

Article

“In The End, God Helped Me Defeat Myself”: Autobiographical Writings by Camilla Battista da Varano¹

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Abstract: Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524), a mystic and Franciscan nun, spent most of her life in Camerino in east-central Italy. Now a saint—since 17 October 2010—she composed two autobiographical treatises across a ten-year period mid-way through a literary career that spanned the end of the fifteenth and the early part of the sixteenth centuries. In one, *La vita spirituale* (*My spiritual life*, 1491), she delivered a complete spiritual life story, tracing her religious devotion from the ages of eight to thirty-three. She described her relationship with a number of men, including her father and several clerics who—to one degree or another—inspired and guided her devotional life. By the time she wrote, she had been a professed Franciscan nun for seven years. She presented herself at that point as one who had undergone visionary, mystical experiences and as a woman who had both benefitted and suffered under the control of men like her father and her spiritual directors. In the other, *Istruzioni al discepolo* (*Instructions to a disciple*, 1501), she told the story of her affectionate relationship with a male disciple she was directing spiritually but used a literary conceit to hide her own identity. She wrote about the spiritual director the male disciple loved and admired in the third person, apparently in a self-deprecating manner inspired by humility but thinly veiling her obvious self-confidence. In these texts, and in other of her devotional treatises, she claimed the ability to provide spiritual direction of her own and wrote in bold imagery, creatively manipulating scripture at times. She exercised a do-it-yourself approach to discernment of God’s will and even to the process of confession. She criticized inattentive spiritual directors and asserted that both her visions and the impetus for her devotional writings came directly, unmediated, from God. But Camilla also exhibited deferential attitudes and strong connections to traditional Franciscan theology while including female authors in that tradition she apparently admired, like Caterina da Bologna (1413–1463). She also wrote at times with vivid expressions of obedience to the variety of men who held some authority over her. She was, apparently, not an individual easily understood through the standard images usually associated with late medieval and early modern women. A fuller portrait of Camilla is emerging as scholars today seek to recover her original voice.

Keywords: autobiography; spirituality; spiritual direction; gender; Franciscan spirituality; mysticism

One Friday evening I was busy until the eighth hour of the night, when I was allowed by my lord father to go to bed. And, since it was very late and there was much to read, and all

¹ What follows began as a conference presentation at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting in 2011. Many colleagues and friends have read one portion or another of this essay, either in connection with that conference, or during my subsequent research on these writings. They are Jodi Bilinkoff, Michael Hickey, Jeanette Keith, Elizabeth Rhodes, Sarah Ross, Jesús Salas-Elorza, and Larissa Taylor. Three in particular, Elizabeth Miller, Safa Saraçoğlu, and Deb Walberg—not to mention the anonymous reviewers and editors from *Religions*—all generously read the entire manuscript. They saved me from numerous errors, offering many helpful suggestions. My thanks to all.

the others were in bed, I was strongly tempted to leave [the book] aside for that evening and not to exercise my usual devotion. More than four times I deliberated whether or not to do it. In the end, God helped me defeat myself, and I made my usual devotion. (MSC² 6v-7r)²

Camilla Battista da Varano (1458–1524) wrote those four sentences at the age of thirty-three, recalling an episode when she was eight years old, and placed them near the beginning of one of her autobiographical compositions *The spiritual life* (*La vita spirituale*).³ These few lines hint at the richly complex self-image, religious commitments, and literary prowess Camilla revealed in that text and in another biographical piece, *Instructions to a disciple* (*Istruzioni ad un discepolo*). Her complexity makes it impossible to define her as a simple exemplar of the terms usually associated with late medieval and early modern religious women. There is, of course, an enormous literature on the religious life of women in that era, and examination of just the principle points in the historical debate would provide material for a substantial essay of its own. Lucetta Scaraffia and Gabriella Zarri provided a critical contribution to this literature when they reflected on a central issue in feminist thought: whether Christianity was principally an institution responsible for the repression of women in western society or was a sphere in which women could participate in culture and gain power. They indicated that three main answers had been advanced: (1) the feminist “yes” to the latter characterization that was combined with a call to return to this ancient practice, (2) the polemical attack blaming clerical persons and practices for the repression, and (3) the source based approach to the lives of religious women that has largely identified inconsistencies in either the clerical repression, the powerful female participation, or both (Scaraffia and Zarri 1994, v–xvi). This essay provides, obviously, a contribution to approach number three. Numerous other overviews of the broad topic Scaraffia and Zarri were addressing are available (McNamara 1996; Ranft 1996; Evangelisti 2007; Zarri 2007; Wiesner-Hanks 2009, pp. 149–81; Ross 2009; Schutte 2011, pp. 23–51).

Camilla composed the text entitled *The spiritual life* over the course of about two weeks in 1491, in approximately 18,000 words, tracing her religious devotion from the age of eight to the age of thirty-three. She wrote *Instructions* a decade later in response to a request she reported from one of the many priests who served as her confessor and spiritual director. These “instructions” were a practical guide to living the spiritual life in a monastery. Camilla utilized a thinly veiled third person conceit, adopting the role of a reporter describing the experiences of another struggling with the challenges of religious life that she apparently considered applicable. She designed both these narrations, therefore, as vehicles for delivery of her own experiences, but Camilla relayed little information about her family, her education, or her life before 1466. She was born on 9 April 1458, an illegitimate daughter in the noble family of the ruler of Camerino, Giulio Cesare da Varano (d. 9 October 1502). She lived in a rather dysfunctional and hyper-politicized patrilineal context. Her father was one of two potential heirs left standing after an inter-familial dispute, and then he—not to mention most of her half-brothers—were the victims of henchmen mobilized by Pope Alexander VI (r. 1492–1503) and his son Cesare Borgia (1475–1507) to carry out papal plans for the region known as the Marches where the town of Camerino

² Una sera di venerdì sera io era stata per fine alle otto ore di notte occupata, quando ebbi licenza del signor mio padre de possere andare a letto. E perchè era molto tardo e quella era molto longa a leggere e le altre erano tutte nel letto, fui forte tentata per quella sera lassarla stare e non far quella usata mia devozione. E più di quattro volte decisi sì e no. Infine Dio mi fece vincere e feci la mia solita devozione. For a literal transcription, and a modern Italian rendering, cf., respectively (Varano 1958, p. 13; Varano 2009, p. 109).

³ In the absence of a critical edition, I studied *La vita spirituale* using the earliest known manuscript, thanks to Madre Laura Serboli, at Monastero di Santa Chiara, Camerino, who provided me with a digital copy. The manuscript is in the hand of Antonio di Spagna, (Antonio di Segovio, d. 1513), and it contains the complete text of several works by Camilla: *The spiritual life*, *The mental sufferings of Jesus in his passion* (*Dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua passione*), *The prayer to God* (*La preghiera a Dio*), and *Memories of Jesus* (*Ricordi di Gesù*). The manuscript is preserved at the convent. [Cited here throughout as MSC²]. I also made use of printed versions in (Varano 1958, pp. 3–67; and Varano 2009, pp. 100–55). Another English translation is available in (Thoman 2012, pp. 131–66). Translations here are my own.

stands. Camilla's birth mother was a relatively obscure noblewoman known as Cecchina di Maestro Giacomo who later married Venanzio di Antonio de Malignis.⁴

Such violence and dysfunction notwithstanding, Camilla, like the other children at her father's residence, received a remarkable courtly, humanistic education. Camilla demonstrated it with her facile use of patristic, scriptural, and vernacular literature. These and other details about her life must be gleaned from numerous biographical studies that almost uniformly extol her devotional heroism and mystical gifts (Pascucci 1680; Marini 1882; Aringoli 1928; Aringoli et al. 1943; Boccanera 1957; Papasogli 1959; Simoncini 1972; Luzi 1989; Lachance 1994). Giulio Cesare and a cast of remarkable women, among them Elisabetta Malatesta (1407–1477), Costanza da Varano (1426–1447), and Camilla's step-mother, Giovanna Malatesta, created on a small scale in that palace setting what was done in grander fashion in Renaissance courts controlled by popes in Rome, by the Medici family in Florence, and by the Montefeltro family in nearby Urbino. They patronized artists, hired soldiers, provided alms to the poor and pilgrims, and heard petitions from ducal subjects (Lili 1649–1652; Simoncini 1972; McGinn 2012, pp. 306–11).

Camilla provided a few memories of court activities in *The spiritual life* and a great deal more: a spiritual autobiography where details about life beyond the devotional, the sacramental, and the mystical may fit but are placed decidedly in the background. Camilla opened with her consideration of a sermon recommending sympathy with the suffering Christ when she was an eight-year old. She ended it by expressing a rather uncertain, even depressed, attitude: lamenting years of spiritual agitation over discernment of spirits and waiting for clerical assistance that never materialized. Unlike more typical spiritual autobiographies that trace a passage from abjection to redemption, Camilla composed an ending that reads like a last will and testament, praying for peace and for the mercy of God to be gained through Christ and the intervention of her deceased confessor. Camilla depicted herself between this beginning and end sometimes at the height of mystical revelation, and at others in the depths of anguished desperation. She constructed a self-portrait in the pages scattering assertions reminiscent of traditional notions of feminine dependence upon authoritative males amid bold claims of personal, spiritual, and devotional independence. Consideration of such self-definitions has driven some ongoing reconsideration of standard ways of thinking about Renaissance literature and the Renaissance itself (Greenblatt 1980; Martin (1997, 2004); Ross 2009, pp. 10–13). Camilla put the self-portrait she constructed in her spiritual autobiography into practical application in her text *Instructions*. There she used scripture, not to mention popular proverbs, Renaissance cultural concepts—like *virtù*—lines from liturgical rites, medieval philosophical notions, and references to the writings of church fathers, all to her rhetorical advantage. She used these to delineate tactics a religious person could use to avoid the temptations of the devil, and to live closer to God, while taking upon herself the role of spiritual director to her own confessor.

