The Binary Construct of Motherhood in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and Margery Kempe's *Book*: Two Contemporary East Anglian accounts of maternity, spirituality, and womanhood

Elisabeth Melattukunnel

Department of English, McGill University, Montreal

May 2020

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts

Abstract

Julian of Norwich's *Revelations of Divine Love* and Margery Kempe's *The Book of Margery Kempe* are two significant accounts of women's writing in late medieval East Anglia. Discussions on gender and spirituality, especially in regard to the women's depiction of motherhood, dominate the research on the works of these two contemporary mystics. Scholarship on maternity in the women's writings is preoccupied with spiritual forms of motherhood. Julian's *Revelations*, for instance, has received much attention for the depiction of God as mother, while the mystic's depiction of physical motherhood and its significance for the understanding of her theology has been widely ignored. Margery's work, too, has primarily been read as an account of the author's transformation from worldly to spiritual person, which is characterized by the abandonment of worldly roles. A closer look at the women's considerations of maternity reveals, however, that spiritual and worldly forms of motherhood co-exist in the works. Julian contrasts the maternity of God to biological motherhood and relates both to the workings of creation and the divine plan; in Margery's *Book* the concept is used to underline the author's role as biological and spiritual mother. The mystics' binary understanding of maternity reflects contemporary attitudes towards the concept, as research on medieval understandings of motherhood and womanhood indicates that maternity was applied to spiritual and mundane realms alike. Clarissa Atkinson, for instance, claims that worldly and spiritual forms of maternity were considered to be mutually exclusive in the Middle Ages—mainly because they derived from the comparison of two biblical maternal figures, Eve and Mary, who served as paradigms of biological and spiritual motherhood. According to Atkinson and others, biological motherhood and womanhood were closely connected to Eve, corrupted sexuality, sin, and death in medieval understanding. While Julian and Margery adapt prevalent attitudes towards women and biological motherhood—they associate the female body with the world and corporeality and favor spiritual forms of maternity— the women also refrain from strictly dividing spiritual and

worldly forms of motherhood. In the *Revelations* and the *Book,* both forms of maternity are not exclusive, suggesting that traditional categorizations of womanhood and motherhood must be considered with caution. An analysis of the deployment of maternity in Julian's and Margery's works, in other words, gives insight into the authors' understanding of different forms of maternity in particular and illuminates their considerations of womanhood in general.

Résumé

Revelations of Divine Love de Julian de Norwich et *The Book of Margery Kempe* de Margery Kempe sont deux œuvres importantes pour les études des écritures des femmes anglicanes de la fin du Moyen Âge. Les discussions sur le genre et la spiritualité, en particulier en ce qui concerne la représentation de la maternité, dominent la recherche sur les œuvres de ces deux mystiques contemporaines. Cependant, l'érudition sur la maternité dans les œuvres s'intéresse aux formes spirituelles de la maternité. *Revelations* de Julian, par exemple, a reçu beaucoup d'attention pour la description de Dieu comme mère tandis que les attitudes du mystique envers la maternité biologique et son importance pour la compréhension de sa théologie ont été largement ignorées. L'œuvre de Margery également était principalement lu comme un compte rendu de la transformation d'une femme mondaine à une femme spirituelle, caractérisée par l'abandon des rôles mondains. Une analyse plus approfondie des considérations de la maternité de ces femmes révèle cependant que les formes spirituelles et mondaines de la maternité coexistent dans les œuvres. Julian compare la maternité de Dieu à la maternité biologique et relie les deux à la création et au plan divin ; dans le *Book* de Margery le concept est utilisé pour souligner le rôle d'auteur comme mère biologique et spirituelle. La construction binaire de la maternité, manifestée dans les écritures de ces femmes, reflète les attitudes contemporaines du concept. La recherche sur la compréhension médiévale de la maternité et de la féminité indique que la maternité était appliquée aux domaines spirituels et mondains. Clarissa Atkinson, par exemple, affirme que les formes de maternité matérielles et spirituelles étaient considérées comme mutuellement exclusives au Moyen Âge— principalement parce qu'ils découlent de la comparaison de deux figures maternelles bibliques, Ève et Marie, qui ont servi de paradigmes biologiques et spirituels de la maternité. Selon Atkinson et d'autres, la maternité biologique et la féminité en général étaient étroitement liées à Ève, à la sexualité corrompue, au péché, et à la mort au Moyen Âge. Bien que Julian et Margery adaptent les attitudes courantes envers les femmes et la maternité

physiologique—elles associent le corps féminin au monde et à la corporéité et favorisent les formes spirituelles de la maternité— les femmes s'abstiennent également de séparer strictement les formes spirituelle et mondaine de la maternité. Dans *Revelations* et le *Book*, les deux formes de la maternité ne sont pas exclusives, suggérant que les catégorisations traditionnelles de la féminité et de la maternité doivent être prises en considération avec prudence. L'usage de la maternité dans les œuvres de Julian et Margery donne un aperçu sur les attitudes individuelles de deux femmes médiévales à l'égard des différentes formes de la maternité principalement et éclaire leurs considérations sur la féminité en général.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank God, and my parents, Mary and Sebastian. You were there when nobody else was. I am sure they will roll their eyes while reading this, but I would also like to thank my siblings, Sharon and Sherin. Even though I am the oldest sibling, you both were my anchor more than I was yours—not only through grad school but through life in general. Thank you for the late- night calls, the tagged memes, and the ugly faces you sent during these two years. I love all four of you from the bottom of my heart and I am deeply grateful for having been blessed with a family as incredible as ours. In this respect, I would also like to mention my aunt Molly. I am convinced that your prayers and encouragement have carried me through my high school years, my undergraduate studies, and also through these two years at McGill.

My utmost gratitude also goes out to the person who had most part in the creation of the present work besides me: Prof. Michael Van Dussen. You were the first person I spoke to at McGill, and the person who supported me most during the past two years in grad school. From the first e-mail I got in Switzerland, stating that my application was accepted, to the most recent e-mail asking about the latest draft of my MA thesis, you were my place to go to for any kind of academic advice. I thank you especially for going through eight drafts of my thesis proposal and at least three versions of every section of my thesis. Without your comments and input this work would not be what it is today. I would also like to thank you for your enduring patience, the innumerable deadline extensions, and the immeasurable understanding you showed during the writing process. I was trying to get drafts written through power outages, computer disfunctions, and, well, a global pandemic. While my professionalism was fluctuating with my immediate circumstances, yours was absolutely impeccable. I truly aspire to have your kind of dedication, passion, and time management skills one day. I think it is quite clear by now, but in case it is not: Prof. Van Dussen, you

were an amazing supervisor, and are an impressive scholar. I am truly grateful for having had the privilege to learn from and work with you these past two years.

I would also like to mention Prof. Elisabeth Dutton, who first introduced me to the works of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Your lectures were outstanding, and it is because of you I decided to become a Medievalist. Thank you for passing on your passion for Medieval Literature and repeatedly reminding me that a genuine interest for what you do is sometimes reason enough to try. Thank you for motivating me to take chances, go places, and encouraging me to step out of my comfort zone. I cannot believe it has been two years since I asked you shyly if you thought I was good enough to apply to graduate school at a Canadian university. All you said was: “I think you shouldn’t ask yourself what others expect of you, or if you are good enough. Instead, just try to do your best, and make the best of the opportunities you get.” I tried, sometimes more, sometimes less, and I can genuinely say that I am grateful for having taken the chance. I cannot believe I made it. Thank you for holding my hand through undergrad, supervising me during the writing process of my BA- Thesis, and supporting me through the grad school application process. If it was not for you, I might have never applied to McGill— and would have missed two of my best years, academically and otherwise.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

> "Botte for I am a woman shulde I therfore leve that I shulde nought telle yowe the goodenes of God, since that I sawe in that same time that it is his wille that it be knawen?"[1]

This famous question, Julian of Norwich asks in her work *Revelations of Divine Love,* which is— alongside *The Book of Margery Kempe*— an integral part of scholarly discourse on women's writing in late medieval East Anglia.[2] Considerations of gender and spirituality characterize much of the scholarship on Julian of Norwich's and Margery Kempe's lives and writings, in which the mystics document their spiritual and worldly experiences and give insight into their mystical visions, personal thoughts, and individual struggles.[3] Maternity, especially, has been recognized as a central theme in both works;[4] not least, because the structure of the writings evinces the centrality of the concept and the theme is also closely tied to the main intention of the writings, that is, to give a testimony to God's benevolence.[5]

---

[1] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love,* ed. Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 75.

[2] See for instance Diane Watt, *Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), Joane Ferrante, *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), and David Wallace and Carolyn Dinshaw, *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[3] See for instance Rebecca Krug, *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017) and Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991) for a discussion on Margery Kempe; and Liz Herbert McAvoy, *A Companion to Julian of Norwich* (Cambridge England: D.S. Brewer, 2008) and Joan Nuth, *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Crossroad, 1991) for a discussion on Julian of Norwich.

[4] See for instance Jennifer Heimmel, "*God Is Our Mother:" Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999) and Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 64–95, for a discussion on Julian's depiction of God as mother and Tara Williams, Sidonie Smith and Wendy Harding, for a discussion on Margery's depiction of maternity. See Tara Williams, "Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe," Modern Philology* 107 (2010): 528-55; Sidonie Smith, *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); and Wendy Harding, "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse on Motherhood: A Reading of Two Fifteenth- Century Texts," *Women's Studies* 2 (1992): 197- 209.

[5] For a detailed analysis of the structure in Julian's work see for instance the work of Diane Krantz, who convincingly explains that the maternity of Christ is thematically at "the heart of the text". See *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich* (New York: Peter Lang, 1997), 62. See also Williams, "Manipulating Mary," for a discussion on the importance of motherhood in Margery's work.

In the *Revelations*, the concept of motherhood is used to illuminate God's love for humanity and to explain the significance of Christ's Passion for the salvation of mankind. The Passion is described in association with childbirth and labor, and Christ's body is clearly connected to that of the woman. In the *Book*, Margery uses the concept of motherhood to illuminate her transformation from a worldly to a spiritual person, which serves as an exemplum for God's ability to turn even the most sinful of creatures into a virtuous disciple.[6] While both women use the concept of maternity in different contexts, their depictions of motherhood mostly correspond. In both works maternity is not solely understood in its worldly sense, but also used in a spiritual context.

This binary understanding of maternity certainly reflects contemporary attitudes towards motherhood. Clarissa Atkinson explains that religion, gender, and maternity were closely connected in medieval understanding. Because "Christianity is a religion of embodiment" that centers around the idea of an incarnate God sacrificing his body for the salvation of humankind, corporeality was often considered in connection to death and suffering.[7] These negative associations with physicality also affected medieval attitudes towards maternity, since, as Atkinson explains, "physicality necessarily lies at the heart of constructions of motherhood in any society."[8] Corporeality and attitudes towards motherhood were also central to medieval gender construction, as womanhood was often closely tied to motherhood. The medieval image of women relied to a large extent on two biblical maternal figures: Eve and Mary.[9] While Eve became the paradigm for worldly womanhood, and was

---

[6] In the preface to the *Book*, Margery reveals that the work is meant to teach through example, and intended to encourage the conversion of sinners: "And therfor […] this lytyl tretys schal tretyn sumdeel in parcel of hys wonderful werkys, how mercyfully, how benyngly, and how charytefully he meved and stered a synful caytyf unto hys love" Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe,* ed. Barry Windeatt (New York: Longman Annotated Texts, 2000), 41.
[7] Clarissa Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 5.
[8] Ibid.
[9] See for instance Harding, "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse," 197- 209, and Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 72.

closely connected to sin and death, Mary represented spiritual motherhood, and was associated with chastity, virtue, and everlasting life.

