
An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Juli Digate

Dr. Ellen Thourcington

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana

May 2010

Graduation: May 8th, 2010
Abstract:

In the twelfth century, mandatory celibacy among priests became the accepted rule. This highlights the conflict between the worldly and the spiritual: many who received a clerkly education were confronted with the difficult choice of whether to marry or to enter the religious life. Two works from the late-eleventh and early twelfth century propose a resolution to this conflict that might be called spiritual marriage. Both the *Life of Saint Alexis* and the *Letters of Abelard and Heloise* demonstrate this notion by binding together marriage and religious life; this view later serves to inform other literary works, specifically Marie de France’s *Eliduc*.

In the *Life of Saint Alexis* the saint first gifts his wife with symbols of his faithfulness before quickly deserting her in order to devote himself to a life of celibacy and service to God. Through their chastity, Alexis and his wife are later joined in a spiritual union that transcends the earthly. Similarly, Abelard and Heloise take religious orders after marriage, but maintain a spiritual relationship through their *Letters*. The influence of these models on Marie de France’s *Eliduc* is evident in the similar plotlines and in the sacrifice Eliduc’s wife makes in taking religious orders so her husband may be free to marry his mistress. Spiritual marriage, then, is embodied when couples choose lives of celibacy and service, showing their love for one another through devotion to God. This paper explores the notion of spiritual marriage expressed in these works as a way to further an understanding of twelfth century literature.

Acknowledgements:

-I want to thank Dr. Ellen Thorington for helping inspire me to pursue research on this topic and advising me through this project. She was extremely helpful in both the research and writing process.

-I would also like to thank Dr. Ruebel and the Honors College for enabling me to explore this topic through an Undergraduate Fellowship and learn from experts at national conferences. This project would not be of the same quality without those opportunities.
Introduction

Society and the church have long emphasized the importance of marriage, whether through property advantages or sacramental rituals. The church has shaped the many definitions of marriage. In twelfth-century France, the church inspired a form of marriage that was primarily spiritual. This notion of "spiritual marriage" finds expression in both literary and historical sources throughout the twelfth century. To begin, I will discuss the various ways that spiritual marriage has been interpreted before defining the notion of spiritual marriage that will be utilized in this paper. Next, I will examine spiritual marriage within three works: the Life of Saint Alexis, the Letters of Abelard and Heloise, and Eliduc.

These three texts express different facets of spiritual marriage. The Life of Saint Alexis demonstrates clearly the aspects of temptation and intent. In Abelard and Heloise, for example, communication between husband and wife strengthens the bond of spiritual marriage, while emphasizing how spiritual marriage allows couples to become closer to God than they could as individuals. In Eliduc, we will see how the topos of spiritual marriage appears in a literary work of the twelfth century, thereby confirming that this view of marriage was prevalent on a number of different levels, both religious and secular. Central to this discussion is the importance of the sentiment dilectio (honorable love) versus amicitia (friendly love), amor (passionate love), and cupiditas (lust). Even more, it will become evident that spiritual marriage mimics the biblical construct of ideal marriage as seen in Ephesians, Corinthians, and in the ideal model of Joseph and Mary. The Life of Saint Alexis and the Letters of Abelard and Heloise will serve as examples of spiritual marriage while at the same time defining the concept. Eliduc confirms the importance of the notion of spiritual marriage during the twelfth century.
In the twelfth century, society was re-examining marriage just as monastic life started to grow in popularity. When couples married primarily for social alliances, and divorce was not generally an option, entrance into the religious/monastic life served as a form of separation or divorce (Gies 88). This was not the only debate regarding marriage during this time: two different schools of thought regarding the definition of marriage developed during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These are consent theory and consummation theory. In the first, people argued that consent was the basis for marriage. This would make it easier for the church to control the details of marriage, but was harder to define because it was difficult to distinguish between betrothal and marriage. Consummation theorists, on the other hand, believed that carnal relations were necessary for a marriage to be valid. The problem with this argument is that it invalidates the marriage of Joseph and Mary, and thereby was seen as unacceptable to both the church and society (Resnick 355). Accordingly, in an examination of spiritual marriage, I shall be most concerned with the first of these theories.

The church initiated another debate at this time as it started to promote abstinence from marriage as a guideline for clergymen and other religious. Joseph and Frances Gies write:

The Old Testament pictured marriage as good...the New Testament on the other hand, while affirming the goodness of marriage, attached a superior value to virginity. (37) St. Paul reinforces the idea that virginity is the ultimate aspiration, stating “It is good for a man not to marry, yet if you do marry it is not a sin” (1 Corinthians 7:28). Virginity signifies the choice to remain pure and devoted to God, creating, as it were, a kind of marital link between the consecrated virgin and God. Morton writes “the profession of virginity or chastity is taken as a solemn nuptial vow and the joys of heavenly marriage are opposed to the disadvantages of union with an earthly bridegroom” (109). This choice is only further reinforced when an individual
devotes his life to the Lord within monastic vows, a clear example of a spiritual marriage (Resnick 356). Even so, marriage is not seen as sin, but it is not equal in value to virginity either. The notion of spiritual marriage merges these two ideals by relying on couples’ chastity and life in religious orders while they remain married.

Another dimension of the debate regarding monastic life and marriage involves the argument that married life distracts one from religious life. St. Paul reinforces this concern in 1 Corinthians, accentuating the idea that marriage should be separated from religious study. St. Jerome discussed this conflict of prayer and marriage as well, writing of Saint Peter’s position that “prayers are hindered by the performance of marriage duty” (St. Jerome). This argument parallels Heloise’s\(^1\) assertion that married life and theology should not intertwine (Historia Calamitatum 14). These theological arguments easily explain the church’s debates on celibacy during the 12\(^{th}\) century. Spiritual marriage presents an acceptable solution to the conflict at the stem of the church’s debates. Couples that recognize the disconnect between a married life of lust and distractions and a religious life of study and devotion can choose a spiritual marriage, where they spend their time on earth separately, dedicating their lives to God, so that after death they can spend eternity together. The couple must signify their separation in some way, whether that be through continued communication or through a symbol of some kind.