In these autobiographical texts, Camilla described her relationships with a number of men, including her father and several clerics. All of them affected her devotional life to one degree or another. One was Domenico da Leonessa (d. 1497), who served repeatedly as provincial minister of the observant Franciscans in the Marches. He delivered sermons that inspired Camilla as an eight year old, and was her confessor/spiritual director from 1490 through 1491. He asked Camilla to compose *The spiritual life*. A second was Francesco da Urbino, another preacher about whom relatively little is known. His sermons in 1479, especially one on the theme of the Annunciation—likely delivered in March of that year—spurred Camilla's entry into the Franciscan order. Camilla's decision was thwarted for a time by another male who looms large in her narratives, her father, Giulio Cesare. He actively opposed her 1479 decision for some two and half years, first with enticements to remain at home, and later with threats and virtual imprisonment, but without breaking her resolve

⁴ There is recent scholarship on the Varano family and their political and social circumstances. Cf. (Falaschi 2010; Nico Ottaviani 2010).

(Bracci 2009, p. 18). A fourth was Pietro da Mogliano (d. 1490), another Franciscan preacher who served as Camilla's confessor and spiritual director. He was, perhaps, the individual she described as knowing and understanding her best of all. A fifth was the man to whom Camilla addressed the *Instructions*, likely an Olivetan monk, Antonio da Segovia (d. 1533), who allegedly urged her to compose the text in 1501. The sixth and final male, of course, was Jesus himself. Camilla described extraordinary visions of him, including a mystical marriage, and related them in prose studded with scriptural allusions and stunning visual details. Camilla had, as will become obvious, complex and interesting relationships with them all.

1. The Spiritual Life

Camilla explained in *The spiritual life* how Domenico da Leonessa, one of the clerics who became her spiritual director, gave a sermon on the passion of Jesus that was central to her spiritual autobiography. Domenico led her by means of the sermon to make a devotional vow in 1466. It was he, she insisted, "and no one else," who provided the "origin, beginning and foundation" of her spirituality (MSC² 5v).⁵ He recommended that everyone in the crowd shed a tear that Friday out of compassion for Jesus. But while Domenico may have provided some devotional inspiration, Camilla quickly took matters into her own hands and proceeded considerably beyond the levels of prayer and meditation recommended by the friar. She pictured the human scene of Jesus before Herod, and inserted herself as an active participant. While observing them, she begged "in her heart," as she explained, for Christ to speak to her. When he did not, and neither did he respond to Herod, Camilla boldly inserted her personal reaction. "It seems that you yourself wish to die," she said, adding, "excuse me, my Blessed Lord, but I do not understand you." After she was a little older, she explained, she remembered Domenico's words, amplifying his devotional recommendation. She vowed to desire the shedding of tears every Friday, far exceeding his call on the day of the sermon (MSC² 4v).⁶ She presented the sermonizing friar as inspired but herself as responding emotionally and devotionally. She even used language that suggested a conviction that any real tears emerging through the vow would be the gift of God and not the result of her own actions (MSC² 5r).⁷

⁵ "E poiché ho detto che da voi ha avuto origine e principio la mia vita spirituale; allora no vi maravigliate, *sed mecum lauda Deum et gratias referamus Creatori nostro, a quo hoc atque cuncta procedunt.*" For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, p. 11; Varano 2009, p. 107). The 1958 editor, Boccanera, surmised that the final phrase here in Latin, beginning with "sed," was an allusion to the liturgy of Holy Week. It seems more likely to me to be a reference to the unofficial "early" rule written by St. Francis, created between 1209 and 1221. A different version became the third, and final, "later" rule accepted by Pope Honorius in 1223. Chapter seventeen of the early rule was on the subject of "preachers," and it included an admonition against vainglory that fit in the developing context of examination of preachers for proper theological preparation. The chapter in Camilla's text was on the preacher who influenced her spiritual life most profoundly, and there, she indicated that any growth she might achieve was due to his initial inspiration and the grace of God. She seemed to be treading very cautiously while trying to praise Domenico without running afoul of the admonitions of Francis. For an English translation of the full text of the early rule of Francis, cf. (Armstrong and Brady 1982). For more on Domenico da Leonessa, cf. (Varano 1958, p. 3).

⁶ "Ora intendete de quanta età io era e di quale purità e semplicità. Ché quando vui diceste che fo menato nanzi a Erode, che se parlasse lui el liberaria, io già già le aveva presa tanta compassione che pregava Dio che me desse tanta grazia che questo Iesù Cristo parlasse e respondesse a ciò ch'è non fosse morto. Ma quando intese che non aveva voluto parlare, me gionse grande dolore; e poi diciva nel core mio per levarme quella penarella che io sentiva: Suo danno, perché non ha risposto liu? Pare che esso stesso voglia morire, Così era, Signore mio benign, ma io non li intendeva." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 10; Varano 2009, p. 106). Her insertion of herself into the scene and actually taking part by speaking is reminiscent of the spirituality likely developed originally through the fourteenth century writings of Ludolph of Saxony and others, a devotional model extended further by the Spanish mystic and founder of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) in his *Spiritual exercises*. He explained in that text how to apply the senses in meditations on imaginary scenes in Hell (paragraphs 66-70) and especially in scenes from the life of Christ (paragraph 121), entitled "The Fifth Contemplation": cf. (Loyola 1951, p. 54). For further information on the *Spiritual exercises* and "application of the senses" in early Jesuit spirituality, including its development by Ignatius's followers cf. (Pabel 2016, pp. 254-59; O'Malley 1993, pp. 37-50; and Guibert 1972, pp. 109-81, 246).

⁷ "Si che, essendo fatta un poco più grandetta, recordandome de questa santa parola, feci voto a Dio ogni venardi volere buttare almanco una lacrema per amore della passion de Cristo. E de qui è sequitata tutta la vita mia spiritual, como de fatto ordinatamente intenderete." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 10-11; Varano 2009, p. 107).

Camilla credited both Domenico and another preacher, Francesco da Urbino, with critical intervention in her spiritual development. To Camilla, Francesco was divinely inspired, a “true trumpet of the Holy Spirit,” who had shaken her from complacency out of “the world of darkness into the true light” by “thundering and flashing” against her soul with messages about offenses given to God through sin. Camilla insisted that Francesco reinforced her contrition, and spurred her meditation on the passion. In the midst of this meditation, she said, she began to hear voices recommending that she “flee the world” rather than “simmer in [its] broth and . . . mud,” as she preferred. She understood the call to mean that she should flee by becoming a nun. She also reported eating either nothing at all on Fridays, or only a few mouthfuls of bread, while sleeping little out of respect for the passion of Christ, all due to the influence of Francesco (MSC² 9r-10v).⁸ She entered into correspondence with him, amazed at his apparent knowledge of her condition—or her “captivity,” as she put it—and recognized in him the words of God. She later explained that the intervention of these friars, and the spiritual consolations she received since deciding to enter religious life, put her at odds with another powerful male in her life, her father.

Camilla took the next major step in her spiritual life via entry into the Franciscan convent in Urbino in 1481. Camilla acted over and against the objection of her father, Giulio Cesare, when entering. In a fascinating passage at the beginning of the seventh chapter of her spiritual autobiography, Camilla compared herself to the Israelites suffering under the bondage of the Egyptians and their Pharaoh. She wrote in an ambiguous manner about this comparison, and about her relationship with her father. After he freed the Israelites from Pharaoh, Camilla explained, God led them through the desert even though they were rebellious and inconsistently faithful. She described herself as similarly inconsistent and rebellious after being freed from a “Pharaoh” who, given what had come before in the text, could perhaps have been understood to be Satan. But when led toward the religious life by God, she said, her “malicious nature,” one rooted in a “false and whorish soul,” refused assent to God’s plan, and made up excuses. “Who could extract me from father and his powerful hands,” she asked? It was impossible for her to imagine, she explained, that she could leave the hands that “held me so dearly . . . even if I desired it deeply.” Camilla thus seemed also to conflate her father and his power with Pharaoh, an authority to be escaped in the interest of loving and serving God. In a tantalizing, but undeveloped point, she explained that she would withhold information about the kind and quality of promises she made in order to escape from her father (MSC² 11v-12r)⁹. Later in the text, she indicated that her father was fearful of “the scourge of God, [or] he would never have permitted me to enter religious

⁸ “Disponente Dio, per sua misericordia, a ciò che delle mondiale tenebre nella vera luce prorrumperesse, vene a predicare a Camerino quella anima benedetta, quella vera tromba dello Spiritua Santo, fra Francesco de Urbino, *qui nunc in pace quiescit*. Le parole e dottrina del quale nell’anima mia parevano che fossero toni, baleni che continuamente contra essa fulminasse; perchè tutta quella quatragesima sempre prepuse quella tremebunda parola: *Time Deum* . . . E per questo timore reforza forte la orazione e el pensare la passion de Cristo: cioè dove prima la pensava e piangeva una volta el dì, allora la voliva pensare e piangere due volte el dì, cioè la matina e la sera. E el venardi faciva questa pascia: o io mangiava tre o quattro bocconi de pane e bevea un poco d’acqua, o vero non mangiava niente in quello dì. Et in quella note, per reverenzia della passion de Cristo, poco dormiva perchè non me colcava in letto e posseva veramente dire: *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat*. Continuando io el voto e frequente orare per el timore sopra ditto, comenzai a sentire certe voce nell’anima mia. Parevano fosseno da longo da longo, non però tanto che io molto bene non le intendesse. Le quale me dicevano che s’io voleva fuggire lo inferno, de lo quale tanto terrore avia e spavento, che fugisse el mondo e fésseme religiosa . . . e forte repugnava per la mia malignità e dessiderio che avea e andare alla broda e fango del mundo.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 16, 19; Varano 2009, pp. 112–13).

