the Duke of Savoy's lands, where he had given them an abandoned Augustinian monastery.⁴³¹

⁴²² Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 103-104.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 119; 127-128.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-144.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

Once they were safely away from the threat of the Genevans, they re-enclosed themselves and reestablished their lives.⁴³²

The Fight for Space

Previous chapters have illustrated the importance of space to the monastic identity. Carrie Klaus's article 'Architecture and Sexual Identity' gives a thought-provoking look at this topic. She discusses how the penetration of the nuns' physical space was a violation of their physical bodies. The assault of the convent was analogous to the physical assault of the women who lived inside.⁴³³ One can understand the urgency to maintain that physical space if one looks at the entrance to the convent with Klaus's supposition in mind. This section looks at how the women resisted this violation and how that resistance affected their identity.

During the occupation of 1530, the Swiss quartermaster ordered the Convent of St. Clare to house three hundred troops. This order terrified the women; they appealed to one of the Genevans who was facilitating the Swiss. They effectively resisted this mandate by making the man feel pity for them and managed to have the number lowered to thirty-five men and six horses, '...all good Catholics...' by God's divine intervention.⁴³⁴ The chronicle recounts that housing and feeding these men was a significant burden on the sisters. The lack of food led the soldiers to try and break into the convent because they did not believe that the sisters were low on rations.⁴³⁵ The men also tried to enter the convent when intoxicated. The chronicle said that they had the intention to '...harm and violate them [the sisters]...' ⁴³⁶ The soldiers never managed to breach the sacred space; the sisters attributed this fact mostly to

⁴³² Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 172-186.

⁴³³ C. F. Klaus, 'Architecture and Sexual Identity: Jeanne De Jussie's Narrative of the Reformation of Geneva', *Feminist Studies*, 29, 2 (2003), pp. 279-298.

⁴³⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 48.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

divine intervention.⁴³⁷ The chronicle tells the reader that God worked through one of the lay brothers to soothe the soldiers. Anytime the sisters' resistance succeeded, they attributed it to God and his favor for them. In their minds, God was using them as instruments to achieve his goal of thwarting the Protestants. The Abbess and the sisters also had a part to play in placating the men and protecting the sacred space. They managed to convince the soldiers that they needed their protection.⁴³⁸ This tactic worked either from a sense of chivalry on the men's part or as the chronicle says God's grace. This fight was necessary because if the men had managed to break-in, it would have ruined the sisters' reputations. The convent's reputation would soon come under fire, so they needed to maintain the boundaries. Each time an outsider entered the sacred space, it forced the sisters to find a way to reinforce their collective identity without the separation that the convent walls gave them. At every turn, the Abbess and the portress managed to soothe the men and protect the sacred space. The chronicle does not tell the reader what they said, but one must assume that it was effective resistance because the men never violated the sacred space.

Threats to the sacred space continued after the troops left the city, but this time the threat came from the Protestants of Geneva.⁴³⁹ In July 1534, there were iconoclastic riots in the city.⁴⁴⁰ The sisters could hear the commotion from these riots inside the convent; this convinced the sisters that they were the next target. They lived in constant fear of their sacred space being breached and being taken out of the convent and harmed.⁴⁴¹ A story about a nun who was accidentally locked in the church one night illustrated the sisters' fear. This young sister had fallen asleep, and when she awoke, she was locked out. This sister did not want to

⁴³⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 49.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104-105.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*

break her vow of silence by calling out, so she began to rap loudly on the convent's door.⁴⁴² The fact that the sister did not want to break her vows was an action filled with symbolism. Jussie could have added this to further her narrative. The keeping of her vows shows that her commitment to her way of life was more important than her fear of bodily harm. That furthers the narrative that the sisters beyond everything else were committed to their way of life. This story illustrated how terrified they were at the possibility of Protestants entering the convent. The sisters were startled awake by the missing sister's clatter. The banging convinced the sisters that it was the Protestants who had come to drag them out and '...violate them...'.⁴⁴³ The Abbess counted all the sisters and discovered that one was missing. This news filled the sisters with dread. The chronicle says. '...it never occurred to them that she might be the one making the noise.'⁴⁴⁴ Like knights going to battle, the Abbess decided to meet the angry mob head-on so they could not breach the convent any further. They needed to protect the sacred space and their reputations. When they reached the door, they found their poor lost sister, who as the chronicle said '...fell paralyzed at the sisters' feet.'⁴⁴⁵ Though this story, in hindsight, feels a little silly, and maybe even a little embellished, it served its purpose, which was to illustrate how scared these women truly were of being harmed. This also sheds light on the importance of the sacred space, and the need to protect it. Though these women were afraid of what lay behind the door, they faced it because protecting the space was more important than being harmed, or verbally assaulted. Space, as seen in Chapter One, was paramount to the monastic identity. For nuns more than just separation from the general public necessitates cloister, their reputations and livelihoods depend on this boundary remaining uncrossed. As

⁴⁴² Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 105.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 106.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

we have seen, a nun's reputation and her chastity are her greatest assets. This story above shows that the sisters saw these and their persons to be at risk from the Protestants.

The fight for space continued when a man, acting in an official capacity for the city, asked to enter the convent. The city had undertaken a fortification project of the city walls.⁴⁴⁶ This project impacted the Clares because their garden wall adjoined the city's outer wall. The man was there to decide the best place to breach the convent walls so the fortifications could continue.⁴⁴⁷ This would have rendered the outdoor space afforded to the sisters unusable, as it would no longer be enclosed. Though these fortifications were a threat to the sacred space, the sisters had to address the threat in front of them, the man trying to enter. The Abbess and vicaress tried their best to explain to the man their way of life and that they could not let him in.⁴⁴⁸ The man refused to relent and demanded entry.⁴⁴⁹ The sisters gave in fearing the situation would escalate to violence.⁴⁵⁰ This was the beginning of the breach of sacred space. The sisters put up ineffectual theological rhetorical resistance to the man's demands. They attempted to illustrate their way of life and rule to him so that he would not enter. This man was Bernese and Protestant; this fact made him indifferent to the sisters' religious identity.⁴⁵¹ According to the chronicle, he threatened to break in if they would not allow him to enter. They relented and fled to the church and started to pray; there was a shift from theological rhetorical resistance to theological physical resistance.⁴⁵² They were overwhelmed with emotion and surrendered themselves before God. When the man saw their sorrow and devotion, his mind was changed, and he promised never to harm the sisters again.⁴⁵³ The

⁴⁴⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 111.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 111-112.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

incident supports Klaus's argument. The nuns viewed the man's entry into the physical space as an act of harm to their persons. The man's change of heart was due to God's intervening hand.⁴⁵⁴ The convent was an extension of the nuns' physical bodies, and it had a devastating effect on the sisters' emotional state when the man and his party entered. The sisters' used the theological resistance of showing devotion and their emotions aided them in this resistance, the great show of sorrow at the men entering worked in their favor. The man left and promised to protect the sisters. Their resistance to the initial entry was ineffective but ended with effective physical resistance. This episode ended with one of the man's companions, leaving and telling everyone that he had kissed one of the sisters. The chronicle refuted this by saying, 'But he was lying falsely because he never touched any nun in there and no one did them any harm that day.'⁴⁵⁵ The sisters were very conscientious of protecting their identity as chaste nuns by refuting the man's statement even if it was just for later generations to read. The maintenance of that chastity was essential to the collective identity at this point in 1534 and later. Their reputation was one of their major bargaining points, to lose their reputation would have caused a loss of credibility, and shattered what little respect and reverence they still held in the city. Moreover, it would have jeopardized the Duke's future goodwill.

In April 1535, the city was becoming increasingly hostile toward the convent. The Protestant preachers were preaching against the sisters, stating that the sisters were having sex with the Franciscans and that they were the reason that the whole city could not find religious unity.⁴⁵⁶ Men began climbing up on the walls of the convent's garden and harassing the nuns.⁴⁵⁷ The men's attacks started with singing bawdy songs and yelling denigrating words.

⁴⁵⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 112.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-119.

⁴⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

The sisters put up practical resistance by simply ignoring the men's hurtful words. The men moved from verbal abuse to physical by hurling rocks at the sisters while they were in the garden. The sisters were unable to protect themselves from this incursion. The taunts and abuse forced the sisters to stop going into the garden altogether. The sisters' practical resistance was ineffective to the men's onslaught. These actions forced the sisters to alter their lives in a way that '... caused them great poverty.'⁴⁵⁸

In August of 1535, the reader sees systematic violent entry into the sisters' sacred space. A group of armed citizens knocked on the main door of the church and were inadvertently let in by one of the lay brothers.⁴⁵⁹ Once inside, the mob swept through destroying everything in their path. The sisters ran and hid in the chapel, calling on God for protection, putting up theological rhetorical resistance.⁴⁶⁰ The mob systematically broke through all the barriers, the speaking window being the first. The portress ran from the window, locked the next door, and barricaded it with her back. Once through the window, the mob began to take down the next door with an ax, almost wounding the portress.⁴⁶¹ The mob had not at this point breached any further than any of the other times people had entered. However, they had done so with violence, which drastically changed the character of the entry. The portress physically resisted these actions by barring the door with a lock and her body, but it was a failed attempt that almost saw the portress gravely injured. The chronicle credits her survival to God, who moved her just in the nick of time. She then ran and bolted yet another door against the mob, then joined her sisters in the chapel.⁴⁶² The mob of over one hundred and fifty, according to the chronicle, quickly took this door down too and spilled into

⁴⁵⁸ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 119.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138-139.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 139.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 139-140.

the convent wreaking havoc.⁴⁶³ Then the mob entered the chapel, and all the sisters used rhetorical theological resistance raised their voices in a single wail, crying out to God. The chronicle tells us that ‘... the whole convent resonated with the violence...’.⁴⁶⁴ The mob then proceeded to remove Sister Blaisine from the convent. The sisters vowed to die to get her back if that is what she wanted. However, Sister Blaisine had converted and wished to leave the convent.