Further, womanhood was divided into categories based on sexual status. The body of a sexual woman, even if she was married, was connected to lust, the original Fall, and sin. In a society that proclaimed virginity to be the ideal state for a woman, physical motherhood was a visible sign of 'defilement' through performed sexual union, and sexual abstinence and a religious way of life were considered to be the ideal. The stark contrast between the main representatives of womanhood, Eve and Mary, which contributed to a binary construction of motherhood, inevitably separated worldly and spiritual realms. Physical motherhood and spiritual motherhood, in other words, were considered to be mutually exclusive.[10]

Most works explaining the standing of woman in medieval society define womanhood as a concept that was strictly separated into the spiritual and secular. Even groupings of women which could be positioned in-between these categorizations, like secular religious orders, were characterized by the abandonment of sexuality and mundane obligations.[11] Physical mothers with their worldly responsibilities and relationships were usually not recognized officially as spiritual women.[12] While it is certainly true that the female was defined by sexual status, and the religious and secular life were generally considered to be incompatible, the *Book* and *Revelations* evince that individual women did not draw a strict

---

[10] However, physical mothers could claim the role of a spiritual mother and holy woman to some extent if they abandoned their worldly relations and obligations. Bridget of Sweden, for instance, only stepped into the role of the spiritual mother after the death of her husband, and after having lived as a recluse in a monastery for an extended period of time. See Claire Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001), 1-19. Furthermore, so called "Third Orders" allowed laypeople to live a religious life in alignment with norms of religious orders outside of a monastery. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* (1912), *s.v.* "Tertiaries."

[11] See for instance Elizabeth Makowski, *A Pernicious Sort of Woman: Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012).

[12] It is to be noted, however, that queens also occupied an ambiguous standing in society that combined both forms of maternity to some extent. Since "[i]ntercession and childbearing were the two functions of her office upon which her coronation *ordo* dwelled most intently," the queen's role as mother was rarely considered equal to that of secular women. Her role as mother was closely associated with that of Mother Mary. John Carmi Parsons explains: "The Marian image, at once celebrating and confining, allowed society to see the king's wife as a humble intercessor even as she was exalted as his anointed consort, and to imagine her as chaste, if not virginal, even as she was consecrated and exhorted to bear his children." See John Carmi Parsons, "The Pregnant Queen as Counselor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland, 1996), 42-43.

boundary between spiritual and secular callings. While both Julian and Margery distinguish between spiritual forms of maternity and biological motherhood, and adapt prevalent negative associations with the female body, in most parts of the works, both forms of maternity co-exist.

Spiritual forms of maternity, whether divine or spiritual, are given special importance in Julian's and Margery's work. However, the women also address physical maternity frequently in their writings and connect it to the created world and God simultaneously. As I will show in the first part of this work, physical motherhood is closely connected to Christ's Passion in Julian's *Revelations*. Biological and divine motherhood are mutually characterized by bodily sacrifice and the creation of new life, either into this world or the spiritual realm. Julian explains: "We wit that alle oure moders bere us to paine and to dying. […] But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone bereth us to joye and to endlesse leving".[13] Compared to Christ's maternity, biological motherhood is less perfect, but the logic underlying this comparison is only understood if Julian's comprehension of human nature is analyzed. According to Julian, human nature is divided into a "lower part" (i.e., the body), which is in substance one with the world, and a "hyer party" (i.e., the soul), which is in its essence one with God.[14] Since the "lower party" of a human is formed and created by a biological mother, motherhood is (at least indirectly) depicted as means of separating the soul from God.[15] This image of the physical mother is further contrasted with divine motherhood and Christ's Passion, which unites the human as a whole, body and soul, to Divinity. However, while Julian considers biological motherhood initially in relation to the created world and suffering, she also dignifies physical maternity later in the text. In the same chapter in which Julian extensively

[13] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings,* 313.
[14] Kempe, *The Book*, 161.
[15] Ibid.

focuses on Christ's motherhood, she also elevates biological maternity by depicting the physical mother as a means through which God provides instruction and care.[16]

Spiritual and worldly forms of motherhood are also connected in the *Book,* as I will illustrate in the second part. Margery, too, initially connects biological motherhood with suffering and death. The events preceding her first vision of Christ, for instance, clearly depict her as "Eve's heiress."[17] Margery's first childbirth, which marks the beginning of her life as biological mother, is accompanied by suffering, madness, fear of death, and the awareness of her deeply sinful nature.[18] Margery is only delivered from her post-partum illness through the reception of her first vision of Christ. This vision marks a turning point in Margery's life, as it is the beginning of her journey as a spiritual laywoman. Shortly after her recovery, Margery abandons her sinful ways and takes up the role of the spiritual mother. Her new identity, however, is not characterized by a complete rejection of her past as worldly mother and wife. Even though Margery clearly intends to distance herself from associations with lust and urges her husband to live chastely in marriage, she does not deny or entirely forsake her role as wife and biological mother. In instances where the integrity of either part of her identity is questioned, Margery neither denies the worldly and spiritual side of her identity, nor does she entirely associate with just one side of it. Instead she focuses on different parts of her identity as circumstances require it. The interaction with her son in Book II, as well as her reference to "bodily" and "gostly" children in her lengthy intercessory prayer at the very end of the *Book*, further place her in the role of the biological and spiritual mother.[19]

Liz Herbert McAvoy notes the significance of female corporeality in the mystics' works, claiming that it serves as tool to establish authority.[20] While McAvoy's work gives an extensive account of the women's depiction of "motherhood, female sexuality and the public

---

[16] Ibid., 315.
[17] Smith, *A Poetics*, 71.
[18] Kempe, *The Book*, 52- 56.
[19] Ibid., 425.
[20] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 24.

female voice," Julian's depiction of biological motherhood is overlooked in her discussion and Margery's journey from worldly to spiritual laywoman is mainly addressed in relation to spirituality, as McAvoy reads the laywoman's change in character as primarily an abandonment of worldly obligations and associations. Further, McAvoy refrains from directly comparing the works of the mystics in an attempt to avoid what she calls "pitfalls of comparative studies".[21] She notes that the women's works are often contrasted in a way that values one work over the other; Julian's *Revelations* are depicted as a sophisticated account of independent thinking, whereas Margery's *Book* is considered to be an amateurish documentation of the laywoman's life.[22] This, however, partly results from the objectives of the research itself (e.g., an analysis of the language and rhetoric of the texts).[23] It is certainly possible to compare the works of the two women by considering them as equally unique documentations of female experience. In fact, a comparison enables us to understand the meaning of the texts more profoundly, as the authors were influenced by some of the same devotional and secular trends, and deviations in the depiction of the same themes might give indications of the authors' individual thought processes. Furthermore, uncovering parallels between the depiction of motherhood allows us to relate Julian's and Margery's understandings of the concept to more general consideration of the theme as discussed by Atkinson and others. While Margery and Julian adapt prevalent attitudes towards women, corporeality, and physical motherhood, they also redefine it. Often spiritual and worldly forms of motherhood appear together and are not exclusive, suggesting that physical

---

[21] Ibid., 26.
[22] Ibid., 25. In his analysis of the language and rhetoric of the works, for instance, Julian's work is much more highly regarded than Margery's *Book*. See Kevin Magill, *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?* (London: Routledge, 2006), or Robert Karl Stone, *Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970).
[23] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 26. See also Albrecht Classen, *Reading Medieval Women Writers* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016) 119-151.

maternity was not as separated from spiritual forms of motherhood as previous research on womanhood in the Middle Ages makes them out to be.[24]

Different forms of maternity, and the seemingly incompatible associations that accompany them, are incorporated in the *Revelations* and the *Book*. Physical maternity, while associated with the material world, death, and sin, does not necessarily hinder the pursuit of a spiritual vocation. Nor do negative associations with biological motherhood keep God from using the mother as an instrument for instruction and nurturing. Medieval images of womanhood derived to a great extent, as mentioned above, from the comparison of two biblical maternal figures, Eve and Mary. Much of what characterized physical motherhood, that is, negative attitudes towards female corporeality, hereby also applied to womanhood in general. The mystics' depictions of physical maternity can thus also be read as a commentary on medieval categorizations of women. While physical motherhood is associated with corporeality and worldliness, the physical mother is also presented as God's instrument, implying that women in general could be used for the proclamation of God's words and deeds regardless of their past or secular standing in society. Julian and Margery incorporate negative associations with the physical female body into their works. However, they do not understand the connection between the feminine body, corporeality, and the mundane as hindrance for God to use women, themselves included. In other words, Julian's and Margery's depictions of motherhood reveal much about how the female mystics considered different forms of maternity in particular and give insight into their understanding of womanhood in general.

[24] See for instance Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, and Henrietta Leyser, *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500* (London: Phoenix, 1995).

2. Julian of Norwich: divine maternity, biological motherhood, and the created order

> And thus oure moder is to us diverse manner werking, in whom oure pertes be kepte undeparted. For in oure moder Crist we profit and encrese, and in mercy he reformeth us and restoreth, and by the vertu of his passion, his deth, and his uprising oneth us to oure substance.[25]

Julian's depiction of motherhood in the *Revelations of Divine Love* is, as the epigraph indicates, closely connected to the humanity of God, Christ. Julian's first vision of the Passion, described in the short and long versions of the *Revelations*, is associated with childbirth and lactation. Christ's divine body is clearly feminized. The wound in his side is connected to female anatomy, namely, the mother's womb and breast. By depicting Christ as mother, Julian incorporates a common medieval trope. Catherine of Siena, Marguerit of Oignt, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Aelred of Rievaulx, for instance, use the image of Christ as mother to illuminate their personal relationships with the Divine or as a means for instruction.[26] Julian, too, connects Passion and maternity in the *Revelations*. Unlike other mystics, however, she uses the concept to illuminate her understanding of the world, human nature, and the salvific process. The anchoress's vision of the Passion, which places Christ in the role of the laboring and nurturing mother, does not appear on its own. It is closely connected to Julian's vision of the hazelnut (section four in the short text and chapter five in the long text), which addresses God's relation to creation, and the vision of Mother Mary, which draws attention to the process of incarnation. The connection between these three visions is clearly visible in the short text, as all of the visions are presented as three parts of the same revelation. In the long text, however, the interrelation is less apparent, as different aspects of the visions are developed in multiple chapters.

---

[25] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 309.

[26] Caroline Walker Bynum, "'And Woman His Humanity:' Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 151-160.