⁹ “Liberata dalla servitù de Faraone, Dio molto più sollicitava ch’el populo suo li andasse a sacrificare nel deserto, cioè l’anima mia alla santa religione. Ma la mia malizia retardante a tali precetti e voce divine, non dava ullo assenso, anzi, forte rebellandome, trovata altre scuse poichè quella era mancata e maxime allegando che ‘chi me poteria delle paterne e potente mane cavare?’ Le qualle per grande amore me tenevano tanto cara e stretta, che impossibile me pareva, quando io ben volesse, me ne potesse ussire. O Dio mio, o Dio mio! Che volive fare de questa anima falsa e meretrice? Che bisogno avive de li fatti mei, dolce Iesù mio, che con tanta istanza me ricercavi e volivi? Che frutto, qual cambio te ho renduto, Signore mio? In questa parte taccio quale e quante offerte me faciva de cavarne de le paterne e potente mane, perchè, patre mio me fanno crepare el core e per niente le posso referire, tanto me sono de grande afflizione.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, pp. 19–20; Varano 2009, p. 115).

life" (MSC² 25r).¹⁰ Whatever his reasons may have been, Camilla was clear about hers: she had been moved to independent action and rejection of the expressed wishes of her father, in part by the sermon on the Annunciation. She indicated her desire to feel the same spark of love that Mary felt at the moment she learned of God's plan. Camilla took matters into her own hands, clearly having been swept up emotionally and spiritually into the Annunciation narrative. So, she made another vow, this time to the Virgin Mary: to remain immaculate until God "disposed of me otherwise" (MSC² 12r-v).¹¹ Her understanding of God's will definitively trumped the desires of her father.

In subsequent chapters, Camilla related spiritual anxieties over impure reception of the Eucharist, and over weak contrition for sin, but no greater anxiety than that concerning her choice about entering religious life. Amid this anxiety she once again chose her own path, and related a tale of cautious spiritual discernment. She had apparently little hesitation when initially rejecting the recommendation—if not to say insistence—by her spiritual advisor Francesco that she become a nun. She had considered him earlier to be the very mouthpiece of God, so this rejection is surprising. After resolving the confessional matters and receiving communion a week after Easter in that same year, 1479, Francesco said, according to Camilla, "Now sin no more. Go in peace." She promptly headed home, but apparently he had a convent in mind. Soon thereafter, God sent voices "so clear and distinct" that she said, at times "[I] put my hands over my ears." Her prayer was like a "battle," she said, and she was in such "conflict," wracked "between 'yes' and 'no'" that she "broke into a sweat, physically, because of the great agony." Once her "free will," she explained, "rendered sentence against me" and she "chose to serve God," she was "refreshed" like a "martyred body on a bed of roses and flowers . . . completely at peace with this decision" (MSC² 14r-15v)¹². In relating the story, Camilla appears to have been asserting several interesting things. First, she claimed not just the initiative in rejecting the initial recommendations of a trusted spiritual advisor but also the independent power of spiritual discernment. She claimed receipt of directive, heavenly voices, plus the ability to distinguish between good ones and bad ones herself. She also seemed to be presenting herself rhetorically as a martyr while under emphasizing her earlier poor choice. She stepped beyond the martyr claim to liken herself even to Jesus as he anguished in the garden of Gethsemane.

In her *Spiritual life*, Camilla wrote with bold imagery about a remarkable array of spiritual and mystical experiences she underwent even before, but especially after, entry into the convent of *clarisse*

¹⁰ "Volse Dio al tutto liberarme della egiziaca servitù mondana e dalle mane del potente Faraone secundo che me aveva promesso. El quale per dui anni e mezo ebbe el core indurato, qui proprio ore dixit quod si non timeret flagella Dei, nunquam permetteret me ad religionem ingredi. E cusi, espoliato l'Egitto, cioè carca et onusta de tesori e grazie spiritual, siccis pedibus, cioè senza nulla fatica e passione, passai el Rosso mare, cioè la gonfiante pompa mondana e stato signorile." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, pp. 35–36; Varano 2009, pp. 129–30). Camilla provided a portion of the above in Latin: *qui proprio ore dixit quod si non timeret flagella Dei, nunquam permetteret me ad religionem ingredi*. Some of that language is reminiscent of Isa 10:26, but it is not a direct quotation.

¹¹ "E fece, quel predicatore, la vigilia della Annunziata fece una predica del divino amore che la vergene Maria avia sentito quando fo annunziata, ché veramente lui pareva un sarafino, con tanto fervore e core el diciva afirmando che era più dolcezza in una sentilla de quello amore che la Vergen senti, che in tutti l'amori carnali insieme insieme. Fenita la qual predica me engenuchiai denanzi a uno altare e feci voto alla Vergene Maria de tenere tutti li mei sentimenti immaculati finché Dio de me altro disponia." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, Varano 1958, p. 20; Varano 2009, pp. 115–16).

¹² "Parve nel volto se ne contristasse e disse, 'Iam facta essana, noli amplius peccare. Vade in pace!' E cusi tutta consolata tornai a casa . . . E quelle usate voce non erano più lontane como prima, ma propinque e vicinissime. Tanto chiare et aperte che qualche volta me chiusi le orecchie con le mani per non sentirle, perché per nullo modo a esse voliva consentire . . . E retornando pure alla santa orazione, un venardi, me pare che fo, se non lo dico de certo, me pusi in orazione et a quella volta fo fatto tale conflitto e battaglia nell'anima mia dal sì al no, che corporalmente, per la grande agunia, sudai. Et el libero arbitrio, el quale sempre stette in sua forza e vigore, allora spontaneamente, non coatto, como iudice in catedra sedendo a vedere la crudele battaglia, dette la sentenza contra de me. E con tanto affetto e core deliberai de servire a Dio, che si bisogna fosse stato de patire per questo le martirio, prontamente lo averia eletto, prima che me fosse volute de tale deliberazione pentire . . . Come a uno martirigiato corpo è summo refrigerio in uno pacatissimo letto pieno de fiori e rose essere collocate, cusi alla mia martirigiata mente fo summo riposo tale deliberazione. E remasi poi tutta pacifica, tutta quieta, tutta tranquilla, reposata e contenta." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 22–24; Varano 2009, p. 118–19). In the text overall, and in this passage specifically, Camilla described a process not unlike that of the "choice of a way of life" and the "Rules for the discernment of spirits" recommended in the later *Spiritual exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. Cf. (Loyola 1951, pp. 71–78, 141–50).

(Poor Clares) in Urbino in 1481. By the time she wrote the text, she had been a professed Franciscan nun for seven years. Her visionary experiences included a visit from Clare, the founder of her order, plus direct conversations with Jesus and a mystical marriage to him. She described all these in vivid prose studded with scriptural allusions and dramatic visualization of both divine persons and scenes from gospel narratives.

Prior to her entry into the convent, Camilla compared herself to a prodigal son and an adulterous sinner that God blessed with recognition of the “abyss” of his mercy flowing from the “cataracts of heaven” (MSC² 15v-16r)¹³. She was immersed in this flood, she explained, and then released the reins on her heart, uniting it in love, “impetuously . . . furiously,” and wedding it, as she said, to her “sweetest spouse, blessed Jesus Christ” (MSC² 17r-v)¹⁴. Camilla challenged the idea that he should love her, a profound sinner, in the mystical conversation with Christ that followed, but only until he explained that he had forgiven her, and restored her to innocence by placing his own innocence within her (MSC² 18r-19r)¹⁵. She inventoried the results of his action. Christ had left with her three fragrant lilies: hatred of the world, true humility, and the desire to endure pain in imitation of him (MSC² 20v-21v)¹⁶. She expressed deep desire to see Christ on another occasion, while contemplating the Transfiguration. Then, using language indicating at least surprise—if not to say joking sarcasm—she related an apparent willingness in him to show her his back but not his face. “This Jesus Christ,” she said, “crosses me in everything.” But after considerable delay, she continued, he did appear, and in a dazzling garment “of whiteness not found in this world.” And after a detailed physical description, she concluded, “He was something marvelous.” Still, Camilla insisted, this gift and other graces that she received did not satisfy her. She had hoped for prudence and patience in this world and felt neither (MSC² 23r-24r)¹⁷. She was being tested, she said. Once in the convent at

¹³ “Essendo per tale deliberazione fatta alla divina volontà unita, in pochi pochi di furono aperte tutte le cataratte del cielo sopra de me, et el diluio delle abbissale misericordie sue antiche assorbette tutta la peccatrice anima mia. Allora el benign patre Dio se fece incontra al figliolo prodigo, allora dolcemente nelle paterne braccia benignamente lo raccolse e strense, allora el dolce baso de la sua santa pace colla propria bocca li donò, non solo una volta e due, ma più e più volte.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 24; Varano 2009, p. 119). In the last two sentences of this paragraph, Camilla was retelling part of the parable of the prodigal son from the gospel (Lk 15:11-32), likening herself and her experience to that of the subject of Jesus’s teaching.

¹⁴ “E però tutta in amore me sumergieva et inabbisava . . . Allora allentai la briglia allo amore del mio core, el quale più anni, per timore dello onore mundane, col freno de la discrezione, con grande fatica avia tenuto infrenato stretto, e lassailo andare impetuosamente e furiosamente e tutto lo efusi e collocai nel mio dulcissimo sposo Cristo Iesù benedetto.” For literal and modern transcriptions, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 25-6; Varano 2009, 120-21).

¹⁵ “Onde, venendome tanto tanto svisceratamente esser amata e sapendo e cognoscendo in me non essere altro che iniquità e peccati, perchè dove alberga el sole de la iustizia, Cristo Iesù, se ce vede lume chiaramente, ma maravegliava fortemente e stupiva. Per la qual cosa, un dì, con profunda umilità, li dissi: O signore, mo’ io so che li demoni hanno ardire de biastemarte; molto più averano ardire de chiamarte amatore de iniquità. Pregote, Iesù mio, che per mio amore non te faccia chiamare amatore de iniquità. Io non so’ altro che profunda iniquità e Tu tanto te dilette in me. Or che Te possono altro dire, se non amatore de iniquità? “Allora esso dolce Dio benignamente me rispose e disse: Sappie, figliola mia, che io non so amatore de iniquità e non me deletto della iniquità, ma ben me deletto nella innocenza che tu nassisti, nella quale adesso sei . . . “E sogionse Cristo benedetto: Sì che io me diletto de me stesso e non di te, perchè questa innocenza l’ho posta io nell’ anima tua è mia e non tua.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 27; Varano 2009, p. 122).