These attempts to enter the sacred space culminated in the final violent entry; the mob did not give the sisters a chance to resist. The portress acted valiantly to try and secure the convent against the mob but ultimately failed. This attack left the convent completely open. The Protestants stripped all the doors of their locks and left a hole where the speaking window had been. The sisters were devoid of protection; the assault of the convent was complete.⁴⁶⁵ Any small victory won in this altercation was attributed to God and his grace. The sisters attempted to resist crying out against the mob, hoping to gain the upper hand, but their resistance did them no good. Iconoclasm was a hallmark of the Swiss Reformation. The newly converted Protestants saw themselves on a cleansing mission.⁴⁶⁶ They needed to remove all vestiges of popery, and a convent of nuns who were not so secretly continuing Catholic rituals would have been a clear target. Then, one should consider that Sister Blaisine, whose story will be addressed later, was writing her sister about the abuses she was suffering at the nuns’ hands; this would have added to the Protestant’s fervor, they needed to free the poor trapped lamb.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶³ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 140.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁴⁶⁶ *Eire, War*, p. 106.

⁴⁶⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 143.

The sisters were very aware of their openness in future incidents. They had been left bereft without any way to protect themselves, and from this moment on, people came and went as they pleased from the convent, because the sisters had no way to keep them out. Moreover, once they fled the city, the first thing they did when safe, was to place themselves behind locked doors.⁴⁶⁸ They were desperate to reestablish cloister, their identity as enclosed nuns, protect their reputations, and reestablish their security. These women had been left vulnerable. This episode was so violent because it removed the sisters' agency. They were not able to grant begrudged permission to enter; the mob entered against the sisters' will. They resisted to protect this aspect of their identity but were ultimately unable to do so. One then must ask how the sisters maintained that aspect of their identity? One way they did this was by the older sisters creating a symbolic wall of protection around the younger to shield them from the Protestants' harassment. The younger sisters were the apparent target of the Protestants in this chronicle. The older women were the ones that confronted the attacks on the convent. Not only did the sisters put up a symbolic wall, but at times the older women created physical barriers around the younger ones to protect them from the Protestants.⁴⁶⁹ The chronicle tells us, '...hiding one young nun at her legs, under her habit...'.⁴⁷⁰ The sisters maintained their identity through their unity, rituals, and eventually their decision to leave the city to set up a new convent elsewhere.

The Survival of Catholicism

During Geneva's Reformation, St. Clare's was a bastion of Catholicism. This section will highlight their resistance to changes and attacks against Catholicism and how the sisters fought against their enemies and aided those in need. During the Swiss occupation of 1530,

⁴⁶⁸ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 176-177.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.141- 142.

the chronicle tells the reader that St. Clare's was the only church in the city still celebrating Mass and Divine Office, symbolically resisting the tide of the Swiss.⁴⁷¹ Eire, in his book, *War against the idols*, says that Bernese pillaging of the surrounding area caused the council to prohibit Mass to save the religious houses from the soldiers.⁴⁷² In an act of theological resistance, the sisters continued their rituals, which flouted the Protestants and council and built their collective identity. The fact that the sisters appeared to be the only place in the city continuing these rituals also set them apart from the other monastics. They were the strong Knights of Christ, who continued the battle even when the threat was real. They showed that their commitment was singular among the city's monastics.

The sisters were afraid that harm would come to them, but they believed that God would protect them. They continued their theological resistance by praying and committing acts of self-mortification.⁴⁷³ In their minds, their praying and flagellation were reinforcing the belief that their commitment was singular. God was protecting them because they were worshiping him regardless of the risks. This was identity maintenance through collective ritual and pain. Self-mortification has a long history among monastics. The belief was that the act of harming one's body takes the focus off the physical and grounds one in the spiritual, and it also acted as a form of punishment for sins.⁴⁷⁴ There is evidence that St. Clare herself participated in self-mortification, lending legitimacy to the Genevan's actions.⁴⁷⁵ The act of harming one's flesh, combined with prayer, enforced the collective identity by giving the participant the feeling of unity. The impression that God was protecting them from the

⁴⁷¹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 54.

⁴⁷² Eire, *War*, p. 127.

⁴⁷³ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 54.

⁴⁷⁴ K. A. Smith, 'Discipline, compassion, and monastic ideals of community, c.950-1250', *Journal of Medieval History*, 35 (2009), pp. 326-339, p. 330.

⁴⁷⁵ Knox, *Creating Clare*, pp. 52-53.; C.F. Klaus, 'Footnotes', Footnote 67, p. 54.

soldiers fortified their feeling of unity. The sisters' unity was a defining feature of their community, and it was also one that strengthened their resistance.

The sisters continued their theological resistance and singularity in their devotions later in the chronicle; this time, they resisted the Genevan Protestants, not the Swiss. In August of 1535, the Protestants of the city stopped churches from celebrating Mass and divine service.⁴⁷⁶ The chronicle tells the reader that, '...no service was celebrated in the whole town, except at the Convent of St. Clare...'.⁴⁷⁷ Again the sisters used their devotion as symbolic resistance. People were subverting the Protestant tide by coming to the convent to hear Mass in secret.⁴⁷⁸ On August 11th, the city officially decreed that there would be no more bell-ringing or observance of Mass and divine office. The sisters continued their resistance, observing the canonical hours and reciting the divine office, though in private in the convent's refectory.⁴⁷⁹

The sisters were publicly continuing to have Mass conducted at the convent. This service was open to others, so they were again resisting by continuing to serve the community around them. The council soon ended these services too. The sisters continued to hold divine office themselves in private. They were resisting through devotion. Their resistance and devotion for them were weapons in the battle, and they honed those weapons and their skill with them by persisting in their rituals.

Another example of how the sisters battled against the Protestant tide was giving aid to others. This was also a bolstering of their traditional identity. Twice in the chronicle, the sisters aided people fleeing the city. A young man, whose brother had been martyred by

⁴⁷⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 137-138.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Protestants, was being pursued. The sisters of St. Clare sent him food, sheltered him, and then had their lay brothers transport him out of the city.⁴⁸⁰ Here, the Clares were acting directly against the Protestants to save a man from death. This was practical and symbolic physical resistance, aiding someone in need with fleeing, and the greater symbolism in the flight. Later in the chronicle, the sisters also aided a recalcitrant monk who wished to return to the fold.⁴⁸¹ This monk turned to the convent when he had regrets about his decision to convert. The sisters facilitated this monk being put back into contact with his order and finding absolution for his misguided action.⁴⁸² The chronicle tells us that, ‘Those dogs [the Protestants] were very angry to have lost him, and they did not know what had become of him.’⁴⁸³ Clearly, from this quote, the sisters’ resistance and aid worked, both men survived.⁴⁸⁴ The sisters were responsible for saving lives, but they were also responsible for bringing members back to the church. Bringing people to the church can also be viewed as a part of the Christian identity as knights. The chronicle tells the reader that all this was due to God’s will, not the sisters’ actions. But because they were the only house still openly and defiantly practicing Catholicism, they formed a safe harbor for those fleeing persecution, trying to return to the fold or even just trying to maintain their devotion. The sisters supported others dealing with the ramifications of conflicts between the two sects in the city, even if the support was just prayer. The sisters recorded fellow Catholics’ names so that those in the future would remember them.⁴⁸⁵ These two men went to the convent when they were in trouble, knowing that they would receive care. These acts of resistance were effective, and they supported the

⁴⁸⁰ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 98.

⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁵ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 44.

sisters' identity as caregivers. They were able to see both men safely from the city and solidify their identities as servants to the broader community.

The sisters were tapping into an alternate identity for themselves, a new aspect of their identity through their singularity declared in these episodes. That other aspect was born from their resistance. The fact that they positioned themselves as the only order to observe these rituals publicly states that they believed they were more committed than others. That commitment showed God's favor, and their success just reaffirmed that notion. Their singular commitment was a bolster to their burgeoning identity as Knights of Christ. This alternate layer of identity flowed through the chronicle and into the devotion once they have fled the city.

Guillaume Farel and the Sisters of St. Clare

In July of 1535, the syndics of the city, along with Guillaume Farel, and Pierre Viret, leaders of the Protestants, came to the convent to preach to the sisters. The group asked for entry into the convent, and the sisters tried and failed to deny them. The men ordered the Abbess to call the sisters to the chapel, or they would go in search of them.⁴⁸⁶ These men not only entered the convent but also wanted to penetrate the sacred space even deeper by searching for any missing sisters. When the sisters had gathered in the chapel, Farel began to preach on the Virgin Mary. He told the sisters; Mary did not live a life of seclusion but went out and helped Elizabeth when she needed her.⁴⁸⁷ He was preaching against seclusion, but the reader knows that the sisters did help others, as was evident by the aid that they gave to those fleeing the city, though Farel would not have agreed that was helping. While Farel was

⁴⁸⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle.*, pp. 129-130.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

preaching, some of the other men began to try and seduce the younger sisters.⁴⁸⁸ The chronicle described the moment thus, ‘When the mother vicaress saw those seducers talking to and flattering the young sisters...’⁴⁸⁹ It is unclear whether this seduction was trying to get the younger sisters to convert or if it was sexual in nature. The younger sisters were the target of many of the Protestants’ attacks, both for religious reasons, but also to get them to leave the convent and marry. The sisters looked at attempts to convert them just as dangerous to the younger sisters and the communal identity as sexual seduction. Both undermined the collective mindset as Brides of Christ. Nuns’ sexual identity was tied tightly to their religious identity. Religious conversion would obliterate that identity as swiftly as sexual seduction. Though being a virgin was not a requirement for becoming a nun, once one had professed, they were expected to live chastely, and for their holy bridegroom. Religious life was the embodiment of this devotion.

The actions of these men started a battle between Farel and the vicaress. The vicaress’s role in the convent was as a second to the Abbess, and her primary duty was as the theological leader, i.e., vicar. Sister Pernette de Montluel was the vicaress of the convent of St. Clare and became the convent’s most vocal and resolute defender in the chronicle.⁴⁹⁰ She became the mouthpiece of the convent. This was partly because the Abbess was old and frail; it appears from the chronicle that she just was not able to handle the altercations. The second aspect of the vicaress’s outspokenness was due to her birth. The chronicle says this, ‘It is true that they [Protestants] often threatened mother vicaress with imprisonment as a criminal, and we expected them to do it someday. But some of them were afraid and said, “She is from an

⁴⁸⁸ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 130.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

important family, and it could cause an uprising against the city.”⁴⁹¹ From this quote, one can glean that the vicaress was a highborn woman, and she spoke to the men like they were beneath her at times because socially, they were.