Julian addresses the motherhood of Christ in the short version of the *Revelations* by describing the Passion in ways that evoke associations with maternity. However, the theme is only fully developed in the longer version. Only there does Julian directly refer to Christ as mother. This is significant, according to Barry Windeatt, as "it is around the short text that the longer version frames the apparatus of what can resemble an edition of this original testimony, with numerous additions of extended meditative commentary on the revelations' content".[27] Since the motherhood of Christ is only touched upon in the short text, and discussed extensively in the long version, it is likely that Julian saw something in the concept that she considered to be useful for illuminating the interrelation of the visions, and the explanation of God's love for humanity. A closer examination of Julian's depiction of motherhood is thus essential for the understanding of the work as a whole.[28]

The centrality of motherhood in Julian's work is also evinced in the structure of the *Revelations*. Diane Kratz notes that Julian strategically organizes the content of her work around the interpretation of God as mother. The anchoress does not only divide her text into sections by linking different visions, but she also repeatedly affirms that all visions are contained in each other. For instance, her first vision (chapters four to ten) and her last (chapters sixty-six to eighty-six) take up the themes that are discussed in visions two to fifteen, and are explicitly linked.[29] While other visions are connected in a similar way, vision fourteen (chapters forty to sixty- four) is the only other revelation besides visions one and

---

[27] Barry Windeatt, introduction to *Revelations of Divine Love*, by Julian of Norwich, trans. Barry Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xxiii.

[28] Watson further notes that one of the manuscripts places much importance on the structure of the work. In the "copy from which the seventeenth- century Sloane manuscript was made" the long text is depicted as a "systematic theology, any statement of which has to be read in its total context," as the author claims that the isolated reading of passages might mislead the reader. Contemplated as a whole, however, Julian's work is considered to be a source of divine wisdom. See Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 11. It is to be noted, however, that the only surviving copy from the 14th century, London Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS 4, does not consider Julian's work in its entirety. In this manuscript, only specific parts of the *Revelations* are included, suggesting that, despite the warning present in other copies, singular parts of the *Revelations* were read individually and without regard to the context they appear in. See Vickie Larsen, "Julian of Norwich in the Fifteenth Century: The Material Record, Maternal Devotion, and London, Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS4," *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 14 (2011): 44.

[29] Krantz, *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich*, 55-65.

sixteen that addresses the themes of all other revelations, leading Krantz to the assumption that it serves as the "heart of the text". According to her,

> Revelation Fourteen mirrors on a large scale the operations of transition between paragraphs and chapters, causing this revelation to function as the heart of Julian's book, a heart which unites within itself three themes: the visual Passion- Resurrection theme which controls and governs the writing of Revelations One through Thirteen, its own special theme of Jesus as mother with its insistence on enclosure, and the theme of enclosure. With these themes, which themselves include or enclose all of the revelations, *the entire book becomes enclosed in the revelation which describes the motherhood of Jesus*.[30]

In the long version, entire chapters are dedicated to the illustration of Christ's motherhood. The connection between different aspects of Julian's theology is certainly less apparent in the longer version of the text than in the concise form of the *Revelations*. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text reveals that in the longer version, too, Julian considers Christ's maternity in the context of God's plan for humanity. The parable of the servant, for instance, gives insight into Julian's understanding of creation, the salvific process, and its implications for humankind.

Motherhood in Julian's *Revelations* has been discussed extensively from different perspectives, primarily in relation to gender or theology.[31] Julian's work has been read as a reaction to prevalent misogynistic attitudes, or as an attempt to create a more gender-fluid

---

[30] Ibid., 62.

[31] For a discussion on female experience in the *Revelations* see for instance Elizabeth Robertson, "Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's Showings," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 142- 168, and Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,*131–69. For a theological discussion of Julian's work see Kevin MaGill, *Julian of Norwich*, and Wai Man Or Yuen, *Religious Experience and Interpretation: Memory As the Path to the Knowledge of God in Julian of Norwich's Showings* (New York: Peter Lang, 2003).

image of God.[32] The anchoress's depiction of motherhood has also been discussed in relation to more abstract concepts like enclosure, time, and space.[33] The vast majority of scholarship on Julian's depiction of motherhood, however, is concerned with her description of God as mother.[34] Discussions on Julian's depiction of physical maternity are rare, if not inexistent. Denise Nowakowski Baker and Sarah McEntire, for instance, discuss Julian's work in regard to the depiction of the female and understand the emphasis on Christ's motherhood as an attempt to correct contemporary theological discourses that closely associate the female with the body.[35] Both scholars understand Julian's insistence on Christ's maternity as an attempt to correct contemporary gender conceptions and read the *Revelations* as an effort to re-write misogynistic attitudes. These scholars discuss female corporeality to some extent, they, however, ignore Julian's depiction of physical motherhood. If Julian's portrayal of biological maternity is analyzed, it is clear that the physical mother is connected to the material world, corporeality, and death. In fact, biological motherhood is presented as the exact opposite of Christ's maternity.[36] This divide between physical motherhood and divine maternity, and the association of the physical body with the world, is especially addressed in the parable of the servant. The lack of scholarship on Julian's depiction of physical maternity might at least partly result from the lacuna of research on the parable of the servant, as the few accounts that

---

[32] Sandra McEntire claims that parts of Julian's *Revelations* are meant to challenge the gendered Augustinian interpretation of human nature. According to her, Julian's text attempts to undermine "the authoritative discourse of male privilege." See "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's Showings," in *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, ed. Sandra McEntire (New York: Garland, 1998), 12-13.
[33] See for instance Laura Saetveit Miles, "Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich's *A Revelation of Love,*" in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008) and Ena Jenkins, "Julian's *Revelations of Love:* A Web of Metaphor," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008).
[34] See for instance McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 64–95, and Jennifer Heimmel, *God is Our Mother*.
[35] Denise Nowakowski Baker discusses the interrelation between female corporeality and Christ's maternity. However, she, like Sarah McEntire, interprets this connection primarily as a re-writing of Augustinian conceptions of humanity. Baker understands Julian's depiction of Christ as mother as an attempt to dignify female physicality. While Baker addresses female corporeality, she does not discuss biological motherhood. Christ's motherhood is further primarily analyzed in relation to gender. See "Reconceiving the *Imago Dei:* The Motherhood of Jesus and the Ideology of the Self," in *Julian of Norwich's Showings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 107-134, and McEntire, "The Likeness of God," 12-13.
[36] "We wit that alle oure moders bere us to paine and to dying. […] But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone bereth us to joye and to endlesse leving". Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 313.

examine the parable are preoccupied with relating it to other medieval sources rather than analyzing its function in Julian's work.[37]

The parable of the servant and other parts of the *Revelations* reveal that Julian's comprehension of motherhood is closely connected to physicality. In Julian's understanding of the human as a being that consists of a soul which is like God and a body that is like the material world, biological motherhood (defined by the ability to form and give birth to a material body) is depicted, at least indirectly, as a means separating the human soul from God. However, paradoxically, highly physical descriptions also characterize the representation of the maternity of Christ. Julian's vision of the Passion and the parable of the servant both emphasize the significance of Christ's corporeality for the salvation of humankind. Christ's body is presented as a link uniting body and soul by joining both to Divinity. Julian strategically uses the concept of motherhood to illustrate her understanding of the created world and God's relation to it. Motherhood in Julian's *Revelations* is used as a means to emphasize Christ's corporeality and illustrate its significance in God's divine plan. The body of Christ is maternal in its life-producing and sustaining nature, and essential for salvation as a means of uniting the human to God.

2.1 The Passion of Christ: Jesus as Mother

Motherhood is considered in relation to all parts of the Trinity at some point in the text, for instance, to illustrate the nature of God's love, which sustains creation.[38]Nevertheless, explicit language associated with motherhood is mostly used in relation to Christ, particularly his

[37] See for instance Philip Sheldrake, "Two Ways of Seeing: The Challenge of Julian of Norwich's Parable of a Lord and a Servant," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 17 (2017): 1-18, and Martin Chase, "The *Elucidarius* and Julian of Norwich's Parable of the Lord and the Servant," *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 360–364. Baker, too, discusses the parable in her work. She, however, mainly considers it in connection to Augustine's writings, as elsewhere in her work. See Denise Nowakowski Baker, "The Parable of the Lord and Servant and the Doctrine of Original Sin," in *Julian of Norwich's Showings* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 83-106.

[38] See for instance ibid., 69.

Passion.[39] Images of childbirth, lactation, and female anatomy dominate Julian's description of Jesus on the cross.

Julian's description of the Passion in chapter sixteen bears striking similarities to childbirth: "Oure very moder Jhesu, he alone bereth us to joye and to endlesse leving […] Thus he sustaineth us within him in love, and traveyled into the full time that he wolde suffer the sharpest throwes and the grevousest paines paines that ever were or ever shalle be, and died at last."[40] Julian understands the Passion as labor and sacrifice that resembles maternal struggles and pains. Much like a mother, Christ sacrifices his body, and by this sacrifice he gives (everlasting) life to his children. The labor of the biological mother is a physical birthing, while that of Christ is "gostly" work.[41] The sacrificial nature of childbirth, especially, links the Passion of Christ to the mother's labor, as during both processes the body of the delivering person is injured. The mother's body is torn open and discharges fluids during labor; Christ's body does the same on the cross.

During his Passion, Christ loses water and blood. McAvoy observes: "Just as the mother's labor brings forth new life along with blood and amniotic fluid, so Christ through his labor on the cross and his exuding of blood and water gives birth to human redemption."[42] In Julian's vision of the Passion the body bleeds without bruising and appears without any visible wound, "the blood," as McAvoy explains, "emerges from an open but apparently woundless body"—a depiction that is unlike "most popular depictions of the bleeding Christ".[43] Employing this specific imagery, Julian highlights the link between the feminine and Christ, as the woundless bleeding is a phenomenon that is specifically linked to the female in medieval understanding, since the woman was often depicted as an "unsealed body

[39] See for instance Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 313.
[40] Ibid., 313.
[41] See ibid., 309- 315.
[42] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 81.
[43] Ibid.

which was characterized by blood-loss, lactation and weeping."[44] The organ connected to these fluids—Jesus's heart—is also associated with a specifically female organ in Julian's work, namely the womb.

Like a child is protected and nurtured in the womb of the mother, all of humanity is sheltered in Jesus's heart, which is described as a place "large inow for alle mankinde that shalle be saved to rest in pees and in love."[45] In her depiction of Christ's heart as a nurturing and protecting organ bearing human souls, Julian adapts images found in various medieval devotional texts. Theologians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and mystics like Angela of Foligno understood Christ's heart to be a peaceful spiritual "dwelling place".[46] Yet the image of peaceful enclosure is somehow disrupted in Julian's *Revelations*, in that the integrity of Christ's heart is threatened by his Passion. Much as the mother's womb tears during childbirth, Christ's heart rips during his labor: "And therwith he brought to minde his dereworthy blode and his precious water which he let poure all out for love. And with the swete beholding he shewed his blisseful hart even cloven on two."[47] This similarity between Christ's heart and female reproductive organs is also noted by Patricia Donohue-White, when she states that the wound in Christ's side serves as "a two-way birth canal that leads from and back to a heart which is also a womb."[48]

While Julian's description of the Passion is quite impressively connected to maternity, she is also not the first mystic to draw parallels between the sufferings of Christ and the mother's labor. Marguerite of Oignt (1240-1310), for instance, also addresses Christ as mother and describes the Passion by comparison to nativity. In her *Oeuvres*, however, it is not specifically Christ's heart or wound which give birth into the spiritual realm, but his entire

---

[44] Ibid., 80.
[45] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 201.
[46] Amy Hollywood, "'That Glorious Slit:' Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound," in *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture: Thresholds of History*, ed. Elizabeth Harvey and Theresa Krier (London: Routledge, 2004), 107-111.
[47] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 201.
[48] Patricia Donohue-White, "Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich," *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5 (2005): 29.

body. In Marguerite's work, it is Christ's "veins" that "burst" in his labor on the cross.[49] However, the association of Christ's heart with specific female reproductive organs is not innate to Julian's work alone but appears also in other medieval texts. In James of Milan's *Stimulus Amoris*, for instance, the wound of Christ is linked to maternity through wordplay. The Latin words for 'wound' and 'female external genitalia'— *vulnus* and *vulva*— are clearly connected in this text. In the *Stimulus Amoris*, the union between Christ and the soul is illustrated through the metaphor of two touching wounds: "The 'copulation' of mystical soul with Christ thus occurs at the site of his wound *(vulnus),* which is transformed into the female vulva when *vulnus vulneri copulatur,* 'wound is joined to wound,'" as Karma Lochrie explains.[50]

Figure 1: The fifth wound of Christ; Man of Sorrows and Wound (c.1375), New York, The Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 90, fol. 130.

