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Walter Brut's Utilization of Profeminine Rhetoric Towards Ecclesiastic Reformation

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WALTER BRUT'S UTILIZATION OF PROFEMININE RHETORIC TOWARDS
ECCLESIASTIC REFORMATION

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband, who has always supported me along the way, and to my parents, who made every sacrifice for my education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to first thank my thesis director, Dr. Holly Crocker. Her guidance not only made this project possible, but also gave me the independent space to stretch myself as an academic. Her feedback helped me to identify critical points in my theory and thus cultivate a more cogent thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Scott Gwara, for his dual role as both my thesis Reader and program mentor. As a mentor, he has always made himself available for program guidance, and, to this project especially, I am most grateful for his minute review of my work. His direction has certainly been a guiding force in this study of Brut. Finally, I would also like to acknowledge and thank Graham Stowe, the Associate Director of the Writing Center at the University of South Carolina. His efforts and willingness to help me work through the countless revisions of my work has undoubtedly helped me refine this piece, and I am particularly indebted to his kind help in the shaping of this document.

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the means by which Walter Brut, a fourteenth-century gentryman, exerted his rhetorical influence in order to change the fourteenth-century Church. Divided into three chapters, this study translates some of Brut's most controversial statements into five component tenets, through which this argues Brut exerts his said-rhetoric. Further, Brut's rhetoric is corroborated and put into dialogue with the voices of two contemporaneous female writers, thereby evidencing the impact of what this little-known layman did, in his challenge to Church authority.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: HISTORICAL AND TEXTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Now the masters teach that the science of rhetoric has two forms, one which consists in speaking orally, and another which consists in speaking by letters; but the doctrine is common to both...*¹

Walter Brut was a fourteenth-century Welsh gentryman, known in modern times for his activism as a Lollard preacher in the area of Herefordshire.² Little verifiable information is known regarding his life, but scholars such as Maureen Jurkowski show how legal texts of the period provide biographical details of Brut's life in England.³ Through these extant legal documents, and the careful research of modern scholars, we have a modest account of this "laycus literatus,"⁴ whose notorious trial before Bishop John Trefnant in Hereford was of such importance to the Church that Brut was required to justify himself and his religious beliefs, in Latin, before an unusually large body of Church officials.⁵

¹ Brunetto Latini, qtd in James Murphy's fifth chapter "*Ars dictaminis*: The Art of Letter-Writing," p.231. Original: "Or dist le mestres que le science de rectorique est en ii manieres, une ki est in disant de bouche et une autre que l'on mande par letres; mais li enseignement sont commun."

² As in Maureen Jurkowski's article "Who was Walter Brut?" there has been some confusion over the nature of Brut's history, with some early scholarship associating this same man with the Oxford scholar and author of *Theorica planetarum* 'Walter Bryt', who was of the same period (cf. p.285, footnote 3).

³ Cf. Jurkowski, "Who Was Walter Brut?": we know that Brut was a land-owner, through inheritance (287-289); he served in military exploits (290-291); and that he both married and then settled his lands within the hands of his wife (291).

⁴ Capes, p.278, "learned layman"

⁵ Capes, p.285, "...a quo sum requisitus quod scriberem responsionem in latinis..." Regarding the number of officials present, cf. Somerset's "Eciam Mulier," p.248: Somerset cites that there were twenty-two officials called upon for Walter Brut's trial, and she intimates that this was abnormal protocol for trials for the lay. Regarding the apparent import of Brut's case, cf. Somerset's same work, further down on p.248, as well as Anne Hudson's "The Problems of Scribes," p.109: both Somerset and Hudson touch on the length of space in Bishop Trefnant's register, given to Brut's particular trial. Somerset focuses on the length of Brut's own treatise, in addition to the fact that it was well-scripted in fluent Latin (an apparently unusual skill, among even the lay), while Hudson focuses more upon the fact that the combined length of Brut's case and that of an acquaintance, William Swynderby, itself shows the reader that this was a matter of great concern, for the Bishop at least, if not the entire Church.

Brut's ideology is recorded in William Capes' transcription of Bishop Trefnant's register. From these legal proceedings, we know that Brut was particularly known for his ideas regarding women as priests. Though Brut was arguably quite progressive for his time regarding his assertion that women might be priests, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton's work shows that, just prior to Brut's trial in 1391, there were already ongoing conversations on the authority of religious women occurring across the European continent, especially in East Anglia, the border adjacent to Brut's area of influence.⁶ After Brut's trial, the debate on power and women in the Church continued to grow well into the fifteenth century, spurred on (for Lollards at least) by a man named William White and several of his female followers (i.e., Hawise Moon⁷), who pushed this idea of a gender-free priesthood.⁸ But Brut himself appears to be the first documented individual to openly defend women's rights within the priesthood of the Church. Yet what does Brut contribute to the discussion of women and for women? Because of Brut's appeal for the possibility of female service within the hierarchy of the Church, we need to re-examine how Brut's written response rhetorically impacted women and religion in the late medieval period. Specifically, we need to reexamine where Brut's ideology fits in within the larger cultural rhetoric, and how Brut constructed his own individual rhetoric, in a way that would both speak to the controlling rhetoric of his day and possibly evoke an ideological shift for the role of female constituents in the Church. Brut informs his

⁶ Cf. Kerby-Fulton's "Eciam Mulier," p271 in particular. While Kerby-Fulton is actually making the case, in her paper, for Brut's being an accidental case amidst an already active topic, what is pertinent to note that Kerby-Fulton's analysis of the historical situation distinguishes Brut's specific contribution to the already-active conversation: that is, Brut is not merely *supporting* holy women in the Church, but calling for their service within the priesthood. Kerby-Fulton makes that evident, in her quest to focus on the larger discussion of areas supporting holy women.

⁷ Cf. Aers "Early Wycliffite Theology," p82: Moon, in particular, believed and preached that *anyone* "oute of synne" [that is, male or female] is able to serve in the Church.

⁸ Cf. Aston's, in particular, "Lollard Women Priests?" pp451-52; also, on p443, Aston briefly mentions Margery Baxter and others alongside Hawise Moon, in regard to leading women of the Lollard movement and proponents of this 'women as priests' ideology.

reformatory appeal through the impetus of his belief system, as will be illustrated by the way he lays out his written defense.

Theologically speaking, Brut is primarily concerned with the erroneous teachings of the Church: largely, that the Church is teaching incorrectly about power and the sacraments. These positions are evident from the opening of Brut's defense. In his letter, Brut writes that there is one true teacher (Jesus), and that, just as there were errors in teaching in the past (e.g., when Paul corrected Peter for his incorrect teaching), so many more appear in Brut's own time.⁹ The root of Brut's concern with teaching, then, is all about power: he contends that the Church's teaching is evidenced by the resultant priesthood, and that the erroneous practices, such as forbidding women to serve, is an improper execution of the Church's God-given power. Thus, with Brut's discourse on women falling inside of what is essentially a power treatise, Brut seeks to illustrate, by means of exposition on his beliefs and Christian scriptures, how it is that the Church is misusing its own power. To this end, Brut must show how women are properly-suited to priestly service. By the authoritative precedent of scripture, Brut hopes to bring about Church reformation in regard to teaching on the priesthood. It is in this religious vein that Brut writes a profeminine agenda into his letter of defense.¹⁰ Although his goal is merely

⁹ Capes, pp285-286. After prefacing his reason for writing this Latin response, Brut, in several spots, makes clear he sees erroneous teaching coming from the Church, i.e.: "...sic non est voluntatis aliquod erroneum propter aliquod commodum sustinere" (285); "Nullius vero magistri, Cristo excepto...quoniam et Paulus fatetur se reprehendisse Petrum quia reprehensibilis erat..." (286); "In sanctis doctoribus preteritis inventus est error...et in modernis magistris sepius cadit error..." (286), etc. The quotes here have been shortened, for brevity's sake, but the full quotes seem to illuminate much of Brut's return-accusations upon the Church leadership and their teachings.

¹⁰ The term 'profeminine' used within this study is based off of Alcuin Blamires' *The Case for Women in Medieval Culture*, first introduced on page 12 of his work. Blamires first coined the word in recognition of the fact that the fourteenth-century was actively engaged in creating gender ideals. He holds that labeling any positive constructions of what is "female" as "proto-feminist" or "pro-feminist" would be an erroneous overlaying of modern conceptions onto what was happening in the middle to late medieval period. Thus, Blamires finds it necessary to create a new term, specific to what was occurring in this time. Regarding the meaning of 'profeminine', he says, "[P]re-modern texts which develop constructions of 'woman' which are positive according to the cultural ideology of their period ought logically to be called...profeminine [since there is by now some consensus that 'feminine' and 'masculine' are best used to express cultural constructions of gender]." This rendering of 'profeminine' is particularly relevant to my study of Brut's work, as Blamires' recognition of gender as a cultural construct in the use of this term echoes much of what Brut argues, in defense of women in the priesthood and how the dispensation of power occurs within the Christina faith.

Church reform, through the inherent construction of *Ars dictaminis*,¹¹ he perhaps inadvertently contributes much more towards the empowerment of women within the Church.