The vicaress resisted Farel and the Protestants saying that she would not sit by and let these women be taken advantage of. The men ordered the vicaress to be quiet; she refused as long as the men were still pestering the younger girls.⁴⁹² Farel became so angry with the vicaress that he lost his composure and his voice began to tremble, the chronicle said that he might have been angry or it could have been in terror at seeing God’s will.⁴⁹³ This account, though possibly embellished has truth to it, Farel was known to be easily agitated.⁴⁹⁴ Jussie, instead of relying solely on this aspect of Farel’s character, chooses to use it as an opportunity to show God’s favor for the sisters and their mission. God struck fear into the heart of the men opposing his favored sisters. As seen above, much of the successful resistance that occurred was attributed to God. The vicaress could be seen symbolically as Deborah, from the book of Judges, leading Israel to victory through God’s will.⁴⁹⁵ These women felt they were on the side of God and that he was protecting them at every turn.

After her outburst, the men removed the vicaress from the chapel. The rest of the sisters attempted to follow her, but the men stopped them. The sisters began to weep violently. Their confessor ordered the sisters to be quiet, out of fear.⁴⁹⁶ This was the use of emotions as a form of symbolic physical resistance. They were so fearful and agitated by the entrance into the convent and preaching that they began to weep and wail against the

⁴⁹¹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 134.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ B. Gordon, *Calvin* (London, 2009), pp. 64-65; 72.

⁴⁹⁵ Judges 4:1-5:31 (NRSV).

⁴⁹⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 130.

Reformers. The sisters might not have viewed themselves as resisting, but that was how the men interpreted their actions. This resistance was successful; it momentarily threw Farel off his game.⁴⁹⁷ Farel eventually continued preaching extolling the virtues of marriage.⁴⁹⁸ This was a common theme also seen throughout the chronicle. When Jussie described the sister's fear, it most often coincided with being dragged from the convent and forced to marry. For the sisters, this was unacceptable; they believed in their way of life. The sisters were so disgusted by Farel's preaching that they spat at him.⁴⁹⁹ This, as one would imagine, enraged Farel, who said, according to the chronicle,

...Father confessor, who keep these poor blind women in this damnable captivity, why don't you make them be quiet and listen to the word of God? But they cannot hear it because they are not from God, but all have corrupt hearts, pretending to live chastely in seclusion and tricking everyone. However, we know well that many of these poor young girls would come willingly to the truth of the Gospel and the great goodness of marriage if you and the old women did not keep them in such restraint and subjection.⁵⁰⁰

The accusations regarding the Father Confessor seems to have been a common assumption made by Reformers. Farel saw the confessor as the real problem with the women converting, not the women themselves. This speech frightened the confessor and the Abbess. The Abbess ordered silence, reminding the sisters of St. Paul's words about women and silence.⁵⁰¹

The vicaress who refused to keep silent thundered against the wall and roared for the sisters not to listen and that Farel was a '...wicked coward...'.⁵⁰² The vicaress's loud pounding caused Farel to lose his train of thought. The syndics threatened to throw her in jail, but she persisted in her resistance.⁵⁰³ The vicaress was using practical physical resistance and

⁴⁹⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 130-131.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

theological rhetorical resistance. She was not making a grand theological argument, but she was urging her sisters to remain faithful. Her resistance was successful as it achieved its goals of making Farel stop preaching and encouraging the sisters to remain strong. The rest of the sisters continued resisting as well by stuffing wax in their ears.⁵⁰⁴ The chronicle does not give much detail about this action. The women did not care to listen. Farel, according to the chronicle, looked dejected and stopped preaching. Jussie says, ‘I who write this [...] observing his attitude carefully [...] firmly believe that the devils that guided him could not endure the company of the true brides of Jesus and their virtuous consistency and the sign of the holy cross, which they made continuously in spite of him.’⁵⁰⁵ This statement was a statement of identity for future readers. The weight of the sisters’ resistance, even if only for posterity, was amazing. Their unity as Brides of Christ and singularity as the only order still resisting made them bold and more committed to the way of life that was protecting them. These women were in their eyes doing battle with the devil, and they were winning. They were protected by God and by virtue of their lives dedicated to Jesus. Once Farel had finished or been forced to stop as the chronicle puts it, the syndics tried to enter into debate with the sisters.⁵⁰⁶ The vicaress returned to the room, and she countered all of their attacks.⁵⁰⁷ That was all the chronicle said; there were no details given about the nature of the debate that occurred. Finally, the men chose to leave, threatening to return. Farel advised the syndics to make the sisters come to a public sermon, possibly believing that it would curb their behavior.⁵⁰⁸

Here we have failed resistance to the men entering the convent and effective resistance to the preaching. This narrative has very visual language; it reads as a story of valiant knights

⁵⁰⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 131.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 131-132.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

vanquishing the enemy. At each turn, the sisters best their competition; even when silenced, something happens for them to regain the edge. One can almost envision them standing together with their chest puffed out in pride at trouncing these men. The resistance found in this episode was direct; there were no grand arguments back to the Reformers, just a refusal to listen and to have their persons violated by the men.

The Demands regarding the Disputation

The sisters of St. Clare faced many altercations with Protestants and city leaders in the years leading up to their flight. The altercation over the disputation was one that shows their collective spirit. In May of 1535, the city leaders and the Protestants decided to hold a disputation to find religious unity.⁵⁰⁹ One evening the syndics and the Protestant leaders came to the convent to demand the sisters' attendance at the disputation.⁵¹⁰ This decree was a blow to the sisters. They were distraught at the news.⁵¹¹ The Abbess and the vicaress went to the speaking window to address the situation. Their initial approach to the men was humble and followed the typical pattern of subservient women.⁵¹² They gently explained to the men that they had taken vows of seclusion and had no intention of breaking them by attending the disputation.⁵¹³ This theological rhetorical resistance was not a grand statement, but it was firm. The men would have been aware that the sisters had vowed seclusion, the sisters were reminding them in hopes that it would cause them to drop the matter. This resistance was ineffective. The men told the women they did not care, and everyone was required to attend.

The sisters changed their tactics, becoming more forceful in their language, and used a more practical and symbolic approach. They told the men that a disputation was no place for a

⁵⁰⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 123.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-126.

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

woman because women had no authority to comment on religious matters.⁵¹⁴ They said, ‘... no woman has ever been called to witness in a disputation, so we will not be the first...’, the symbolic nature of this resistance was explicit.⁵¹⁵ The sisters combined the inappropriateness of women commenting on religious matters, with the inappropriateness of breaking cloister and adding the understood meaning of lost honor. Being present in a place where no women should be would harm their reputations. They were also practical by saying that no woman belonged there, not just nuns. The sisters used the theme of the uneducated woman to bolster their argument. Again, this resistance was ineffective as the men were not moved from their course and told the nuns that they would attend. The chronicle tells the reader that the men were so fixed on the women attending; because they had ordered all ‘honorable people’ to do so, to find religious unity.⁵¹⁶

The sisters again changed tactics; they became even more forceful. The vicarress stepped up and took over the conversation.⁵¹⁷ As seen above, the vicarress was a woman of strong will and was very committed to her convent and vocation; she also had a sharp wit. She was not afraid to make statements that exacerbated a situation. This aspect of her personality was seen best in this next incident. The vicarress asked the men not to get in the way of their vocation. She continued saying, ‘Hearing your foolish questions, we do not believe that you are messieurs the syndics, for we think messieurs are too wise even to dream of causing us any trouble. But you are wicked guards who do nothing but harass the servants of God.’⁵¹⁸ Her statement was using symbolic and practical resistance. Whether it was her intention or not, she questioned the syndics’ authority by doubting their identity and intelligence. This was

⁵¹⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 123.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid.

a bold tactic, and it could have had further ramifications. By not accepting their authority, the vicaress was opening an avenue for others to do the same. The vicaress was not from Geneva; she was from a smaller area a short distance from the city, and from what the chronicle tells us, she was of noble or at least very elite stock.⁵¹⁹ She outranked these men socially and had no allegiance to them as a native-born Genevan would. The chronicle makes clear that the vicaress had no regard for the threats that the men made toward her. This resistance worked momentarily but also backfired. The men accused her of mocking them, which she clearly was, and demanded to be let into the convent so the native-born Genevans could identify them as the syndics.⁵²⁰ The attention did shift from the disputation but resulted in a possible breach of the sacred space. This whole conversation took place through the speaking grille, which did not allow participants to see one another clearly. The vicaress backpedaled and told the men that the girls they demanded to speak with were not available as they were reciting Compline, the last canonical hour before bed, and it was time for the convent to retire.⁵²¹ She bid the men a good night.⁵²² This practical resistance of making excuses of non-availability did not work for the sisters.

The speedy retreat did not happen as the men accused the older sisters of forcing women to stay against their will. The men argued that not all the sisters were as committed to their way of life. That they would convert if the others were not holding them captive.⁵²³ This accusation is seen above as well; there seems to have been the consensus among the Protestants of the city that the sisters were imprisoning young budding Evangelicals. The nuns asked the men to be kind and to remember that they were all in the convent because God

⁵¹⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 175.

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² *Ibid.*

⁵²³ *Ibid.*

called them to be.⁵²⁴ This sparked the men to call them all hypocrites and ‘corrupt women’.⁵²⁵ With that, the vicaress stepped in to refute the men.

She accused the men of not having a Christian spirit. She said, ‘You, who call yourselves Evangelicals, do you find in the Gospel that you should speak ill of others?’⁵²⁶ She was chastising the men for calling them names and again put up her brand of witty resistance. She was also questioning their understanding of what they were preaching and what the Bible truly taught. This theological argument was subtle; it served to make the men angry and again pushed them off of their course of making the women come to the disputation. The syndics told the vicaress to be quiet and let someone else speak. When the nuns in her company spoke, they told the men that they agreed with the vicaress and wanted to live and die in their vocation.⁵²⁷ Their unity became their single most significant asset throughout the entire chronicle. These women were more effective in their resistance when they spoke with a unified voice, within their minds, God’s help. This statement highlighted the communal identity and the community’s commitment to religious life.

