

A New Manuscript of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* at Morris Library, Southern Illinois
University at Carbondale

The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (*MVC*) is a Latin devotional text written in the fourteenth century C.E. that describes the life of Jesus Christ in a more intimate and detailed manner than the New Testament. Originally attributed to St. Bonaventura, the text is written as a missive from a Franciscan monk to a Poor Clare nun seeking spiritual guidance. The text gained wide popularity throughout Europe during the Middle Ages and exists in over 200 manuscripts. Mary Stallings-Taney published a critical edition of the *MVC* in 1997 and attributed the work to a Franciscan monk from San Gimignano, John of Caulibus. More recently, Sarah MacNamer (2009) has suggested that the *MVC* was actually based off of an earlier Italian devotional text written by an unidentified Italian nun. In MacNamer's view, a Franciscan monk (perhaps John of Caulibus) translated the original Italian text into Latin and, in the process, altered the work to appeal to a more conservative and masculine audience. A manuscript of the *MVC* currently at Morris Library at Southern Illinois University can contribute to this debate. This manuscript, unexamined by Stallings-Taney, shares similarities with the four earliest manuscripts of the *MVC* and includes an epilogue not incorporated into any other *MVC* manuscript. This paper will describe the textual evidence that establishes the Morris Library manuscript as one of the earliest versions of the *MVC* and offer a synopsis of the epilogue. The evidence from the Morris Library *MVC* supports Stallings-Taney's hypothesis on the origin of the *MVC* and suggests that the earliest versions of the *MVC* were written in Latin and specifically tailored to a female audience.

Bibliography

M. Stallings-Taney, M. ed. 1997. *Iohannis de Caulibus: Meditationes vite Christi*. CCCM 153.

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McNamer, S. 2009. "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*." *Speculum* 84: 905-955.