¹⁶ “Per grazia de Dio, ille qui est flos campi et lilium convallium et inter lilia pascitur, per darne certo segno che esso era stato nell’anima mia me lasso tre vernanti e odoriferi gigli. Et el primo fo questo: uno odio del mondo . . . Lo second giglio fo questo: una cordiale umilità, . . . El terzio giglio fo questo: uno infocato desiderio de mal patire.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 30-31; Varano 2009, pp. 124-25). Using the Latin quotation, *ille qui est flos capui et lilium convallium et inter lilia pascitur*, Camilla adapted passages from the Song of Solomon. The words appear to have been taken from Song 2:1 (*Ego flos campi, et lilium convallium*, or “I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys”) and 2: 16 (*Dilectus meus mihi, et ego illi, qui pascitur inter lilia*, or “My beloved is mine and I am his; he pastures his flock among the lilies”).

¹⁷ “Onde avendome fatta per sei mesi per tale disio penare, me satisfecce per tal forma, che io li domandava de vedere la gloriosa faccia et Esso me mostrò le spalle. E imperò qualche volta ho ditto cianzando: ‘Questo Iesù Cristo ogni cosa me fa per traverso!’ . . . Ora udite come me se mostrò. Stando un dì in orazione, et avendo sentito chiaramente che era stato ne l’anime mia, quando se voles partire da essa, me disse: ‘Sì me voli vedere, guardame.’ . . . Era vestito de veste candidissime—simile bianchezza non se trova in questo mondo—fine in terra . . . che era una cosa maravigliosa.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 33-34; Varano 2009, pp. 127-28). The vision of Christ Camilla related here contains language reminiscent of Rev 1:13-15.

Urbino, she prayed, she explained, for a share in the impassioned suffering of Christ (MSC² 26v-27r).¹⁸ This was the beginning of a condition she described as following logically from her spiritual marriage with Jesus. It was a state of great joy, but one also of desperation. Jesus revealed to her in a vision some words that were written on his heart: “I love you Camilla.” She reacted with deep anxiety over the condition of her soul, given that she was the focus of such affection. Comprehending the depth of Christ’s love in comparison to her weakness and sinfulness, she could not bear to look at a crucifix. The big letters in his engraved expression of love became like a set of “poisoned darts,” she said, piercing her “to the heart” (MSC² 27r-v, 31v-32r).¹⁹

While Camilla experienced these heights of devotional love and depths of spiritual desolation, she apparently also longed for clerical guidance. But she had a particular sort of guidance in mind and was apparently unafraid to indicate when what was given did not measure up. Amid a long period of spiritual agitation as a new sister in the convent at Urbino, and before her 1484 return to Camerino, the clerical help she expected did not materialize. So she sought—and explained quite clearly that she received instead—the guidance of Jesus himself. She expressed agitation best described as self-doubt. Prayers, the good example of others, and divine graces, Camilla explained, were all pleasing, but since she considered herself unworthy of the gifts, she thirsted instead for the myrrh of Jesus’s passion. It was he who tended the “lily” of her desire to suffer evil, she explained, and “with . . . [his own] mental anguish he furrowed, bathed and watered” that flower (MSC² 28v).²⁰ She independently found traditional devotional texts of some assistance, if her story about an early fourteenth century tract is true. She displayed considerable knowledge of the 1305 text *Arbor vitae crucifixae Iesu* (*The tree of the crucified life of Jesus*) by Ubertino da Casale Montferrato (1259–c. 1329), a follower of Peter John Olivi (1248–1298) ([Casale Montferrato 1458](#)). Both of them were key voices in the development of the ideology of Spiritual Franciscans (later known as the Observants), literal interpreters of the Rule of St Francis. Camilla quoted Ubertino in her *Spiritual life* and insisted that she found in her own monastery the secret supports for the spiritual life that he identified in *Arbor vitae*. She implied that the Holy Spirit used her consideration of the text to lead her into the desert of “secret pain [in] the heart of Jesus” (MSC² 26r-v).²¹ Camilla occasionally praised the recommendations of some clerics on traditional devotions, as she found them helpful, but after applying what look like enhanced techniques. A certain Fra Gregorio recommended rosary recitations for better imagination of events in the life of Christ. She found “many consolations” in the meditative practice, at least when

¹⁸ “Allora resolvei tutto el tempo della mia orazione nella meditazione della passione de Cristo e non voliva più altro meditare, né pensare; e tutto lo sforzo della mente mia missi per intrare al mare amarissimo delle pene mentale del core de Iesù et in quello loco anegarme, se posseva.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively ([Varano 1958](#), p. 38; [Varano 2009](#), p. 131).

¹⁹ “Or non è maraviglia se me vene voglia de intrare dentro allo tuo core, o bon Iesù, perché in esso per el tempo passato de prima me avivi mostrato essere scritto el nome mio a lettere d’oro. Oh, quanto bene compariva ne lo tuo vermiglio core le lettere d’oro grande et antiche: EGO TE DILIGO CAMILLAM . . . O anima mia misera, perchè non pigli un poco de conforto recordandote tanto bene et amore del tuo diletto Cristo? Ma so che tu dirai: ‘Non posso perchè tutti questi ricordi non me sono conforti, ma dardi pungenti che me passano el core.’ And later in the same chapter (12): “Lassòme questo vero segno, che per dui anni e più non possiva sofferire de guardare al Crucifisso e non posseva vedere scale, martelli, chiodi, né tenaglie; e non me ricordo che tali istrumenti allora vedesse.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively ([Varano 1958](#), pp. 38–39, 45; [Varano 2009](#), pp. 131–32, 137).

²⁰ “Ma sopra a tutti fiori ramificava e fioriva con suavissimo odore quello vernante giglio che già fo piantato, nel principio della mia conversione, ne la terra sterile de l’anima mia; cioè el desiderio infocato del mal patire. Questo più che tutti l’altri fo in quello sacratissimo tempo della regia mano del vero re Assuero, Cristo Iesù benedetto, coltivato sarchiato e con le acque delle sue mentale pene rigato, bagnato, et adaquato.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively ([Varano 1958](#), p. 40; [Varano 2009](#), p. 133).

²¹ “Sicut in materiali deserto invenitur cantus avium, florum pulchritudo, secreta cubilia animalium, ut dicit Ubertinus, sic in sacro monasterio urbinensi inveni suavissimum cantum devotarum orationum, bonorum pulchritudinem exemplorum, secreta cubilia divinarum gratiarum et coelestium donorum. Et essendo io da lo Spirito Santo mossa e premossa, me vene uno santo desiderio de intrare ad interiora deserti, cioè alle secretissime pene del core de Iesù.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively ([Varano 1958](#), pp. 37–38; [Varano 2009](#), p. 131). Ubertino’s text circulated in manuscript, with a first printed edition from Venice, in 1485. The work emphasized literal interpretation of the Franciscan Rule, especially on poverty and charity. Boccanera believed that the quotation comes from Camilla’s sense of the contents of the text, but could not identify any particular passage. For more on Ubertino and this work, cf. ([Armstrong et al. 1999–2001](#), pp. 3: 139–203).

she made the recitations last for three hours. She insisted that the meditations seemed highly realistic, as though she were “bodily present” to witness the words and actions of Mary and the baby Jesus, accompanying them on their travels and experiences (MSC² 22r-v).²²

But Camilla indicated not just her independent search, and not just helpful clerical interventions, in the more remarkable passages about seeking and securing spiritual guidance. She sometimes apparently attempted to manipulate the clerics. Neither did she fail to assert herself when describing the director/devotee relationship, indicating her own intentions and demands. And neither did she fail to mention the failures and improvements she perceived in them. She told the tales of her devotional life and begged her reader and sometime spiritual advisor, Domenico, to weep over her disconsolation, “unless he had a heart of stone,” of course (MSC² 19r-20r).²³ Clearly, Camilla wanted compassionate guidance. She also wanted steady, reliable direction on her own terms. She did not identify such steadiness in her relationship with Pietro da Mogliano, one of the principle characters in her story. After her tribulations were over and she had moved to the convent at Camerino in 1484, Camilla was delighted with Mogliano’s appointment as pastor and vicar of the monastery. He wanted to hear her confession, but she refused, she said, on a “whim” and indicated that she had no need to confess. She reconsidered after he left the convent and wrote to him, asking for pardon over what she called her “asininity.” Mogliano delayed his return in order to “lead” her “to a greater desire,” she explained, and it worked. She hated herself for her spiritual laziness, and she hoped that Mogliano would hate her in return. Here again, as in her relationship with her father, and in her time of spiritual disconsolation, she asserted that God intervened directly. “Since I wanted hatred from [Mogliano],” she explained, “God promised me that I would have love . . . [and] from that point on, he loved me with a greater holy and spiritual love than ever a spiritual daughter [has been loved] in this world” (MSC² 32v-33v).²⁴

Camilla described another set of dramatic mystical experiences in the remainder of the text, beginning with her self-critical reflection on the human condition and the need for the grace of God transmitted through the crucified Christ. Of course she had been self-critical in the text before, hinting at the contemporary condition she perhaps planned to relate at the end. Quite early in this autobiography she complained of her laziness after entering the religious life, particularly regarding midnight recitation of the rosary. She said, among other things, that “now that I am a

²² “De po’ sette mesi nelli quali per morire era stata, me levati del letto; et frate Gregorio *qui nunc triumphat gloriosus in coelis, si verum et quod dicitur* me amaestrò et dirizò a pensare la vita de Cristo nella corona de le vergene Maria, la quale me bastava tre ore. Erano tante le consolazione e dolceze che in essa trovava, che non me ne sapiva e possiva reussire. Ogni cosa al gusto mio era mèle, era zucaro, era manna suavissima e saporosa; e tutto quello che pensava non me pareva fosse stato, ma quasi corporalmente essere presente alle parole, alli servizii de la gloriosa Vergene e del fanciullo Iesù accompagnarli nelli fatigosi viaggi.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 31-32; Varano 2009, p. 126. The phrase in quotation marks (*qui nunc triumphat gloriosus in coelis, si verum est quod dicitur*) Camilla provided in Latin, but I am aware of no particular source for the passage. Fra Gregorio has been identified by earlier editors as a Franciscan named Giorgio Albanese. He had, apparently, served as a soldier under Francesco Sforza before conversion under the influence of the preaching of San Giacomo della Marca in 1445. He joined the order that same year and died in 1495. Cf. (Varano 1958, pp. 31-33; Thoman 2012, pp. 147, 225). This passage again anticipated a significant element in later Jesuit spirituality.