The chronicle stated that the sisters’ proclamation rattled the men. The vicaress used their astonishment to her advantage. She issued a threat that if the men forced them to come to the disputation that they would make such a den that the sisters would have supremacy in the situation.⁵²⁸ Again, the vicaress’s personality was coming out in full. The men then turned their attention back to the situation at hand. They told the women that they would make them attend and that they would not return to the convent after, as each leader would take a sister

⁵²⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 123-124.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

home and educate her in the Gospel.⁵²⁹ One man told the sisters that he had once lived a wicked life, and the new theology had helped him see the light.⁵³⁰ The vicaress's response was so blunt that it even shocked her fellow nuns. She told the man, 'It is very good for you to mend your ways because you have lived badly. But my companions and I, thanks be to Our Lord, have never committed any murders or other acts that require us to take up another life, and so we will not change in any way...'⁵³¹ This was a bold statement, but one wonders why the vicaress brought up murder, as the man had said he was a thief, this meaning he was profiting off of others not that he was an actual thief, who lived lavishly. The vicaress may have been insinuating that the men were responsible for the martyrdoms that had taken place.⁵³² As one can imagine calling the leaders of the city murderers would have been shocking. However, one must also look at the othering of the Protestants and the blatant statement of superiority. She was othering those who had come to the convent by making the sisters their moral superiors. The vicaress was not pulling punches; gone was the humble servile language. She was quite plainly stating that it was fantastic that he has seen his errors, but the sisters had no errors that require them to change their manner of living. The old way had served them well. This resistance was theological and symbolic. She was placing the women of St. Clare morally above the syndics and Protestant leaders. This statement caused the men to call her arrogant and to threaten her.⁵³³ She informed them that they could only punish her physically. She also asked that if they were going to dole out punishment that it only be against her.⁵³⁴ An interesting change occurred here to the united front that was being portrayed earlier in the encounter. This was a breach of the communal identity, but it was also

⁵²⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 124.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

a bolster to that identity. She was willing to martyr herself; this would have highlighted the communal identity. The vicaress protected her sisters and what they stood for and singled herself out by shifting the blame. The chronicle ended the confrontation with the syndics leaving without the sisters giving in. They told the sisters to come to the disputation or else, and they left.⁵³⁵ The sisters did not attend the disputation, nor were they forced to; they used more resistance by just not showing up.

This episode was one that encapsulated the identity of the sisters; they were committed to fighting for their community and religion. It also portrayed the version of the sisters that they wanted the reader to have of them. They were obedient, but only so far as their conscience allowed. Jussie was very invested in portraying these women in an ongoing unified battle against evil.

The Flight of the Convent of St. Clare

The week of August 23rd, 1535 was one of great tribulation for the Convent of St. Clare. On Wednesday of that week, the 25th, the convent, was entered and ransacked, as seen above.⁵³⁶ Then every day following that, the sisters were harassed in some way. It culminated in the sisters' flight from the city on Monday, August 30th.⁵³⁷ The violation of the convent on Wednesday led to the removal of Sister Blaisine Varember, who had converted to Protestantism.⁵³⁸ Shortly after her removal Blaisine demanded reparations from the convent, the price of her dowry, and a share of the convent's goods.⁵³⁹ The sisters maintained that Blaisine came to the convent with nothing and had no claim to the convent's goods as they

⁵³⁵ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 125.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 146-147.

belonged to future generations.⁵⁴⁰ The situation that surrounded the reparation payments was what precipitated the sisters leaving Geneva.

On Friday, the Varember sisters, Blaisine and Hemme, and the syndics came to the convent to demand Blaisine's payment.⁵⁴¹ Along with her demands for money, she also started making accusations about her living conditions and the sisters' reputations. Blaisine accused the sisters of keeping her chained, imprisoned, and beating her.⁵⁴² These accusations shocked the sisters. These accusations undermine the sisters' identity and call into question the unity that they were carefully portraying. The city leaders seemed to believe Blaisine's accusations.⁵⁴³ The vicarress stepped up and called Blaisine a liar and denied all her claims with acts of practical rhetorical resistance. To the accusation of Blaisine being held prisoner, she said that Blaisine looked healthy and well-fed. If they were mistreating her, she would not have been so healthy.⁵⁴⁴ She said that if anyone was beating Blaisine, it was Blaisine herself.⁵⁴⁵ The devotional routines of the sisters seemed to have involved self-mortification. The vicarress refuted all of Blaisine's accusations, and the men who were with the Varember sisters requested to see Blaisine's prison.⁵⁴⁶ Blaisine's 'prison' was described by the chronicle as a cozy little bedroom.⁵⁴⁷ To further the case that Blaisine was lying, the chronicle reports that upon seeing the room, the men were jealous and wished they had something so comfortable.⁵⁴⁸ This statement was most likely an exaggeration of their reactions, nonetheless the living conditions called Blaisine's testimony into question.

⁵⁴⁰ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 146-150.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-156.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

After seeing the room, the men ask Blaisine to identify the four sisters being held against their will.⁵⁴⁹ Upon hearing that Blaisine had named four girls that needed to be removed, the vicaress became angry and told the men that they would die before they let them remove any sister.⁵⁵⁰ This was symbolic physical and rhetorical resistance. The threat was symbolically significant; it shows that the women were willing to lay down their lives; this carries the symbolism of martyrdom. One could draw correlations to Jesus's sacrifice for others on the cross. What was clear is that the bonds that these women felt were strong enough to die for. The men let the issue drop possibly because they had dealt with the vicaress before and did not wish to provoke her further.⁵⁵¹

The men then moved back to their reason for coming to the convent in the first place, the dowry. They told the nuns that the city had decided that the sisters were responsible for repaying Blaisine the money her father had allegedly paid on her behalf.⁵⁵² The chronicle described what happened next, 'That apostate led them through the convent and took whatever she wanted; no one said anything to stop her; she was bolder than a common prostitute.'⁵⁵³ By this quote, one can tell that Blaisine was not very well-liked by Jussie. Jussie had been one of the women whom Blaisine had continually named as wanting to leave and having converted to Protestantism. These accusations caused Jussie to be singled out several times by the Protestants, so maybe Jussie was angry over the trouble Blaisine had caused.⁵⁵⁴ Regardless of personal feelings, the imagery of this statement was fantastic; one can almost see Blaisine skipping through the convent picking up any goods she wished. Along with explicit imagery, this statement also contained identity maintenance and resistance. Jussie was

⁵⁴⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 157.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-158.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

showing future readers just how far Blaisine had traveled from the other nuns; she had crossed to the complete other side of the moral spectrum by acting like a prostitute. This othering and distancing of Blaisine carefully resolved the tare that her leaving left in the communal identity and the unity of the convent. One could read it as saying that maybe Blaisine was never really one of them, to begin with and that their identity was stronger without her influence. The nuns refused to speak to Blaisine and avoided touching her, again othering her with physical resistance.⁵⁵⁵ The group of outsiders left.⁵⁵⁶

The next day, Saturday, a group of Protestants came to preach to the sisters; this did not go well and turned into an examination of the sisters.⁵⁵⁷ One by one, the sisters were questioned on various topics.⁵⁵⁸ The older sisters were questioned about theology, holding younger girls prisoner, money, and the convent's plans. The men offered the younger sisters, honorable wealthy husbands.⁵⁵⁹ The first nun to be taken was the Abbess; the nuns were terrified as they did not know what awaited them, and begged to all go together.⁵⁶⁰ The next nun was the vicaress. She fell to her knees and begged the men not to separate them. She said that if they were going to kill them, to kill them altogether.⁵⁶¹ There was an amazing amount of symbolism in falling to one's knees. It humbles one before the person that they are begging and puts one at the other's mercy. Here, the sisters were using the symbolism of martyrdom. The sisters, certainly the vicaress, were not afraid to die for their beliefs and one another. The men reacted negatively to her statement, asking her if she thought they were murderers. Which the reader knows she did from statements that she had made previously about the

⁵⁵⁵ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 158.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 158-159.

⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 160-164.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Protestants. The men explained that they were just questioning the nuns.⁵⁶² One has to speculate that Jussie was again taking creative liberties with her account. There seems to be a common theme through this whole chronicle of the sisters being extremely upset; this could be a literary device used to build sympathy or enhance the feeling of danger that the nuns were under, making their triumph all the more rewarding. Regardless of this fact, the nuns were inconsolable at the removal of the vicaress. The vicaress told her sisters to stay strong. She was then taken away for her questioning.⁵⁶³

The questioning continued for most of the day, according to the chronicle. Through this questioning, the chronicle tells us that God again intervened on the sisters' behalf.⁵⁶⁴ When the men questioned each sister, they all answered with the same words. The chronicle said, 'But Our Lord and the Holy Spirit worked miraculously, and a miracle was seen there, visible and worthy of remembrance and great praise to God, for they were all of a single desire and a single answer and opinion, as they were all parts of a single heart and a single voice without any disagreement.'⁵⁶⁵ This scene is employing theological and symbolic resistance, but not in the form of a theological argument. Here as seen above, God got the credit for this resistance.

The religious symbolism of this miracle could be seen in conjunction with the works of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts from the Bible, especially the Day of Pentecost.⁵⁶⁶ In this episode, in Acts, the apostles were given the ability through the Holy Spirit to be heard in languages that were not their own.⁵⁶⁷ In the case of St. Clare, God gave them the ability to

⁵⁶² Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 161.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 162-163.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁶ Acts 2:1-41 (NSRV).

⁵⁶⁷ Acts 2:1-41 (NRSV).

speak with a single unified voice. This symbolism would be apparent for the reader of the chronicle in the future. The Holy Spirit spoke through the sisters proving that they were on the right side of the debate and had God's favor. This miracle also has a similar effect on the men hearing it as it did on those hearing the apostles. The first-century Jews in Jerusalem were very confused and amazed at the fact that these men who spoke Galileans were suddenly speaking in their languages.⁵⁶⁸ The men in the convent also experienced confusion and amazement that the women were all answering the same way. Several of the examiners said that anyone who tried to bother the women again would be cursed and left the room.⁵⁶⁹ This was a claim to legitimacy by Jussie for the actions taken by the convent. It is essential to keep in mind that Jussie could have entirely made up this situation, but it fits the convent's narrative that God favored the sisters.

It was also an act of resistance in the moment; even if the women did not say the exact same words, they all answered in a way that thwarted the examiners' intentions of finding imprisoned Protestants. The message that they conveyed was one of unity and faithfulness to the Catholic Church. This unity showed their communal identity as they were all united enough to convey the same message. There is the possibility that all the sisters did not share the same views and that Jussie chose not to include that because it would disrupt her larger narrative and the future communal identity. Here we will function under the assumption that all of the sisters remained faithful. The unity in their identity displayed in their actions, and they were able to put up an effective form of resistance.