The strongest form of spiritual marriage is one where communication between the partners continues throughout their lives, even after they have separated to take religious orders or pursue theological study. In a marriage, both partners have duties to their spouse (Schine Gold 31). In the twelfth century, it was typical for husbands to serve as head of their household and guide to their wife in spiritual matters. Wives, on the other hand, were responsible for inspiring their husbands to good works, providing comfort, and providing emotional and physical

\(^1\) Cf. below the discussion of Abelard and Heloise (p. 10).
nourishment. In spiritual marriages, husband and wife were separated and thus lost the ability to fulfill their marital duties. Communication filled this gap, allowing couples to fulfill their duties through their interaction (Schine Gold 31). By maintaining communication with the wife, the husband can still serve as the head of the couple by providing her with guidance and support, and the wife can still inspire her husband to higher avenues of devotion. St. Paul illustrates the ideal marriage construct in Ephesians:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless... However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. (5:22-28, 33)

This passage shows St. Paul’s interpretation of marital roles. These roles are emulated by the couples in the works discussed in this paper. Spiritual marriage can be characterized as one that emphasizes a constant struggle with temptation, which is present with or without continued communication, but the Paulian roles of husband and wife are better represented when communication exists (Elliot 308).

Spiritual marriage in and of itself has been defined in many different ways. As previously discussed, a vow of virginity or life within monastic orders may be considered forms of spiritual marriage because they signify an implied bond between an individual and God. The idea of the church as the bride of Christ provides yet another form of spiritual marriage, but
serves better as an illustration of an ideal marriage. Dyan Heather Elliot presents yet an additional explanation when she defines spiritual marriage as a marriage where both spouses remain in contact with one another and in the world. This characterization refers to spouses being “in the world,” and monastic life would be apart from the world, which separates her definition from my own (308).

George Duby takes the discussion of spiritual marriage one step further, discussing types of love. Duby points out that the primary duty of marriage is not sex, but attachment, and argues that marriage is neither dlectio nor amicitia, because lust cannot be equated with divine love and the lack of parity in marriage prevents it from being characterized as amicitia. This argument could be seen as conflicting with definition of spiritual marriage presented in this paper. The literary and historical examples I examine exemplify the merging of dlectio, a form of divine love, and amicitia as a critical aspect of spiritual marriage, which is just as important as the denial of amor (v.3 94).

Spiritual marriage allowed couples to help one another dedicate their lives to God in ways that they had not been successful at discovering individually (Brooke 115). Whether through monastic life or through a devotion to God outside of the monastic walls, spiritual marriage is typified by a couple who serves God while remaining together, abstaining from sexual relations and denying temptation in the name of God. In a spiritual marriage, the wife serves the higher power through her husband. As Duby explains, “both having entered the monastic life, [the couple] had progressed together towards salvation, the woman, however, subject to the man, serving God ‘under him’” (v.1 47-48). The couples’ connection is maintained through communication, symbolic gifts, or in some other equal way that makes it clear that neither spouse wished to dissolve the marriage. Upon entering the afterlife, the
couple’s reverence and chastity is then rewarded because in Heaven they could be dedicated to one another while remaining pure.

*Life of St. Alexis*

The first model that I will discuss, the *Life of Saint Alexis*, illustrates a type of marriage unique from others of their time. Saint Alexis and his wife’s earthly devotion to God was given freely with the belief that they would be reunited with one another upon entering heaven. The *Life of Saint Alexis* is a literary model of the late-eleventh century, and is essential to further analysis of the definition of spiritual marriage.

**Background:**

It would be useful to begin with a brief summary of the story portrayed in the *Life of Saint Alexis*. To begin, Alexis’s father found a wife for his son, presumably wanting Alexis to have the best marriage and the best life possible. On his wedding night Alexis remained chaste – instead of engaging in marital relations, he convinced his bride to take God as her bridegroom, leaving with her tokens of his commitment to her (his ring and sword). Alexis then departs to pursue spiritual wholeness on his own, leaving his wife behind. Alexis returned home to Rome incognito. Not even his parents recognize him, and he continues a life of service to God all while living under the stairs of their house. His bride, father, and mother all mourned for him, grieving his disappearance and living in misery. Following Alexis’s death, people discovered that Alexis was actually the son of the lord of the house where he had been staying. Alexis had removed himself from his wife, likely to avoid the distraction and temptation she presented, but his bride served God in his honor both before and after his death.
The fact that Alexis’s wife remains in his parents’ home is significant. In this time period, if a bride was abandoned without consummation of the marriage, the wife often left her husband to return to her family, pure and free to remarry. Alexis’s wife, however, chose to remain faithful to him and the Lord; although she would not have been slighted if she had returned home, she chose instead to remain in Alexis’ home and in doing so dedicated her life to her husband and through him to God.

There has been some debate between literary and cultural historians regarding the length of the narrative and whether the poem ends directly after Alexis is buried or if it continues on to describe the salvation of Alexis’ family and his reunion with his wife (Uitti 14). The ending of the poem is crucial in understanding the depth of the love Alexis and his wife shared, and it reflects the same patterns as the rest of the poem, hence I have chosen to examine an English version based on the Hildesheim manuscript for this article.²

**Spiritual Marriage in the Life of Saint Alexis:**

It is clear that Alexis wished to live a spiritual marriage with his wife rather than a physical one. Rather than consummating their marriage, Alexis convinced his wife to devote her love to God rather than to him. As he says on his wedding night, “Hearken to me, maiden! Consider Him as your bridegroom / Who redeemed us by his precious blood” (St. Alexis 66-7). From this, it is clear that Alexis wished his wife to have a marriage with God, and have that serve as the primary focus of her marriage with him. Alexis, as husband, guided his wife to Christ, which fulfilled his marital duty as head of household. Even more, since Alexis left his

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wife behind, the best way for the two to remain married would be through mutual dedication to Christ.

Another important element of *The Life of Saint Alexis* is the lack of correspondence after marriage and Alexis’ departure. During the Middle Ages, a spouse’s departure could be viewed as a form of divorce. Alexis’ wife would have been free to return home to her family after her husband left her, particularly as their marriage was not consummated. Continued communication is one way to indicate a continued interest in a marital relationship, but that interaction is missing for Alexis and his wife. We know, however, that Alexis did wish to remain married to his wife because he chose to gift his wife with his ring and sword, traditional symbols of courtship. This exchange was described:

When he has set forth his whole argument
Then he entrusts to her his sword-belt
And a ring; he has commended her to God.