Ars dictaminis is the rhetorical art of epistolary composition. In the medieval period, this rhetorical art developed into a distinctly medieval formulation, through the merging of classical rhetorical theory and the need to transmit effective oral communication to distant audiences.¹² Eleventh- and twelfth-century rhetors, such as Alberico di Montecassino and Adalbertus Samaritanus, thought of *Ars dictaminis* in terms of "prose orations," and this was the tradition that was still being espoused in the epistolary mode of writing by Brunetto Latini in the thirteenth century.¹³ If Brut conceived of his writing as a kind of "prose oration" in the style of *Ars dictaminis*, then his words require reexamination in terms of the orality and intentionality inherent to this art form.¹⁴ Ronald Witt, in his study of the progression of *Ars Dictaminis* in the medieval period, writes that, "[the Letter] ... is *formal* and *consciously crafted to evoke the desired response* ... with *no allowance made for digressions that do not serve the central object of the composition*."¹⁵ Thus, the medieval epistle was much different from the modern letter: it not only conveyed vital updates and instructions, but, more importantly, it served as a mode of indoctrination.¹⁶ John Murphy defines the letter as "a *discourse* composed of

¹¹ For further background on the history and development on *Ars dictamins* in medieval Europe, see John J. Murphy's *Ars dictaminis: The Art of Letter-Writing*; William D. Patt's "The Early 'Ars Dictaminis' as Response to a Changing Society"; and Ronald Witt's "Medieval 'Ars Dictaminis' and the Beginnings of Humanism: A New Construction of the Problem".

¹² For more on the formulation of medieval *Ars dictaminis*, see Camargo's brief description, in *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, pp50-51; Patt's article, particularly p134, and Witt's article, particularly pp. 3-7

¹³ Witt, pp. 8-9; pp. 16-17, for discussion of Latini's taking up of the southern tradition of *Ars dictaminis*.

¹⁴ Patt, p134: "To the Middle Ages, a letter was not a spontaneous and natural expression of thought or sentiment, but...a matter of rigid convention"¹⁴.

¹⁵ Witt, pp11-12, italics my own, for emphasis.

¹⁶ Patt, p134.

coherent yet distinct parts signifying fully the sentiments of its sender."¹⁷ In this way, the medieval letter is contrasted with our modern letter, with the former written primarily for public, oral persuasion, as evidenced by its emphasis on auricular aspects of how the recipients would receive the letter. And, like the classical demonstrations of public, oral persuasion, the medieval letter was organized strictly¹⁸.

Of particular import to the medieval audience was the introductory material - in this case, the Salutation and the Securing of Goodwill - since these two sections alone were considered as the controlling aspect of effective *Ars dictaminis*.¹⁹ In Brut's opening, for example, he describes himself as "laycus, agricola, cristianus" and the son of parents who had both originated among Britons.²⁰ Murphy defines the introductory material of *Ars dictaminis* as "an expression of greeting conveying a friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the persons involved" and "a certain fit ordering of words *effectively influencing the mind of the recipient*"²¹ (italics my own). Jurkowski similarly muses that Brut's opening serves as an identifying mark: "[t]his Welsh heritage was clearly important to him; he claimed that the Britons as a race had been especially called by God to the faith ..."²² Arguably, then, where Brut lists his identifying information, he asserts his faith and lineage for the purpose of controlling how his audience will receive his rhetoric. As I suggest, the rest of Brut's letter develops similarly, with Brut interweaving his heritage of faith in a controlled construction: an epistolary

¹⁷ Murphy, p222.

¹⁸ Cf. Witt, p.19, where he cites the thirteenth-century rhetorician Brunetto Latini's strict attention to the teaching of the *Ars dictaminis*. Cf. also Murphy, pp220-222, where he refers to the twelfth-century treatise *Rationii dictandi*: The five principal parts are strictly organized into the following parts of the epistle: the Salutation, the Securing of Goodwill, the Narration, the Petition, and the Conclusion. For more on the specific parts, see also Camargo, pp. 50-51.

¹⁹ Camargo, p51.

²⁰ Capes, p.285

²¹ Murphy, pp. 222-223

²² Jurkowski, p287.

treatise intent on reforming the Church's teaching.²³ The very nature of the medieval letter tells us that writers of letters did not compose without much forethought and attention to purpose.²⁴ And for Brut, this argumentative purpose is to evoke a responsive change in how the Church executes its ministerial power. Brut constructs his power rhetoric, in an effort to reform the fourteenth-century Church.

But in order for Brut's letter to effect ecclesial reformation, Brut must engage with a wider cultural fourteenth-conversation, which he does when he takes up the issue of women in the Church, particularly in regard to priestly participation.²⁵ While the fourteenth-century Church relegated women to positions outside of the priesthood, Brut's rhetoric effectually promoted women. I do not assert that Brut is at all concerned with what most would term a modern feminist agenda, or even that he was the source of profeminine doctrine. But, in writing his defense, Brut found the platform for women and service in the Church useful and important as a tool to correct Church officials. Because of Brut's choice of medium, and the way in which he focuses upon women, Brut's reforming purpose had the coterminous effect of opening up the discourse on religious women that was already taking place throughout the European continent. Indeed, where Brut is required to defend his beliefs, he takes the opportunity to address the matter of women in the Church, wielding a profeminine agenda as one aspect of his religious

²³ This development is Brut's *narratis*, or the Narration, and is, perhaps, one aspect of why Brut takes the time to precede his discussion of women with the lineage of Aaron.

²⁴ For a case in point, cf. example cited in Witt, p17.

²⁵ Cf. Nye, p12: Though proof of medieval misogyny and relegating of women under men is likely unnecessary, the general sentiment regarding women in the Church is relevant. Nye, in her exploration of the relationship between the twelfth-century theologian, expresses the general medieval sentiment regarding a woman's place in the Church: "The house of God is an "armed fortress" with a commander and a clear delegation of authority...The abbess is in charge, *taking her orders* from her spiritual husband Christ as well as from his subordinates in the nearby monastery...God...gives commandments to men...[T]here must be a strict law for a woman's order and no loose, unsupervised arrangements" (italics my own, for emphasis).

defense.²⁶ Regardless of Brut's motivations for his use of a profeminine rhetoric, the effect was that he successfully opened up the channels of communication regarding women in the priesthood.

In what follows, I examine only a portion of Brut's letter to the Church, due to the length of Brut's entire composition. Analysis of the entire rhetorical structure requires a much larger work. It is my hope that, by beginning with this well-studied portion, my findings may substantiate and encourage further research into the lesser-studied portions, and how each section fits into Brut's intentional construct. The section which garners most of critical attention is Brut's third subsection of the third directed section. Brut's full letter has five sections: a preface, and four directed sections. Each directed section is delineated by the heading "MARIA. JHESUS. JOHANNES", and are variously partitioned into subsections.²⁷

While scholars have debated Brut's views on women, his treatise on women requires reconsideration with respect to its larger rhetorical aims, rather than only a piece of the rhetorical whole. By "rhetorical aims," I am referring to the use of oration towards persuasion, which, during the Middle Ages, was achieved through the *Ars dictaminis*. Brut's treatise on women has already been well-studied, in regard to the larger, controlling cultural rhetoric - that is, the majority-rhetoric encouraged and espoused regarding fourteenth-century women. These past studies have focused on matters of history: history of the text, and the potential of the text to empower women in an age of

²⁶ Several prominent scholars have already offered erudite discussions on the unlikelihood that Brut was a forerunner of feminist ideologies, and most questioning this idea that Brut was advocating for women priests: i.e. Somerset's *Eciam Mulier*, especially p248, "Walter Brut's claims for women's capacities...do *not* provide us with...any sort of evidence for support of women's learning...The tradition of...this debate...continues to exclude...women's participation".

²⁷ A note on textual division for this study: in the Capes text, the preface occurs on 285-289, and the four delineated sections as follows: 289-336; 336-350; 350-357; 357-358. For further discussion of this heading and how Brut's transcribed words are broken down, cf. Hudson, pp 82-83 and 91, respectively. The section of interest to this study occurs in the second section, pp. 336-350. I have broken down the subsections as follows: 336-341; 341-345; 345-347; 347-350.

misogyny. But in all these discussions, the *individual* is absent. My concern is for how the individual (and the individual's perhaps subaltern rhetoric) speaks from within and informs the larger, controlling cultural rhetoric. This concern stems from David Aers' study of Brut's sacramental theology of the altar, wherein he notes (but does not pursue) that Brut's individual language, ideology, and political motives have been sorely underdeveloped in recent critical studies, especially in regard to how Brut's text develops as a genre.²⁸

Aers' statement points to the issue that past studies have not been primarily concerned with the subject of Brut or his individual rhetoric, but rather the rhetoric of the Church, or those matters pertaining to the construction the majority-rhetoric informed and propagated by Church officials. Ann Hudson, for example, examines the textual transmission errors within Brut's text, and, in doing so, recognizes that her findings are often frustrated by the errors in transmission via Church scribes: that some vital documents relevant to Brut's entire inquest appear to be disordered and (although unlikely) possibly absent from the text available to modern readers.²⁹ Margaret Aston, similarly, looks to locate historical evidence, outside of Brut's text, that women priests actually existed, contrasting Brut's statements against the rhetorical accusations and transcribed accounts of hearsay.³⁰ And Alistair Minnis examines the origin of Brut's professed ideology within Wycliffite doctrine, but his focus is on the rhetorical response of Brut's opponents, how these opponents perceived Brut and his ideology and rebutted

²⁸ Cf. Aers, p68.

²⁹ Cf. Hudson, p80, regarding the purpose of her study, and pp82-83, in particular, for one of her major conclusions regarding incomplete information, based off of the original scribe apparently trying to discern correct construction of the document from loose leaflets.

³⁰ Cf. Aston, pp458 and 461: Aston does not find anything beyond circumstantial evidence, her conclusions are that the rumors are unconfirmed, however much attested to.

Brut.³¹ This list is just a sampling of my observations on past critical attention given to matters adjacent to the rhetoric of Walter Brut.³² In other words, many scholars are talking about Walter Brut, and all around the matters pertaining to his presentation of women to the Church officials in 1391. But while each of these previous studies has contributed invaluable to our knowledge of Brut's text and how it fits in and influences late-medieval gender and religion, no one seems to have deconstructed how the individual argument has influenced the whole. Such an omission, as Aers points out (albeit briefly), is to miss out on the critical: how the component parts of individuals - their language, their chosen genres - contribute to, develop, and react with the composite whole of their larger communities. What is good about these broad strokes of past critical studies is that they establish how the majority-rhetoric enforced or suppressed certain aspects of individual rhetoric, generally establishing the framework for the impact of Brut's text within the trajectory of Church history as it pertains to women and gender in the fourteenth century. What remains is to look at Brut's individual rhetoric separately - how he pieces together his entire discussion, and to what apparent purpose; how he lays out his own ideas within a corpus, so that his text speaks persuasively toward his own end, that of Church reformation.