After hearing all the nuns, the men decided to leave the convent, but they left the sisters with a decree that the sisters were to perform no more Catholic rituals and that

⁵⁶⁸ Acts 2:12 (NSRV).

⁵⁶⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 163.

seclusion was disbanded.⁵⁷⁰ They also told the sisters to decide how they were going to pay their debt to Blaisine.⁵⁷¹ On Sunday, the Protestants returned to get Blaisine's goods. The nuns and Blaisine had each appointed two representatives to discuss the settlement. The sisters met with their representatives. The vicaress told the men that Blaisine's father had given nothing to the convent and that the goods housed there were not theirs to give. The men wanted to speak with the sisters individually to see if their stories matched.⁵⁷² Echoing the scene from earlier, all of the women spoke in unison and affirmed the vicaress's statement.⁵⁷³ The sisters' testimony did not convince Blaisine's representatives. They demanded that the sisters pay their debt to Blaisine.⁵⁷⁴ Then again, God intervened on the sisters' behalf. The vicaress said with God's inspiration,

Lords, you are our fathers and our friends, and I believe that you always advise us for the best. I have decided to ask messieurs the syndics to allow us to depart and to protect us as we go, and we will leave the city, for we can no longer maintain our way of life here or observe divine service and are in very great physical danger, we willingly relinquish all the convent's property.⁵⁷⁵

The chronicle portrayed this as a sudden decision on the part of the vicaress. However, one knows from reading that they had previously mentioned leaving the city and had been offered a monastery by the Duke of Savoy. However, Godly inspiration and a moment of prophetic revelation were better for the legitimacy of the decision. Thus, with that, the sisters had made their intentions known that they would leave the city of Geneva.

The convent's representatives were supportive of the sisters' decision. They advised the sisters that the violence against them would only continue to escalate, leaving was the

⁵⁷⁰ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 164.

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

right course of action.⁵⁷⁶ The men called the syndics. The syndics told any of the sisters who wished to stay, could, and receive a portion of the proceeds from the convent.⁵⁷⁷ The vicaress said that she spoke for the sisters and that they all wished to leave to maintain their holy vocation. The next logical question was when the sisters wanted to leave; the answer was the next day at dawn.⁵⁷⁸

Thus, on Monday, August 30th, at 5 o'clock in the morning, the sisters' performed their greatest act of resistance; they left the city of Geneva.⁵⁷⁹ This act represents all the types of physical and rhetorical resistance. These women were practical by removing themselves from an increasingly hostile situation. Even as they fled the city, they were told of threats to harm the older nuns and keep the young ones in the city. They were acting symbolically. There is religious symbolism of the Israelites being led out of Egypt. The sisters see themselves being freed from a life of constant fear and anxiety, though just like the Israelites, they were leaving the only home they had ever known, for the promise of better. There is also the symbolism of showing that the leaders of Geneva had no authority over the sisters, they were able to make their way, and their only allegiance was owed to God. They were also acting theologically; they were taking the stand that they would rather leave the certainty and comfort of their home than give up their religious ideals and one another.

Conclusion

The nuns of the Convent of St. Clare in Geneva were women dedicated to their religious ideals and their identity. They fought hard and lived through harrowing experiences to resist the Protestants. They had their space violated, and their belongings were taken. They

⁵⁷⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 165.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

lost the guidance of their confessors, and they lived under constant threat of being removed from their home. These experiences forced them to access an alternate identity for themselves as Knights of Christ in conjunction with their traditional identity as Brides of Christ. These women fought the Protestants in a holy war, in which they saw themselves on God's side. This understanding of the actions around them created another layer to their collective consciousness, which helped them weather the storms they were faced with. Their unity and stability within the confines of their relationship with one another was their most significant asset to mounting resistance to the Reformation. Their resistance took many forms, but by far, the most successful episodes were those that united the sisters in a singular purpose against their attackers. Some would say their resistance failed as they were forced out of their cloister, but what is more important and how their resistance truly succeeded was that the community continued. Through the Reformation period and the next two hundred years, they were always the Sisters of St. Clare of Geneva in exile.⁵⁸⁰ This chronicle acted as the diaspora's creation myth. It was their foundational story. It created a tradition of resistance that would be pivotal to the community's identity, who always saw their rightful place as that convent in the city of Geneva. The identity created by the chronicle was one of unity and loyalty to their way of life and God's will for their convent. Carrie Klaus's article explores the importance of the sisters' space and how the entry into this space is analogous to sexual assault.⁵⁸¹ This chapter has endeavored to add to Klaus's argument by looking not only at the symbolic nature of the entry but how the sisters tried to stop it. This chapter has also looked beyond this document's value as a literary piece and used it to interpret the situation of the convent in Geneva's Reformation and the sisters' actions to that reform.

⁵⁸⁰ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 12.

⁵⁸¹ Klaus, 'Architecture and Sexual Identity'.

CHAPTER FOUR: COMPARISON OF THE RESISTANCE IN TWO POOR CLARE CONVENTS

In the last two chapters, we explored the resistance of two convents in different parts of Europe. In this chapter, we will look at those groups of women, compare their stories, and understand why some forms of resistance worked better than others, depending on which convent they took place. We will also explore how this resistance fortified their identity as Brides of Christ and cultivated the identity as Knights of Christ.

As seen in the last chapters, the chronicles themselves acted as forms of rhetorical resistance for future generations to witness. These women used these texts to present themselves to those that would follow them. The tone of the Nuremberg Poor Clares' chronicle was diplomatic; they said, 'We were poor, simple, unlearned females and therefore did not wish to get involved in this conflict.'⁵⁸² The image these women tried to portray was one of coexistence with Protestants. Their goal was to continue their way of life in their home. They used practicality as a weapon against change, and appeasement when that failed. The Geneva Poor Clares, on the other hand, presented a militant narrative.⁵⁸³ They were not looking to appease the Protestants of Geneva. They were willing to fight and die for their lives to carry on as they had been. There was to be no quarter given to Protestants. These women used a rhetoric of martyrdom, and physical violence to resist. Moreover, they ended their campaign with a strategic retreat.

The structure of these two chronicles served the goals of their communities in different ways. The Geneva Poor Clares formulated their text in the more traditional chronicle style.

⁵⁸² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 149.

Jeanne de Jussie, the writer of the document, had total control of the narrative. That narrative was one of war. These women believed they were fighting with evil, and that they saw themselves in that way was very clear in the document. The Geneva Poor Clares used forceful mystical rhetoric that showed that fight. They believed that God was on their side and that they were on the right side of history.

Letters between the convent and outsiders and writings in the traditional chronicle style made up the Nuremberg Poor Clares document. Though possibly incomplete and edited, this allows the reader to see both sides of the story. Though the writer of the chronicle may have edited the letters from the opposing side, their narrative was one of balance. When the writer of the Nuremberg Poor Clares text recorded both sides of the conversation, they were emphasizing that there was a negotiation. They showed that the Nuremberg Poor Clares were trying to live in some semblance of normalcy with their newly Protestant neighbors. The writer crafted the narrative sections of the text to show that the Protestants were usually unreceptive to the sisters' attempts at keeping the peace; these illustrated the conflict. When faced with this conflict like their Genevan sisters, the women felt God was on their side and resisted with sophisticated theological, and logical, practical arguments.

Now the question is, why did these women choose to craft their narratives in such a way? What motivated them to respond the way that they did? The Nuremberg Poor Clares crafted a narrative of coexistence because of their house's long-standing connection to Nuremberg, and the women's connection to the city. The Nuremberg Poor Clares had been part of the Nuremberg landscape for three hundred years. They were ingrained in the city's identity as any long-standing institution would have been; one of the city's gates was even called the

Ladies Gate because it was next to the convent.⁵⁸⁴ The women living in the institution were, as seen, members of the city's most elite families. For the Nuremberg Poor Clares, leaving the city was never an option; they belonged there just as the Ladies Gate belonged where it stood. Their goal was to continue in their way of life with as little disruption as possible. The text outlines that struggle and their reliance on practical resistance rather than stringent theological resistance illustrates that. The Nuremberg Poor Clares were not interested in creating a narrative of the convent against the city. Nuremberg was their city, and the people they were pitted against were their families. They were trying to live as things had been before the Reformation took hold. Merry Wiesner's argument places the survival of convents on their connections to the governing elite. When used with the Nuremberg Poor Clares in mind, Wiesner's argument and framework hold up.⁵⁸⁵ The convent's connections to the city were one reason it remained, even if just for a time. It was also that connection that drove their resistance. The connection colored the treatment that the convent received. The Reformation in Nuremberg was peaceful, and for the most part, the sisters experienced little violence. This treatment was due in part to the relative ease with which the city converted. These women were intimately connected to the city's leadership; the council might disapprove of their sisters, aunts, and daughters being harmed. This allowed the sisters to take their diplomatic approach.

The Geneva Poor Clares' narrative was militant because, unlike the Nuremberg Poor Clares, they did not have their roots in the city of Geneva. Their connections were to one another, and they could be the same convent anywhere. This is not to say that the physical building in Geneva was unimportant to the sisters; the building, the memories, and graves it held were critical to the sisters' identity. The chronicle tells us they, '...bid a last farewell to the

⁵⁸⁴ Strauss, *Nuremberg in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 15.

⁵⁸⁵ Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State*, pp. 47-62.

holy departed mothers, begging them in great sobs to convince God never to allow this good convent to be ruined or disrespectfully violated.⁵⁸⁶ However, it was not the city that was important; it was the loss of their connection to the past and founding generation. When the Geneva Poor Clares formulated their narrative, they sought to create symbolic distance between the convent and the city. They were in a fight for their space and way of life, and that fight about space became more about how the physical space in Geneva did not define their community.

The sisters' aggressive narrative was in direct response to the fact that they were experiencing violence. The Reformation in Geneva was not the peaceful reform of Nuremberg. This was due partly to the confessional difference between the Swiss Reform and Lutheranism. Luther had never taken a firm stand against 'idols' or religious imagery and did not condone popular violence, as evidenced by his stand against the Peasant's Revolt of 1524.⁵⁸⁷ On the other hand, Zwingli and other **Reformed theologians** were much more violent in their pursuit of religious change. Iconoclasm was a common sight in the Swiss Reformation, as was war, Zwingli himself died fighting in the Second Kappel War of 1531.⁵⁸⁸ Another reason that could have affected the sisters' view of the Reformation was that Geneva was from 1526-1530, fighting a war against the Savoyards, to whom the convent was loyal. All of this metastasized into the sisters fighting against the Genevans and the Genevans fighting back. Violence colored the sisters' perception of the Reformation. That violence precipitated the flight to Annecy. The Geneva Poor Clares' lack of connection and support to the city and the increasing danger caused them to leave, and it also inspired Jussie to record the injustices faced by the sisters for future readers.