(*St. Alexis* v.71-75)

These gifts represent their second marriage – a spiritual marriage – and through the gift of the ring and the gift of the sword can be seen as a symbolic consummation of their love (Uitti 48). As Uitti notes:

[Alexis] provides [the Bride] with a course of action. He...[sets] aside [their] previous worldly marriage, but only to suggest a new, fuller spiritual union in which her task is to remain perfectly faithful. (38)

Thus, Alexis and his wife commit to a spiritual marriage prior to Alexis’ departure.

Alexis spends his married life apart from his wife to avoid temptation and ensure chastity in their marriage. It is clear that Alexis saw it as impossible to live with his wife and stay on his
spiritual journey. It is possible that his wife, however, envisioned a life where she would have stayed by Alexis’ side, providing spiritual and emotional support. At the end of the text, she says:

If I had known that you were down there under the stairs,
Where you lay in your long infirmity,
The whole world could never have prevented me
From dwelling alongside you:
If I had been allowed, I would have taken care of you.

(Saint Alexis v.485-490)

These words again emphasize that Alexis’ wife considered herself married to Alexis, despite his physical absence from her life and the lack of contact between them after his departure.

It was almost necessary that Alexis be married in order for him to receive his sainthood. It is through the temptation provided by his wife that he earns his sainthood. As Uitti observes: “the refusal of one kind of potency engenders the other” (24). The bride is the “essential rhetorical key” to understanding and believing the life of Saint Alexis (Uitti 39). In addition to her place as faithful supporter, the bride is not given a name in the narrative, but rather is referred to as Alexis’s wife. This anonymity supports the notion that the wife is not a traditional figure, but instead is a part of her husband’s sainthood – relating to the wife through Alexis shows how being a part of his story and his life is her purpose (Uitti 40-41).

Alexis and his wife dedicated their lives on earth to God, knowing that they would be reunited in heaven. The text describes the couple’s final reunion:

Saint Alexis is in heaven without a doubt,
Together with God and the company of angels
With the maiden from whom he so estranged himself;

Now is has her with him, their souls are together:

I cannot tell you how great is their joy.

*(Saint Alexis v.606-10)*

By avoiding physical temptations on earth, they are able to enter into a spiritual marriage in heaven whose purity, innocence, dedication, and love transcend any found on earth.

**Abelard and Heloise**

In a second example, that of Abelard and Heloise, we see a perfect representation of spiritual marriage. Abelard and Heloise’s spiritual marriage is defined by their written correspondence – and hence evident communication – that continues throughout their lives even after they take separate monastic vows. The couple’s consistent spiritual support of one another enriches their bond not only with each other but with Christ. Spiritual marriage is not just a way for Abelard and Heloise to maintain their marriage after separation, but it brings them closer to God in a way that they could not have attained individually. As Irven Resnick explains in describing spiritual marriage:

> Within society, then, a spiritual marriage – which demanded sexual abstinence in wedlock – could bring individuals closer to the perfection sought by higher clergy, monks, and consecrated virgins, and closer to the marital model offered by Joseph and Mary. *(358)*

This perfectly depicts the marriage of Abelard and Heloise, as their chaste marriage allowed them to guide each other closer to God. Christopher Brooke goes on to explain how in the relationship of Abelard and Heloise we observe a paradox that becomes a unique marriage:
For the ascetic, the path to heaven lay through the cloister or the hermitage; in the mingling of the sexes lay an instant and inescapable threat of hell...There is a deep paradox here: the ascetic ideal and the ideal of marriage marched hand in hand, often in conflict, often in harmony. Of this paradox we have a unique witness in the letters of Heloise and Abelard. (93)

Abelard and Heloise embody the conflict of marriage, celibacy and religious orders that the Church debated during the twelfth century. The couple’s paradoxical relationship is in part what makes their marriage so noteworthy; the notion of spiritual marriage is fully defined by Abelard and Heloise’s example.

Manuscript history:

The relationship of Abelard and Heloise is known to us today in part because of the letters exchanged by the pair and also because of both implied and direct references to the couple in other works. Their written correspondence is based in textual traditions that date centuries back. The first reference to Abelard and Heloise’s correspondence is in Jean de Meun’s continuation of Roman de la Rose in 1280, which contained sixty-four lines from Abelard’s Historia Calamitatum. This reference indicates that Jean de Meun possessed a manuscript of the letters. According to Betty Radice, “none of the nine known manuscripts of the letters can be dated before the late thirteenth century at the earliest, 150 years after the letters were written” (Introduction xlvii). Since original manuscripts have not been discovered, there is some debate between historians about whether or not the letters are real – if they were written entirely by Abelard, or if they were created as literature in the thirteenth century (Brooke 99).
The argument that Abelard wrote all of the letters occurs because of the similarities in writing styles. Clanchy explains “[Both authors] made use of the same stock of quotations” (lxvii). There are indeed instances in which both Abelard and Heloise refer to the same pieces. Both authors use nearly the same quotation in reference to Heloise’s protestations on marriage, specifically her words: “The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word friend [amica], or, if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore” (Letter II 51). Abelard wrote of Heloise, “[Heloise] argued that the name of friend [amica] instead of wife would be dearer to her and more honourable for me” (Historia Calamitatum 16).

Another example of similarities in the Letters is shown in Abelard’s Historia Calamitatum – Abelard references St. Jerome’s Against Jovinian several times (12, 14, 16), and Heloise also refers to St. Jerome in Letter IV (71). Yet another instance is in Abelard’s Letter III, when he writes “But if the Lord shall deliver me into the hands of my enemies so that they overcome and kill me,” a quote which Heloise also uses in her Letter IV. There are several possible explanations for these similarities: it is vital to one’s argument to have accurate quotations (as when Abelard quotes Heloise), and when working to prove an argument it is best to move towards the same sources as the opponent to point out their weakness in only providing one side of the original author’s viewpoint.

Brooke, on the other hand, suggests that these similarities are the result of the fact that Heloise was Abelard’s student:

Heloise was one of [Abelard’s] most brilliant pupils, and enjoyed an intimacy with the master beyond that open to any of her colleagues: she was soaked in his ideas and his words and works. It is inherently probable that she wrote with the pen of Abelard. (99)
As stated, then, it is probable that the writing styles appear similar because they were similar, for Abelard was Heloise’s tutor. Moreover, the literary value of the letters comes from Heloise’s careful sense of argument. As Brooke argues:

When [Heloise] started to write to [Abelard], [she] had a unique opportunity for self-expression. She in particular seized the chance to develop an argument with her master [tutor]. The result might or might not be moving personal letters – it was bound to be work of the highest art known to the authors, work of literature. (99)

In essence, any fictional appearance could be attributed to the fact that the goal of the authors was not necessarily truth but literary mastery and an expression of love via written communication and logical argument. For this paper, it is to be assumed that the letters were in fact written by Peter Abelard and Heloise, and that the nine manuscripts available today accurately detail the original letters.