²³ “Basta assai che possete chiaramente comprendere in quanta pace e tranquillità in quanta dolcezza et amore, in quanta confidenza e familiarità io fui in quello santo iubileo spirituale, trovandome spesso spesso nelli divini colloqui, nelle dolze braccia del celestiale sposo, ne lo amore e familiarità del benigno eterno Patre, nella grazia e consolazione dello Spiritu Santo . . . Piangi, o dilette patre mio, se non hai el core de pietra, sopra la tua desconsolata figliola.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 28-29; Varano 2009, pp. 123-24).

²⁴ “Pietro da Mogliano . . . venendo al nostro monasterio, de po’ più cose, me disse in presenza de più sore, ‘Sòra Batista, preparate che te voglio confessare prima che me parta.’ Io subitamente rispose, ‘No, no. Non ho bisogno de confessarme.’ . . . O patre mio, molto eri benign verso questo asena! Forsi un dì poi che fo partito de questa terra tutto el core me se mangiava, dicendo fra me stessa: Molto so’ stata asena e villana rispondere a quello modo al patre vicario. Veramente me voglio confessare da lui, como torna. E cusì li scrissi pregandolo me perdonasse tanta asenaria . . . Ma lui, como volpe mastra, induziava per condurme in maggiore desiderio, secundo che poi me disse . . . Solo el mio dolore era perchè aveva offeso io la infinita bontà divina, con tanto odio de me stessa che desiderava con tutto el core che de po’ la mia confessione el patre vicario me pigliasse in grande odio e despiazere. Ma perchè voliva odio da lui, Dio me prometteva che n’averia amore . . . d’allora in qua, sempre me amò de santo e spirituale amore più che figliola sipirituale che mai avesse in questo mondo; e questo so de certo.” For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, pp. 46-48; Varano 2009, pp. 138-39).

nun I don't get up, and I do nothing good" (MSC² 8r).²⁵ After her profession in 1483, she explained, she came to understand the deep debts human beings owe to God which can never be repaid. All the praises, prayers and devotions we can produce, she concluded, were nasty and foul. Only grace in meditation on the crucifixion, delivered "by his merciful hand" would "restrain her," she explained, from evil (MSC² 38r).²⁶ She longed for "escape from the prison of this body in order to be with Christ" (MSC² 39v).²⁷ She made a general confession to Mogliano in September of 1484 after this recognition and related breathtaking mystical experiences, including a commission by Christ himself to write another of her spiritual treatises, *The mental sufferings of Christ in his passion (I dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua passione)*.²⁸ But she lamented her fall from this pedestal into a pit of spiritual despair. Her depression persisted from 1488 to 1490, the year in which her now-trusted spiritual advisor, Mogliano, died. Camilla wrote her *Spiritual life* in 1491, addressing it to Domenico da Leonessa, her new confessor, as she emerged from the despair. She told him and other potential readers to learn from her disastrous example before it was too late. She exhibited some serious literary and religious self-confidence in the process, and not just self-critical reflection, despite the negative feelings she described. She may have explained that now after becoming a nun she does "nothing good," but she also delivered withering criticism of the author of a fifteen-part meditation on the passion: it was "written by someone," she said, "who could not think" (MSC² 6r-v).²⁹

Still, finally, Camilla ended her spiritual life story in despair. She apparently could not bear to celebrate solemn feast days, like Christmas and Easter, so she made her life "a continuous Good Friday" (MSC² 43r).³⁰ She ended the text with a stern warning. "Even if one can speak with God and to God, to the Virgin Mary and with the angels and all the saints," she said, "one can still fall miserably and into the ruin of many mortal sins just as I did." Camilla seemed by this point to have had many more readers than just her spiritual director in mind. She urged them all to "learn from the experience of this unfortunate and unhappy soul which attained the high watermark of divine love and spiritual delight, but now has been sunken by a strong storm in a bottomless, infernal abyss" (MSC² 47r).³¹

²⁵ "E adesso che so sora non me levo e nullo bene fo." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 14; Varano 2009, p. 110).

²⁶ "Allora col capo chino fine in terra domandai de grazia alla divina magestà che me collocasse perpetualmente per finché viviva senza intermissione alli clementissimi pei del suo crucifisso figliolo, e tutto quello tempo che li steva me fosse imputato a biastima de Dio e a fornicazione, perchè era certa che quello et ogni male feria se la sua pietosa mano non me tenesse, e po' la morte me mandasse dove a lui era più onore." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 53; Varano 2009, p. 144).

²⁷ "Passato el sopra narrato lume, remase ne l'anima mia un foco tanto grande che ho ardire de dire con summa verità che l'anima mia fo cusi veramente affiamata et arsa da questo ardent immateriale foco, como nello materiale foco se affiara e abrusa la cosa materiale. E questo foco me pare, se ben me ricordo, che me durasse più de tre mesi. Questo foco era un desiderio de ussire della carcere de questo corpo per essere con Cristo." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively (Varano 1958, p. 55; Varano 2009, pp. 145-46). Of course, there is a decidedly Pauline/Augustinian, but obviously pre-Lutheran ring to this language and to the passage found in footnote 23 above. While sources of this idea go back to Plato, who in the *Phaedo* argued that pure knowledge is impossible while the soul is imprisoned in the body, Camilla more likely associated the notion with Scripture. There are passages in the Psalms that are relevant (Ps 142:7), but the notion was more fully elaborated in the epistles of Paul. Cf. Rom 7:21-25; Phil 1:21-24.

²⁸ This text by Camilla fairly took on a life of its own, which has been described elsewhere: cf. (Hudon 2004; Serventi 2010).

²⁹ "Onde io, perseverando in questo voto con molta fatica, como ho ditto, per più tempi, piaque a Dio me venisse alle mane una meditazione della passione in quindici parte distinta. Pareva fosse stata fatta per qualche persona che non sapesse pensare." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, p. 12; Varano 2009, p. 108).

³⁰ "Vero è che da un poco in qua la mente era tirata, queste feste solenne che la millitante Chiesa representa, pensare in esse quasi contra mia voglia, resolvendome pure nella passione de Cristo e nella meditazione che aviva fatta, cioè che la vita mia fosse tutta un venardi santo." For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, p. 59; Varano 2009, p. 149).

³¹ "O si Dio me desse una voce tanto potente che tutto el mundo me intendesse, io gridaria ad alta voce e diria: 'O tutti vui, servi e servi de Dio, li quail passati per la via del suo amore divino, imparate senno alle spese mei; e state col capo basso perchè se pò parlare a Dio e con Dio, alla vergene Maria e con l'angeli e con li santi e sante, et anco se po miserabilmente cadere e ruinare in multi peccati mortali como ho fatto io! Pigliate esempio da questa anima sventurata et infelicissima quae pervenit in altitudinem maris divini amoris et spiritualis dulcedinis, nunc autem tempestas valida demersit eam in profundum abissi et inferi.'" For a literal transcription and a modern Italian rendering, cf. respectively, (Varano 1958, p. 64; Varano 2009, p. 154). Camilla provided a fairly lengthy Latin quotation at the end. While not an exact quotation, she seemed to be drawing on two passages from Ps 69: 3, 15-16. These are the original Vulgate passages: *Veni in altitudinem maris; et tempestas demersit me*

2. Instructions to a Disciple

In her 1501 *Instructions to a disciple* (*Istruzioni al discepolo*), Camilla articulated some extended guidance on how to live a successful monastic life (C. Magl 219r-236r).³² She wrote it while apparently utilizing the literary deceit of a religious woman composing a devotional story at the request of a confessor or spiritual director, one who was to keep the whole matter secret. The confessor and director in Camilla's case had long been considered a Franciscan friar, Giovanni Pili da Fano, provincial minister for the Observant branch in the Marches of Ancona. The identification has been challenged and remains uncertain (Thoman 2012, p. 167; and Zarri 2003, p. 148), but the editor of the new critical edition of the *Istruzioni* made a strong case that the recipient could have been Antonio da Segovia, who had served as Camilla's confessor for some years (Varano 2017, pp. 155–57).³³ Camilla wrote ostensibly about another sister who both she and the confessor held in high esteem. Camilla may have employed this deceit like others before her to avoid attributing mystical experiences and revelations from God to herself. She also wrote the text with obvious affection for her addressee, whom she described throughout as her spiritual son. To her, he was thus the object of direction, not just someone from whom she received confessional and spiritual advice, so their spiritual relationship was genuinely mutual. Camilla produced a remarkable narration in *Istruzioni*, emphasizing the practical importance of overcoming obstacles in the religious life, including some contemporary Roman religious authorities she firmly criticized, while bending expectations about gender roles for women and men engaged in relationships of spiritual friendship. She provided several recommendations for action to her own confessor in the process. She strongly encouraged him to imitate her, arguing at times that his priesthood—and the success of his service in that office—depended upon this imitation. She provided explicit instruction on how he might avoid certain sins. Camilla made these recommendations while expressing great love, apparently relying on their mutual esteem for one another, especially upon his esteem for her.

More than a decade ago a scholar stepped forward to challenge the simple, fundamentally repressive model for explaining the relationship between early modern women and their confessors, arguing that their relationships were more complex, nuanced, and reciprocal than the traditional view, where male confessor/directors exercised determined authority over obedient penitents (Bilinkoff 2005). Camilla provided evidence in *Istruzioni* that takes us another step altogether. Her approach may represent a complete reversal of both this basic—and gendered—notion of the power relationship between women and men in spiritual life, not to mention a reversal of the typical—and also gendered—expectations of the target audience for early modern devotional literature written by women. Such authors more typically addressed fellow female devotees. And perhaps most remarkable

... Exaudi me in veritate salutis tuae. Eripe me de luto, ut non infigar; Libera me ab iis qui oderunt me, et de profundis aquarum. Non me demergat tepestas aquae, Neque absorbeat me profundum.