The connection between wound and vulva is also present in visual representations of Christ's Passion in illuminated medieval manuscripts. Various medieval texts used for daily devotional practice, like versions of the Book of Hours and personal prayer books, depict Christ's fifth wound. In these illustrations, the wound is often separated from the rest of Christ's body and presented life-

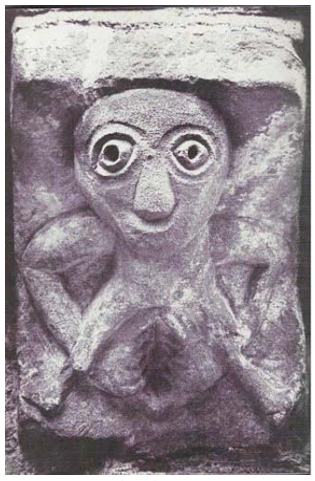

Figure 2: Sheela-na-gig, Kilpeck, Church of St. Mary and David

[49] "My sweet Lord[…]are you not my mother and more than my mother?[…]For when the hour of your delivery came you were placed on the hard bed of the cross […]And truly it is no surprise that your veins burst when in one day you gave birth to the whole world […]Ah! sweet Lord Jesus, who ever saw a mother suffer such a birth?" Marguerit of Oignt, cited in Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg," in *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 2012), 97.

[50] Karma Lochrie, "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality,* ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 189.

sized in a mandorla-shaped frame (see figure 1).[51] These representations of Christ's side wound were certainly means for worship and part of personal religious rituals. The active sensory engagement with the image— whether by observing, touching, or kissing — was even promoted by indulgences.[52] Marks and fading ink around some of these depictions further affirm the intimate consideration of the images.[53]

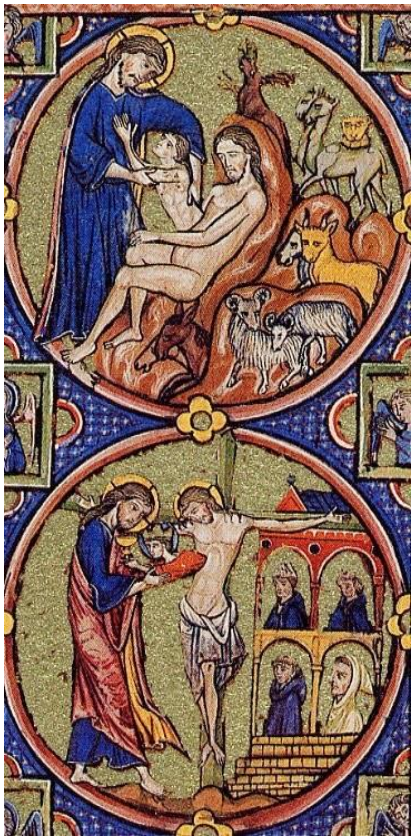

Figure 3: The birth of Ecclesia and Eve, Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vindobonensis 2445, fol. 2v.

While the religious significance of these pictures cannot be denied, it is nevertheless striking how much these illustrations resemble depictions of the vulva as they are presented in medieval medical manuals and religious artefacts (i.e., pilgrim badges). [54] The vulvas of early medieval "sheela-na-gig" sculptures (small figures found on the exterior walls of European churches and castles, amongst other buildings) also bear striking similarities to depictions of Christ's fifth wound (see figure 2).[55]

In one of the most famous versions of the Bible moralisée, a 13th-century French account (Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Cod. Vindobonensis 2445, fol. 2v), the wound in Christ's side is explicitly presented as a means for giving birth. It is the opening through which Christ delivers Ecclesia (see figure 3). In this illumination, Christ's side wound clearly serves as vaginal opening. Furthermore, the Bible moralisée— known to connect Old

[51] Hollywood, "'That Glorious Slit'," 113.
[52] Ibid., 117. In her rather sexualized interpretation of female engagement with the images of Christ's wound, Karma Lochrie further notes that "religious instruction and devotional texts for women explicitly invite them to touch, kiss, suck, and enter the wound of Christ." See "Mystical Acts," 190.
[53] See for instance Nancy Thebaut, "Bleeding Pages, Bleeding Bodies: A Gendered Reading of British Library MS Egerton 1821," *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 45 (2009): 178.
[54] Martha Easton, "'Was It Good for You, Too?' Medieval Erotic Art and Its Audiences," *Different visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1 (2008): 5-15.
[55] Ibid.

and New Testament themes— links Christ's Passion and the birth of Ecclesia to the creation of Eve in Genesis.[56] By doing so, the Bible clearly links the bodies of Adam and Christ. Both men give birth through their open side: Adam to Eve, the mother of all humans, and Christ to Ecclesia, who represents all Christians. It is to be noted, however, that in the single known English version of this pictorial Bible (see figure 4), this connection, while present, is less apparent. Eve is no longer pulled out of Adam's side.[57] Nevertheless, the interrelation of the Genesis and Passion scenes, as they are presented in the French versions of these Bibles, are also entirely adapted into the English version, suggesting that the ideas presented in the pictorial Bible were known in England.

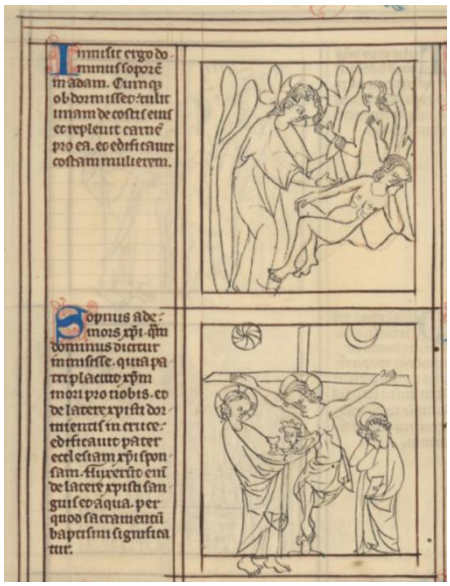

Figure 4: London, British Library, Add MS 18719, f. 3v

Many of the images presented in the longer version of the *Revelations*, especially the parable of the servant, are consistent with what is found in these Bibles. Not only is Christ's heart described in terms that associate it with the womb, but Julian also links Adam, Christ, and all of humanity in her work, as we shall see later. In both works, the Bible moralisée and the *Revelations*, Adam and Christ are further linked in their function as men who give birth to collectives. In both, too, the body of the first and second Adam is ascribed maternal characteristics through a divinely intended wound, evincing the correlation between the maternal, corporeal, and the humanity of God in medieval understanding.

The association of God's humanity with the feminine body further illuminates medieval attitudes towards female corporeality. To some extent, the feminized divine body

[56] For an analysis of the genre of the Bible moralisée see for instance Katherine Tachau, "God's Compass and *Vana Curiositas*: Scientific Study in the Old French Bible Moralisée," *The Art Bulletin* 80 (1998): 7-33.
[57] See ibid. for information on the different versions of the Bible moralisée. It is also to be noted that the meaning of the illumination seems to slightly shift between the presented French and English versions. The focus in the English version seems to be Eve's subjection to Adam. God holds Eve's hand in a tight grip pointing to the sleeping Adam. In the French version, however, the focus is on Eve's creation. God is entirely occupied with Eve and she is presented as part of Adam. This shift is quite significant, as the French versions (from one of which the English version was copied) almost exclusively depict the scene in the same way.

was considered to be a complement to the often negative associations of the physical female body. Female reproductive organs, considered in relation to Christ and the Passion, served as a metaphor for unity and salvation. The actual female vulva, however, was often associated with hell and Satan and linked to the image of the hellmouth.[58] *The Hours of Claude Molé*, for instance, depicts damned souls in Satan's womb. Here, Satan spreads his legs, granting sight into the space behind his exterior— a depiction that clearly links the vagina, the devil, and the image of the hellmouth (see figure 5).[59] In a Flemish Book of Hours, the hellmouth is further presented as "both the entrance to the bedchamber and to the body of the woman herself".[60] "Le Blasme de Fames" even depicts woman as "a hellmouth that is cursed" and as a creature "more artful than the devil."[61] Neifile's tenth tale in Boccacio's *Decameron*, too, evinces this association.[62] The negative connotations of female genitalia presented in these medieval works stand in stark contrast to the femininized divine body. In the *Stimulis Amoris*, for instance, the wound of Christ is presented as the "gate of Paradise," functioning as the exact opposite of the entrance to hell.[63]

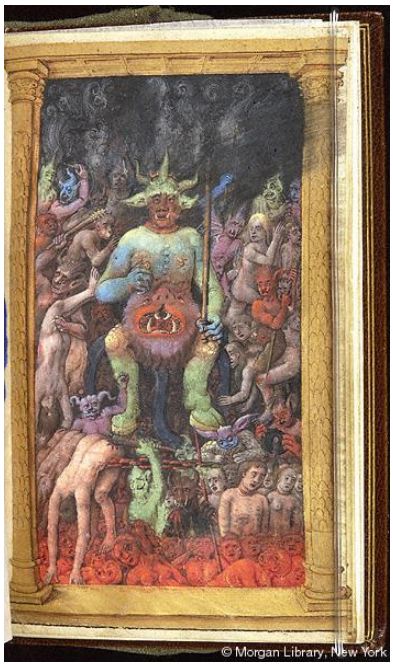

Figure 5: Satan in The Hours of Claude Molé, Paris, France, MS M.356 fol. 64r, ca. 1500

[58] It is to be noted, however, that Hildegard of Bingen clearly connected the womb to the church, suggesting that parts of the female body were not only considered in relation to Christ, Satan, or hell in the Middle Ages. In one of Hildegard's visions, Ecclesia appears as womb with "many openings" through which people can go in and out. Ecclesia is depicted as a womb with arms and breasts, but without legs and feet. See Carolyne Larington, *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 1995), 134-138.
[59] Martha Easton, "The Wound of Christ, The Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages," in *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, ed. Susan L' Engle and Gerald Guest (London: Harvey Miller, 2006), 403.
[60] Easton, "Was It Good," 5.
[61] See Easton, "The Wound of Christ," 403.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Lochrie, "Mystical Acts," 11, and Easton, "Was it Good," 5.