A good example of what this kind of study looks like would be to examine how the position of Brut's treatise on women relates to its preceding discussions on the Eucharist and priesthood. As mentioned before, the practice of *Ars dictaminis* requires the utmost care for rhetorical success, and Brut seems to take this kind of care in the way

³¹ Cf. Minnis, 'Respondet Walterus Bryth...', p231-32.

³² For other considerations, cf. Somerset's "Eciam Mulier," p.248, wherein Somerset argues for Lollardy's inhospitable environment for the profeminine agenda, and that viewing Lollardy in this more-accurate fashion, stimulates critical debate, in the recognition of the growth of female presence in both the academic and politic realms. Also, Kerby-Fulton's "Eciam Lollardi," which is concerned with the larger cultural rhetoric of the European continent, and locating Brut's discourse within said-rhetoric.

he prefaces his discussion of women's rights in the priesthood and administration of the sacraments. In the two sections which precede Brut's discourse on women, Brut first sets forth the matter of the Eucharist, and those problems inherent in the Church's current theology regarding it. This section is followed next by discussion of the precedent of the Christian priesthood, as begun by the lineage of Aaron through to Jesus the Christ. In both of these passages, Brut acknowledges the varied opinions held by those learned in the matters of the body and blood of Christ, all while making abundantly clear that Christ instructs *all* faithful believers.³³ These first two preceding sections are the inception point of Brut's impending discourse on women. This introduction makes possible his conclusions that women are reasonably suitable to the position of priest within the Church. These two sections necessarily locate Brut's argument within the bounds of biblical precedent, which is necessary staging before Brut can engage in his primary topic of women. Brut invokes the Eucharist and priesthood to get to the matter of women in the "modern" Church, by which discussion he hopes to correct erroneous Church teaching. Just as Brut carefully aligns his prefatory section with relevant biblical scripture (first with the Eucharist, and second with the priesthood), so, too, does he continue to do into his discussion of women and how they factor into matters of the Eucharist and priesthood. In this way, Brut's careful consideration and construction of topics are evidence that Brut mounts an orderly *Ars dictaminis*. In Brut's systematic and precursory

³³ Cf. Capes, p.336: "In materia sacramenti corporis et sanguinis Domini nostri, Jhesu Cristi, diversi diversimode sunt opinati, ut literati satis norunt, ego autem in ista materia firmiter credo quicquid dominus noster, Jhesus Cristus, docuit implicite aut expresse a suis fidelibus esse credendum, quoniam ipse est, ut credo et scio, panis Dei verus qui de celo descendit et dat vitam mundo, Joh. 6 ca°..."

justification of his beliefs, he efficiently lays out the order of the priesthood from the beginning of its biblical text to its end within the modern Church.³⁴

Further, Brut is intent upon saying neither more nor less than what the Christian texts allow, and these preceding sections inform critics as to what information Brut perceived as relevant to his defense of women in the priesthood. If Brut can establish via biblical (and thus authoritative) precedent that holy women are more useful to the priesthood than immoral men, then Brut theoretically situates himself well, in terms of rhetorical intent, to effectively chasten his Church officials. This careful anticipation of topic, via precursory material, is just one example of how modern research could benefit from reassessing Brut's text with attention to his individual rhetoric. When studied as a purposeful, rhetorical correction against the reigning Church authority, Brut's text reveals how an individual (minority) works within the larger, controlling-rhetoric, allowing scholars to glean more accurately how cultural dissent worked and was manufactured alongside the majority rhetoric to give us our present-day conceptions of medieval history.

As we move into the specific components of Brut's rhetoric, the final point to keep in mind is that, although Brut's rhetoric involves the situation of women, his ultimate rhetorical goal is a reformation of Church doctrine, not the empowerment of women. However, because Brut's epistle dovetails with the larger cultural discussions of women within the Church, it is easy to conflate his profeminine rhetoric with his ecclesiastic concerns. These two concerns are important to distinguish, for the purpose of

³⁴ Somerset, in particular seems disappointed regarding Brut's 'defense' of women. She perceives that Brut has an overall "lack of interest in mounting any effective defense of women's capacities" (p256). Specifically, she sees in Brut's use of the female pope, Joan, a lack of concern for the cause of women, although, for Somerset, she sees in this a gleam of productive truth, in terms of "absence" and how women were viewed conceptually by their male peers (257).

understanding Brut's rhetorical motivation. This is not to say that Brut was not also advocating for women's rights, especially given his history in partnering with women: prior to his trial in 1391, Brut transferred his estates to his mother and a woman by the name of Alice Bradley (later his wife), which, among other things, prevented the seizure of Brut's lands by the crown. Because of this transfer, his wife represented herself personally, after Brut's death, and successfully defended her legal right to the Brut estate, with the courts finding no fault with her claims.³⁵ Was this clever paperwork and use of women, so that Brut could, even in death, keep his land from Church authorities who were not acting in right-practice?³⁶ Or was Brut genuinely advocating for women, in not just the priesthood but other venues of life? The text does not elaborate on this point. But what we do know is that this Walter Brut was proud of both his heritage and his faith: "Ego Walterus Brut, peccator, laycus, agricola, cristianus, a Britonibus ex utraque parente originem habens..."³⁷ And in this naming of himself, he not only describes his person, but he describes his purpose for writing to the church at Herefordshire. And, in this preface, Brut makes use of choice phrases - i.e. "aliquis cuiuscumque status, secte, aut condicionis" and "ex auctoritate scripture sacre aut probabili racione,"³⁸ which, in my understanding, he does purposefully, in order to show that his defense is predicated not on status, party or condition of a person (hence the naming of himself fully and honestly),

³⁵ Cf. Jurkowski, particularly pp291 and 298-99, where the author points out Brut's signing over the lands to his mother and soon-to-be wife, and where Alice is able, upon the death of her mother-in-law, to personally represent herself in court and maintain her hold on all the Brut lands.

³⁶ Amy Appleford presents a masterful study of how the Church and the English government worked together, in legal matters. She focuses on a late-fifteenth century frontispiece, which commemorates the death and will of Richard Wittington, wherein she observes a similar move by Wittington and his clerks, to protect and secure property after one's death. The difference in the Wittington case, though is that, instead of women, Wittington and his colleagues use English law to give personhood to an Almshouse. In regard to the perception of the Church during this period, Appleford notes the petitions put forth, "that new almshouses should be under the supervision of 'true and good seculars,' since Church oversight of poor houses had 'well-nigh destroyed all the almshouses in the country' (Thomas and Thornley 88)" qtd on p93 of *The Ends of the Body*, a collection of essays edited by Suzanne Conklin Akbari and Jill Ross.

³⁷ Capes, p285.

³⁸ Capes, p285-286.

but on the authority of holy scripture and probable reckoning. As Brut relates his opening material to his discussion of women in the priesthood, Brut's rhetorical goal is incredibly important to bear in mind, for understanding how and, more importantly, *why* he utilizes *Ars dictaminis* to effect a profeminine agenda. As a proud sinner, layman, farmer, Christian, and Briton, Brut means to give honest reflection, via the only authority of scripture and rational thought. His ultimate objective is to use his powers of persuasion in order to reorient the Church to the authority of scripture. Under this authority, holy women *can* be vested with priestly power alongside men, because only God has power.³⁹ Power is not dependent upon gender, but upon what should be (in Brut's mind) the higher mission of the Church. The bulk of Brut's treatise therefore traces the logical flow of God-given power through the bodies of holy women. Whatever his ulterior motives might be, we can be assured that Brut purposefully uses his discussion of women in this vein, arguing for female service in the priesthood, but always, foremost, with an eye to proper exertion of Church authority.

³⁹ Capes, p286: This reading is taken from Brut's final thoughts in his opening defense. In closing his opening thoughts, Brut ultimately commends his readers to God's justice, being the supreme power.

CHAPTER 2

BRUT'S PROFEMININE RHETORIC

This thesis examines Brut's profeminine rhetoric as a five-fold iteration. Each iteration posits an equalization of the genders within the hierarchy of the Church. In assessing and extending each tenet as part of his *Ars dictaminis*, I hold that Brut carefully constructs each iteration in order to fully persuade his audience toward his purpose of equalization. Of course, in seeing Brut's rhetoric as a persuasive construct toward rectifying ecclesiastic misdeeds and executions of power, Brut was not the progenitor of this profeminine rhetoric, but merely the first to put it forth into writing at a time when conversations about women's role in the ministry were hotly debated. Brut gives voice and engages this growing concern among the religious laymen.

In order to illustrate how Brut constructs his *Ars dictaminis*, I organize Brut's iterations into the following tenets. In Chapter 1 of my thesis, I noted how Brut uses the Salutation and the Securing of Goodwill of *Ars dictaminis*, asserting his lineage and faith as a means of controlling the audience's reception of his letter. The following five tenets show how Brut builds off of these controlling aspects of belief and lineage, with Brut continuing to interweave his heritage and faith as a logical means of persuasion that critiques the priestly use of power. Each tenet thus builds upon the former, with Brut often using recurrent themes throughout each iteration. The first tenet is Woman's Power to Baptize, and it establishes that women are appropriate, and appropriately capable, to administer the holy Church sacraments. The second tenet is Woman's Power to Absolve

from Sin, which establishes that this initial granting of power to women thereby conveys the consequent capability of absolution of sins. The third tenet, Negative Female Exemplum in the Church, moves that, by virtue of the example set by Pope Joan, holy women are equally appropriate to priestly ordination. The fourth tenet, Negative Male Exempla in the Church, continues that the failed example of male priests offers scriptural support of gender-equality between both female and male priests, since power ultimately resides in and is dispensed via the Godhead, not the person. And finally, the fifth tenet, Christ's Empowerment for All in the Church, concludes that, since the endowing power of the Godhead is ultimately effected through any medium - be it male or female - then the Church ought to follow the example set by Christ. The power of Brut's tenets compound throughout his Narration (the third step in formal *Ars dictaminis*), as he emphasizes the illogicality of much of the Church's teaching, such as the Church's mandate that only male persons are capable of effecting sacraments or the ministry of the priesthood. The consequence of Brut's constructed ideology, then, and his point to the the Church, is that women deserve a place within ecclesiastical priesthood.