⁵⁸⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 168.

⁵⁸⁷ Roper, *Martin Luther*, p. 8.

⁵⁸⁸ J. Balsarak, *Calvinism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2016), p. 2.

This has illustrated why the two convents' narratives took such different forms, and ultimately why these two convents' outcomes were so different. For the Nuremberg Poor Clares, their connection to the city helped their immediate survival. However, it was ultimately harmful as the council had total control over the city and the convent. The council stopped the sisters from accepting novices, causing the community to die out. For the Geneva Poor Clares, their disconnection from the city and the council saw them lose their home. However, their community thrived for another two hundred years, because they did not have the connection, and were not tethered to the city of Geneva.

Relations with the Councils and the Reformers

Connection played a large part in the outcome of these events. Here we will investigate these connections and look at how they played out. Comparing how these women handled their interactions will allow us to examine the effectiveness of specific methods of resistance. For the Nuremberg Poor Clares, there was a formal system for interaction with the city council. Unlike in Geneva, the Nuremberg city council was the total governing body. They did not answer to anyone other than the Emperor because of this; they held control. The Nuremberg Poor Clares had a system in place for formally petitioning the council. They used rhetoric that allowed them to achieve their end goals. The chronicle gives many examples of this formal system at work anytime the sisters needed to air a grievance or just communicate a problem; it went through Nützel, the superintendent, to the council in the form of a petition. The Geneva Poor Clares also used petitions to achieve their goals. However, they were not a part of a formal system, as the sisters were still under the Prince-Bishop's jurisdiction and were in contact with Savoy, as seen in the gift of the Augustinian monastery in Annecy.

When one compares two of the sisters' petitions, they on the surface seem very similar. The two convents were using traditional rhetoric for women addressing leaders or

men in general. There were similar emphases on begging the councilmen, the traditional language of calling the men ‘honorable’.⁵⁸⁹ This language was standard at the beginning of most encounters between the women and the council, even when the relationships began to deteriorate. This language was a convention of the time; it formed the frame that the sisters should have stayed in but often did not. Both petitions use the language of father/child.⁵⁹⁰ Through this language, the women created a symbolic link between the women as children and the men as fathers. This relationship would create the bond of caretaker, which the sisters were looking to generate in these petitions. They wanted the men to feel responsible for the convent’s wellbeing. The two convents also emphasized the importance of past relationships between the councils and the convents. They were asking the men to use the past as a guide.⁵⁹¹

The Geneva Poor Clares were petitioning the council to protect them from the Protestants.⁵⁹² This was before the council had committed to conversion. Emphasizing the caregiver role was very important, but what took a less important role was the emphasis on the council’s authority over the convent.⁵⁹³ For the Nuremberg Poor Clares, their petition focuses on the fact that the council has the authority they said, ‘... those who have, after God, no one but your honors to appeal to.’⁵⁹⁴ For the Nuremberg Poor Clares and the political environment in Nuremberg, they needed to stress that they were not overtly subverting the council. They were asking them not to remove the Franciscans’ pastoral care; they needed to make these men see that they posed no threat to their authority.⁵⁹⁵ This could also have been

⁵⁸⁹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 18.; Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁵⁹⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 18-22.; Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁵⁹¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 18.; Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁵⁹² Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 18.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 18-22.

an attempt to play on the men's vanity, the sisters telling the men that they were second only to God probably fanned their ego. The Geneva Poor Clares, on the other hand, makes no illusions to the council's authority. They told them that if they would not protect them, then they would leave.⁵⁹⁶ The Geneva Poor Clares said, '... let us leave our convent and your town...', this statement, along with a rejection of the council's authority, also illustrates that the sisters saw themselves as separate from the city.⁵⁹⁷ This was practical rhetorical resistance; the women were simply making the council aware that they could and would continue their lives elsewhere if the council did not help them. The Nuremberg Poor Clares resisted too, but theirs was more nuanced because they had no escape options. Though they told the council that they were second only to God, the sisters also remind them that there was a limit to that obedience, they could only consent as far as their conscience would allow. They did not choose to share with the council what that limit was.⁵⁹⁸

The outcome of both of these petitions was positive. The sisters' rhetorical language and resistance worked. The council in Geneva told the Geneva Poor Clares that they would protect them.⁵⁹⁹ The Nuremberg council was less forthcoming with a definite answer, but there was no immediate action. Even with the Nuremberg Poor Clares appeals to authority and traditional relationships, they received a less favorable answer than the Geneva Poor Clares.⁶⁰⁰ For both the convents, these successes were short-lived, as seen in the previous chapters, the Nuremberg Poor Clares lost the Franciscans, and the Geneva Poor Clares were not protected.

⁵⁹⁶ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 19.

⁵⁹⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 47.

⁶⁰⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 22.

As the Reformation continued in each city, the relationship between the councils and the convents changed. The Nuremberg Poor Clares became much less worried about offending the council as their decrees tried to push the sisters farther away from their lifestyle. They subverted their authority outright. However, they also walked a tightrope because the Nuremberg Poor Clares were subject to the council's goodwill. The Geneva Poor Clares did not accept the council's authority even before the confessional change. The sisters saw the rebellion against Savoy and the Bishop as the moment that ended the council's authority over the convent if there ever was any. In the end, all they requested from the council was safe passage from the city.

Both convents, as we know, were in cities that became strongly Protestant. Though these two cities were Protestant, their acceptance of Protestantism and the types of Protestantism were different, as were the sisters' reactions to the changes and the Reformers. The Nuremberg Poor Clares' relations with Reformers was one of cordiality; they listened or read politely and then chose not to convert. The Nuremberg Poor Clares saw the Protestants' inconsistencies and inability to reach an agreement among themselves as a signal that their beliefs were not in line with God's will. However, as seen above, because of Nuremberg's political structure, they were unwilling to become overtly antagonistic. Though the language found in the chronicle was more assertive of the convent's beliefs, and shows that though they were addressing things one way in a public forum, they were still resisting in private. When the sisters did resist the Reformers openly, it was with careful biblically-based arguments and practicality. When confronting Wenzel Link's accusations and suggestions to leave the convent, Caritas replied, 'If they want to force us to do something or compel us or even drive us out then we must commend that to Almighty God. We know well that nothing happens

against His Will, “not even a hair can be moved”. May His Divine Will be done for ever.⁶⁰¹

Here Caritas was quoting the book of Luke; the passage is worth quoting in full to understand the undercurrent of resistance.

But before all this occurs, they will arrest you and persecute you; they will hand you over to synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors because of my name. This will give you an opportunity to testify. So make up your minds not to prepare your defense in advance; for I will give you words and a wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents and brothers, by relatives and friends; and they will put some of you to death. You will be hated by all because of my name. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your souls.⁶⁰²

Caritas was saying on the surface all things happen in God’s time and by his will, but using that quote of the hundreds of others she could have used, was full of symbolic theological resistance to the Protestants. By quoting this passage where Jesus was foretelling the persecution that his followers would undergo because of him, Caritas was aligning herself and the convent with the Apostles and faithful followers of Christ. This passage would have spoken volumes to the sisters as they watched what was going on around them. Their families were turning on them. The sisters believed that God was helping them in their resistance, though not to the same extent as the Geneva Poor Clares. Furthermore, the sisters did feel like their reliance on their beliefs was ensuring their salvation.

When Caritas refuted the Protestants, she was also practical and often pointed out their inconsistencies. At the end of the first response to Link, she said,

A while ago your honor [Nützel] praised Zwingli and others to me. If we had followed him, then look where he leads us now with the sacrament. And nevertheless all that is supposed to be God’s Word and the pure Gospel. The preachers of Strassburg, as I have been reliably informed, consider Christ no more than another man. If we followed them, we would really have a bad ride.⁶⁰³

⁶⁰¹ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 121.

⁶⁰² Luke 21:12-19 (NRSV).

⁶⁰³ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 125.

With this, it was clear that the sisters of St. Clare found the Protestants' inconsistency a detriment to their cause and sacrilegious. Caritas was using her vast knowledge of what was transpiring outside the convent to resist against the Reformers.

On the other hand, the Geneva Poor Clares engaged in overt verbal and physical altercations with the Protestants. They did not try to feign politeness or to remain cordial. This confrontational approach was illustrated after Farel preached to the sisters the chronicle said, 'One sister went after him [a former Franciscan friar] and hit his shoulders with both her fists and said, "Wretched apostate, hurry up and get out of my sight."⁶⁰⁴ Here a sister physically attacked one of the Reformers. This was physical resistance in its most clear-cut form. The chronicle goes on to tell the reader that, '... he did not react and never said a word. I [Jussie] think his tongue was bound and tied.'⁶⁰⁵ Jussie might have taken freedoms with this account, but let us assume that it was true to better understand Jussie's meaning and resistance within the statement. The symbolism here was twofold. The man could have remained silent because he was ashamed to be confronted with the fact that he had turned his back on his vows. The Protestants would have lauded his leaving the order, so the sisters' confrontation played on his guilt. Of course, the other aspect was that God had rendered him speechless as he had done Farel earlier in the encounter because God's will was so apparent in the sisters' actions. Another example of their physical altercations was when a young sister accosted a man with a chair leg when he attacked the vicaress.⁶⁰⁶

These were physical actions taken against the Reformers, but the sisters' symbolic resistance was also physical. The sisters made it very apparent that they were willing to be

⁶⁰⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 132.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid., pp. 143-144.

martyred for their way of life and to protect one another.⁶⁰⁷ After Farel's sermon and Blaisine's sister's attempts to remove her, the sisters made a promise to stay committed to their way of life and one another.⁶⁰⁸ The younger sisters promised this to the older ones, 'And so we ask that you pray for us, and do all you can to help us, because we are willing to die for God. If they take us by force, do not be afraid to your best to get us away from them, for we would rather be chopped into pieces than give into them.'⁶⁰⁹ The symbolism of martyrdom was evident in the passage. For a Christian living under persecution, there was no greater honor than dying for God. They were using the symbolism and promise that they would join that holy register if killed for the cause. This language reinforced their new identity and commitment to their traditional identity. As we have seen, the Geneva Poor Clares saw themselves as battling evil, and that was how they approached any situation involving Protestants with aggression like going to battle. Like any good soldier, they were willing to die in that fight. That was the form that their resistance took. These relations colored how the sisters resisted and how they handled the hurdles that they faced. Both of these convents approaches to their dealings with the council and Reformers were successful. The sisters usually got the results they were aiming for, even if it was not permanent.