This divide between female corporeality and the humanity of Christ is also addressed in Julian's work. In the parable of the servant in chapter fifty-one, the physical female body is connected to the original Fall, suffering, and estrangement from God, whereas Christ's redeeming act of salvation and his "birthing" on the cross is depicted as a willing sacrifice that grants eternal life. Julian does not directly connect female anatomy with hell, but (as I will show) she does closely associate the female body with worldly suffering and death. Christ's wound is understood as a life-producing organ and serves as counterpart to the physical (hellish) vulva. Yet Christ's injury was not only connected to the mother's womb in medieval understanding. Because of its nurturing qualities, it was also likened to other parts of female anatomy.

Christ's wounded breast was also frequently depicted as deeply nourishing body part by association to lactation. In medieval understanding, blood was closely connected to the feminine, and associated with nurturing, sustenance, and fertility, mainly because of the fluid's link to menstruation, pregnancy and childbearing, as Nancy Thebault explains.[64] A common medieval understanding of pregnancy was that menstrual blood (symbolizing fertility) was transformed into a nurturing substance in the womb, leading to the belief that "the fetus was composed of entirely maternal uterine blood."[65] This transformative quality of blood, that is, its function as a means of enabling the consubstantiality of mother and child, is also to some degree reflected in Christian eucharistic doctrine.[66] The consumption of Christ's body and blood in the consecrated bread and wine was believed to join the believer to Christ.[67]

---

[64] Thebault, "Bleeding Pages," 193.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 187- 192.
[67] For a detailed discussion on the significance of the Eucharist in Julian's work see Jennifer Garrison, "Julian of Norwich's Allegory and the Mediation of Salvation," in *Challenging Communion: The Eucharist and Middle English Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), 105-31.

Various mystics document visions of Christ feeding them from his side, which is an act of deepest intimacy and evidence for the closeness of the visionary's soul to God. Catherine of Siena recounts a vision in which Christ urges her to drink the blood from his wound, which is described as "Fountain of Life".[68] In texts that focus on the nurturing qualities of Christ's blood, his open breast is no longer a womb-like opening that gives birth to humanity, but a nurturing organ resembling the breast of the mother. In *De institutione inclusarum* Aelread of Rievaulx addresses the nurturing and revitalizing properties of Christ's blood and explicitly connects the fluids emitting from his side to wine and milk ("The blood is changed into wine to inebriate you, the water into milk to nourish you").[69]

Julian incorporates both interpretations of Christ's open wound in her text. As was shown earlier, Christ's injury is connected to the labor of the mother. It is, however, also linked to nurturing and sustenance. Christ's breast is not only womb-like, but also resembles the milk- producing breast of the mother. In chapter sixty, for instance, the image of the lactating mother is drawn upon to illustrate the sacrificial and nurturing nature of Christ. Julian explains:

> The moder may geve her childe sucke her milke. But oure precious moder Jhesu, he may fede us with himself, and doth full curtesly and full tenderly with the blessed sacrament that is precious fode of very life. And with all the swete sacramentes he sustaineth us full mercifully and graciously. And so ment he in theyse blessed words where he saide: "I am that holy church precheth the and teacheth the.[70]

---

[68] Raymond of Capua, *The Life of Catherine of Siena,* trans. Conleth Kearns (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1980), 156.
[69] Caroline Walker Bynum, "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," *Church History* 71 (2002): 685-714. Easton further notes that wine and blood were closely connected in the Middle Ages. Wine, once consumed, was believed to transform into blood. It was even used as a substitute for blood and given to people who suffered from blood loss. See Easton, "The Wound of Christ," 399. Milk and blood, too, were closely related in medieval understanding. Thebault explains that in "medieval medical discourses," breast milk was understood as a product of "surplus menses". See "Bleeding Books," 191-192.
[70] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 313.

The nature of the food that Christ as mother offers is physical sustenance through the Eucharist, and a spiritual sustenance through teachings of the church. The milk of Christ becomes an emblem for all "sweet sacraments".[71]

By extending the metaphor of the lactating Christ to comprise not only the nurturing nature of the Eucharist but also that of God's words and teachings, Julian incorporates a common medieval association with the milk of Christ. Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, links the milk of Christ's breast to the doctrine of the church.[72] The image of the lactating and nurturing Christ is one that many medieval mystics and theologians use in their writing. Lutgard of Aywieres, Catherine of Siena, and Marguerit of Oignt all received visions in which they were nursed by Christ.[73] The association of the Passion with childbirth, too, is one that appears frequently in the works of various medieval authors. Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, Francis of Assissi, Marguerit of Oignt, Hadewich, and Catherine of Siena are only some of the authors that use motherhood in relation to the Passion or Christ himself.[74] These mystics, however, mostly consider the Passion in relation to themselves. Male authors, for instance, separate paternal and maternal characteristics of God (i.e., that of the ruling, disciplining father, and that of the nurturing, caring mother), and mainly use the concept of Christ as mother to describe the personal relation to fellow Christians and to affirm their own authority. Caroline Walker Bynum explains: "[m]ale writers thus linked their own 'motherhood' (i.e., nurturing) with that of Christ and explored, through these images, their own ambivalence about the exercise of authority and, at the deeper level, the growing power of the clergy."[75] Female authors, too, consider images of Christ as mother primarily from a personal standpoint. They, however, do not strictly separate God's paternal and maternal

---

[71] Ibid.
[72] In one of his sermons, Bernard of Clairvaux encourages priests to "feed the needy with the milk of doctrine." See Caroline Walker Bynum, "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth- Century Cistercian Writing," in *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 118.
[73] Bynum, "And Woman," 151-179.
[74] Ibid., 158-160.
[75] Ibid., 160.

characteristics and do not use the allegories to highlight their role as spiritual guides, or to emphasize the virtue of their own character. Bynum explains that "[w]omen writers simply projected themselves into the role of the child vis-à-vis mother Jesus, whereas men sometimes drew an analogy between God's motherhood and their own".[76] In the *Revelations*, however, the concept of divine maternity is used primarily to illustrate God's relation to all humans and not just a particular individual. It is a tool to portray God's loving and sustaining nature and does not solely relate to the author. This is also evinced in the detached tone that Julian repeatedly uses in the passages that discuss the motherhood of God. Talking about Christ as mother, Julian uses collectives like "us" and "oure."[77] Even though the Passion of Christ is a central aspect of Julian's theology, it is not considered on its own, but in relation to creation and God's divine plan.

2.2 Julian's first vision: The Passion, the creation, and Mother Mary

Julian's first vision in the short text clearly links the Passion to God's creation and Mother Mary. During a period of severe sickness, Julian is granted three visions simultaneously, as she recounts in the short text: on the cross in front of her, which the priest holds over her face, she sees the "bodily sight" of Christ's bleeding head; "gasteleye" she receives the vision of the hazelnut; and she witnesses Mother Mary in the moments before conception.[78] The nature of the vision is threefold, but at the same time inseparably linked, as all of them are revealed to Julian at the "same time".[79]

To understand the deeper theological meaning of the coherence of these visions, it is necessary to look closer at the vision of the hazelnut, which describes God's relation to creation. In the vision, Julian beholds "a litille thinge the quantite of a haselle nutte, lyggande

[76] Bynum, "And Woman," 161.
[77] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 313. Emphasis mine.
[78] Ibid., 69.
[79] Ibid.

in the palme of my hande".[80] Later, the meaning of the vision is revealed: the "litille thinge" is a symbol for the entirety of creation; "[i]t is alle that is made," which is sustained and enclosed by God's love.[81] The world is shaped, loved, and protected by God—he is "the makere, the lovere, the kepere."[82] However, even though creation is intended and sustained by God, it is still not of the same nature and substance as God.[83] In this separation between the Divine and creation, Julian recognizes the origin of distress. Union with God is understood as the source of peace and happiness. To achieve this unity, however, the Passion of Christ is necessary. In the conclusion to the vision of the hazelnut, Julian realizes:

> For to I am substantiallye aned to him I may nevere have full reste ne varray blisse: that is to saye, that I be so festenede to him that thare be right nought that is made betwyxe my God and me. And what shalle do this dede? Sothlye himselfe, be his mercye and his grace, for he has made me thereto and blisfullye restored."[84]

In this excerpt, Julian explicitly traces the spiritual vision of the hazelnut back to the physical vision of Christ's Passion, as it is through Christ's body, the Eucharist, that the human becomes "substantiallye aned" to him.[85] This last section of the vision of the hazelnut is then further linked to the second spiritual vision, namely that of Mother Mary.[86]

The vision of Mother Mary depicts the Virgin at a key moment in the salvific process, shortly before the conception of Christ. Besides emphasizing Mary's role in the divine plan, as I will illustrate later, this specific vision highlights the voluntary aspect of the Incarnation. In this vision, Julian is given insight into Mary's thoughts. The Mother of God wonders at her role in the salvific process and ponders the mystery "that he wolde be borne of hir that was a

---

[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Ibid.
[86] "In this, God brought oure ladye to mine understanding." Ibid.

simpille creature of his making".[87] This emphasis on God's willingness to become human and the wonder at his decision is what connects this spiritual vision to the physical vision of the Passion. Much as Mary addresses the fact that God chose to take on the form of his creation, Julian emphasizes that God "for love wolde become man dedlye".[88] Mary, however, cannot fathom the significance of the incarnation at the time of her conception. Only Julian, who, through her revelation, lives through the moments before Christ's conception and death and sees them in the context of God's relation to his creation, is able to see the connection between the visions: the incarnation of God is necessary for the salvation of humankind, which is granted through Christ's Passion, the voluntary suffering of an innocent God.

The essence of this understanding is also adapted into the long text. A closer analysis of the parable of the servant reveals a similar comprehension of the interrelation of the Divine and creation. In Julian's first vision in the short text, creation and its relation to God are only discussed in general terms. Julian gives insight into the relation between the Divinity and creation, but her account does not focus on the individual parts of creation. In the long text, however, much space is given to the illumination of the relation between God and humanity. Here Julian focuses extensively on human nature to reveal her understanding of concepts such as corporeality and spirituality. Julian's detailed interpretation of the parable not only elucidates her understanding of the nature of body and soul, but also helps to comprehend the importance of Christ's Passion. Julian also introduces a new concept in the long text: motherhood. In connection with corporeality, spirituality, and Christ's Passion, Julian discusses biological and spiritual motherhood and highlights its centrality in God's divine plan. In the parable of the servant, for instance, Julian connects Christ's Passion to the original Fall, and gives insight into her understanding of physical and spiritual motherhood by relating the concepts to her comprehension of human nature.

---

[87] Ibid., 69-71.
[88] Ibid., 67.

2.3 The parable of the servant: Fall, redemption, and motherhood

The complex parable of the servant, a product of twenty years of contemplation, is essential to Julian's understanding of God's divine plan and the history of salvation. In its essence, the vision tells the story of a servant who stands in front of his lord, runs willingly to do his service, and eventually falls into a deep pit, where he experiences "sore brosing."[89] This story, as simple as it might seem, combines parts of the Old and New Testament and interrelates Christ's Passion and the original Fall. By employing the tale as a means of explaining the workings of salvation, Julian also addresses the role of the physical mother and relates it to the motherhood of Christ. To properly understand Julian's attitudes towards motherhood, it is thus necessary to first comprehend the structure and intricate symbolism of the parable.