Profeminine Tenet #1: Female Power to Baptize

“...mulieres baptizare possunt...”⁴⁰

In his first rhetorical move, Brut opens with the assertion that women have the ability to administer a viable baptism. That is, women have power to carry out the sacrament of baptism, and that baptism, performed by a woman, ought to be fully-sanctioned by the Church, as it is sanctioned through the Godhead. He writes that,

...baptismatis sacramentum est secundum traditiones ecclesie Romane inter omnia sacramenta maxime necessaria, quoniam ut dicunt parvuli decedentes sine baptismo

⁴⁰ Capes, p.345: "...women are able to baptize..."

eterno igne cruciandi sunt et illo habito sine alicuius alterius sacramenti receptione
salvantur quod patet discurrendo per singula sacramenta.⁴¹

In this passage, Brut takes issue with how the Church diminishes the efficacy of salvific ministry, through the relegation of half of the Church's members, women. This address of a female's ability to perform a holy baptism – one that is sanctioned by the Church as carrying all salvific efficacy – is highly provocative, essentially allowing Brut to force listeners to acknowledge that, if it is true that baptism saves from the fires of hell (a tenet held by the medieval Church), then it would not be at all reprehensible for a woman to perform baptism, since, as Brut further points out, women are physically capable of performing this task. Brut's only caveat is that women should only perform baptism "nisi in absencia aliorum qui ad hoc sunt in ecclesia constituti,"⁴² which introduces Brut's second point in opening with the concept of baptism: that there is a difference between lay and ordained individuals. Therefore, this simple assertion of a woman's right to perform baptism achieves two effects. First, it de-emphasizes gender in the priority of requirements for priestly service within the Church. Second, it prohibits baptism in *any* but those ordained to the act.

In allowing that women can, in fact, baptize, Brut de-emphasizes the role of gender, essentially elevating women as potential priests alongside their male counterparts. Further, not only are women able to baptize, but, by virtue of baptism's status as highest of the sacraments in its salvific effect, women are therefore automatically sanctioned to perform the lesser of sacraments: those sacraments that do

⁴¹ Capes, p.345: "...the sacrament of baptism is, according to the traditions of the Roman Church, of the greatest necessity among all the sacraments, since it is said that young ones dying without baptism are tortured with eternal fire, and those ones that have it, even without any of the other sacraments, receive salvation, so that salvation is opened, running its course, by this singular sacrament."

⁴² Capes, p.345: "...except in the absence of anyone who, towards this [administration of the sacrament], are able to settle the matter according to the Church"

not have the power to save from eternal damnation.⁴³ Brut clarifies that *only in the absence of ordained officials* ought these sacraments be performed by laymen or women. The focal point of this opening rhetorical move is women as priestly enactors: women are elevated to the level of men, in their potential to do equitable (if not as powerful as priests) good work for the mission of the Church. That women are able to act in priestly capacity, similar to male priests, is the foundation of Brut's profeminine rhetoric, as it initiates a leveling of the gender power structure within the Church. James Brundage reminds readers that, for the eleventh-century Christian, the biblical principle was well-known that, "within the Christian community there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free, man nor woman, but that all are spiritually equal in the sight of God."⁴⁴ Yet this was not the practice seen in Brut's Church, with its reigning patriarchal hierarchy. Blamires notes that the medieval Church was instead utilizing scriptures to foreground male dominion over women, which was resulting in many sects labeled as heretical (such as the Lollards) for combatting this through their emendations of their own doctrine.⁴⁵ Brut himself hints at this conflict regarding teaching in his commentary on the words of the Apostle Paul: "Paul does not say [women] are *unable* to teach or exercise authority over men..."⁴⁶

In this spirit, Brut addresses points of disputation regarding the doctrine of the medieval Church teaching: specifically, that women should be silent and learn in subjugation. Brut perceives error in the Church to begin with, and by constructing a

⁴³ Capes, p.345: "Si ergo mulieres possint ministrare hoc precipuum sacramentum, non audeo dicere quod non possunt ministrare cetera sacramenta." Translation: If therefore women may be able to administer this greatest sacrament, I do not dare say that they are not able to administer the other sacraments."

⁴⁴ Brundage. "Sexual Equality in Medieval Canon Law," p.70: italics my own, for emphasis.

⁴⁵ Blamires, *Women Defamed*, p.250.

⁴⁶ Capes, p. 345: "Quod tamen *non possunt* docere necque in virum dominari non dicit Paulus..." italics my own, for emphasis.

logical situation where his audience might be forced to concede women's right to perform baptism where necessary, Brut substantiates his critique of the Church. Brut clarifies his understanding of Christian scripture and challenges the Church's exemption of women from priestly service by stating that the scriptures do not say that women are not *able* to exert authority over men, but that women should not, in that particular instance. For Brut, this distinction makes all the difference. This slight nuance confers upon women the *possibility* for authority over men. In the context of his passage, then, Brut's argument specifically opens up the *possibility* for a woman's authority - in both teaching and actual dominion - over men, in the context of the priesthood and administration of any of the sacraments. To cement his critique, Brut ends with this slight, directed at the Church: "Quod tamen non possunt docere neque in virum dominari non dicet Paulus, nec ego audeo affirmare, cum mulieres, sancte virgines, constanter predicarunt verbum Dei et multos ad fidem converterunt sacerdotibus tunc non audentibus loqui verbum..."⁴⁷ In other words, godly women (albeit unordained) were helping people, ministering where ordained men were doing nothing. In so praising women and highlighting the failing cleric, Brut is suggesting that the patriarchally-structured and governing body of the Church is an utter failure. Brut's rhetoric starts where the Church's misdirected aim starts: at the subjugation of viable ministers within the Church congregation.

Beyond extending the possibility of gender equality within the priesthood, Brut's rationale of a woman's right to baptize simultaneously works to separate the ministry of the priesthood from anyone not ordained to perform the task: it separates women from specifically ordained women, and it separates men from specifically ordained men. This

⁴⁷ Capes, p.345: "As to that fact, however, Paul does not say [that women] are not able to teach or to rule among men, and yet I dare assert, that women, holy virgins, have firmly proclaimed the word of God and have converted many to the faith, [while] at the same time priests lack boldness to speak the word..."

is a critical move in Brut's first rhetorical tenet, for not only do women now have authoritative sanctioning, by the word of God, but, by this separation, Brut now establishes that the problem of the priesthood lies not within the gender of the individual but in the lack of holy vocation: a secular individual cannot effectively administer holy matters, and should not attempt to (in Brut's mind) where those who are qualified by holy vocation are present and able.

This separation between lay and holy continues in each of Brut's coming iterations, which is why it is so important to highlight here. As an essential part in Brut's profeminine rhetoric, this idea of separation between lay and holy is what allows Brut to ultimately establish his fifth and final tenet. We see this in a number of instances. For example, in Brut's grammatical structures, he defends women through the use of Latin words which are neutral in terms of gender (i.e. "laycis," "sacerdotibus"). Brut selects gender-neutral terms to suit his topic: that of fulfillment of service through either a male or female body, depending on God's dispensation of power to that individual via vocation. These word choices follow in quick succession from Brut's admission that he does not see why women could not also administer the various sacraments, yet also fall amidst Brut's discussion of the separation between lay and priest. Consequently, Brut's text itself - the very words Brut uses to establish his defense - illustrates the effects of Brut's first profeminine tenet. Brut's defense of women's right to baptize therefore seems to speak for this idea that Brut considers male and female on equal grounds in terms of priestly duties. Thus, when Brut argues that Paul does *not* say women "non possunt docere necque in virum dominari,"⁴⁸ he leaves room for women to perform priestly

⁴⁸ Capes, 345: "...that women are *not able* to teach nor able to exercise authority over men."

functions in the same capacity as men. That Brut's attestation to the capabilities of women occurs alongside purposefully neutral terms such as "laycis" marks a significant of intention in this stage of Brut's rhetoric to remove this relegation of women from the priesthood. Could it be that Brut's prohibition of the act of baptism is upon all, except those who are ordained, not merely women? That Brut takes the time to establish that power is not located within a gender thus points out the non-necessity of gender to the priestly equation. By this rhetorical move, Brut effectively renders gender as irrelevant, as far as the Church is concerned. For Brut, the highest priority regarding any person ministering as a priest and administering the sacraments is that the person ought to be an ordained Church representative; male or female component is of secondary and lesser importance. Brut makes explicit that no unconsecrated body – be it male or female - should perform the sacrament of baptism, unless absolutely necessary, since the sacraments themselves disperse the power, not the human body itself.⁴⁹

The critical distinction of women as capable of exercising authority over men and the distinction of lay versus ordained put forth this idea of elevation and stature within the Church, based on vocation rather than gender. For Brut, who is assessing the Church in terms of its mission, the performance and service done within the Church ought to be done by those most able, rather than relying on something as insignificant as gender. Proper ministry is what Brut's rhetoric primarily addresses, and, for Brut, this propriety is inclusive of women within the priesthood.