The Apostates

The two convents both only had one apostate in the years of the Reformation.⁶¹⁰ The way they wrote about and portrayed these women illustrates how they resisted this rejection of their way of life by one of their own. The communal identity was paramount to the sisters. They found their strength in their connections to one another and their way of life. The sisters

⁶⁰⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 135.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁶¹⁰ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 136.; Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 153.

formed a chain of solidarity, and one of these links to break was severely detrimental to that identity, and the sisters had to find a way to re-forge their chain.

The Geneva Poor Clares' recounting of Blaisine Varember leaving the convent came in stages. When the account began, the sisters reserved the resistance and caustic language for Blaisine's sister Hemme, who led the charge to remove Blaisine.⁶¹¹ As days went by and the account continued, the reader learned that Blaisine had begun to have Protestant leanings. The sisters offered to spirit her out of the city to live with her Catholic family in another town; Blaisine refused this offer.⁶¹² The chronicle tells the reader, '... the poor mothers saw her wicked intentions clearly and they did what they could to correct her, and as gently as possible.'⁶¹³ The last part of this quote was an interesting addition, as the reader knows from the previous chapter, Blaisine accused the convent of mistreating her, Jussie felt the need to add that the corrections were gentle. This was an act of identity maintenance and showed later in the account that Blaisine was lying. This was where the account's language began to shift the aggression to Blaisine herself. As the last chapter illustrated, Blaisine's situation and accusations cause trouble for the sisters. Blaisine was the catalyst for the ransacking of the convent, and her demands for money are why the sisters chose to leave the city. Their resistance to her actions and departure show a group of women desperate to fill the hole that Blaisine created in their identity and their reputations. Jussie called Blaisine a prostitute saying '...[Blaisine] looked more drunken and dissolute than a common prostitute', and 'a false cat'.⁶¹⁴ Jussie was working tirelessly to create distance from Blaisine and show the future reader the perverting power of Protestantism and the marked difference between

⁶¹¹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 100.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 155; 157.

Blaisine's behavior and the remaining Catholic sisters. These words are acts of rhetorical resistance in defense of the convent's identity. This account continues the chronicle's overall tone of aggression. The sisters resisted Blaisine's attempts to slander them and to make them seem less than, though they did resort to Blaisine's tactics by calling her names. In the end, the sisters chose to leave to save their integrity and do give into Blaisine's demands for reparations.

The Nuremberg Poor Clares' approach to their apostate, Anna Schwarz, had similar goals to the Geneva Poor Clares'. They were striving to separate themselves from Anna, but their resistance and outcome were different. The Nuremberg Poor Clares' account of Anna started by saying that it would not focus on her leaving, because she was now a Lutheran.⁶¹⁵ In the limited information given regarding Anna, the author puts particular emphasis on the fact that she wanted to be Abbess, and that possibly that was her reasoning for acting out.⁶¹⁶ The chronicle tells us that unlike in Geneva where Hemme was trying to free Blaisine, Anna's family advised her to do all she could to remain in the convent. The chronicle imparted on the reader that finances were not the best for the Schwarz family, and Anna's leaving would cause an undue burden.⁶¹⁷ The chronicle's tone regarding Anna to this point had been that she was misguided, ambitious, and obstinate, not characteristics a nun should embody. Then when Anna made it clear to her family that she wished to leave, the chronicle records her making a strange request, 'She [Anna] demanded that her mother have her taken away in a coach and that they drag her out and force her just as had been done to the three other sisters.'⁶¹⁸ Paul MacKenzie postulates that this was because Anna wanted the convent to be shown in a bad

⁶¹⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 153.

⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-155.

light, again interfering with parent/child relations, and also that Anna would enjoy being the center of attention. MacKenzie also says that Anna's mother's refusal to do this effectively stopped Anna's ploy.⁶¹⁹ Mackenzie could be correct in his suppositions, but one can also argue that this had more to do with setting Anna apart from the sisters, than Anna's actual schemes. The inclusion of this demand furthers the author's narrative that Anna was obstinate and narcissistic. This image of Anna was the systematic othering of her.

The Geneva Poor Clares othered Blaisine by comparing her to a prostitute and calling her a liar. The Nuremberg Poor Clares chose to distance Anna by showing her self-centered nature, and her attempts at glory separated her from the communal identity, not religion. The chronicle illustrated this dichotomy very literally, saying, 'When the convent sat at table, she slept. When they were in choir, she ate. She was uninhibited and did whatever she wanted to.'⁶²⁰ The Nuremberg Poor Clares did not use the Geneva Poor Clares' defamatory language, but they created distance and othered Anna just as effectively. This, as with the Geneva Poor Clares, was rhetorical resistance. The chronicle went on to tell the reader that Anna demanded reparations from the convent, and that the convent paid them not wishing to start an unnecessary conflict. The chronicle recounts that Anna caused her family so many problems that they were eventually impoverished. This end to Anna's story was a continuation of the sisters' narrative that she was selfish. The account emphasized the Schwarz family's misfortunes were due to Anna's selfish personality and that those misfortunes could have just as easily been the convent's. The writer tells us that '... she [Anna] was a very small loss for the cloister.'⁶²¹ The sisters did not miss Anna, and they may have seen themselves as avoiding a similar catastrophe to the Schwarz family.

⁶¹⁹ MacKenzie, 'Footnotes', Footnote 160, p. 155.

⁶²⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 153.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

The othering of those that went against the convent and the narratives presented acted as resistance to their breach of the collective identity. For the Nuremberg Poor Clares, this encounter continued their overall tone of appeasement; they let Anna leave as she wished and paid her to end any further conflict. The Geneva Poor Clares' narrative also continued their aggressive and combative position. One must also bring up the fact that maybe the sisters in Nuremberg simply had the funds to pay Anna off, and the Geneva sisters did not, and this forced their hand. What was made clear was that these two women leaving the convent needed to be addressed in the sisters' accounts to sure up any holes left in the communal identity.

The Visitations

When the councils of both Geneva and Nuremberg came to interrogate the sisters, the proceedings took on eerily similar circumstances. Again, like the situations surrounding their apostates, the sisters resisted these invasions, but here they resisted in a very similar manner though the rationale was very different.

The way that the two councils approached the visitations was different. In Nuremberg, like most of the interactions between the convent and the council, things were cordial. The councilmen came to the convent and asked to speak with the sisters individually. Caritas asked the men to give the sisters a few moments to concur. The men allowed this.⁶²² The sisters' request reinforces for the reader their representative lifestyle that was vital to their communal identity. However, it also allowed the sisters time to formulate an approach to the questioning. The men of Geneva wishing to know the sisters' 'heart', forced them into the interviews.⁶²³ Unlike the Nuremberg Poor Clares, the Geneva Poor Clares were not given the

⁶²² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 146.

⁶²³ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 160.

option to decide whether or not they would go. The Reformers quite literally forced the sisters, according to the chronicle.⁶²⁴ This was also a continuation of the relationship painted by the chronicle, the Reformers acting forcefully and violently toward the Geneva Poor Clares.

In Nuremberg, when the men returned, the sisters had ‘empowered’ Caritas to speak for them.⁶²⁵ She informed the men that they would not speak with them alone.⁶²⁶ She imparted to them the convent’s hope that the men were truthful in their intentions only to hear the sisters’ grievances regarding their treatment and not try to convert them. The men said that they were, but the sisters had to speak with them alone so that the men could report the truth.⁶²⁷ The men’s rationale was similar to the one seen in Geneva; they were trying to find the truth but believed that they could only gain that if the sisters would speak alone. The difference here was that in Nuremberg, the men promised that there was no ulterior religious motive.⁶²⁸ In Geneva, the chronicle recounts that the men tell the sisters that, ‘... it is a great pity for so many beautiful young girls to waste their youth in idleness when they could bear great fruits in the world’, here the motive was religious, and the Reformers were trying to find any hint of a religious rift in the convent to remove the nuns.⁶²⁹

In Nuremberg, the sisters then put up practical rhetorical resistance to the councilman’s insistence on speaking in private, listing various reasons they could not speak with the men alone. One of these reasons was that some sisters had not spoken alone with an outsider for over fifty years and that the action would shock them.⁶³⁰ This resistance was

⁶²⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 160-164.

⁶²⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 146.

⁶²⁶ Ibid.

⁶²⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

⁶²⁸ Ibid.

⁶²⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 162.

⁶³⁰ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 146.

ineffectual as it did not sway the men. In Geneva, the sisters did resist, but they used physical and rhetorical resistance of all three kinds. They wailed and fell to the ground begging the men not to separate them. The women begged to be martyred together and not torn apart.⁶³¹ Their resistance, like the Nuremberg Poor Clares' practical resistance, was ineffectual. The sisters were separated and questioned.

In Nuremberg, the back and forth continued for some time, and eventually, the sisters did give into the men's requests to speak alone if only so they did not come back to try and interrogate them again.⁶³² And then when the sisters answered it was all the same. The chronicle recounts the men saying, 'The sisters were all whistling the same little song'.⁶³³ Thus, the sisters maintained the collective identity and resisted the men's attempts to find dissent by being of one voice. In Geneva, the same thing happened, when questioned the sisters, all answered with a single voice.⁶³⁴ So here we have two convents hundreds of miles apart recounting the same resistance to two very similar incidents. One has to wonder if maybe the Geneva Poor Clares were aware of the Nuremberg story? It is possible they did know about the Nuremberg struggle. The incidents did take place several years apart, so there would have been time for the Geneva sisters to hear about the Nuremberg conflict, but this scenario was unlikely. As pointed out by Woodford, there is no evidence that the Nuremberg chronicle was transmitted to other convents.⁶³⁵ This similar resistance can be viewed as an embodiment of the sisters' collective identity, they found strength in numbers, and it was a tactic that had been used by their Clarain forbearers against the Pope and the Franciscan order during the pastoral care crisis of the thirteenth century, which saw groups of nuns traveling

⁶³¹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 161-163.