Background:

Now that the manuscript tradition of the letters of Abelard and Heloise has been established, it is helpful to be familiar with the couple’s unique story. Abelard began his acquaintance with Heloise after learning of her academic talents and physical beauty. As he explains:

A gift for letters is so rare in women that it added greatly to [Heloise’s] charm and had made her most renowned throughout the realm. I considered all the usual attractions for a lover and decided she was the one to bring to my bed. (Historia Calamitatum 10)

Initially Abelard became Heloise’s tutor, though they quickly became intimate. When Fulbert, Heloise’s uncle, learned of their affair he insisted that the couple marry; Abelard agreed to this,
provided that the marriage remain secret. Though Heloise protested the union, Abelard and Heloise married; afterwards, Fulbert, still unsatisfied, broke his vow of secrecy. When Abelard learned of Fulbert’s actions, he removed Heloise to a convent for her protection. Soon afterwards Abelard was castrated, presumably on Fulbert’s orders. After this, Abelard implored Heloise to join a convent before he subsequently joined a monastery himself (Historia Calamitatum 17).

Heloise began her religious life as a nun and prioress at Argenteuil. After Argenteuil was closed, Abelard built the Paraclete. Heloise moved and became abbess of the Paraclete, guiding the creation of six houses. This not only shows her success as abbess, but also shows both Abelard’s care and respect for Heloise (both building her a convent and installing her as abbess) and her nearly obligatory role in his life as she was living in a convent owned and guided by him; were she to need advice, he would be the one to whom she could turn (McNamer 12).

It is important to note that several years passed before communication began between Abelard and Heloise. After having been separated from Heloise for many years without contact, Abelard wrote his Historia Calamitatum as a biographical letter to a friend. Though this letter was not directed to her, Heloise received a copy of the letter and chose to respond, initiating the exchange of letters with Abelard. This choice is remarkable for several reasons. First, Heloise had a thorough understanding of religious protocol – beyond her theological study with Abelard, she lived in a convent until the age of 12 and was familiar with monastic life. Despite this familiarity, she still needed and requested religious guidance from Abelard. Secondly, this communication indicates Heloise’s desire to maintain a spiritual marriage with Abelard. As shown through their letters, the couple’s close relationship after their monastic separation illustrates an extremely strong example of spiritual marriage.
Spiritual Marriage in Abelard and Heloise:

The way in which Abelard and Heloise met and fell in love can shed light on their eventual move to a more spiritual relationship. At the onset, their motivations were primarily romantic. Heloise wrote of Abelard:

In you...there were two things especially, with which you could immediately win the heart of any woman – the gift of composing and the gift of sinning...they kept your name unceasingly on everyone’s lips...this made women sigh for love of you. (Letter II 53)

This courtly relationship eventually transformed into a more divine friendship, indicative of the couple’s shift from a traditional marriage to a spiritual one. Duby develops this notion:

_Cupiditas_, the desire to take and to enjoy, gradually gave way to _amicitia_, the gift of oneself, freely, generously, disinterestedly – it was this disinterestedness to which Heloise aspired – to that mutual reverence, that fidelity, that abnegation which, in the humanist renaissance of the twelfth century, men of culture, rereading Cicero and the Stoics, placed so high in their scale of values. (v.1 63-64)

_Amicitia_ implies equality, however, which is noticeably absent from marriage, as Duby explains “Although there is a gift of oneself, there is a lack of parity. The husband holds the place of Christ, and Christ is incontestably the master” (Duby v.3 94). Rather, _dilectio_ is the sentiment that should be aspired to in a spiritual marriage.

The type of sentiment Abelard and Heloise aimed for illustrates the couple’s desire to emulate Joseph and Mary’s marriage. Joseph and Mary’s marriage is an ideal example of a spiritual marriage, as the couple’s chastity and intense spiritual devotion led them to a richer,
more divine relationship, or *dilectio*. The question has oft been raised about the validity of a chaste marriage such as Joseph and Mary's, however. As George Duby explains:

Could Mary remain intact while performing her duties as wife? Yes, replied Hugh [of Saint-Victor], because the 'office', the prolific function of marriage, which required the union of bodies, is secondary, subordinate with regard to what is essential, that is the 'association', that *adhaesium* of which Adam became aware when, emerging from his torpor, he discovered the woman by his side. Such an attachment, analogous to that which bound the son to his parents, and which was loosened when he took a wife, could not be carnal; it was of the order of sentiment, it was born of a 'disposition of the heart', and it was strengthened by *dilectio*. This was the term used by St. Paul in the New Testament to characterize the union of Christ with His Church. Of such a union, which was spiritual, marriage was the 'sacrament', the sign. (v.3 94)

Christ and His Church were married in that the church followed the law of Christ just as the wife follows the word of her husband (Ephesians 5:22-23). Marriage is centered on attachment, which should aspire to the sentiment of *dilectio*, the type of attachment and relationship represented in the marriage of Christ and His Church.

As Resnick states "[Joseph and Mary's] chaste union either implied that they were not truly married or implied a definition of marriage that separated it from the carnal act itself" (355). This further emphasizes Duby's assertion that the point of marriage is not the carnal act, but rather the attachment and consent between partners. Continuing, Resnick writes that "Augustine added that the bond of matrimony remained permanent even when the couple had agreed to abstain forever from the carnal enjoyment of the marriage bed" (355). Chastity is an important element of this type of ideal spiritual marriage. Duby again notes "There is nothing in
common, in fact, between *dilectio* and *amor*, which is eaten up by lust,” (v.3 94). Abelard and Heloise follow the example of Joseph and Mary in order to pursue *dilectio* rather than *amor* and in doing so earn religious salvation rather than earthly love.