⁴⁹ Capes, p.345: "...nisi in absencia aliorum qui ad hoc sunt in ecclesia constituti." Translation: "...except in the absence of any of those who are confirmed in the Church." Note that *aliorum*, here as above with *laycis* and *sacerdotibus*, can similarly be gendered masculine or neuter, thus continuing this thread of gender-ambiguity in sacrament performance. Also, "...nec laycis...": nor unconsecrated. The form of this word is plural, and can be masculine, feminine, or neuter, the sentence giving no preference either way.

Profeminine Tenet #2: Female Power to Absolve from Sin

"Mulieres quos baptizant absolvunt a peccatis...ergo mulieres potestatem habent solvendi..."⁵⁰

Brut's second tenet establishes that women can absolve the sins of laypeople. In asserting women's capacity of absolution, Brut does three things: he connects the ability to baptize with the ability to absolve sins; he distinguishes between the effect of both lay and ordained performance of the sacraments (that the ability to absolve is lessened, if the person performing the sacrament is not ordained); and he establishes the role of priest ultimately as a facilitator of power, rather than potent because of its gendered body.

Brut's second rhetorical tenet moves his conversation from the issue of gender-equalization to matter of the source of a priest's power. In order to do this, he must first connect the sacrament of baptism with the action of absolution (in effect, connecting word and deed), thereby transitioning the ideas between his first and second tenets. To do this, Brut glosses Luke 11:27, a passage which tells of a woman who praises Jesus' mother, saying that she is the recipient of great blessing, for giving birth to such a powerful one as Jesus. In response to the woman's words, however, Jesus does not take in this blessing to himself. Rather than permitting the woman's localization of blessing into his own body, Jesus instead reorients the woman's words, in essence correcting the misconception that Jesus enacts power for his own benefit. He acknowledges that his mother is certainly personally blessed, but, rather than selfishly appropriating the ministry of the Church for personal blessing, Jesus states that it is of *greater* blessing if a person externalizes the blessing of the Church through service to another. In essence, that

⁵⁰ Capes, p.345: "Women who baptize absolve from sins...therefore, women have the power to loosen [from sin]..."

greater blessing is in hearing God's word and putting into action is the model for the Church.

This illustration of turning divine word into action necessarily yields converts,⁵¹ and Brut uses this illustration of unselfish motivation to assert that *this* is the model extended to the medieval Church. By this analogy, Brut implicitly condemns the Church for exempting women from the priesthood, as this relegation attempts to localize power within a gendered body, just like the woman in the scripture did. Brut's illustration of Jesus' model shifts the self-serving understanding of blessing that was occurring in the medieval Church, and this shift simultaneously functions to connect Brut's first and second tenets: the connection between deed (baptism) and word (absolution) is the externalization of blessing beyond the Church. In other words, to "hear God's words and do [them]" is to perform the sacraments for those who need them. Indeed, this is why Brut links this story with another familiar scripture, "it is better to give than to receive," so that he might further emphasize that it is not for personal blessing that Christ's work is done, but for the blessing and service to others outside the Church.⁵² This bridge performs a natural segue into Brut's second tenet, where Brut begins to argue that absolution *is* words, those words being "in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti."⁵³ In allowing women to combine words (absolution) to salvific deeds (baptism), Brut reasserts

⁵¹ Capes, p.345: "...et an predicare verbum Dei sit maius vel minus vel equale cum ministracione corporis Cristi Deus novit qui respondit mulieri dicenti: *Beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera que suxisti dicendo quien ymmo beati qui audiunt verbum Dei et custodiunt illud*, si beati qui audiunt et custodiunt, magis beati qui predicant et custodiunt verbum Dei, quoniam beacius est magis dare quam accipere." Translation: "...and whether to make known the word of God is the greater and lesser or equal with the administration of the body of Christ it is known how God responded to the woman [who said]: *Blessed the womb that has born you and the breast which you have sucked, and [Christ] affirming [this] ever more [that] the blessed ones are those who hear the word of God and keep it*. If the blessed ones are those who hear and keep [the word of God], more blessed are those who proclaim and keep the word of God, since [it is] more blessed to give than to receive."

⁵² Here, too, note that the above-excerpt is bridging directly from a passage where male priests are being pointed at as not proclaiming the word of salvation. Thus, the male priests are like this woman, trying to maintain a selfish type of blessing, where blessing was meant to serve others. This is one of Brut's main points of contention in this line of rhetoric.

⁵³ Capes, p.346: "...in the name of the father and of the son and of the holy spirit..."

what service in the Church ought to look like: hearing God's word and doing it - an active performance, where word meets deed.

After connecting the words of absolution to the deed of baptism through the unified mission of the Church, Brut then moves to alert his audience that there are specific consequences for improper use of priestly authority. Now, Alcuin Blamires specifically translates this admonition of Brut's as, "[t]herefore women do not seem to be excluded from Christian priesthood even though their power is restrained so long as others are ordained to perform the functions of the priesthood."⁵⁴ However, Blamires' rendering does not allow for the preceding textual assertion of women as capable, which I posit is key to Brut's first tenet. The care with which Brut establishes women as capable and the priesthood as distinct from the lay delineates a very specific direction of rhetoric. In the Blamires' translation, the text conflates all women as priests, with the consequence being that female priests are somehow lessened in power – restrained, "refrenetur" – as to their male counterparts.⁵⁵ But I am not convinced this is the case, since "refrenetur" occurs within a much longer passage. When the passage is considered in its entirety, the relevant chain of thought reads:

Women who baptize absolve sins...therefore *women* have the power to loose...therefore *women* have the power to bind and loose, and this power is said allowed under priests, therefore *women* do not seem excluded from the Christian

⁵⁴ Blamires, *Woman Defamed*, p.258.

⁵⁵ Cassell's, p.508: from "refreno," to hold back, restrain, curb

priesthood, however the power is restrained of *those* [*women*], so long as there are those ordained to the official execution of the priesthood...⁵⁶

The power in this passage moves through the expression of the subject of the sentence: women. From the start, Brut is making a case for all *women*, as seen through the linking noun, "*mulieres*". Not women *priests*. Just women. Thus, it is *women* who baptize and absolve sins; it is *women* who bind and loosen; it is *women* who should therefore not be restricted from the priesthood. In this passage women are always the ones acting in power. Consequently, when Brut inserts this word "restrained", he is not relegating women priests or countering his profeminine stance. Instead, Brut is saying that there is restraint for those not in the priesthood. The restraint is not upon the women *priests*, but upon women who are not ordained.

This distinguishing point is critical to make in light of other translations of this passage. By separating the thought out as a separate sentence, as the Blamires translation does, the subject of women is unclear. But understanding "women" as the subject of a much longer chain of thought tracks Brut's purposeful use of gender-neutral wording and that his rationale is built upon a distinguishing point between the lay and the ordained, not male and female. This is why it is paramount to view Brut's defense in its proper rhetorical context: each of his tenets build upon each other. Thus, just as Brut has already made the case in his first tenet that it would be inappropriate for any *laywoman* or *layman* to act in the place of present ordained official, so here Brut establishes that, where any layperson acts in place of an absent Church official, it is the power of the *lay* that is necessarily restrained. Brut is intently focused upon distinguishing the acts done by the

⁵⁶ Capes, pp.345-46: "Mulieres quos baptizant absolunt a peccatis...ergo mulieres potestatem habent solvendi...ergo mulieres habent potestatem ligandi et solvendi et hec potestas dicitur sub sacerdotibus con[c]essa, ergo mulieres non videntur excludi a sacerdotio cristiano, quamvis earum [mulieres] potestas refrenetur, dummodo alii sunt ordinati ad sacerdotii officia exequenda..."

lay and those ministering within the Church. Again, the impetus is not on gender first, but on lay versus ordained. This is why Brut first needs to establish the capabilities of all women, before this seemingly contrary phrase, "*quamvis earum potestas refrenetur....*"⁵⁷ For Brut's rhetoric to effect Church reformation in the priesthood, he has to establish that there are delineated roles for members of the church, and that these roles - lay or ordained - carry with them specific effects of power. This is why Brut's employment of the term, "*refrenetur*" is so significant. By this term, Brut wishes to illustrate that improper use of power has consequences. By assigning this as part of Brut's second tenet, I am drawing attention to the rhetorical effect Brut creates in clarifying that execution of priestly office is improper (and thus restrained) to *anyone* who acts in the stead of a priest.

Lastly, Brut's second tenet reminds his audience that the source of priestly power is localized not within the body, but within the sacraments themselves: that priests merely serve as vessels, saying words or performing to create ambiance and solemnity for the people.⁵⁸ Using his distinction between lay and ordained, Brut's continues with the reasoning that, just as laypeople effect the sacrament of marriage through their own words,⁵⁹ so, too, must women effect the powers of absolution via the words "*in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti.*" The priest is only present as a sanctioning official of God, and it is the sacrament which is power, in itself, not the priest; the priest is only given special dispensation, from the source itself. In these terms Brut restructures the priestly

⁵⁷ Capes, p.345: "...however, the power of these [women] is restrained..." Where "*earum*" refers to the laywomen, the earlier referent "*mulieres*," as noted by gender, number, and case.

⁵⁸ Capes, 346: "...et si ad decorem et solemnitatem sacramenti ordinentur." Translation: "...although [the priests] have been ordained toward the decoration and solemnity of the sacrament [of marriage]."

⁵⁹ Capes, 346: "...et matrimonii sacramentum complent quoniam verba sua non sunt de essencia sacramenti..." Translation: "...and they [non-ordained individuals] fulfill the sacrament of marriage, since their words are not the essence of the sacrament..." Here, Brut notes that, where an ordained priest is not able to effect the words, still it is allowed that those who are unordained may say the words and effect the same sacrament, however with less power.

power, as priests apparently saw themselves as the wielders of divine power, rather than intermediaries of the God they purportedly served. Brut finds it necessary to remind his audience that, just as in the sacrament of marriage, where non-ordained men and women effect the power of the sacrament, so, similarly, do priests effect the higher sacraments. The implications of this is that bodies - both male and female - are not only equal, but that both are merely vessels, with power coming from an external source. In this way, the negating of gendered bodies disempowers the male priest, as it elevates the female priest to commensurate functionality. By placing the source of power within the sacraments itself, Brut negates yet again gender as essential in the salvific mission of the priesthood, thus equating females within the conception of men and women in the priesthood.