⁶³² Pirckheimer, *Journal*, pp. 147-152.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶³⁴ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 163.

⁶³⁵ Woodford, *Nuns as Historians*, p. 101.

and protesting the lack of pastoral care.⁶³⁶ These women banded together then, and they did the same at these moments in the sixteenth century. They used their voices laced together to thwart the Protestant threat. A striking difference between these two instances of resistance was the reasons given for each. Both of the accounts and the rationales continue the tone of the respective chronicles. The Nuremberg Poor Clares used their collective voice as a practical measure to tire out the men. It worked; the men did not even make it through all the sisters before they gave up. This continued their narrative of practicality and limited attempts to disrupt the delicate accord that they had fashioned with the council. In Geneva, the resistance was attributed to God, as many of their acts were. For them, it was God giving them a weapon to wield against the men.⁶³⁷ The last chapter discussed the theological overtones in this episode of resistance. The importance lies in how the sisters use a similar tactic but interpreted it in very different ways to further their respective images.

The writer of the Nuremberg chronicle ended the account by describing the whole encounter as a ‘circus’; clearly, the sisters were not overly troubled by the men’s attempts. However, the chronicle does tell us that none of the women would wish to undergo the incident again.⁶³⁸ The Geneva Poor Clares did not view the incident lightly; they spent a sleepless night in prayer and tears, praying for God to strengthen them.⁶³⁹

Conclusion

This chapter has compared how these two convents responded and resisted the Reformation in their given cities. These women fought hard to protect the aspects of their identity that they found most important, and they did this in various ways, but all relied on

⁶³⁶ Knox, *Creating Clare*, pp. 79-81.

⁶³⁷ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 163.

⁶³⁸ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 152.

⁶³⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 164.

one another. These two convents left behind written accounts of their struggle to both record their resistance and further it. The outcomes of the resistance were very different. As we have seen in their respective chapters in this thesis, the Nuremberg Poor Clares were allowed to continue their lives in their long-established home and in their native city, but the council effectively ended the convent when it refused to let them bring in novices. The Nuremberg Poor Clares' immediate resistance was effective. Their generation won the fight to remain, but there were no further generations to carry on their way of life. The Geneva Poor Clares experienced the opposite. Their immediate resistance seemed to have failed as they fled their convent, but their flight as an act of resistance was wildly successful. They had a community in Annecy for two more centuries. Here one has to wonder if the Nuremberg Poor Clares' long history was detrimental to their survival. They were so tightly woven into the city that extracting themselves would have been impossible. The Geneva Poor Clares' lack of connections allowed them to leave, but their future sisters always were linked to the city of Geneva, and that link was one forged in the resistance recorded in Jeanne de Jussie's work.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analyzed the resistance of two convents to the Reformation. It has explored their trials and fights; it has described how these women saved their traditional identity and argues that they accessed an alternate identity as Knights of Christ. When we look at the convents of St. Clare in Nuremberg and Geneva, we see two communities that resisted the Reformation very differently but used many of the same tactics.

In Geneva, the sisters of St. Clare embodied the Knights of Christ identity in the literal sense they saw themselves as going to battle. These women were a Catholic island in a violent Protestant storm. The nature of the Reformation in Geneva made the sisters take on this battle-hardened persona. They fought physically. The sisters hit Reformers and spat at them.⁶⁴⁰ The sisters prostrated themselves on the ground and used their fragility as women as a weapon.⁶⁴¹ When physical resistance would not work, they used rhetorical resistance. These women were openly antagonistic; they threatened and cursed these men, questioning both the Reformers and the city's leaders.⁶⁴²

These women saw God actively working to further the Catholic cause within the city. This belief led to their chronicle, having a mystical undertone, where God's intervening hand was present. For the Geneva Poor Clares, God was responsible for all their successful resistance.⁶⁴³ As we have seen, they ended their time in Geneva by leaving the city, their final act of resistance against the Reformers, and the city. These women built a community in France. We know that after the sisters fled Geneva, the vicaress became Abbess. After the vicaress died, Jussie was elected Abbess of the convent. These two women would have

⁶⁴⁰ Jussie, *Chronicle*, pp. 131; 132.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 124.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

instilled the importance of the time in Geneva, the resistance, and the aspect of their identity that was born there.⁶⁴⁴ The connection to the founding generation, still within living memory, gave these women strength and unity that allowed them to survive the Reformation.

In Nuremberg, we see more nuanced resistance to the Reformation. These women took to heart the passage from Luke that they quoted to Dr. Link.⁶⁴⁵ They felt certain God was on their side and that he would provide for them. However, even with that certainty, they knew too that they were responsible for acting out the resistance. Their narrative was not as mystical as that of the Geneva Poor Clares; God's presence was less physical. Though the Nuremberg Poor Clares believed that God was on their side, they did not write about the miracles and divine intervention seen in the Geneva Poor Clares' narrative. The Nuremberg Poor Clares embodied the identity of Knights of Christ in a different way than the Geneva Poor Clares. They chose to let practicality and theology be their weapons to the Reformers and the council. These women used their long-standing status and reputation to their full advantage. Their arguments were often sophisticated and, for that reason, hard to refute.

These women did physically resist but always in a more symbolic way than the Geneva Poor Clares. Their physical resistance is found in acts like not changing their garments when ordered.⁶⁴⁶ Also, with small acts of disobedience when ordered to do something that was against their consciences. We know that after Caritas died, her niece became Abbess of the convent.⁶⁴⁷ Katherina Pirckheimer was the last Abbess that the convent had; for these women, the identity that they created in the 1520s as they confronted the Reformation, would live through them.⁶⁴⁸ One has to assume that by the 1590s, the remaining

⁶⁴⁴ Klaus, 'Introduction', p. 12.

⁶⁴⁵ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 121.; Luke 21:12-19 (NRSV).

⁶⁴⁶ Pirckheimer, *Journal*, p. 96.

⁶⁴⁷ Strasser, 'Brides of Christ', p. 197.

⁶⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

nuns could have just walked away to live out their lives with family. This was not the case; they persisted in their lives as Catholic nuns. This being their final act of resistance and solidified the identity as Knights of Christ, believing that God would usher them into the Kingdom with fanfare because of their resilience and commitment.

When we analyze the resistance found in both of these convents, we see similar actions and approaches. These convents were two sides to a coin, one using overt resistance and the other resisting more quietly. In their arsenal, the Geneva Poor Clares and the Nuremberg Poor Clares had the same weapons, reputations, status, education, and unity. These convents used all of these to their advantage. They leveraged their reputations against the councils, calling for the protection of that reputation because the city's reputation was linked to their wellbeing. The mistreatment of a group of poor women would not have looked good for the city regardless of the confessional divide. We know from the outcomes that this was a much more successful for the Nuremberg Poor Clares than the Geneva Poor Clares, but this leads us into the next weapon. Status.

Both of these convents had status. The Geneva Poor Clares' convent was arguably filled with women of a higher status than the Nuremberg Poor Clares. We know from the chronicle that some of the women were of noble birth.⁶⁴⁹ As we have seen, this status worked in their favor keeping the vicaress from being arrested.⁶⁵⁰ This status also afforded the sisters an escape route. Their connection to the family of Savoy in their founding and their support of the family in the city resulted in them being given a new home in a safely Catholic area of the Savoyard lands.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹ Jussie, *Chronicle*, p. 175.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

The Nuremberg Poor Clares' status was different; the women living in the convent were not noble and had no connections to nobility as patrons. Where the Nuremberg Poor Clares' status came from was their connections to the Nuremberg elite.⁶⁵² The Nuremberg Poor Clares used this status in connection with their reputations to further their resistance. Then we also know Caritas herself had status as a well know female intellectual.⁶⁵³ This fact shined a light on the convent and bolstered the status of that institution. The next weapon in the sisters' arsenal was their educations.

The Nuremberg Poor Clares were a well-respected community with an extensive library and was known for giving quality education to girls.⁶⁵⁴ Caritas and the Pirckheimer women, in general, were very well educated, Caritas and her brother were both educated by their father growing up.⁶⁵⁵ She was well versed in Latin, as were her charges. The city of Nuremberg was home to many of Germany's humanists. One of those humanists was Willibald Pirckheimer, Caritas's brother.⁶⁵⁶ These connections put the Nuremberg Poor Clares in contact with Europe's intellectual elite. This was probably why Dr. Link was even willing to enter into a discussion on theology with the sisters. This education was one of the sisters' major tools; they used it to form their arguments and to ability subvert actions in a way that still followed the rules.

The Geneva Poor Clares were educated women but not to the same degree as the Nuremberg Poor Clares. These women though educated and literate, did not formulate the more elevated arguments seen in Nuremberg. This was partly due to the city of Geneva; the city was not the haven for intellectuals that Nuremberg was. Geneva did, of course, rise on the

⁶⁵² MacKenzie, 'Introduction', p. 3.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁶⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid.

European stage after John Calvin came to the city. The city became the epicenter of Calvinism.⁶⁵⁷ This happened years after the sisters of St. Clare had left the city. The Geneva Poor Clares relied on their education much less, but when it was helpful, they used it. These women were well-read and used that to their advantage, but it was not the core of their resistance like it was in Nuremberg.

The final weapon for these Knights, their most used and most successful one, was unity. The Nuremberg Poor Clares and the Geneva Poor Clares' connections among the sisters were their bedrock. Without their commitment to one another and their lifestyles, these women would never have survived the Reformation. The Nuremberg Poor Clares and the Geneva Poor Clares used unity in the same way as a bolster to arguments, where a chorus of voices spoke louder than a few. They used their unity to create a safety net for those that spoke out. They created an enclave for themselves while their families and cities turned on them. Their unity shines out as the defining trait of these women.

The thesis has shown that these women resisted and how they did so. It contributes to the historiography by engaging with this often mentioned, though rarely analyzed, topic. It has also brought two convents into conversation that have never shared pages in this way. It has allowed the reader to see how the socio-religious landscape of two very different cities affected these convents' resistance. Finally, I argue that these women honed a facet of their religious identities as Knights of Christ, allowing them to defend their way of life to draw strength from their community.

⁶⁵⁷ Balserak, *Calvinism*, pp. 3-4.

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