Like Julian's first vision in the short text, the parable of the servant has different layers. The servant is shown to Julian in two different forms. At the beginning of chapter fifty-one, Julian reveals: "[t]hat one perty [the symbolic meaning of the servant] was shewed gostly in bodely liknesse. That other perty was shewed more gostly withoute bodely liknes."[90] This claim seems confusing at first, as terms such as "bodely liknesse" and "gostly" lack definition, and both forms of the vision seem to operate independently at first glance. If we recall Julian's first vision in the short text, however, the distinction between physical and spiritual vision becomes clearer. In the short text, Julian distinguishes between the "bodily sight" of Christ's bleeding head and the "gastelye sight" of the hazelnut and Mother Mary.[91]

---

[89] Ibid., 275. It is to be noted that the allegory of the falling servant appears in two different medieval works besides Julian's *Revelations*. In St. Anselm's *Cur Deus homo* and Honorius Augustodunensis' *Elucidarius* the allegory is used to explain the nature of original sin and to underline the importance of obedience and foresight. The authors of these texts are preoccupied with the nature of sin and strictly consider the parable in relation to Adam's Fall from paradise, rather than God's forgiving nature and unconditional love for humanity. See Sheldrake, "Two Ways of Seeing," and Chase, "The *Elucidarius* and Julian of Norwich's Parable".

[90] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 273. Sheldrake understands Julian's multilayered interpretation of the parable as a product of subjective and objective experiences. Chapter fifty-one is, according to him, a product of Julian's own perspective on the nature of salvation, but also a reflection of "the world seen through God's eyes". See Sheldrake, "Two Ways of Seeing," 11.

[91] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 69.

Julian's physical visions are more concrete images, whereas her spiritual visions are abstract and symbolic. In Julian's first vision, for instance, the vision of the bleeding head of Christ is directly related to the cross in front of her. Even though Julian recognizes the symbolic value of the vision—it signifies God's unending love for humankind—she nevertheless refrains from describing it with extensive allegories. Julian does not dive into prolonged interpretations of the phenomenon, and her account of the physical vision is dominated by her visual perception. Julian's spiritual visions (e.g., the vision of the hazelnut), on the other hand, are more abstract, illuminate whole concepts, and are often contained in extensive allegories. Further, whenever Julian's spiritual and physical visions appear in close succession, they stand in direct relation to each other. The spiritual vision is linked to the physical revelation, and the former reveals the deeper theological meaning of the latter.

The layers of the parable are not different visions, but different interpretations of one parable. However, much of what characterizes Julian's distinction of physical and spiritual visions can also be applied to the tale of the servant. The parable is perceived entirely in spirit and not stimulated by a material thing (e.g., the cross in Julian's physical vision of the bleeding head in the short text). The parable consists of a concrete image (the "bodely liknesse"), its more abstract interpretation (the second part, which is "more gostly"), and the interpretation that evolves from the connection of the two (i.e., "the hole revelation, fro the beginning to the ende," with both its symbolic meanings).[92] Even though Julian recognizes different meanings in the parable, she also admits that all meanings merge into one in her mind: "And theyse thre be so oned, as to my understanding, that I can not nor may deperte them".[93]

---

[92]"The furst is the beginning of teching that I understode therein in the same time. The secunde is the inward lerning that I have understonde therein sithen. The third is alle the hole revelation, fro the beginning to the ende, which oure lorde God of his goodness bringeth oftimes frely to the sight of my understanding. And theyse thre be so oned, as to my understanding, that I can not nor may deperte them." Ibid., 277.
[93]Ibid., 277.

While all interpretations of the parable are linked, its meaning can be separated into three aspects. First, the parable of the servant represents the original Fall; second, it describes the nature of all humans; and third, it is an allegory for the redemptive process. Julian discovers over the course of twenty years that the servant is an emblem for the first human, Adam, the entirety of humanity, and eventually even the humanity of God, namely, Christ.[94] "[T]here is effectively a collapsing of the sense of time and historical sequence in the 'sight'" as Sheldrake observes.[95] Adam, Christ, and the rest of humanity are separate but also contained within each other. Julian explains: "in the sighte of God alle man is one man, and one man is alle man."[96] All three entities have their humanity in common, as each individual is simultaneously a descendant of Adam and a member of Christ. Indeed, the three identities of the servant seem to merge into one. Julian explains: "When Adam felle, Godes sonne fell. For the rightful oning which was made in heven, Goddes sonne might not be seperath from Adam, for by Adam I understond alle man."[97]

The fall of the servant is central to the comprehension of Julian's consideration of physical motherhood. In Julian's understanding, both Adam and Jesus fall. The nature of their falls, however, differs significantly:

> Adam felle fro life to deth: into the slade of this wreched worlde, and after that into hell. Goddes son fell with Adam into the slade of the maidens wombe, which was the fairest doughter of Adam—and that for to excuse from blame in heven and in erth—and mightily he feched him out of hell.[98]

Adam falls twice: first into the "wreched worlde", and from there into hell. Jesus, on the other hand, only falls once into the womb of Mary. In this passage, the world and womb are linked and associated with the "slade" that causes "brosing" in the parable. The "wreched worlde" is

---

[94] Ibid., 279.
[95] Sheldrake, "Two Ways of Seeing," 15.
[96] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 279.
[97] Ibid., 283.
[98] Ibid.

linked to death, and the Virgin's womb is associated with both.[99] At first glance, the association of the womb—an exclusively female organ— with the world and death, might suggest that Julian adapts prevalent misogynistic interpretations of the female sex.[100] William of Thiery, in the *Meditativae Orationes,* interprets the female body in connection with the corrupted, created world, namely, as "a symbol of weakness or of the flesh."[101] As we have seen earlier, others went so far as to liken the female body to hell and damnation, interpreting it as the "devil's gateway".[102] In the context of Julian's creation- affirming stand, which is evinced in other parts of her work (e.g., the vision of the hazelnut), the negative depiction of the world and woman in this passage might surprise and even seem contradictory to the message of her work as a whole. If the passage is read in relation to the rest of her work, however, it reveals the underlying depth of the connections that Julian makes in the parable.

Woman and creation are indeed depicted as corrupt to some extent in this passage. To assume the anchorite's condemnation of creation, femininity, and corporeality, however, would be to fundamentally misunderstand Julian's theology. While the passage initially seems to connect the female body to the corrupted world, a closer examination reveals that Julian refuses to incorporate prevalent misogynistic ideas about the female sex. Unlike some theologians, Julian completely refrains from associating the original Fall with the first woman, Eve. In fact, as Jenkins observes, "there is no Eve and no Serpent" in Julian's version of the human Fall.[103] It is all of humanity, women *and* men, that are expelled from heaven.

---

[99] Ibid.
[100] For the misogynistic depiction of the female in the Middle Ages see for instance Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation,* 71, or Bynum, "And Woman," 155.
[101] Bynum, "Jesus As Mother," 119.
[102] Tertullian describe woman as 'devil's gateway' and connects the female to death—even to that of Christ. See Tertullian, "Modesty in Apparel Becoming to Women in Memory of the Introduction of Sin Through a Woman," in *Ante- Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Michigan: Wm. B Eerdmans, 1885). Here, Tertullian further uses garment as metaphor for female corporeality: "And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins? […] Accordingly, these things are all the baggage of woman in her condemned and dead state, instituted as if to swell the pomp of her funeral." Ibid.
[103] Jenkins, "Julian's *Revelations*," 188. Sandra McEntire interprets Julian's omission of Eve as a "disagreement with Augustine's premises," which pleads for a "gendered, dualistic" consideration of human nature. McEntire further suggests that the consideration of humanity as a whole "silences or blocks the authoritative discourse of male privilege and substitutes new meaning." See McEntire, "The Likeness," 12-13. I do not deny that the exclusion of Eve can be read as an attempt to correct misogynistic attitudes. However, it is more likely that

The human Fall is not attributed to one specific person—least of all Eve—but to the nature of human, which is "febil" and "stoned in […] understanding".[104]

Julian does not depict the female as the origin of sin. Mary is a virgin and the physical mother of Christ. More importantly, however, she is also foremost a representative of physical motherhood. While it is Mary's womb into which Christ falls, it is not Eve's womb into which Adam falls. Eve is not mentioned separately but included in the collective that Adam represents. Julian does not understand Eve and Mary as counterparts but considers the first woman to be equal to the first man. Eve is not depicted as a vessel through which evil and death come into the world, and the human Fall is considered to be emblematic of all of humanity. The sole depiction of biological motherhood is thus given in the portrayal of Mary as Christ's mother. Mary, while being a virgin, is also depicted as a biological mother, and as such she is connected to the world and corporeality. This characterization of Mary differs from more common representations of the Virgin, as often, the Virgin's body is separated from the world, and compared to the rest of womanhood or presented as direct counterpart to Eve.[105] Mary's body is usually associated with the Divine and not the mundane. In the *Revelations*, however, Mary's body, though virginal, is connected to the world and suffering. This suggests that Julian's negative depiction of physical motherhood is not defined by sexual status. What connects the physical mother to the world is not corrupted sexuality, but her role as God's vessel for the creation of the physical body. This understanding of biological motherhood, as I will show later, is also addressed in other parts of the *Revelations*.

While Mary's biological motherhood is also connected to suffering and death, the association of the female with death is less severe than it initially seems. In Julian's understanding, death is not final, but temporary. It is certainly depicted as a consequence of

---

Julian refrains from mentioning Eve in the *Revelations* because she holds no particular significance in the main argument of Julian's work. The main objective of Julian's *Revelations* is the explanation of God's love for humanity, and not the examination of the interrelation of man and woman, and their role in the human Fall.

[104] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 279.

[105] Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 109.

the Fall. However, death is not greater than God's love for creation. God's love does not consider humans' shortcomings, but already at the moment of the first humans' Fall, God has a plan to rescue and dignify humanity. His caring and concern even extends to the realm of hell ("The merciful beholding of his lovely chere fulfilled all erth and descended downe with Adam into helle, with which continuant pitte Adam was kepte fro endlesse deth.").[106] Even as humans suffer the consequences of their shortcomings, God does not abandon them. Instead, he sustains and saves them from "endlesse deth."[107] God does not wish humans to suffer for eternity or to extinguish them but wishes to rescue and be united to them.

Indeed, the pain and suffering, the servant's "ful gret sore" that humans must endure in the world, does not derive from God at all.[108] The injury is not primarily sin, or even the violation of God's commands. The bruising is rather to be understood as estrangement and separation from God. It is the inability to recognize and see God, and the failure to love and accept oneself. "[T]he most mischefe" that the servant (i.e., Adam, "Alman," Christ) endures is "a failing of comfort," resulting from the inability to face God: "For he culde not turne his face to loke uppe on his loving lorde, which was to him full nere, in whom is full comfort. But as a man that was full febil and unwise for the time, he entended to his feling and enduring in wo".[109] This general description of the "brosing" can be applied to all entities that the servant represents.[110]

However, this general claim is further extended in each separate interpretation of the parable. The nature of the injury— while remaining the same in essence— slightly differs in the accounts of the story of each individual that the servant represents. Adam's injury, for instance, is described as follows:

---

[106] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 279.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid., 273.
[109] Ibid., 275. Augustine and Bernard of Clairvaux, too, understand self- acceptance and self- knowledge as important aspects for the unity with God. See McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 11.
[110] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 275.