Profeminine Tenet #3: Negative Female Exemplum in the Church

“...quare nunc bone mulieres non possunt sacramenta ministrare...?”⁶⁰

Tenets 1 and 2 of Brut's rhetoric are the foundational pieces. Where they end, Tenet 3 next shifts Brut's discussion to contemporary exempla, offering first an exemplum of a female pope, who successfully executed her offices, as evidenced by the effective ordination of countless Church authorities. Some scholars have noted that Brut's defense is lackluster on purpose, revealing his disregard of women as a sex. Yet I maintain that Brut's use of this female pope acts as a negative exemplum within his rhetorical sequence. Use of exempla to catalogue either notorious women or women of renown was not unusual in the Middle Ages: thirteenth-century French author Jean de Meun, in his infamous poem *Le Roman de La Rose*, used a catalogue of notorious women

⁶⁰ Capes, p.346: "...by what means now are not good women able to administer the sacraments..."

to warn against the innate depravity of all women.⁶¹ Meanwhile, in the fifteenth-century, Italian author Christine de Pizan similarly presents various catalogues of women, but by focusing on the positive attributes of women (even when the women have questionable or alternate histories), she responds to some of the accusations put forth by Jean de Meun and Jehan le Fèvre.⁶² We see, then, by these examples, that catalogues of women were often used to further the purpose of the author. In the case of de Meun and le Fèvre, negative images validate negative qualities, and, in the case of de Pizan, positive images extol positive qualities. But Brut departs from these traditions. Instead of following the formulary set forth by other medieval writers, Brut inverts the tradition, setting forth a negative image in order to extol a positive quality. Brut's departure from standards of medieval rhetoric ought to be the first hint that he is doing something genuinely different. In this case, he asserts a profeminine agenda for a purpose. So what is that purpose? Why does Brut offer here a negative example of female service within the Church?

Somerset maintains that this part in Brut's argument is simply ill-thought out, that his need to prove his case against the priestly establishment and the use of sacraments⁶³ supersedes quality argumentation: "Brut is quite happy to revile Joan in order to reinforce his argument...Brut's treatment of her, which epitomizes his treatment of women in general helps to show...the opinions of women expressed by a learned Lollard differ from the mainstream...little." Somerset holds that Brut is not interested in defending the

⁶¹ Qtd. in Blamires, *Women Defamed*, p166: "Malicious Delilah, through her poisonous flattery, cut off Samson's hair...As a result, this man...lost all his strength when she thus sheared off his locks...Whoever hold men dear should preach...that they may guard against women and never confide in them."

⁶² Cf. Jeffrey Richards' translation of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, by Christine de Pizan, with Blamires' *Women Defamed*, p191. On p38 of the Richards translation, Christine opens one of her catalogues with a recounting of Semiramis, noting the queen for her courage, strength, and judicious reign. She says nothing of Semiramis' alternate and more seedy lore, lore which Jehan le Fèvre (qtd' in the Blamire's translation) highlights and writes about, some thirty years before de Pizan's time. This indicates that the lechery of Queen Semiramis was known, as well as the positive aspects of her reign as queen.

⁶³ Cf. Somerset, "Eciam Mulier", p256.

priestly abilities of women, but her position seems unconvincing for several reasons.

First, as has already been established by Witt, the act of composing a letter in the style of *Ars dictaminis* was given careful thought, with careful purpose to each element.⁶⁴

Second, Somerset's theory presumes that Brut is merely stating "his skepticism about sacramental theology and the established Church."⁶⁵ But Brut's epistolary treatise and how its component parts work together just so intimate more than a lackluster display of his disenchantment with the Church. The key to understanding what Brut is doing with his use of Joan as an exemplum seems to lie within his use of the word "fornicaria."⁶⁶

Again, according to medieval precedent such as that we see in Jean de Meun and Jehan le Fèvre, a negative image would couple with a negative word, in order to substantiate a negative image. Brut's use of this word, 'fornicaria' thus anticipates a negative complement: that, whatever else is known regarding this pope, she is sexual to a fault.

And yet Brut does not continue in this vein. Instead, he makes a point of noting that, despite Joan's faulty person, even *she* was able to attain to the position of pope, the highest position in the priesthood, where she *effectively* ministered and installed countless ordained individuals until she was exposed. In setting up a flawed vessel here, where Brut's audience would typically expect a positive exemplum (and modern audiences see a failed argumentative stratagem), Brut exemplifies his previous two tenets: that a woman has the capability to minister in the priesthood, and that she herself is not the source of salvific power. This is why he gives us a faulty woman in what I assert is meant to be profeminine ideology: because, if a faulty woman might serve effectively, then why

⁶⁴ See page 3 of Chapter 1 of this document, for the Witt quote.

⁶⁵ Somerset, p256.

⁶⁶ "Fornicātōur (n.)" *Middle English Dictionary*: the MED defines fornicator as "(a) A lecherous person, one guilty of fornication or of adultery; (b) an unmarried lecher (as distinguished from an adulterer)". In Brut, cf. Capes p.346, "...ipsa fornicaria talia", "...this same fornicator..."

should not good, ordained women – that is, virtuous, holy women – be all the more encouraged to serve in an ordained capacity? “...quare nunc bone mulieres non possunt sacramenta ministrare...?”⁶⁷ The impetus behind this third tenet is that *good* women would effect *good* ministry within the priesthood. Inherent in Brut's rhetorical use of the negative exemplum of this female pope, where one would typically find a positive exemplum, is the idea that, though negative examples may exist, still the power of the Church's ministry resides in a higher, sovereign God, rather than within the faulty, priestly vessels.

Profeminine Tenet #4: Negative Male Exempla in the Church

*"...non video quin hoc idem posset Deus facere ad sancte mulieris imprecationem
hoc ex pia affeccione imprecantis..."*⁶⁸

After giving his negative female exemplum, Brut mirrors his third tenet with his fourth by turning to negative exempla of male priests who fail in their service to the Church. This seems an appropriate moment to point out that, unlike in his previous sections, where Brut uses gender-neutral terms for priest, here the priests are distinctively male, as in "mali sacerdotis" and "bonus sacerdos." It is worth considering that Brut purposefully invokes the distinct verbiage for male priests here, as a contrast against the single negative example of a female priestess in the previous tenet. Thus it is that, when Brut discusses all the nameless *male* priests who, with unholy motivations, performed the sacrament of the Eucharist effectively, he creates a stark contrast with the single exemplum of a female priest who similarly served effectively, despite her ungodliness. If such a purposeful comparison was meant, it would critique a Church doctrine which

⁶⁷ Capes, p.346, "...why now are good women not able to administer the sacraments...?"

⁶⁸ Capes, p.346: "...it does not seem that God would not be able to do for the spoken curses of holy women, invoking out of pious affection..."

states that the character of the priest does not matter, yet refuses women from the priesthood for their sinful ways. It is through this hypocrisy that I think Brut intentionally seeks to highlight the inconsistencies between male and female priestly expectations, using the Church's own reasoning in order to demonstrate flaws within the fourteenth century priesthood. In citing how there have been good and bad male priests, but, regardless, the deeds of both were deemed acceptable, due to the power stemming from the word of Christ, Brut is able to logically that, if the word of Christ was able to make efficacious the workings of these bad male priests, despite themselves, how not then also good women?⁶⁹ Thus, where Brut's earlier tenets push to establish the basic fact that women might also viably serve as ordained priests within the Church,⁷⁰ his third and fourth tenets together illustrate and validate his reasoning, that the sacraments have their own supervening power, outside of the priests who administer them, and women are therefore authorized to the priesthood. This logic-chain of first-female-then-male exempla builds, rhetorically, to his main point: that truly neither male nor female matters. In the administration of priestly duty, it is the essence of the sacraments - not the priests or the words they speak - which effects the quality or power of God and His sacraments.

Profeminine Tenet #5: Christ's Empowerment for All in the Church

*"...et sic non videtur michi quin mulieres possint esse sacerdotes quo ad sacramentorum ministracionem."*⁷¹

⁶⁹ Capes, p.346: "...in consecracione corporis Cristi nichil bonus sacerdos agit amplius malo nec malus agit minus bono, quoniam ut dicunt non virtute sacerdotis sed virtute verborum Cristi, ipso potencialiter operante, panis in corpus ad sacerdotis invocacionem consecratur." Translation: in the consecration of the body of Christ, nothing a good priest does increases the good nor a bad [priest] does lessens the good, since it is said that it is not by the virtue of the priest but by the virtue of the word of Christ, itself powerfully working, [that] the bread is converted into the body by the invocation of the priest.

⁷⁰ Capes, p.346: "Deus facere ad sancte mulieris imprecacionem hoc ex pia affeccione imprecantis..."

⁷¹ Capes, p.347: "...rather, thus, it seems to me that women may be able to be priests for the administration of the sacraments."