³² I studied the text in a manuscript copy thanks to Madre Laura Serboli, at Monastero di Santa Chiara, Camerino. She provided a digital copy of the pertinent pages from a manuscript held at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, the Codice Magliabechiano, XXXV, 243, 219r-236r [henceforth C. Magl]. I also made use of the first printed edition, a twentieth-century Italian printed edition, and a modern English version. Cf., respectively (Cimarelli 1621, 2: 795-816; Varano 1958, pp. 175-217; and Thoman 2012, pp. 167-191). A definitive critical edition of this work has just been published by Massimo Reschiglian: cf. (Varano 2017, pp. 195-247). Translations presented here are my own.

³³ A. M. Marini considered it a work of Camilla in his description of her writings at the end of the nineteenth century. He based this view on the apparent inclusion of the text in two early manuscripts that were referenced by Bollandist scholars, but lost no later than 1842: cf. (Varano 2017, p. 272; and Boccanera 1957, pp. 53-4). The history of the text, its transmission, and its publication has been fully explained in the opening portion of Reschiglian's new critical edition: cf. (Varano 2017, pp. 1-45; Reschiglian 2013). The C. Magl text is certainly the oldest version and became the base for the critical edition because of its closeness to the regional dialect Varano spoke. Domenico di Francesco Baglioni (1494-1568), a Dominican friar from Perugia, created the manuscript. He apparently dedicated his copying efforts to his spiritual directees in Perugian confraternities and female monasteries. The manuscript volume included works by a contemporary Dominican, Ignazio Manardi (1495-1557) in addition to ones by Camilla. In the manuscript, Domenico indicated that he used a copy shared with him by a certain Sister Eufrosina of Cornia. Her transcription of Camilla's *Istruzioni* was edited and published in 1621 by Bartolomeo Cimarelli. But Cimarelli changed the tone and content of the work quite significantly: cf. (Zarri 2003, pp. 150-52; Corradini 1987; Bucur  2001; Reschiglian 2010; Varano 2017, pp. 31-35), plus the notes to the text provided here below.

of all is that even considering the contents of the text, Camilla still seemed to presume that her confessor—and any others who might read the text—would be just fine with all of these innovations.

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century manuscript copyists and compilers, however, were quite another story. A Franciscan friar compiling earlier devotional writings named Bartolomeo Cimarelli (d. 1628) edited the text considerably. He eliminated some of the directorial language Camilla used in writing the text, as well as much of the intensity she delivered when comparing sins among practitioners of the religious life with those committed in other contexts. He may have been trying to create something more in line with changed sensibilities after the Council of Trent. But regardless, his version was considered authoritative until the end of the twentieth century. Still, the extent of his changes were not so substantial as those created by editors in the Oratorian order in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. They positively transformed *Istruzioni*, all but eliminating the real author's voice. They composed a saintly portrait of Camilla as an ideal female religious devotee out of a text that originally expressed something very different: the affectionate relationship between a female acting for all practical purposes as a spiritual director to her male disciple (Varano 2017, pp. 31–35).³⁴

Camilla argued creatively that her correspondent must avoid a common pitfall affecting monks and nuns: hasty judgments about the character of brothers or sisters in religion. She recommended active pursuit of the opposite, that is, esteem for anything good found in fellow devotees. “Take the rose and leave the thorn,” she said, utilizing an Italian proverb. She told her spiritual son to find a way, as she had, to “draw the good from every single thing . . . given by God” (Varano 2017, p. 200; C. Magl 219v).³⁵ Camilla insisted that murmuring about the shortcomings of fellow nuns and friars in one's own monastery “loses graces” for those in religious life. She told this man whom she repeatedly professed to “love heartily” that he must not “act like a slave . . . [or] a whore” but rather “like a true son and a legitimate spouse,” refusing to be dragged down by temptation (Varano 2017, pp. 201, 203; C. Magl 220r-v).³⁶ While delivering these exhortations to her reader, Camilla utilized related scriptural passages that might spring readily to mind, like the admonitions from the “Sermon on the Mount” regarding the speck in another's eye.³⁷ She was also apparently using other passages that might not come to mind quite so readily, like the assertion from Romans that “in everything God works for good,” plus the admonition of James against a religious who does not bridle his tongue.³⁸

Camilla had practical advice on how to avoid the temptation to judgment and murmuring, and how instead to focus properly on day-to-day life. She explained that she had avoided temptations from a devil determined to “destroy fraternal love” through properly cautious conversations with prelates making canonical visitations of her monastery. She indicated that at the heart of one who complains about others is a troubled soul. “Make peace with yourself,” she said, “and you no longer have anyone to complain about.” (Varano 2017, p. 207; C. Magl, 222r).³⁹ She recommended to her reader that when visitors come to review and evaluate religious life at the monastery, he should act like “that mother of yours,” who “never said a word,” adding that if he were to learn that a fellow religious had complained about him, he should “praise to [the] visitors the holy conversation of

³⁴ For more on the changes to the text, especially those made by Cimarelli, see the notes to the text selections included below.

³⁵ “L'altro ricordo, figliuolo mio benedetto, è questo: che voglio che imiti quella tua madre in questa virtù a sé da Dio concessa: d'ogni cosa che vedi, senti e odi cavane bene, piglia la rosa e lascia stare la spina.” For the edited version that omits the Camilla's familiar, directorial language, cf. (Cimarelli 1621, 2:796; and Varano 1958, p. 179).

³⁶ “ . . . cioè di cavare bene e anche dello aperto male. Perché credi ad me che ti amo di cuore: molti e molte per questo iudicare et poi ne seguita il mormorare perdono gli servi e serve di Dio tante gratie tanti doni e tante prerogative che non è intelletto che lo potesse extimare. . . . Lassa, lassa figliuol mio dolcissimo, questo fallace mondo non per paura d'inferno, come servo, non per speranza di premio, come meretrice, ma come figliuolo, et sposa amabile per amore del tuo crocifixo Jesù.” For the edited seventeenth-century version, omitting the reference to “whore” and inserting “sinner” instead, cf. (Cimarelli 1621, pp. 2:796-97; and Varano 1958, pp. 180-81).

³⁷ Mt 7:3-5; Lk 6:41-42 (NRSV).

³⁸ Rom 8:28; James 1:26.

³⁹ “Fatto che ha pace con se stessa, non ha più di chi si dolga.” The edited seventeenth-century version is nearly identical: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:799; and Varano 1958, p. 184).

your brothers as [though they were] angels incarnate” (Varano 2017, pp. 208–9; C. Magl 222v).⁴⁰ Instead of dwelling on such inconsequential things as the conversations of others, Camilla indicated that Giovanni should intentionally “sanctify every moment” of his communal life. She implied that it would be a rather simple thing to do, if he could “pray, read, chant the office, wash the bowls, sweep the house, and exert yourself in all works of charity,” out of love for God. (Varano 2017, pp. 214–15; C. Magl 224v).⁴¹ The benefit to be gained, she further explained, was to promote more frequent, even constant, thoughts about God, and to promote action with service and love of God as the object of all. The sanctifying intention—love of God—was clearly at least as important to Camilla as the action itself. The devotee, she insisted would, by this means, banish “unclean thoughts” even more quickly than through mortifications alone. Since the object of all action would be God, her reader would not become attached to creatures or be in danger of stealing love from God. She wanted Giovanni to keep the commandments, but she was more concerned that he have a “burning desire” to do penance, since “God considers only the heart.” Such properly intended and directed heat, Camilla added, would have another practical benefit: keeping away spiritual pests. She told him this was “because flies don’t go near a pot that boils, but they come quickly to one that is tepid” (Varano 2017, pp. 215–16; C. Magl 225r).⁴² The pesty “fly” she had in mind when using this proverb, of course, was the devil.

In the *Instructions*, Camilla made some remarkable, but sometimes contradictory, claims about herself—and about her devotional actions—to counteract the forces battling against Christians. She described victory over the “powerful captains” aligned against monks and nuns trying to be faithful in their religious communities as requiring a miracle. She explained that the captains were “the world, the flesh and the devil,” and only the intervention of God could permit one to endure in the religious life and be saved when enemies preemptively attack those committed to the goal of perseverance.

⁴⁰ “Ma poi che fu in religion intese la dottrina dello Spirito Sancto in modo che lei è stata circa 18 alla religion et è stata subdita e prelatà e mai non disse parole di nulla particolare creatura. Et se caso fusse che lo demonio incitanti e Dio permettente, per tua corona che tutti dicessino di te male, fa’ che non ne lasci la vendetta a tuoi figliuoli ma falla tu stesso; cioè che laudi alli tuoi visitatori la santa conversatione delli tuoi fratelli come di angeli incarnati.” The edited seventeenth-century version has editorial changes that do not appreciably change the meaning: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:800; and Varano 1958, p. 186).

⁴¹ “Tu, sapiente e prudente, non voglio imiti le vestigie delli pazi, ma in ogni piccolo e grande operatione leva l’occhio della mente a Dio e colla intentione santifica tutto il tempo della tua vita. Cioè, per amore di Dio fa’ ogni cosa buona per amore di Dio sopporta ogni cosa adversa per amore di Dio, ora, leggi, canta l’oficio, lava le scodelle, scopa la casa fa’ gli caritativi officii e exercitii alli sani et alli infermi, e se piglierai questo habito nella mente di dire ‘per amore di Dio’ etiam non pensandoci ti verrà detto colla mente.” In the edited, seventeenth-century version, Cimarelli changed this passage, inserting *mentre spirito di vita avrai* (“while you have the spirit of life”), and omitting the instruction to “sanctify.” Cimarelli not only changed the portion above but also inserted a direct appeal to God: *Signore Iddio, io le faccio per vostro amore* (“Lord God, I do them out of love for you”). The Florentine manuscript has a much simpler phrase, *di dire per amore di dio*: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, pp. 2:801–2; and Varano 1958, pp. 191–92).