When her relationship with Abelard progressed to marriage, Heloise “was strongly opposed to the proposal, and argued hotly against it for two reasons: the risk involved and the disgrace to [Abelard]” (*Historia Calamitatum* 13). Heloise did not wish to marry Abelard, as she believed it would detract from his theological studies – she states her protests quite clearly:

I looked for no marriage-bond, no marriage portion, and it was not my own pleasures and wishes I sought to gratify, as you well know, but yours. The name of wife may seem more sacred or more binding, but sweeter for me will always be the word…if you will permit me, that of concubine or whore. (*Letter II* 51)

Marriage to Heloise would detract from Abelard’s studies and his work as a philosopher and theologian. Heloise’s opinion of marriage and Abelard’s place within such a vow are made obvious when she says:

What harmony can there be between pupils and nursemaids, desks and cradles, books or tablets and distaffs, pen or stylus and spindles? Who can concentrate on thoughts of Scripture of philosophy and be able to endure babies crying, nurses soothing them with lullabies, and all the noisy coming and going of men and women about the house?

(*Historia Calamitatum* 14)

Heloise did not believe that the roles of husband and of theologian could work together, since Abelard would need to dedicate himself to being her husband and rather than to philosophy and religious study.
Macrobius, an academician from the early fifth century, also makes a clear distinction between philosophy and the nursery through his discussion of fables:

Fables – the very word acknowledges their falsity – serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works…This whole category of fables that promise only to gratify the ear a philosophical treatise avoids and relegates to children’s nurseries. (84)

By stating particularly that this type of fable is strictly for the nurseries, Macrobius noticeably separates the nursery from the philosopher. Macrobius also wrote:

A decent and dignified conception of holy truths, with respectable events and characters, is presented beneath a modest veil of allegory. This is the only type of fiction approved by the philosopher who is prudent in handling sacred matters. (85)

Thus, a philosopher should be dealing with issues completely beyond that of the nursery – matters dealing with “holy truths” and “sacred matters,” the topics to which Abelard devoted his energies.

As Brooke stated, “Heloise put forward with telling eloquence…marriage was not for her, because it would ruin [Abelard’s] career” (91). Heloise was mirroring St. Paul’s concerns. St. Paul spoke of this same conflict:

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord’s affairs—how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world—how he can please his wife—and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord’s affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world—how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own

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3 Refer back to the introduction, where the conflict between theology and marriage is introduced.
good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the
Lord. (1 Corinthians 7:32-35)

Though it may appear otherwise, Heloise’s protests did not indicate a lack of affection. Brooke states:

It was not, needless to say, that Heloise wished to be rid of him; on the contrary, it was
the measure of her total surrender to his true interest that made her prefer to be his
strumpet to being his wife. (Brooke 106)

Even Abelard admitted that Heloise was a distraction from his theological study, explaining:

The more I was taken up with these pleasures [of loving Heloise], the less time I could
give to philosophy and the less attention I paid to my school. (Historia Calamitatum 11)

Spiritual marriage, as explained later, resolved this conflict of interest for the couple.

Despite her protests and arguments, Heloise married Abelard. Though they shared the
official bonds of marriage, Abelard had Heloise enter a convent while he in turn entered a
monastery. As noted earlier, in the Middle Ages, joining a convent was an acceptable form of
divorce. Divorce was granted under the following conditions: lack of consent, impotence, and
one’s partner becoming a monk or nun. Thus, one was free to remarry if one’s spouse entered
religious orders (Gies 57).

Although entering a convent/monastery could have symbolized divorce to some, for
Abelard and Heloise is it unlikely that this was the case. By insisting that Heloise join a convent
before him, Abelard ensured that Heloise would not be free to remarry which eliminating any
chance of divorce. Moreover, in view of Abelard’s emasculation it seems perfectly
understandable if he felt they must live apart, as he could no longer fulfill the sexual obligations
of marriage. Heloise was upset by the chronology of the events, explaining as follows:
When you hurried towards God I followed you, indeed, I went first to take the veil—perhaps you were thinking how Lot’s wife turned back when you made me put on the religious habit and take my vows before you gave yourself to God. Your lack of trust in me over this one thing, I confess, overwhelmed me with grief and shame. (Letter II 54)

In this statement, Heloise showed not only her dedication and love for Abelard, but how his doubt hurt her. At the same time, Abelard’s doubt showed that he was concerned about the possibility of Heloise remarrying. Abelard clearly did not desire that, thus indicating a resolve to remain married.

Another element to consider is that during the Middle Ages, women were not free to abandon contact with men due their financial dependence. A wife’s livelihood depended on her husband’s cooperation. Had Abelard entered a monastery before Heloise was ensconced in a convent, he would have been deserting her. Abelard’s insistence on Heloise taking orders first could be seen as his way of providing for her—indicating his care—while being able to pursue his religious interests (Schine Gold 31).

Not only did Heloise’s taking monastic vows first reaffirm the couple’s intent to remain married after their separation, but their exchange of letters made up for any lack of physical contact. It was extremely uncommon for nuns to have contact with the outside world. C.H. Lawrence writes that many monastic reformers “regarded contact with women as a hazard to their souls to be avoided at all costs” (178). During the twelfth century, women were thought to be a dangerous temptation. Penny Schine Gold describes this sentiment “Women’s sexuality was dangerous to the woman herself, and so necessitated her strict enclosure” (113). This provides a partial explanation for why Abelard did not contact Heloise directly after their cloistering. Nuns were “enclosed and dead to the world so that they could be entirely occupied
with God” (Bolton 82). If Abelard were to contact Heloise to inquire as to her well-being (or vice versa), this could very well be regarded as sinful.

It would have been extremely difficult for Abelard to find a suitable reason to contact Heloise. By writing a letter to a friend that he knew would be circulated, he was able to reach her. Heloise, however, could contact Abelard provided she seeks out religious guidance. The Rule of St. Benedict had no provisions for women, and so it made sense for an abbess to request guidance. Brook writes:

The essence of the matter is that she wanted him to make up for the deficiencies of the Rule of St Benedict, which was written for men and took no account of women’s special needs in clothing and so forth, nor of their physical weakness. (116)

As a mere nun, Heloise was unable to have much outside contact. As abbess, however, she was able to request assistance to help her in the management of the Paraclete. The Rule of St. Benedict had no provisions for women, so it was very feasible for Heloise to initiate contact for these purposes.