> This man was hurte in his mighte and made fulle febil, and he was stoned in his understanding, *for he was turned fro the beholding of his lorde.* But his wille was kepte hole in God's sight. For his wille I saw oure lorde commende and approve, but himself was letted and blinded of the knowing of this will. And it is to him gret sorow and grievous disses, *for neither he seeth clerly his loving lorde, which is to him full meke and milde, nor he seeth truly what himself is in the sight of his loving lord*.[111]

This description takes up the general idea of the nature of the injury as a metaphor for the separation from God, and the inability to practice self-love and acceptance. However, it also emphasizes the uncorrupted state of human will. In this passage, Julian depicts the human as a fallible, but nevertheless inherently good creature.[112] Even though Adam (i.e., "Alman") occasionally fails to do good, this does not indicate that his soul is corrupt. Rather, Adam's missteps result from the failure to recognize God's good will and the goodness in himself. Julian emphasizes that the human, in his or her essence, is good and does not intend to inflict harm. What keeps Adam from following his innate goodness is ignorance, the failure to recognize the source of all goodness and love (i.e., God), or to acknowledge the remains of that source in his own soul.[113]

On a first glance the parable seems to devalue physical motherhood to some extent by comparing it to the world and pain. A closer look at the symbolic value of the bruising reveals, however, that such an interpretation is only partly valid. An individual is not corrupt

---

[111] Ibid., 279.

[112] "[…]in ech a soule that shall be safe is a godly wille that never assented to sinne, ne never shall. Which will is so goodthat it may never wille evil, but evermore continually it willeth good and werketh good in the sight of God," ibid., 293.

[113] In chapter fifty-six, for instance, Julian elaborates: "For only by oure reson we may not profite, but if we have evenly therwith minde and love. Ne onely in oure kindly grounde that we have in God we may not be saved, but if we have, coming of the same grounde, mercy and grace. For of these thre werkinges alle togeder we receive alle oure goodes: of which the furst be goodes of kinde. For in oure furst making, God gave us as moch good and as grete good as we might receive onely in oure spirite. But his foreseeing perpos in his endlesse wisdom wolde that we were doubil." Ibid., 303. Further, this understanding is also linked to Julian's comprehension of "vertu": "it is nought eles but a right understanding with trew beleve and seker truste of oure being, that we be in God and he in us, which we se not." Ibid. 297.

by nature but is rendered so by the inability to recognize God—both in his or her surroundings and in the very essence of his or her being. A closer look at Julian's understanding of human nature (and its relation to the bruising of the servant) reveals that the slightly negative consideration of physical motherhood does not originate in misogyny, but that it is in fact rooted in Julian's understanding of human nature.

In the *Revelations*, the human is defined as a being consisting of body and soul.[114] The human soul, according to Julian, is one with God. In chapter fifty-eight she explains: "alle these [God father, wisdom, and love] have we in kinde and in oure substantial making."[115] Elsewhere Julian even goes as far as to describe the human soul as "made trinite".[116] In Julian's understanding, the essence of each individual (i.e., the soul) is inseparably united to God.[117] In the beginning, when God created Adam, he "made us alle at ones." The human's soul is "knowen and loved fro without beginning."[118] However, the soul, though in substance similar to God, is still not identical to him. Unlike God, it is still "a creature in God" and "unlike [him] in condition, by sinne on mannes perty."[119] "[M]annes soule," according to Julian,

> is made of nought. That is to sey, it is made, but of nought that is made, as thus: whan God shulde make mannes body, he toke the slime of the erth, which is a mater medeled and gadered of alle bodily things, and therof he made mannes body. But to the making of mannes soule he wolde take right nought, but made it.[120]

---

[114] Garrison claims that Julian does not depict the division between body and soul. According to her, Julian understands human as a being consisting of two different "souls." See "Julian of Norwich's Allegory," 120-124. The arguments presented here, however, clearly contest such a reading. Julian explicitly addresses the divide of body and soul. In fact, this division is essential to the understanding of the anchoress's discussion of important aspects like female corporeality and salvation.
[115] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 307.
[116] Ibid., 299.
[117] See ibid., 297.
[118] Ibid., 307 and 299.
[119] Ibid., 259 and 255.
[120] Ibid., 295.

Here, Julian clearly distinguishes the soul from the body. The body, unlike the soul, is not in its essence like God, but like the earth from which it is taken. In substance, the body is not united to God but the world. The body is the "foule, blacke, dede hame' wherein oure fair, bright, blessed lorde hid his godhede."[121] In Julian's understanding, as mentioned earlier, human nature is divided into two entities: the "hyer party", the soul, and the "lower party", the body.[122]

This division is essential for the understanding of the bruising of the servant. Adam's fall is mainly rooted in his inability to behold the face of God. He lacks the understanding of his own nature or that of God, and thus finds no way out of his misery. The nature of Jesus's injury, however, is fundamentally different from Adam's. In Jesus's case, the bruising is corporeality, the transformation into human form ("the sore that toke was oure flesh, in which as swithe he had feling of dedely paines.").[123] Jesus does not lose sight of God, but he is separated from Divinity through physicality. The comprehension of the twofold nature of the human and its relation to divinity is crucial to the proper understanding of the concept of motherhood in the *Revelations*.

Physical motherhood is linked to the world, because it is closely connected to corporeality. The mother receives an individual's soul in her womb, but it is eventually her body that forms, nurtures, and gives birth to the lower part of the human, in which the soul is enclosed. This understanding of physical motherhood is addressed in various passages of Julian's work. It is even applied to her own life. In the short text, for instance, we find the sole reference to her own mother:

> My modere, that stode emanges othere and beheld me, lifted uppe hir hande before me face to lokke min eyen. For she wened I had bene dede or els I

[121] Ibid., 161.
[122] See for instance ibid., 305.
[123] Ibid., 285.

> hadde diede. And this encresed mekille my sorowe. For noughtwithstandinge alle my paines, I wolde nought hafe been letted for love that I hadde in him."[124]

In this passage, Julian recounts the moment that surpasses even the pains of her sickness: her mother's attempt to close her eyes. Julian's mother deprives her of the sight of the cross, the only solace in her suffering.[125]

This is especially significant, as in the preceding lines Julian experiences one of the most intimate moments with Christ. Before her mother attempts to close her eyes, Julian is granted a "mental" experience of Christ's Passion, which she describes as the fulfilling of one of her three wishes.[126] In the recollection of Christ's Passion, Julian takes part in his suffering, and is united to him through pain. McAvoy interprets this union as a reflection of shared humanity. She explains: "[I]n contemplating her own abjection, [Julian] recognizes in herself the mystical union of humanity with Christ by means of that same flesh—which, like Christ, she has taken from *her* mother."[127] Unlike Margery Kempe's illness, which is the result of repressed sin, Julian's sickness enables union with God. Julian's corporeality links her to both her mother and Christ. Interestingly, however, this moment of exceptional proximity to Christ, bordering on complete unity with him, is interpreted as corporeal death by the person most connected to her physical body: her mother. The moment in which Julian is closest to God is characterized by abandonment of her body and estrangement from the person from which it originated. In this scene, Julian's growing closeness to God correlates with the increasing estrangement from her body—a phenomenon which aligns with Julian's interpretations of human nature and its implications for the relationship between God and human.

---

[124] Ibid., 83.
[125] "I wiste wele whiles I luked upon the crosse I was seker and safe. Therfore I walde nought assente to putte my saule in perille, for beside the crosse was na syekernesse, botte uglinesse of feendes." Ibid., 85.
[126] "This shewinge of Criste paines filled me fulle of paines. For I wate wele he suffrede nought botte anes, botte as he walde shewe it me and fille me with minde, as I hadde desired before." Ibid., 83.
[127] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "'For we be doubel of God's making:' Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich," in *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008), 173.

Corporeality and physical motherhood are also considered in relation to death and suffering in vision fourteen. Here, Julian directly compares biological motherhood to spiritual motherhood: "We wit that alle oure moders bere us to paine and to dying. […] But oure very moder Jhesu, he alone bereth us to joye and to endlesse leving—blessed mot he be!" [128] Images of corporeality, suffering, and death also dominate the depiction of the biological mother in this passage. However, physical motherhood is also compared to the motherhood of Divinity. The mother that births us into this life is not our true mother, "our very moder," but Christ.[129]

To understand the difference between biological motherhood and Christ's motherhood, it is necessary to look at the second metaphor for the flesh in the parable: the clothing of the servant. Clothing in the parable is highly enriched with symbolic meaning. It is at the same time a metaphor, and an indicator for the state of the thing it represents. The blue clothing of the lord signifies his "stedfastnesse".[130] The servant, however, is clothed in "a whit kirtel, single, olde, and alle defauted, dyed with swete of his body, straite fitting to him and shorte, as it were an handful beneth the knee, bare, seeming as it shuld sone be worne uppe, redy to be ragged and rent."[131] Julian especially emphasizes the raggedness of the servant's clothing: "And in this I marveled gretly, thinking: 'This is now an unseemly clothing for the servant that is so heyly loved to stond in before so worshipful a lord!'"[132] Later in the parable, the significance of this unsuitable clothing is revealed: "The whit kirtel is his fleshe."[133] The flesh that all versions of the servant (i.e., Adam, "Alman," and Christ) share. Whereas before it was the woman who was mainly associated with flesh, in this passage it is primarily the male who is connected to physicality. Even though Adam

[128] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings,* 313.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., 281.
[131] Ibid., 281.
[132] Ibid., 281.
[133] Ibid., 285.

comprises the entirety of humanity, it is still explicitly "*Adam's* tunic," in which Christ appears before the lord.[134]

If the two symbols for corporeality (i.e., the injury that Christ suffers when he falls into Mary's womb and Adam's tunic) are further compared, a slight shift in value can be observed. The symbol of motherhood associated with woman is exalted above that associated with man. Even though the womb into which Christ falls is described as "slade", the person to whom it belongs is dignified. Mary is the "fairest doughter of Adam"—a description that holds much value if the significance of color in the parable is considered.[135] The word "fair" brings up associations with whiteness and brightness, which are terms that are connected to purity later in the parable.[136] Adam's tunic, on the other hand, is "old" and "straite", and later revealed as signifying "oure foule dedely flesh".[137]

However, the tunic of the servant undergoes a process of transformation from one interpretation of the parable to another. In the version in which it is associated with Adam, it is indeed somehow filthy. In the interpretation in which the servant signifies Christ, however, its nature is utterly changed. Julian explains:

> oure foule dedely flesh, that Goddes son toke upon him—which was Adam's olde kirtel, straite, bare, and shorte—then by oure savioure was made fair, new, whit, and bright, and of endlesse clennesse, wide and side, fair and richar than was the clothing which I saw on the fader. For that clothing was blew, and Cristes clothing is now of fair, seemly medolour which is so mervelous that I can it not discrive, for it is all of very wurshippe.[138]

---

[134] See ibid., 287. Emphasis mine.
[135] Ibid., 283.
[136] See ibid., 287.
[137] Ibid., 287.
[138] Ibid., 287.

