

P. Nash, *The Spirituality of Countess Matilda of Tuscany*, (Quaderni di Matildica, 1), Bologna, Pàtron, 2021, 109 pp.

In 1633, Pope Urban VIII commissioned Gian Lorenzo Bernini to sculpt a very singular monument for the Basilica of St. Peter: it was not intended for a pope or a saint, but for a lay person and, moreover, a woman. But not just any woman: he will have to chisel a monumental sepulchre for the mortal remains of Matilda, the great countess who, at the turn of the 11th and the 12th century, dominated much of the *regnum Italiae*. Bernini depicts her as a fierce, proud queen who goes into battle with armour on her chest, the troop command stick in one hand, while with the other she holds and defends the keys and the tiara of St. Peter. But who was this woman, whose fame has never died down during the centuries, and why did she deserve such a solemn burial? Heir of two aristocratic families, related on her mother's side to Emperor Henry IV, holder of vast domains which ensured her a large sphere of political influence, Matilda is mostly remembered for her role in the conflict between the papacy and the Holy Roman Emperor, as the faithful ally of Pope Gregory VII and his successors in the struggle for the *libertas ecclesiae* from imperial control. Her profuse service to the papacy determined the history of Christendom, but by choosing to support the pope, Matilda actually jeopardized her reputation and her possessions, exposing herself to innumerable hostilities. Then what prompted such a powerful woman to risk so much for the Church of Rome?

One possible clue is provided by the words impressed on her seal: «Matilda, Dei gratia, si quid est», «Matilda who, if she is something, owes it to the grace of God». A formula that seems to be inspired by humble devotion, but that actually states and testifies how faith in God and fidelity to Christianity worked as the driving force for Matilda's political and military decisions. Called to carry out dangerous actions in the midst of troubled times, she entrusted herself and her reign to God and his mercy, nourished by a blind trust in the goodness, the purity, and the grandeur of the cause to which she had made absolute dedication of herself.

The lofty spirituality of the *magna comitissa* is the subject of the essay written by Penelope Nash, honorary associate of the University of Sydney, who intends to broaden the field of the *studi matildici* by delineating a full-fledged “spiritual biography” of the countess. The volume, which inaugurates the Pàtron series “Quaderni di Matildica” of the Matilda of Canossa and Tuscany International Association, adopts an unprecedented angle in the study of the countess, as the historiography has always been more focused on her “queenship” rather than her religiosity.

Divided into three main sections, the essay starts with an introduction where the author specifies how she will refer to the concept of “spirituality” by critically reviewing the claims of the scholars, in particular those of André Vauchez, Susan Groag Bell, Pierre Solignac and Jan Frederik Niermeyer. If Vauchez denied the presence of the word *spiritualitas* until the 12th century, arguing that before then the term was unknown and therefore devoid of actual relevance in the early medieval context, Solignac traces the first mention of the word in a 5th century text, considering it functional within the current debate. According to Bell, who remained in the path crossed by Solignac, during the Middle Ages the term could have been declined in a religious and philosophical manner, but also used in an ethical and juridical sphere, intended

as «the quest to do the will of God by holding to what is good and making progress therein». Nash chooses to conduct her research by combining Bell's perspective with that of Niermeyer, who affirms that in medieval Latin the *spiritualitas* could be understood as «the character of someone who has the mind, attitude or inclination towards supernatural things».

The first section of the book examines the public, material and historical dimension of Matilda's piety, outlining a detailed picture of the Investiture controversy and the triggering causes of the so-called Gregorian Reform through the description of the most important personalities of the current ecclesiastical debate (such as Humbert of Silva Candida, Peter Damian and Hildebrand of Soana, later pope Gregory VII), their character and their doctrinal position, explaining the standpoint of the Reform's "radicals" and "moderates" and the relationship that bound them to Matilda and her mother Beatrice.

The author then moves to the analysis of the countess' spiritual genealogy, trying to trace the roots of Matilda's spirituality in the history of her family and blood ties. The chapter analyses the intense and reciprocal bonds she had with her spiritual guides: Anselm II, bishop of Lucca; Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury; and above all Pope Gregory VII, the man who had the most profound influence in the formation of Matilda's spirituality.

The entire book offers numerous insights on Gregory's spiritual direction on Matilda, a subject that deserves further in-depth studies, as an accurate attention to their relationship would add important contribution not only to the understanding of Matilda's motivations, her own agency, and female identity, but also to the study of friendship and spiritual partnership in the Middle Ages, of the Gregorian reform and, overall, to the history of the church.

Pope Gregory was the one who most firmly shaped Matilda's faith and devotion, as shown in the paragraph dedicated to the cult of saints and the Virgin Mary, which offers relevant clues for the history of Marian devotion, at a time, the turn of the 11th century, that testifies a rise in the cult of the Virgin which was going to progressively increase in significance, and whose influence on medieval women's piety still has to be extensively explored.

The pope's guidance is even reflected by the manuscripts that the countess owned or sponsored, analysed in the first part of the second section, called *Books and judgments*, which offers considerable information on the way she conceived both the Catholic faith and her own regency. Matilda was in fact a learned woman, who intervened in the cultural debate of her time through the production of texts which reflected and divulged the ideals that Gregory transmitted her: the *libertas ecclesiae* for which to fight, intended to mark the absolute primacy of Christ's vicar over the whole world, the spiritual supremacy of Rome first and above all things.

Her fidelity to the pope and his cause and her humble yet firm submission to pontifical authority were Matilda's drama and glory, an undoubtedly courageous stance that brought her a series of slanders and misunderstandings, as reported in the final paragraph of the second section, dedicated to the judgments of her allies and enemies.