Thus, Heloise contacted Abelard. Her intent was triple: to gain religious knowledge from an esteemed monk and theologian, and to regain contact with her husband and offer him consolation. In all three cases, her intent was pure. Requesting guidance on rules for nuns is a request for guidance on how to serve God, and thus could in no way be construed as having a sinful intent. For the latter reason, the Bible states that husbands and wives should not deprive one another of company (1 Corinthians 7:5). Marriage was “viewed by churchmen as a sacrament and an act of religious significance” (Resnick 355). Since Abelard and Heloise were married, they were committed and had made promises to one another that needed to be kept even

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4 The Rule of Saint Benedict was the primary set of guidelines for monastic life in the Middle Ages. The Rule outlined strict structure for monks, but had few to none guidelines for nuns and abbeys.
if carnal relations were discontinued. Heloise's decision to contact with her husband is not sinful but well within the rights of a married woman, even one who has dedicated her life to Christ.

As discussed earlier, there is more to marriage than the carnal, there is attachment and duty. For Abelard and Heloise, the only remaining way to carry out these duties was through spiritual communication and guidance. Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* showed just how much Abelard had need of Heloise. Heloise used her correspondence with Abelard to convince him that she still needed him, both spiritually and emotionally, and to offer Abelard spiritual comfort. When a wife is left alone, she loses her role of provider of nourishment and advice. A wife's duties include supporting her husband in all his actions and providing physical, spiritual, and emotional nourishment. When a wife has no opportunity to fulfill these duties, she is bereft (Schine Gold 31). Similarly, Abelard was lost without Heloise in his life to fulfill these roles.

Heloise expressed her feeling of bereftness and entreated Abelard to provide for her, writing: "You alone have the power to make me sad, to bring me happiness or comfort; you alone have so great a debt to repay me," *(Letter II* 51). Abelard had the ability to influence Heloise's emotions and her actions. Heloise made sure to inform him not only of her emotional need but also of the duty he has as her husband to communicate with her in some fashion. After his castration, Abelard did not recognize that Heloise still needed him as husband and guide, a misunderstanding he explained as follows:

If since our conversion from the world to God I have not yet written you any word of comfort or advice, it must not be attributed to indifference on my part but to your own good sense, in which I have always had such confidence that I did not think anything was needed. *(Letter III* 56)

Upon recognizing that Heloise did have need of him, Abelard provided the following comfort:
If, on the other hand, in your humility you think differently, and you feel that you have need of my instruction and writings in matters pertaining to God, write to me what you want, so that I may answer as God permits me. (Letter III 56)

Accordingly, Heloise consulted Abelard on her accountability to God as a way to continue her relationship with her spouse. Abelard “awoke to his duties as a husband…to be the intermediary, as a husband ought, between her and the divine power” (Duby v.1 57-58). The couple’s correspondence renewed their marriage, giving both Abelard and Heloise the spiritual comfort and guidance that they needed.

Abelard’s role as Heloise’s guide to Christ is a perfect example of how the Bible portrays married life. Referring back to Ephesians 5:22-24, St. Paul states:

Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the savior. As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

The husband is shown as the guiding figure in the married couple’s relationship. Abelard thus exercises his husbandly duties through the course of their letters: the act of communication, so expressive and passionate, was a greater act of love than any physical action.

After their separation, there was no initial power construct between Abelard and Heloise. By initiating contact, Heloise recreated the marriage structure, allowing Abelard to act as master and provide guidance to her, his wife. Heloise’s role here is important – she was responsible for reviving their marriage and finding a way to maintain it in a chaste manner. According to Walters, “[women’s] duty was to inculcate wisdom and virtue in their husbands and sons and inspire them to defend the Church” (66). Though particularly in reference to the wives and

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5 Refer back to the introduction and the case study of Saint Alexis for further discussion on Christ and His Church.
mothers of men involved in the Crusades, Walter’s observation mirrors Heloise’s role here as inspiration for Abelard’s dedication to the Church.

Heloise demonstrates that it was possible to hold fast to the traditional dynamic of marriage and to one another not in spite of their commitment to God but rather in a manner that strengthened their commitments to God. Heloise’s dedication to her husband and her submission to his will allowed Abelard to serve God by teaching and bringing her to Christ while simultaneously helping her to serve God. Duby explains:

In the manner of a saint’s life, [the text of their story] described their ‘passion’: that is what each of them had suffered, the trials that had been inflicted on them, until they had at last been able to triumph and accede, ultimately, to a sort of sanctity. (v.1 55)

Abelard served as master, lord, and husband to Heloise (Heloise, Letter II 47), and their relationship was a spiritual one. While Abelard did not necessarily wish to surrender Heloise and free her of the bonds of marriage, he wanted to dedicate himself to philosophical and theological studies, and so he fulfilled his marital duties by serving as Heloise’s guide to Christ.

Although Heloise was perfectly capable of running her Abbey on her own, as was proven when she became Abbess of the Paraclete (Brooke 96), it was her duty to serve God through Abelard since she was his wife. As Vera Petch Morton writes:

[Heloise’s] questions and the reasons for asking them show her thorough understanding of her position and her spiritual and administrative duties in her convent. They also suggest that what she longed for, and felt entitled to, was some personal support and comfort from the former lover and husband at whose wish she had originally entered the religious life. (51)
Abelard and Heloise’s communication shows the couples’ intent to remain married, fulfilling their marital duties while simultaneously devoting their lives to God through monastic orders. These separate roles do not conflict, rather each role enhances the other, demonstrating an ideal spiritual marriage – one in which the marriage enables a higher level of spiritual dedication on earth, allowing the couple to enjoy the glory of afterlife together with perfect love. As Brooke notes:

It was precisely because [Abelard and Heloise] were married that God revealed to them the true path to the holier life they were now leading – he had made their marriage an instrument of their salvation. (115)

While on earth, Heloise worked to dedicate herself to Abelard and through him to God – in this way, she could keep their marriage alive while staying true to Abelard’s original goals as a theologian.