⁴² “E così ti do per consiglio: che lo tuo desiderio sempre arda di fare penitentia, ma nelle operationi exteriori serva mandata patrum tuorum allo cuore riguarda Iddio et questo fa’ che sia sempre acceso nella charità divina, perché alla pignatta che bolle non si appressono le mosche, ma a quella che è tiepida vi si aniegano. Dalla anima che bolle del divino amore si fugge lo demonio e le immonde cogitationi. Nella anima tiepida di carità fredda d’amore vi si anniegano le mosche delle vane, e inutile cogitatione. E di qui nasce lo sommo pestifero della negligente anima.” The idea Camilla seems to have been expressing in the quotation can be linked to a host of scriptural passages that employ the same words (*serua mandata partum tuorum*), although none use them exactly. Cf. Mt. 19:17 (“If you would enter life, keep the commandments”) and Prov 7:2 (“Keep my commandments and live”). The seventeenth-century editor, Cimarelli, made substantial changes to this sentence: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:802–3; Varano 1958, p. 192). He eliminated reference to the burning desire required for the passage overall to make sense. He reduced the semi-mystical allusion included in the reference to *carità divina*. He also emphasized reference to the leadership of spiritual “fathers,” while this passage in itself—and the entirety of the text overall—contains advice addressed to a male religious from a spiritual mother. Camilla used a variation of a proverb apparently drawn from the writings of one of the ancient church fathers. The basic proverb, “Flies don’t light on a boiling pot,” (*Alla pignatta che bolle le mosche non vi si appressano*) can be found in numerous dictionaries. Cf., for instance, (Mortillaro 1838–1844, p. 2:111). One such work identified the original source as *un S. Padre antico* [an ancient Church Father]: cf. (Tommaseo et al. 1872, p. 3:1034). Camilla may well have picked it up from the writings of a fourteenth-century Dominican friar, Domenico Cavalca (c.1270–1342), about the sin of loose talk. In addition to his *Tractato contra il peccato della lingua* (Cavalca 1476), he also compiled and translated patristic literature published in large eighteenth-century editions. In his *Volgarizzamento delle vite de’ santi padre*, Cavalca provided the proverb as follows. *Disse un S. Padre antico: Come alla pignatta che bolle le mosche non vi si appressano, ma sì quando è tiepida, e fannovi puzza, così le demonia fuggono e temono l’uomo acceso e fervente dell’ amore divino, ma lo tiepido perseguitano e sì lo scherniscono*. Cf. (Cavalca 1853–1854, p. 2:76).

(Varano 2017, p. 217; C. Magl 225r-v).⁴³ Camilla infused a description of endurance against them with battle imagery. She clearly indicated that God's grace and "angelic defense" facilitated the miracle, but just as firmly emphasized her own agency in the process. She had "triumphed over the flesh and the world," she explained, for after having "jousted" with a "shining sword" against "both the one and the other," God "made her victorious." (Varano 2017, p. 218; C. Magl 225v-226r).⁴⁴ Camilla followed these assertions with phrases completely rejecting the notion that she had any value before God. She insisted that there were two Trinities that real Christians must believe in, demonstrating surprising theological creativity. First, she discussed the "divine Trinity" of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, of course. But Camilla then added a second, most unholy one that must become an equal object of belief if a Christian were to achieve perfection. The second Trinity was a three-part self-denigration. There is "[an]other trinity," she insisted, "that is, that [I am] nothing other than a nothing, complete foolishness, and hateful to God." It was only "spiritual ignoramus," she continued, who did not know, adore, and believe in this second Trinity (Varano 2017, pp. 222–23; C. Magl 227v).⁴⁵ But Camilla did not, apparently, feel constrained to silence her own spiritual advice due to such realizations. And neither did she seem to consider knowledge of her status as "hateful" to God as anything but a step toward perfection. She apparently did not consider herself useless to her reader at all, and further evidence lies just a few pages later in the text. There, she asserted that imitation of her own actions by this priest and "spiritual son" was more than desirable: it was necessary for success in his priestly vocation. She told him to acknowledge it all in prayer to God. Here, she said, was the "infallible [way of] life along which your mother walks and has walked." She explained that he needed to beg God, for the "revelation" he desired, instructing him to say "I cannot be perfect without it," for that quality in turn was "necessary for my dignity and excellence as a priest" (Varano 2017, pp. 225–26; C. Magl 229r).⁴⁶ Obviously, Camilla was making a remarkable claim about herself imbedded in this advice to a contemporary clerical follower. He was to follow her path, just as she had followed the path laid out by Mogliano and other spiritual advisors she had trusted.

Camilla felt sufficient spiritual confidence, it seems, to include criticism of ecclesiastical superiors even beyond the spiritual directors she corrected in stories from *The spiritual life*. Here, in the *Instructions*, she took on other religious figures she apparently believed failed to live up to proper ideals of humility and devotion. The rightly devout person in religious life had well-ordered affections, unattached to any particular created thing. For Camilla, that meant the Christian life must be marked

⁴³ "Fa' anima da Dio benedetta, che sempre preghi Iddio che ti facci fare questo miracolo di perservare in vita monastica usque in fine. . . . Stupendissimo è questo miracolo perché tre potentissimi capitani ogniuno da per sé con innumerabile exercito di tentationi si oppongano alla anima nostra ché non vogliono che 'l faccia . . . Li 3 potenti capitani sono questi: lo mondo, la carne, e lo demonio. O quanto è mortale, pericolosa, e horribilissima questa angoscioso preliatione." Based on the Florentine manuscript, Camilla used a particular word, *preliatione* (or *prelazione* in modern Italian), at the end of this passage. It means "preemption": a prior seizure or appropriation, and when used in a military context, by a belligerent. It makes perfect sense in the context of the rest of the paragraph. Cimarelli muddled the point by changing the word in his edition to *contesa*, ("quarrel") and adding an exclamation point: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, pp. 2:803-4; and Varano 1958, pp. 193-94).

⁴⁴ "Ma sta' di buona voglio e non ti sbigottire, figliuolo dilectissimo, perché quella tua carissima matre benché sia in sesso fragili con la divina gratia e presidio angelico già ha victoriosissimamente trionphato di duoi, cioè della carne e del mondo con ferro pulito. Ha giostrato con l'uno et coll' altro, e Iddio l'ha fatta victoriosa." The seventeenth-century editor removed the "shining sword" and jousting imagery, substantially changing the rhetoric and tone Camilla used but without changing the meaning dramatically: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:804; Varano 1958, pp. 194-95).

⁴⁵ "Più anni fa, che nella sua mentale oratione davanti alla immagine del crocifixo, da Dio fu illuminata di questa verità: che mai doventeria perfecta se in lei non adorava una trinità come in Dio credeva Padre, Figliolo e Spirito Sancto, questa Trinità bisogna sola adorare per essere salvo et quest' altra si creda et si confessi et in sé adori per esse perfecta, cioè che lei non altro che nichiltà, stultitia e odio odiabile. O beatissima trinità non conosciuta né adorata né creduta dalli ignoranto spirituali!" For the edited, seventeenth-century version, cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:806; Varano 1958, p. 198).

⁴⁶ "O quore divino, non posso fare che non ti nomini perché epsa al mondo si vede scripta a lettere d'oro, patente, et belle. Qua dentro entra, messer mio reverendo se vuoi in breve tempo esser perfetto. Questa è la via breve, occulta e sicura infallibile per la quale cammina e ha caminato la matre tua. Seguitala perché la conformità genera e conserva lo amore. 'Questa revelatione di' ad Dio la voglio, Signor mio, perché senza essa non posso essere perfecto, la quale perfectione, è necessaria alla mia dignità et excellentia sacerdotale.'" The seventeenth-century editor removed the personal reference to "my Reverend sir" but left the rest of the basic meaning of the passage intact: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, pp. 2:807-8; Varano 1958, pp. 200-1).

by profound charity. Or, as she put it to her follower in the final section of the *Instructions*, “be generous to the poor and your neighbors, [but] stingy with yourself.” She elaborated by suggesting that the kindness, generosity, and liberality “without measure” exhibited by God ought to be emulated by his followers. But “the servant and the one who grants dispensations,” she continued, “who came into the world naked and very, very soon will return the same way . . . show themselves [to be] most avaricious, stingy, impious and cruel to a neighbor and brother” (Varano 2017, p. 238; C. Magl 233r-v).⁴⁷ She used the word *dispensatore*, the “dispenser” of favors or graces. She seems certainly to have had in mind religious superiors with authority over other “brothers” in the community that her follower represented. Given that the word *dispensatore* has secondary meanings implying a legal and/or administrative functionary, even sometimes a functionary in financial and treasury administration, it seems reasonable that she may also have been referring to granters of ecclesiastical dispensations more broadly conceived. If so, her allusion would be to prelates operating under episcopal and perhaps papal authority, granting benefits applied through the so-called “treasury of merits.” In this case, coming from a woman, and well before what is sometimes called the Lutheran “revolution,” hers would be a remarkable criticism, indeed.

3. Significance

Camilla’s voice has apparently been significant and influential from the moment of her speaking right into the twenty-first century. The most interesting and significant twist in the story of her influence for historians, however, may lie in the appropriation and manipulation of her voice. This appropriation and manipulation took place in between the immediate impact she had upon contemporaries she lived with and advised on the one hand, and her longer run impact as exemplified by her recent canonization, on the other. It occurred in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at the height of the so-called “Counter-reformation.”⁴⁸ And we owe, curiously enough, a great deal of the popularity and transmission of Camilla’s written works to males in a Tridentine-era religious order—the Theatines—not often associated with valuing or encouraging female spiritual discourse. They picked up one of her treatises, *I dolori mentali di Gesù nella sua passione* (*The mental sufferings of Christ in his passion*), that some commentators consider a continuation of the *Instructions to a disciple*. Theatine editors not only picked it up, but they also published it, sometimes as the work of another Theatine. The other writer was perhaps the best known of contemporary devotional authors, Lorenzo Scupoli (1530–1610). His principal work, *Il combattimento spirituale* (*The spiritual combat*), was a certifiable early modern bestseller (Hudon 1996a, pp. 16–62; Mas 1992).