An essential thing which Matilda and Gregory disagreed on was the countess' intimate desire of living a full religious life: in spite of her worldly accomplishments, she actually nourished a life-long yearning for the monastery, an intimate desire to

withdraw from the world that did not vanish until her death. Something that Gregory never permitted, rather reiterating the importance of her own commitment to society, arguing that the Providence had disposed for her a new notion of *caritas*, intended as the sanctification of active life, as service to her neighbours and allies, towards all of her subjects and, especially, to the cause of his ecclesiastical reform.

The reason why he never succeeded in persuading her was that a certain vision of Christian life, which came from the monastic circles and had spread widely in the church, had convinced lay people that perfection could only be achieved by wearing the monastic habit, and therefore the condition of laity was penalizing for the achievement of eternal salvation.

Nevertheless, Matilda will pledge obedience to the pope and remain a lay woman, fighting for a church that was preparing to ideally “overwhelm” the laity. One would have to wait until the following century to see the affirmation of new models of secular Christian life and new perceptions of lay female devotion, with the appearance of religious movements that flourished precisely in response to the Gregorian ecclesial asset. However, the example of Matilda stands out as an occurrence of great significance for the history of medieval semi-religiosity. The tension in her life between the model of Mary and Martha, contemplative and active life – one longed for, the other undertaken out of duty – characterises many contemporary portrayals of the countess, who seems to have striven to reconcile a life of pious spirituality with a life of leadership and warfare. This becomes clear through the analysis of her donations and foundations, as demonstrated by the final section of the essay, named *Endowments and will*, which scrutinises her documents for endowments of monasteries and religious institutions.

In conclusion, it seems to us that the description of Matilda’s spirituality is here not merely conceived as the enumeration of the characteristics of an 11th century woman’s religiosity – as influenced by her rank for example, or by her positioning of proximity to the ecclesial world – but instead wants to rediscover in Matilda’s faith the trigger and ultimate goal of her action in the world. An illuminating interpretative key to understand Nash’s work is offered by the solid intuition of don Giuseppe De Luca in regard to the meaning he attributed to the word “piety”. In his methodological *Introduction* to the first issue of «Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà», De Luca states that piety is not «the theory alone, or the sentiment of one or the other religion in general, not only the vague religiosity, or the supreme and exact summit of mystical union, but the state, and that alone, of the presence of God in one’s life, by a habit of love». Where «love» is not understood as a mere sentiment, but, above all, as «the will, the reasoning force that springs into action: contemplation and action, reason and meaning, will and sentiment» (G. De Luca, *Introduzione alla storia della pietà*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1962, pp. 7-8, translation of the author).

This proves to be particularly relevant in the context of early medieval politics as well, as De Luca recalls in the further pages of the *Introduction*: «The motive of piety was then present and operative no less than that of justice, and the new sovereigns fully inherited the title of “pious”, and felt it to be an integral part of their dignity and their mission». De Luca continues by arguing that «an exact definition of medieval politics, both practical and theoretical, will not be reached if piety is not given a much wider place», lamenting that «rarely or never the boundless congeries of chancery

documents, from which a whole conception and a whole conduct of common life *sub capite pietatis* is proven, has been put to profit for the purposes of the History of Piety» (ivi, p. 72, translation of the author).

We believe that this is exactly what has been done by the author in the present volume. Nash provides a full insight on the spirituality of the countess through the analysis of a heterogeneous array of sources – most of which are indeed documental – that have been previously ignored or taken for granted by the bibliography. This whole set of testimonies and documents has been declined in a way that prompts reflection on the inference that Matilda of Canossa may not have been just a pawn in the service of ecclesiastical will, but that at the foundation of her political choices there was a profound devotion to Christ and his mystical body – that is to say, her piety. There are not a few who see the relevance of this historiographical perspective, and we hope that many will follow Penelope Nash's example in carrying it out.

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The Fourth Lateran Council and the Development of Canon Law and the ius commune, ed. by A.A. Larson and A. Massironi, (Ecclesia Militans. Histoire des hommes et des institutions de l'Église au Moyen Âge, 7), Turnhout, Brepols, 2018, 332 pp.

This volume brings together fourteen papers delivered in English, Italian and French at an international conference held in Rome in 2015, called, *Concilium Lateranense IV: Commemorating the Octocentenary of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215*. Several other volumes of papers arising from this conference have also been accepted for publication with Brepols, some of which have already appeared: *The Fourth Lateran Council and the Crusade Movement. The Impact of the Council of 1215 on Latin Christendom and the East* (ed. by J.L. Bird and D.J. Smith, 2018); *Jews and Muslims under the Fourth Lateran Council. Papers Commemorating the Octocentenary of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215)* (ed. by M.-T. Champagne and I.M. Resnick, 2018); *Teacher as Shepherd. Theology and Care of Souls at the time of Lateran IV (1215)* (ed. by C. Monagle and N. Šenocak, forthcoming). These other volumes are clearly devoted to specific themes, but all essentially concern canon law, since all but three of the seventy-one canons issued by the Fourth Lateran Council entered the *Liber extra* (1234), the official collection of post-Gratian canon law commissioned by Pope Gregory IX, which remained in force among Catholics until 1917. As this volume's introduction emphasizes, the council's decrees represent a «high point in the development of medieval canon law» (p. 14). Nevertheless, the rationale for a separate volume on canon law, *ius commune* (including Roman law), and the council is clear enough: as its introduction notes, this volume examines the origins of Lateran IV decrees in earlier canon law and canonistic doctrine; the relationship between these decrees and Roman law; and canonistic reception of the decrees.

The first of the volume's four parts considers the canon law background to the Fourth Lateran Council, in particular the influence of Pope Alexander III (1159-