**Comparisons of the Life of Saint Alexis and Abelard and Heloise:**

While it is impossible to say with certainty whether Abelard and Heloise know the Old French Saint’s life, the idealized version of marriage presented within the Life of Saint Alexis informs their own view of marriage, as shown in the striking resemblances between the stories and relationships of these two couples. Heloise’s spiritual perspective on marriage was similar to the perspective of Alexis’s wife, as Abelard’s actions in some ways imitate the actions of Alexis. Alexis did not understand how to be married without dedicating himself to his wife, while Alexis’s wife, on the other hand, understood that by simultaneously dedicating their lives to Christ they could be maintain their marriage spiritually – they could share the burdens of chastity and charity together and live in a way that would please God.
Both Alexis’s wife and Heloise understood that carnal relations are not the only aspect of a marriage, and that it is possible to share and learn from one another spiritually to maintain marriage. Alexis abandoned his wife to serve the Lord, and upon discovering his death his wife stated emphatically “I would have taken care of you” (Alexis v. 99). As Thorington states “She would have been his handmaiden in act as well as in thought, a Scholastica to his Benedict, sharing his poverty and his life of hardship just as she shared his vow of chastity and his dedication to God” (38). Scholastica and Benedict are an excellent example of a spiritual relationship; the pair was brother and sister, but consulted and reacted with one another in a more intense fashion, both eventually achieving sainthood. Morrissey elaborates:

There is a harmony, deeper than the ties of blood, which binds brother and sister to one another. [Saint Gregory the Great in his Dialogues] acknowledges as much when, after mentioning that Benedict had his sister buried in the tomb he had prepared for himself, he comments ‘quo facto cintigit ut quorum mens uno semper in Deo fuerat, eorum quoque corpora nec sepultura separat,’ ‘The bodies of these two were now to share a common resting place, just as in life their souls had always been one in God.’ (252)

Similarly, Alexis and his wife as well as Abelard and Heloise’s souls were “one in God.” For Abelard and Heloise, this merging of souls was recognized even on earth, as the two were buried together in one common grave (Radice Introduction xlvii).

Alexis’s bride wished to spend her earthly marriage with Alexis, a possibility she saw as feasible if the marriage was carried out in a spiritual, chaste fashion. Heloise, too, thought it feasible to maintain a marriage while on earth, only she carried out the marriage by initiating religious communication with Abelard. Both the wife of St. Alexis and Heloise were eager and prepared to support their husbands in their dedication – this was their understanding of what
marriage could be, in a spiritual and nonphysical sense. A couple could live apart or together while serving God and their love for one another could be manifested primarily through mutual devotion. Both couples displayed clear intent to remain married rather than divorced, Saint Alexis and his wife through a symbolic gift, and Abelard and Heloise through their extensive letters.

A strong element of spiritual marriage is temptation, an element that appears in both *The Life of Saint Alexis* and in the letters of Abelard and Heloise. According to Uitti:

Many saints are chaste throughout their lifetime…the saint’s renunciation of the world and his or her consequent dedication to divine love are often dramatically symbolized by a rejection of carnal love: the saint refuses to marry or, if already married, does not live conjugally with his or her spouse…the saint thus sets himself apart from other men. (22-23)

This denial of carnal relations is necessary to the “sainthood” or spiritual health of the male partner – without it, there would be far less for the husband to resist. This lure is not merely one of physical attraction and denial, but is one of love. As discussed earlier, the husband is tempted to dedicate himself to making his wife happy and loving her instead of dedicating his life entirely to making God happy and serving Him.⁶ The rejection of physical love and conventional marriage practices, such as living together, introduces a love beyond what was previously conceived of by humans; “[Alexis’] exchange of earthly for divine love ‘humanizes’ divine love as much as it ‘deifies’ the love human beings are capable of” (Uitti 23). Divine love was shared by a couple, replacing the typical marital interactions of intercourse, children, courtly flirtation, and shared households.

⁶ The conflicts between theology and marriage are discussed in the introduction and earlier in the Case Study of Abelard and Heloise.
Unlike Saint Alexis, Abelard did not resist Heloise’s physical charms by choice. Castration rather settled the physical question for him. Nevertheless, he did resist Heloise in the sense that he separated himself from her to resist the temptation of dedicating himself to her instead of to his academic pursuits. Abelard and Heloise took religious orders – Abelard thus did resist the temptation of an earthly love, preferring instead the divine love of God. This separation enabled the two to transform their marriage into a spiritual one where divine love (love of God above all else) took precedence.

Both Saint Alexis’ marriage and Abelard and Heloise’s marriage were spiritual marriages. The elements of religious devotion in or out of the veil, temptation, and intent shown through a symbolic gift or communication were present in both situations, making both couples prime embodiments of spiritual marriage.

**Eliduc**

**Background:**

The last example of spiritual marriage provided in this article is that shown in Marie de France’s *Eliduc*. Again, it would be useful to begin with a brief summary. In Eliduc, a man is banished from his kingdom for an imagined offense, and he leaves his wife behind (promising to return and be faithful) to seek a life in surrounding kingdoms. In his adventure, Eliduc takes up residence with a king that he helps to defend, gaining a respectable position within the king’s household. Guilliadun, the king’s daughter, and Eliduc fall in love. The situation becomes complicated when the king of Eliduc’s own country requests that Eliduc return to his homeland. Loyalty leads Eliduc to go back to his king and his wife.
After promising to come back to Guilliadun, Eliduc returns to his wife but it is obvious he is not happy. He goes back for Guilliadun who falls into a faint upon learning of his marriage. Eliduc, believing her dead, places her body in a chapel. Seeing that he is terribly unhappy, Eliduc’s wife follows him one day as he visits his dead love. When she sees the beautiful girl, she revives her with a magic herb. Seeing the love between Eliduc and Guilliadun, the wife decides to take holy orders in order to free Eliduc so he may marry his love (*Eliduc* v.1125-1130). At his wife’s request, Eliduc founds a convent which the wife then enters. Once she has done so, he marries Guilliadun. Later, both Eliduc and his second wife enter monastic orders as well.

**Spiritual Marriage in *Eliduc***:

I have examined two couples that represent spiritual marriages; *Eliduc* presents a third illustration, one that is more purely literary. This is in contrast to the literary-historic representation found in *Saint Alexis* and the real-life example provided by Abelard and Heloise. *Eliduc* is a significant example because by the very fact that Marie de France evokes the topos of spiritual marriage, this work testifies to the prevalence of such practice in the twelfth century. There are two unique situations in *Eliduc*, both of which demonstrate aspects of spiritual marriage. Eliduc’s marriage to his first wife does have some characteristics of spiritual marriage, most notably her selfless act of entering a convent, in order to permit her husband to remarry. It is this act which brings all three protagonists closer to God. Guildelüec, Eliduc’s first wife, clearly indicates her desire to dissolve her marriage with Eliduc:

   When the lady saw how they looked,
   She addressed her lord;
She sought and asked his leave
To depart from him,
She wanted to be a nun, to serve God.
Let him give her a piece of his land
To establish an abbey;
Then let him take Guilliadun, whom he so loved,
For it is neither good nor fitting/to keep two wives,
Nor should the law consent to it.
(Eliduc v.1120-1130)

Guidelüec’s actions not only resulted in the legal end of her marriage to Eliduc, but also
facilitated Eliduc’s second marriage. She thus plays a key role in the spiritual marriage of Eliduc
and Guilliadun, as her noble actions inspire her ex-husband and his new wife to a more
ciceronian friendship and ultimately to a life devoted to God.