Brut's 5th tenet is the culmination of Brut's profeminine aims. Having established the precedents for women's right to administer the sacraments and speak absolution (the first and second tenets), and having demonstrated through a show of both male and female negative exempla (the third and fourth tenets), Brut's final move is to urge his audience's right-action, through consideration of Christ's own actions on behalf of women. That Christ himself performs miraculous feats for holy women is, to Brut, the ultimate example of how power ought to operate within the Church, from Christ downward. Because it has already been established that this tenet follows on Brut's establishment of the surety and priority that Christ is able to work in the non-gendered body, towards the Church's role of effecting the good, the only thing left for Brut to accomplish is to show authoritative evidence of the power of Christ working positively - as opposed to the previous tenets with their combined negative exempla - on behalf of holy women ordained to serve within the Church. To that end, Brut invokes the instances of Jesus' working miracles on behalf of specific holy women: his mother, Mary; the sisters Mary and Martha; and Veronica. He is demonstrating the Christ's precedent already established for the fourteenth-century Church, that the work of the Church has been and will continue to be done, for those "*sancte mulieris hoc rogantis pia intencione non ex presumpcione...*"⁷²

For Brut, the impetus of his rhetoric stems from his understanding that power stems ultimately from the Godhead to both male and female equally. How Brut then choose to assert his power rhetoric - moving women and men within the Church into a more equalized position - is critical to understand, since this understanding is the vehicle

⁷² Capes, p.347: "...holy women, asking for this reason with pious intention, not out of presumption..."

by which Brut hopes to motivate the realigning of Church teaching with its mission to serve others. To this end, he constructs a deliberately profeminine agenda, built upon logical links of rhetoric. The first link is that, in the Church, with regard to the priesthood and the sacraments, "...sed bene consencio quod non decet eas nec layicos hoc facere ubi sunt qui sunt ad sacramenta ministranda in ecclesia constituti...."⁷³ No, what is most important is that ministry (and thus the execution of Church power) should occur through the proper channels of power, with first and best priority given to the ordained official, regardless of gender.⁷⁴ And if gender issues can be logically set aside, so that the governing body of the Church might be persuaded to dispense power according to the model set by Christ, Brut's profeminine rhetoric ends with this probing, critical question: if Christ acts on the behalf of women, in these listed miracles, would he not also act on behalf of women in consecrating the sacraments, especially those that are effecting his Church's purpose? How Brut's individual rhetoric incorporated aspects of the *Ars dictaminis* to speak to and impact his generation is perhaps still too large a matter for this brief work. But by this parsing out of his five tenets, Brut's purposeful use of a profeminine agenda to effect Church reform is evident, and his ideas found cultural resonance from his contemporaries.

⁷³ Capes, p.347: "...but properly I assent that it is not suitable that women nor laymen do [this consecrating work] where there are those who are within the Church, by arrangement, administering the sacraments.

⁷⁴ Capes, p. 347: "...et sic non videtur michi quin mulieres possint esse sacerdotes quo ad sacramentorum ministracionem." Translation: "...thus it seems rather to me even women are able to be priestesses, toward the end of the administration of the sacraments.

CHAPTER 3

BRUT'S RHETORIC IN DIALOGUE WITH TWO PERIOD TEXTS

Without cultural resonance - that is, if a voice fails to enter into dialogue with and appeal to contemporary voices - an ideology will fail.⁷⁵ Successful rhetoric requires engagement, lest the rhetoric become inconsequential. In the case of Brut's rhetoric, studies show us that, in the late fourteenth century, the condition of women in the Church was changing. Edith Ennen, in her encompassing study on religious women of the late middle ages, compares the various experiences of religious women from across the European continent: of Mechthild of Hackeborn, Marguerite of Porète, and Birgitta of Sweden, to name a few of the women who were part of the impetus for this rising discontent regarding religious women in power.⁷⁶ Two religious women who were contemporaneous with Brut in particular are Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Julian's writings were penned in 1373, eighteen years before Brut's trial but certainly during his time of activity. Kempe's writings date several years after Brut's period of activity and subsequent death, dating sometime around the 1430s. Both women, however, left writings which reflect various aspects of Brut's rhetoric.

⁷⁵ Cf. Murphy, p255: This comment is based off of the example of the work of Boncompagno, a thirteenth-century rhetorician, who tried to institute his own line of rhetoric, thereby reforming the instruction of *Ars dictaminis*. As Murphy tells us, Boncompagno's ideas failed because they failed to appeal to his contemporaries: "[Boncompagno's attempt] to set up a system of three-part letters [failed utterly]...Intriguing though he may be...Boncompagno seems to have made no lasting impact either on his own university or on Europe at large. As is asserted in this chapter, such is not the case with Brut.

⁷⁶ Cf. Ennen, pp154-155.

As noted in the first chapter, Walter Brut lived and preached throughout and around the area of Herefordshire,⁷⁷ an area of western England. Both Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe were from East Anglia, in the areas of Norwich and Bishops Lynn, respectively.⁷⁸ Kerby-Fulton, in her research into the history of Brut's trial, demonstrates competently how profeminine ideals - which originated in England in East Anglia, the area in which Julian and Margery fare - could have crossed the country and been the impetus for Walter Brut's unusual trial of 1391.⁷⁹ Indeed, she writes that, "the Brut trial [and other sources] ... show English scholars in contact with new continental ideas and wrestling academically and publicly with a new threat ... "⁸⁰ This trans-national struggle that Kerby-Fulton brings to light in her study draws together East Anglia and the west country, making appropriate the exploration of how Brut's rhetoric corresponds ideologically with what we see being espoused by the writings of these particular female religious authors.

Engaging Profeminine Tenet #1

In his first rhetorical move, Brut establishes that women can baptize, in order to establish the basic right that women can operate alongside men in the ministry of the Church. He also does this to begin distinguishing between lay and ordained individuals. This rhetoric is found also in Julian of Norwich's writings. In her *Shewings*, Julian writes, "god was never displesid with his chosin wif; and of three properties in the trinite, faderhede, moderhede, and lordhede; and how our substance is in every person, but our

⁷⁷ Cf. Jurkowski, pp287-288.

⁷⁸ Cf. *The Shewings*, Crampton, p1, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Staley, p1, respectively, for both Julian's and Margery's locales. Charity S. Stokes also corroborates that Kempe was both born and spent much of her time here, cf. p10, and E.A. Jones does the same regarding Julian's background, in prefacing his/her examination on the person of Julian of Norwich.

⁷⁹ Cf. Kerby-Fulton, p263.

⁸⁰ p263.

sensualite is in criste alone...."⁸¹ With this statement, Julian incorporates women into the power structure of the church, through the image of a holy woman set apart from others. First, in understanding Julian's rendering of the female, the Middle English "wif" connotes the biologically female person.⁸² Yet here, in Julian's words, the "wif" in "chosin wif" connotes the embodiment of all Christian believers, which the reader can further understand when Julian writes, "he [god] is our very trewe spouse, and we [the church or body of Christian believers] his lovid wif...."⁸³ Further, this "wif" is "chosin," or set apart from all other potential wives. In one act, then, Julian not only genders all believers as female, in calling all Christians god's "chosin wif," but she also essentially unifies all believers into a single, purposefully-elect female body. Additionally, in rendering all believers as god's "chosin wif," Julian recognizes the unity between husband and wife (again, "wif" here connoting male and female believers together). Thus, she understands women and men equally in this role of "wif," working together to serve the role of "wif" to their god. Male and female are equalized in their role of "wif." This unity is further attested to when Julian writes of god and humanity engaging in "the knittyng and...the onyng...."⁸⁴ To be husband and wife necessitates that the two become unified, this "onyng." And, moreover, Julian believes that "onyng" happens as "the werke which is wrought continually in every soule that shal be save,"⁸⁵ and that this "werke" (work) is the purpose of the "wif" (all those who are Christian believers). Therefore, just as Brut puts into words this idea that women *can* baptize, thereby initiating this idea of women

⁸¹ *The Shewings*, Crampton, p.120: Julian's introductory summation of her 58th revelation.

⁸² Cf. "wif", Middle English Dictionary.

⁸³ *The Shewings*, Crampton, p120, lines 2394-2395.

⁸⁴ p120, line 2394

⁸⁵ p120, lines 2390-2391

having purpose in the priesthood, so, similarly, does Julian, in her analogy of the Church as "chosin wif," express the purpose of the Church, through this image of the female body, the wife. In Julian's expression of the Church as wife, she, too, prefers women - that is, she elevates them in esteem, as those selected for a specific role. And, as she illustrates this "wif" functioning in a specific, active role,⁸⁶ she gives her audience a focal image of women evincing good, which can be likened as a precedent for this discourse regarding male and female service within the Church.

Engaging Profeminine Tenet #2

Brut's second tenet deals in the execution of the power of baptism, ultimately concluding that even women may effect the sacraments and that priests are merely vessels of this sacramental power. Even laypersons, Brut asserts, may administer the sacraments, though the power given them will be lessened. In Margery Kempe's fifteenth-century account, Kempe echoes this lessening of power, in her own lay attempts at ministry. In her account, Kempe describes how she helps the hysterical wife of a desperate husband. Her story goes, "sche [Margery], parceyvyng hys [the husband's] hevynes, askyd what hym eylyd ... than askyd sche the man yyf he/wolde that sche went wyth hym and sawe hir ... so sche went forth wyth hym to se the woman."⁸⁷ In this account, we see Margery, a laywoman, acting out Christian ministry. Just as Brut emphasizes the laywoman acting, in active Christian service, so, too, does Margery, her own testimony. Indeed, though Margery tells us that the man in the passage positioned

⁸⁶ *The Shewings*, Crampton, p.120, lines 2391-2396: "...in our makeyng/ God almighty is our kindly fader, and God alwisdom is our kindly Moder, with/ the love and the goodnes of the Holy Gost, which is al one God, on Lord. And/ in the knittyng and in the onyng He is our very trewe spouse, and we His lovid/ wif and His fair madien with which wif He is never displesid. For He seith, I/ love the, and thou lovist me, and our love shal never be departid on to." lines 2398-2411: "...the properte of the faderhede, the properte/ of the moderhede, and the properte of the lordhede in one God. In our Fader/ Almyty we have our keping and our bliss as anemts our kyndly substance...and in the Second Person, in witt/ and wisdom, we have our keping as anempts our sensualite, our restoryng, and/ our savyng...For al our life is in thre. In the first we have our/ beyng, and in the second we have our encresyng, and in the thrid we hav our/ fulfilling.