Perhaps even more pertinent for the understanding of Camilla’s autobiographical works, however, are editorial changes made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the *Istruzioni*. Cimarelli, the seventeenth-century Franciscan editor considered to have introduced mainly non-substantive changes, may be worth another look. While his revisions may not have been heavy, he removed some language highlighting Camilla’s directorial action with her reader while emphasizing in other places the leadership of spiritual fathers. He discounted Camilla’s mystical claims and allusions at times. He also tuned down both the imagery of spiritual battle that was so central to her other writings, as

⁴⁷ “L’altro ricordo è questo: voglio che siei liberalissimo e voglio che siei avarissimo, cioè liberalissimo alli poveri e proximi, avarissimo per te e per la persona tua . . . O cecità infinita o calamità lacrimabile! El Signore del tutto è cortese et liberale, largo senza misura, et sue sono tutte le cose—quia Domini est terra et plenitudo eius orbis terrarum et universi qui habitant in eo—e lo servo e lo dispensatore lo quale non ha affare niente in questa machina mondana, il quale venne nudo, e presto presto tornerà nudo in polvere e in terra, e avarissimo et stretto e dispietato e crudele al proximo, al suo fratello!” The imedded Latin phrase is a quotation from the Psalms: Ps 23:1 (Vulgate); Ps 24:1 (NRSV). The seventeenth-century editor removed both Camilla’s emphatic insistence that the end for these misbehaving clerics was coming “very, very” soon, as well as her visual imagery of the dust of the earth: cf. (Cimarelli 1621, p. 2:813; and Varano 1958, p. 211).

⁴⁸ I caution all readers on the employment of this term, or of any other—including “Catholic reform,” “Catholic reformation,” “early-modern Catholicism,” or the “Tridentine reformation” concept—that can typically be encountered in descriptions of this era. All are problematic over-simplifications that tend to cloud rather than clarify the characteristics of persons and events in the religious history of early modern Europe (Eire 2016; Hudon 2012; O’Malley 2000; Bireley 1999; Hudon 1996b).

well as the urgency of her appeal for the reinvigoration of charitable ideals among key ecclesiastical persons—perhaps even dispensation granters—that were key points among the myriad reform voices emerging in her lifetime. Her expressions of endearment for her reader, which she delivered always with male nouns and adjectives like *mio caro* (my dear) or *amico caro* (dear friend), Cimorelli rendered as a generic “devout soul” (*anima divota*). He removed much of her colorful language, most notably her admonitions to her directee concerning service to God. She warned him in earthy language to perform service not like a “whore” who expected a prize or benefit, but rather like a “legitimate son” and “loving spouse.” She applied the language of mystical marriage to him as another potential spouse of Christ and did so repeatedly, using this formulation twice in the space of two pages in the Florentine manuscript. Of course, the phrasing she used in this section—recommending that he act like a “legitimate” son, for instance—held special significance given Camilla’s own birth status. Cimorelli edited out most of this, including all the uses of the word “whore” (*meretrice*), while preferring elimination of all references to a male addressee. The result was a book of advice from a perfectly devout woman given to a generic, genderless other devotee. Thus, possible sexual innuendo—not to mention the real story of the spiritual, well-wishing desires of a spiritual mother for her beloved spiritual son—was effectively neutralized. Cimorelli made other changes where his rationale seems difficult to determine. Toward the end of the text, for instance, he removed the reference to “the poor” when Camilla identified those that her spiritual son and others—probably fellow Franciscans—should serve with generosity while being stingy with themselves. This is especially puzzling given the fact that Cimorelli was himself a Franciscan and presumably imbued with the same drive for extreme devotion to evangelical poverty that motivated the founder of the order—the same drive that was exhibited by both Camilla and the other Franciscan writers Cimorelli celebrated in the volume he was editing. His work, significant as it was, only set the stage for Oratorian editions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the text was fully transformed into one about her, not written by her. This editorial work discounted Camilla’s authorial and directorial agency. Camilla’s unique voice was submerged for a time.

Despite editorial appropriations and manipulations, if these texts are illustrative of Camilla’s genuine self-image, numerous interesting conclusions can be drawn, and further questions can be considered. Camilla surely wanted to be remembered as a woman of considerable, but hardly unlimited, independence. She had both benefitted from and suffered under the control of men like her father and her spiritual directors, after all. But she claimed the ability to provide spiritual direction on her own in these texts and in other devotional treatises, writing in bold imagery revealing creative, surprising ways of thinking about the relationship between a devotee and her God. She presented herself as the practitioner of a do-it-yourself approach to discernment of God’s will and, at times, even to the process of confession. She criticized inattentive spiritual directors and asserted that both her visions and the impetus for her devotional writings came directly, unmediated, from God. She seemed to view all males with whom she had any sort of relationship—even Jesus—always at an angle, never accepting them fully, and always with mixed feelings, if not an outright mixture of love and hate. Perhaps the best example can be found in Camilla’s description of her relationship with her biological father in their conflict over her monastic vocation. But what exactly was she suggesting such a father should do, especially while the head of a noble family in a largely patriarchal society, as his daughter began to assert herself as a spiritual mother?

Still, Camilla also exhibited self-deprecating attitudes at times, including deference we associate with the subservience stereotypically identified in pre-modern women. She wrote to express her own obedience, on occasion, to the variety of men who held some authority over her, and by implication, she recommended similar attitudes in others. Such attitudes sometimes involved what appear to be strong ties to traditional Franciscan, Pauline, and Augustinian theology, plus its contemporary

offshoots.⁴⁹ Camilla delivered many of her more emphatic traditional theological statements in the *Instructions*, composed in the year that her father was excommunicated and the year before his death as little more than a pawn in papal power politics. It seems undeniable that agony and frustration played a role in driving Camilla toward what she considered “true” devotion. Camilla surely also exhibited self-discipline and devotional determination to, as she said, “defeat herself,” or at least her own reticence for prayer.

Just as surely, however, she in no way defeated herself or undermined her own significance. She was clearly engaged, from the very beginning of her spiritual life, in a process of active negotiation with authoritative males for spaces and activities—for public, semi-public, and private devotions—that suited her understanding of her personal vocation and her relationship with God. She never used the word “negotiation” to describe these interactions, but it seems clear that such was occurring based upon her description of give-and-take with Mogliano over commonplace events like a confession and her description of the long battle with her father over defiance of his will concerning a life decision like religious vocation. In the process, Camilla exhibited determined agency: hammering out a role in which she both received and gave advice on her own terms, reflecting a curious, complicated mixture of independence and subordination. She seemed to feel empowered to recommend that same mixture of apparently contradictory qualities to those she directed through her writings. She addressed an audience that included her own convent sisters and male practitioners of the religious life living far beyond the confines of her cloister. The latter group, she seemed to assume, had identical goals to her own: living a more perfect life and achieving—so far as it was possible—union with God through prayer and meditation. For her, whether a spiritual director was female or male seems to have been largely beside the point. To suggest that Camilla challenged “gender expectations” in her society may be a statement more about the way she is remembered than about the way she was. There is no evidence that she challenged anything she would have defined as “gender expectations” deliberately or consciously. Her motivation seems throughout to have been to fully express her devotion and spirituality, not to bend or break what we call gender expectations. For Camilla, the point was always true spiritual guidance, true spiritual devotion, true religious life, which could apparently be generated, practiced, and lived only by a rightly devout person. Nonetheless, her actions—as she described them—force reconsideration of any gendered boundaries historians may consider to have effectively limited spiritual messages composed in early modern Europe. And our notions of how gender expectations affected real women in that era must be complex enough to explain the actions and words of Camilla to be useful in comprehending early modern society.

It may be that, for a time, seventeenth-century editors defeated Camilla by manipulating her work, by attributing portions of it to male authors, and by temporarily submerging her voice. But the very fact that male scholars and devotional writers in multiple contemporary religious orders included her works in editions of important spiritual writings and sometimes even claimed them as works of their own members, indicates that they acknowledged her authority and the value of her message. Her canonization in 2010, of course, shows that neither the early modern manipulation, nor the text appropriations, nor any authorial submersion could last. Indeed, the canonization process always demonstrates powerful local and international support for the religio-cultural ideals the new saint exhibits (Copeland 2016; Finucane 2011; Duffin 2009; Ditchfield 2007; Woodward 1990; Burke 1984). In Camilla’s case, the early following she gained among popular devotees in Italy beginning in the mid-sixteenth century expanded in the seventeenth and eighteenth, even to Italian immigrant communities in the United States. Besides the life memorialized by these devotees and that she constructed in these texts, what can be known about Camilla’s actual life? A thorough reconsideration of all her spiritual writings, and of the circumstances of her daily life, especially her interaction with

⁴⁹ There seem to be echoes in her language, for instance, to inconsistent Savonarolan recommendations that women take the initiative in their own reform, not to mention the rigorous fasting that some of his female devotees undertook, now considered by many scholars to have been a multi-regional phenomena. Cf. (Zarri 1990; and Herzig 2008).

spiritual advisors and confessors, has been underway for some time. The reconsideration should reveal more about Camilla's fascinating voice.⁵⁰ But some brave scholars have gone so far as to suggest that texts by early modern religious women—including the autobiographical works of Camilla—represent a sort of religious Renaissance because of their learned content and their obvious purpose of inspiring and directing others, both male and female, in enhanced religious devotion. Camilla was just one among many who served as spiritual guides to other religious women and to religious men (McGinn 2012, pp. 292–328; Zarri 2007; Bilinkoff 2005; Zarri 1990). But it also seems clear that her story of negotiating a space for herself over and against males attempting to control her, even as she wrote frequently in deferential language and powerfully asserted her own authority to provide spiritual direction to some clerical males, has another possible significance. Her autobiographical writings can be used, like other documentation exposing genuine female agency, for rethinking the traditional narrative of the marginalization of late medieval religious women. We must indeed, as Sherri Franks Johnson recently argued, reconsider how we discuss the struggles between religious women and the leaders of their orders, reaching beyond legislative documentation. She and others have found that convents were complex institutions where individuals on the inside and the outside competed for control, authority, and independence, doing so through the spoken and written word (Johnson 2014, pp. 2–18; Tylus 2009; Strocchia 2002). Only fully contextualized reconsideration of these spaces—and of the voices used inside, even projecting outside, those spaces—shall permit us to see women in religious life as they were and not just as they were supposed to have been. Camilla's experiences and surprising voice thus have a role in the continuing—and hotly contested—reassessment of both the Renaissance and the Reformation in early modern Europe.

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⁵⁰ Careful analysis of Camilla's interactions with Domenico da Leonessa, Francesco da Urbino, and Pietro da Mogliano, for instance, will be necessary to determine if the sort of "participatory feminism" that Sara Ross described seems to have taken place in Camilla's life experience: cf. (Ross 2009, pp. 131–89).

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