Eliduc’s second marriage to Guilliadun is a clear example of spiritual marriage. The
couple had what Marie de France described as “perfect love between them,” which approaches
dilectio. This sentiment overwhelmed the physical aspects of their marriage and led them into a
spiritual marriage, “they gave great alms and did great good, / so much so that they turned to
God” (Eliduc v.1151). The couple’s dedication to good works combines with the example of
Eliduc’s first wife to inspire the couple to religious devotion. The couple rejoin Eliduc’s first
wife as they both take monastic vows:

   With his first wife
   He placed the wife whom he so cherished.
   She received her as her sister

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7 Cf... Abelard and Heloise for further discussion on dilectio, amor, and amicitia. (p.17)
And gave her great honor;
She encouraged her to serve God
And instructed her in her order.
They prayed to God for their friend-
That He would have mercy on him-
And he prayed for them.
He sent messages to them
To find out how they were,
How each was doing.
Each one took great pains
To love God in good faith
And they made a very good end,
Thanks to God, the divine truth.

(Eliduc v.1165-1180)

By both entering religious life, the couple fulfills the first element of spiritual marriage. As the text indicates, Eliduc sends messages to both his ex-wife and his second wife, continuing communication once they are in their respective monasteries.

The notion of spiritual marriage is best represented in the relationship between Eliduc and his second wife. Eliduc and his second wife developed a spiritual marriage by choosing to dedicate their earthly lives to God after having chosen to marry. This is the direct result of his first wife’s selflessness, which then leads to a holier state for all three. Although Abelard and Heloise and Alexis’ marriages were more straightforward examples, Eliduc provides yet another model showing that spiritual marriage was an accepted practice during the twelfth century.
Comparisons of the *Life of Saint Alexis, Abelard and Heloise, and Eliduc*:

The notion of spiritual marriage as seen in *Eliduc*, a very unique example, shares many similarities with the notion expressed in Abelard and Heloise. The most apparent comparison of the two couples is that “[Eliduc and Guilliadun] end their lives sharing a religious vocation, communicating by letter and praying for each other, rather like Abelard and Heloise” (Hanning and Ferrante 232). The text of Eliduc does not specify the triad’s communication beyond “messages,” but the comparison can still be made. Abelard and Heloise’s marriage was carried out through their communication, and in a similar manner, Eliduc communicated with his first and second wives in order to maintain relationships with them.

Another similarity between the two couples is in their pursuit and arguable achievement of *dilectio*, a sentiment representative of the love Christ experiences for His Church and a sentiment indicative of spiritual marriage. Eliduc and Guilliadun’s “perfect love” emphasizes the couple’s *amicitia*. As previously discussed, however, husbands were meant to hold the role of Master and guide, similar to Christ and the Church. These roles resulted in an unequal distribution of power, as the wife was not equal to her husband as was the case with *amicitia* and in true Ciceronian friendships. The lack of parity implied simply by the nature of marriage itself alters the sentiment into *dilectio*.

Additionally, both Heloise and Eliduc’s wife acted selflessly, putting the good of their husbands before themselves in pursuit of love, happiness, and faith. Just like Heloise, Guilliadun takes monastic orders in an abbey founded by her husband. As Leslie Brook notes:

Eliduc communicates with his former wives, and they give each other mutual encouragement and comfort. Both wives pray for Eliduc, and he for them; Abelard
fervently requested Heloise’s prayers for him at the end of his first letter to her, and sends one for her and her nuns to say for him in his next letter. (Brook 15)

Eliduc is a manifestation of the notion of spiritual marriage, similar to Abelard and Heloise and the Life of Saint Alexis. Even though there are many similarities between the three examples, Eliduc is not a model that defines the notion, rather it confirms that spiritual marriage was a subject at the forefront of the Church’s debates regarding marriage. The defining characteristics as represented in the Life of Saint Alexis and Abelard and Heloise are not all present in Eliduc’s illustration, but the interpretation of spiritual marriage provided in Eliduc demonstrates the pervasiveness of this topic in twelfth century literature in France.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the Life of Saint Alexis, the Letters of Abelard and Heloise, and Marie de France’s Eliduc all illustrate the notion of spiritual marriage. The Life of Saint Alexis presents one example of spiritual marriage, unique to the other works examined in that the couple chose chastity, did not undertake monastic vows, and did not maintain communication after separation. Even so, the couple’s clear intent to remain married was displayed through the symbolic gifting of sword and belt and Alexis’ wife’s words at the end of the text. More so, the element of temptation was clearly present, and inarguably so was the element of religious devotion even outside of monastic vows.

Abelard and Heloise present the strongest example of spiritual marriage, primarily because of the obvious exchange of guidance through their letters that enabled the couple to attain a higher level of spiritual growth than they could have attained individually. Alexis
inspired his wife to higher religious dedication than she had attained prior to marriage, but Abelard truly serves as a guide to his wife, her intercessor and the Christ to her Church.

_Eliduc_ is the final representation of spiritual marriage that is discussed. The defining elements are present, as are distinct similarities to the story of Abelard and Heloise. Together, these elements confirm that the notion of spiritual marriage was a common topos during the twelfth century.

Spiritual marriage is a unique embodiment of a particular type of relationship popular within twelfth century France. By dedicating their lives on earth to God through pursuit of religious truth, most frequently typified by the undertaking of monastic vows, a couple could live a chaste marriage. Spiritual marriage is epitomized by the sentiment _dilectio_, indicative of a couple’s mimicry of the marital roles provided by Saint Paul (Ephesians) where he compares marriage to Christ and His Church. As we have seen, three important elements help define spiritual marriage, including intent to remain married as displayed through symbolic gifts or continued communication, the existence of temptation that is then denied in pursuit of chastity, and the aforementioned religious devotion as displayed through monastic vows or similar spiritual pursuits. The exploration of the notion of spiritual marriage is important, as it helps to enrich not only our cultural perceptions of the twelfth century, but also our understanding of twelfth century literature.
Works Cited