⁸⁷ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Staley, pp.170-71, lines 4208-4214

himself perhaps purposefully near her,⁸⁸ Margery herself takes the initiative, inquiring of the man and essentially performing the task which, according to Brut, ought to have been done by a priest.⁸⁹ Margery tells us that her ministry to the woman is effective - the woman is healed. But the healing is not instantaneous,⁹⁰ and Margery must execute her power over the course of three separate visits.⁹¹ Her power seems restrained, slow. Conversely, we are told that the healing of Julian of Norwich occurs "sodenly," soon after her curate - an ordained minister - bids her look upon an image of the cross as part of her last rites.⁹² Of course, the priest administering Julian's last rites is a male, but the text tells us that he is there because Julian is expected to die. And according to Julian's testimony, the priest does not effect the miracle; the image of the cross does. Thus, we see, in these two female accounts engaging with ideology quite similar to the rhetoric constructed by Walter Brut: the first, a laywoman acting in ministry, in which she successfully acts as a vessel of healing power for a woman, albeit over a long period of time; and the second, a woman experiencing instantaneous healing of a woman, with the ordained minister serving as the vessel or officiator and the Cross sourcing the instantaneous healing. These two female authors thus corroborate the kind of empowerment Brut espouses by his second tenet: that women minister in power, and the sacramental power issues according to the minister's status as either ordained or lay.

⁸⁸ Lines 4206-4207: "...ther/cam a man *knelyng at hir bak*..." [italics my own, for emphasis]

⁸⁹ Lines 4207-08: The man is described as "wryngyng hys handys and schewyng tokenys of gret/hevynes." Whatever the man's motivations for coming to the Church, it is evident that Margery wants the audience to know that the man was perceived as in distress, perhaps in need of religious assistance. Yet no priest comes forth or who can be called upon, in the narrative, only Margery.

⁹⁰ Cf. lines 4214-4237, for the account of the miraculous healing of the woman.

⁹¹ Cf. especially lines 4214-4216; 4223-4229; 4230-4234, for indication of at least three different indices of visitations made to the sick wife.

⁹² Cf. *The Shewings*, Crampton, pp40-41, lines 89, 90, and 102, with especial note of "My curate was sent for to be at my endeing...He sett the cross before my face...And in this, sodenly all my peyne was taken fro me, and I was as hele..."

Engaging Profeminine Tenet #3

In Brut's third tenet, Brut inverts the tradition of literary exempla, creating the space in his narrative to speak about good religious women and the work they might achieve, given the precedent set by the example of Pope Joan. Here, again, by way of comparison, I want to set forth for consideration a passage from Julian's writings. This text, I argue, shows a possible rhetorical resonance such as is seen in Brut's exemplum of Pope Joan. Julian writes,

...i am a womann, leued, febille & freyll...botte sothelye charyte styrres me to tell yowe it. For i wolde god ware knawenn...botte for i am a womann, schulde i therfore leve that i shulde nought telle yowe the goodenes of god, syne that i sawe in that same tyme that is his wille that it be knawenn, and that schalle ye welle see in the same matere that folowes aftur, if itte be welle and trewlye takynn. Thane schalle ye sone forgette me that am a wrecche, and dose so that i lette yowe nought, & behalde jhesu that ys techare of alle.⁹³

Julian opens by citing all the failings of her femininity. Yet, immediately, she counters that charity - or love - bids her to tell what God told her, though she knows she is forbidden to teach.⁹⁴ Her defense that she is not teaching seems more perfunctory (perhaps as a defense against accusations of heresy?), for she moves immediately after to say that the love of God compels her to speak what God himself has taught her, ending (again, perhaps as a safety precaution) with the entreaty that the reader forget that she is

⁹³ Cf. *The Shewings*, Crampton, Appendix A, p207. Translation: "...I am a woman, lewd, feeble, and frail...But, truly, charity stirs me to tell you it. For I would God were known. ...But that I am woman, should I therefore believe that I should not tell you of the goodness of God, since that which I saw in that same time that is His will that it be known, and that shall you well see in the same matter that follows after, if it be well and truly taken. Then shall you soon forget me that am a wretch, and do so that I let you not, and behold Jesus that is teacher of all."

⁹⁴ Cf. earlier in the passage "Botte god for bede that ye shulde say or take it so that I am a techere for I meene nought soo..." Julian seems keen to make clear that she is not teaching.

such a "wrecche" as a female. Julian's own writing thus shows a similar profeminine agenda as Brut's, since she seeks to establish her right to minister through the authorizing power of her God. Julian certainly recognizes that for her to effect any good, she at least must credit a higher authorizing power, God: "but in al thing i leve as holy church levith, preachith, and teachith...i truste in our lord god almightie that he shal of his godenes, and for yowr love, make yow to take it more gostly and more swetely than i can or may tell it."⁹⁵ This belief in the power behind the Church is what gives Julian the right to speak (against cultural teaching) and echoes the rhetoric which Brut himself calls for several years later.

Engaging Profeminine Tenet #4

Conversely, Margery Kempe echoes Brut's exempla of sinful male priests when she testifies to her belief in a priest's power to make holy, despite *his* (italicized for emphasis) "vicyows" ("vicious") spirit. She confesses,

...i beleve in the sacrament of the/awter on this wyse, that what man hath takyn the ordyr of presthode, *be he nevyr so/vicyows a man in hys levyng*, yyf he sey dewly tho wordys ovyr the bred that owr/ lord jhesu criste seyde whan...ther he sat at/ the soper, i beleve that it is hys very flesch and hys blood and no material bred ne/nevyr may be unseyd be it onys seyde.⁹⁶

In Kempe's confession, she is required to prove her alignment to Church doctrine. And yet, within her confession, she also finds space to assert her own critique against those within the Church priesthood by her comment that "nevyr so vicyows" man was in "the ordyr of presthode." Kempe perceives that wicked men are being ordained to the

⁹⁵ p.50, lines 335 and 343-345.

⁹⁶ *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Staley, pp.116-17, lines 2703-2708, italics my own, for emphasis.

priesthood and do, in fact, administer the sacraments, such as the Eucharist. For Kempe to remain orthodox, then, she must - and does - attest to the power of the Church. But she uses the context of her confession to purposefully ensure that power is located within the sacrament of the altar and Jesus Christ, despite the wicked men who enact the sacraments. Therefore, Kempe's testimony proves her belief in a kind of prevenient power, if it is true that the words of the priests "nevyr may be unseyd." The sacraments must be empowered by something other than the unholy priests who act to consecrate these holy things. This prevenient power is the kind which Brut maintains in his second tenet, where priests act only as vessels for a greater power. Kempe's testimony, then, offers support for the possible far-reading influence of Brut's rhetoric.⁹⁷ Together, Brut's third and fourth tenets illustrate the supervening power of the sacraments in the ministry of the Church.

Engaging Profeminine Tenet #5

Brut's fifth and final tenet is his call to action: since Christ worked on behalf of good women, the Church ought to allow that Christ still works on behalf of women. And thus, the Church ought to allow both men and women into the priesthood, as, for the effecting of the sacraments. Julian, while not openly attesting to as vocal a profeminine agenda as Brut's, does attest to this same kind of model. In one of her Shewings, Julian hears God say of woman:

lo, how i lovid the. Behold and se that i lovid the so mekyl ere i deyde for the/that i wold dey for the, and now i have deyde for the, and suffrid wilfully...how should it now be that thou should onythyng pray me that/lekyth me, but if i shuld ful gladly

⁹⁷ Capes, p.346: "Deus facere ad sancte mulieris imprecationem hoc ex pia affectione imprecantis..." Translation: "...God [may be able] to do for the spoken curses of holy women invoked for this reason out of holy disposition..."

*grant it the? For my lekyng is thy holynes and/thyn endles joy and bliss with
me.*⁹⁸

According to Julian, God has such great love for her, that "onythyng [she might] pray...[He will] grant it," because of her "holynes." This is exactly the kind of doctrinal model to which Brut is calling the Church: that *holy* women ought to be admitted to the priesthood, since God promises to continue good works on behalf of good women. Just as Brut's final tenet confers power upon all holy women, so Julian attests that God, by virtue of His "lekyng" for her, a good woman, will grant her anything she asks in prayer.

Fourteenth-century writers such as Walter Brut were actively engaged in the discussion of women's role in positions of religious power. Brut's five-fold rhetoric employs aspects of the medieval *Ars dictaminis*, as a means of both critiquing and persuading his Church audience. Julian of Norwich, and Margery Kempe found it relevant to express God's love for *woman*, and especially for *holy women*, at the same period in history, possibly for a similar purpose. But certainly, whatever their respective purposes, Brut, Julian, and Kempe were all talking about women as part of a similar tradition. For Brut, at least, his imperative seems to stem from his desire to reform the Church, perhaps in the hope that, by promoting an understanding that power stems ultimately from the Godhead to both male and female equally, he might correct erroneous teaching by the ecclesial powers. Seeing Brut's letter to his accusers as an intentionally crafted example of *Ars dictaminis* reflects his profeminine agenda and reformation ideal, helping us to understand Brut's persuasive measures in terms of how and why he carefully constructed this letter of defense. For him to effect what he saw as necessary

⁹⁸ *The Shewings*, Crampton, p.70, lines 877-882. Italics are from the text, intended to show God's speech.

reform within the Church, Brut had to first realign the Church's conception of its own power, and the issue of women in the priesthood served as a useful vehicle for this rectification. Even if Brut could not persuade his accusers to adopt his way of thinking, Brut, intentionally or otherwise, acknowledges a much larger broader conversation, connecting past profeminine voices (e.g. Julian) with future ones (e.g. Kempe). For this reason, Brut's rhetoric, as one of the first documented attempts to put into circulation elevated ideals for women, marks a dissenting voice, by which means an individual sought to correct institutional practice.

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