Here Julian reveals important aspects of Christ's humanity. For instance, she indicates that up until the Passion, death, and resurrection, Christ's body was of the same nature as that of all humans. Christ's body is by nature lower than the soul and belongs more to the world than to heaven. Like all humans, Christ first appears in Adam's worn tunic. This tunic, that is the lower part of human nature (i.e., the body), is then transformed and exalted: it is made "fair, new, whit, and bright, and of endlesse clennesse", and more importantly, it is merged with the substance of the lord's clothing. The new transformed clothing shows properties of both the clothing of the lord and the garment of the servant. It is a "medolour," a "mixture".[139] In other words, it is the new divine body of Christ. In this section of the parable, Julian depicts the transformation of the body from a worldly object to a heavenly one.[140]

Only through Christ's suffering, death, resurrection, and, eventually, his ascension to heaven is the human body exalted from the worldly to the heavenly sphere. Christ, in other words, overcomes the divide between the lower part of human nature and the higher part; he bridges the divide between body and soul. All humans who were by their physical bodies prevented from unity to God since Adam are joined to Divinity through Christ. It is striking how much Julian's interpretation of Christ's Passion aligns with Bernard of Clairvaux's. He, too, understands the bodily union with Christ as necessary for the ultimate union with God. Bernard insists that "the individual, who was also linked inextricably with the human Christ, was offered access to God through the flesh, which in turn could facilitate the development of pure, spiritual union" as McAvoy explains.[141] Garrison, too, notes the significance of Christ's bodily sacrifice in the *Revelations* when she observes that the ultimate unity with God is

---

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid. John Alford notes the correlation between the symbolical implications of the cloth in Julian's *Revelations* and Langland's *Piers Plowman*. In Langland's poem, Hawkin's coat is characterized as the 'cote of Chrystendome,' marked by various stubborn stains symbolizing sin. This stained clothing is further also compared to the spotless cloth of salvation, which Hawkin is promised to be granted at the day of resurrection. It is also interesting that the spotless cloth is further linked to a transformed, holy body. See John Alford, "Haukyn's Coat: Some Observations on 'Piers Plowman' B. Xiv. 22-7," *Medium Aevum* 43 (1974): 133.

[141] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,* 11.

accompanied by "bodily and sensual connotations, increasing the emphasis on the physical incorporation of Christ's body into the body of the believer."[142] After Christ's death on the cross, the body is no longer something that separates the human from God, but Christ's body *is* God, and it is this divine *body* that eventually unites all humanity to God. It is through Christ, body, soul, and God that each human as a whole—body and soul— is made a part of divinity. In chapter fifty-seven, Julian elaborates:

> For oure kinde, which is the hyer party, is knitte to God in the making; and God is knit to oure kinde, which is the lower party, in oure flesh taking. And thus in Crist oure two kindes be oned. For the trinite is comprehended in Crist, in whom oure hyer party is grounded and roted. And oure lower party, the second parson hath taken, which kind furst to him was adight. For I saw full sekerly that alle the werkes that God hath done, or ever shall, were full knowen to him and before seen fro without beginning. And for love he made mankind, and for the same love himself wolde become man.[143]

In this understanding, the reasoning behind Julian's depiction of physical motherhood is illuminated as well. Biological motherhood is intended by God and part of the divine plan. Nevertheless, biological motherhood misses the saving nature of Christ's spiritual maternity.[144] The biological mother is only able to give life into this world, while Christ gives life into the spiritual realm. A physical body is created and formed in the mother's womb, and born into this world through her body. Inevitably, this renders the mother— at least

---

[142] Garrison, "Julian of Norwich's Allegory," 125. Baker, too, notes the centrality of the bodily union to Christ in the *Revelations*: "While all three persons of the Trinity are substantially united to humankind, only the second person achieves union with the creaturely sensuality. In addition to Christ's special role in enlivening the body in the first act of creation, Julian calls attention to the second person's unique function in taking on a body in the Incarnation." However, later in her work, Baker interprets Julian's emphasis on Christ's corporeality as a rewriting of Augustine's teachings: "Conceiving of these embodiments enacted by Christ as motherhood, Julian of Norwich transforms the Augustinian denigration of woman as sign of the body. By envisioning a God who is both Father and Mother, she affirms that both literally and symbolically woman is created and re-created in the *imago Dei."* See "Reconceiving the *Imago Dei,"*131-13.
[143] Julian of Norwich, *The Writings*, 305.
[144] Ibid., 315.

indirectly— a means through which the soul of the child is separated from God in Julian's understanding. However, this does not mean that Julian condemns maternity entirely. In vision fourteen, for instance, she acknowledges its purpose and divine intention. Julian explains: "To the properte of moderhede longeth kind love, wisdom, and knowing; and it is God. For though it be so that oure bodely forthbringing be but little, lowe, and simple in regard of oure gostely forthbringing, yet it is he that doth it in the creatures by whom that it is done."[145]

It is God's labor in the woman that dignifies physical motherhood. While it is the mother's body that forms the body of the child, it is eventually God that drives the process leading to the creation of the child. In the lines succeeding this passage, Julian even presents the mother as a tool that God uses to protect and instruct the child: "The kinde, loving moder […] woot and knoweth the neede of her childe,[…] kepeth it full tenderly, […]suffereth it that it be chastised […] This werking, with all that be fair and good, *oure lord doth it in hem by whome it is done*."[146] Thus, Julian's slightly negative depiction of physical motherhood does not follow the same intention of other medieval authors, who condemn worldly aspects of creation and convey misogynistic ideas. Julian does not connect the female body to original sin and corrupted sexuality. In the *Revelations,* physical motherhood is solely understood in the context of the Christian teaching of the nature of Christ's incarnation.

While physicality is the aspect that degrades biological motherhood to some extent, it is paradoxically the very aspect that makes Christ "our true mother" in the *Revelations*. As was shown in the beginning of this section, Julian repeatedly uses images associated with motherhood to illustrate the Passion of Christ. While Julian refers to God both as father and mother, and the Holy Spirit, too, is described in maternal terms, it is nevertheless God's humanity, Christ, who is primarily connected to motherhood. This insistence on Christ's

[145] Ibid., 313-315.
[146] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

motherhood is most likely related to Christ's role as God incarnate and the connection between motherhood and physicality. Through Passion, death, and resurrection, Christ's body is transformed. It is this transformation that makes Christ "oure very moder," as it is through these events that humans are given everlasting life.[147] Through Christ's sacrifice, the human becomes a being in Christ, a part of his body. The Passion, in other words, renders the human a part of Divinity, and unites the human as a whole, body and soul, to God. Julian's depiction of motherhood, in relation to the divine as well as the biological mother, is closely connected to her understanding of the world and the relationship between humans and God. With regard to the Fall, woman is not attributed more guilt than man, and even though physical maternity is considered in relation to the world, it is also redeemed by serving as God's tool for creation and instruction. Julian's considerations of physical maternity is thus to some extent different from Margery's understanding of the concept. In the *Book*, as we shall see, maternity is not used to describe the significance of the Passion, to illuminate deeper theological phenomena, or used in relation to Divinity, but the concept of motherhood is employed to illustrate Margery's transformation from worldly to spiritual laywoman.

[147] Ibid., 313.

3. Margery Kempe: the spiritual laywoman

The depiction of motherhood in *The Book of Margery Kempe* is distinctively different from that in Julian's *Revelations*. Julian portrays God as both mother and father and pleads for a God- image that is not gender specific in a static way. For Julian, the Divinity is neither exclusively female nor exclusively male. However, in Margery's *Book*, God is mainly described as father, husband, or boy-child, and Margery is cast as his daughter, bride or mother. In the *Revelations* maternity is used to illustrate the intricate connection between different parts of Julian's theology; in Margery's *Book*, however, the concept is employed to illuminate Margery's personal development and to underline her role as a worldly and spiritual mother.

Critics have treated Margery's depiction of maternity extensively, with some recognizing motherhood as a central theme in Margery's work, while others, noting the author's reluctance to share her worldly experiences, dismiss it as a minor aspect of the *Book.*[148] It is true that physical motherhood is only primarily addressed in the beginning and towards the end of Margery's work. However, it is precisely this placement that emphasizes the importance of the theme in the *Book*. The story of Margery's life is not only enclosed by the concept of motherhood, but it is also physical maternity that introduces and concludes the narrative of her spiritual journey.[149] Margery's first childbirth and subsequent period of madness are succeeded by her first encounter with Christ—an event that marks the beginning of her life as a spiritual person. The relationship with her son, addressed in the second part of the *Book*, further legitimizes Margery's piety, as it highlights Margery's role in her son's conversion through prayer.

---

[148] Tara Williams, Sidonie Smith and Wendy Harding, for instance, clearly recognize the significance of maternity in Margery's work. See Williams, "Manipulating Mary," Smith, *A Poetics,* and Harding, "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse." Anthony Goodman, on the other hand, notes that Margery only gives limited insight into her experiences as mother, and does not acknowledge maternity as a central theme in the work. See Anthony Goodman, *Margery Kempe and Her World* (London: Longman, 2002).

[149] See also Williams, "Manipulating Mary," 533.

Biological motherhood is, however, not the only form of maternity that Margery addresses. In the course of the *Book*, the laywoman also claims the role of the spiritual mother. A priest from Rome and Thomas Marchelle are only two individuals who share a deep spiritual bond with Margery and acknowledge the divine wisdom of her biblical exegesis and counsel.[150] While the interactions with these men clearly place her in the role of the spiritual mother, more often than not, spiritual maternity appears alongside Margery's role as worldly mother and wife.[151] Her encounters with Christ, for instance, cast her simultaneously in the role of the worldly and spiritual mother, as I will show later.[152] Unlike other medieval worldly and spiritual mothers like Birgitta of Sweden, who "defined their devotional lives as a departure from" worldly obligations, as Tara Williams explains, Margery understands her spiritual vocation as "an extension" of her worldly stand."[153] According to Williams, the *Book* is to be understood as an attempt "to fashion a distinctive form of spiritual authority" by the inclusion of spiritual *and* worldly experiences.[154] Williams's argument suggests that the purpose of the work is not primarily to give a detailed account of Margery's life, but that the content of the work is intentionally arranged in a way that is meant to legitimize the laywoman's spirituality.[155]

---

[150] In chapter forty and forty-two, for instance, Margery illuminates the nature of her relationship with a priest from Rome, who at their first meeting "clepyd hir 'modyr'" and asked her "for charite to receyven hym as hir sone". Margery also recalls that the same priest "mad hir as good cher be the wey as yyf he had ben hir owyn sone, born of hir body." See Kempe, *The Book*, 206 and 212. See also 223 for the description of Margery's relationship with Thomas Marchale.

[151] For a reading of the *Book* as an *Imitatio Mariea*, see for instance Williams, "Manipulating Mary," and Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe," in *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made Flesh,* ed. Susannah Mary Chewning and Robert Yeager (London: Routledge, 2005), 121-38.

[152] Williams, too, acknowledges the co-existence of these two forms of maternity when she claims that Margery's encounters with Christ are dominated by "sexual imagery," which she understands "not [as] a misstep but instead a conscious authorial strategy, the capstone of her [Margery's] effort to fashion a distinctive form of spiritual authority that is modeled on the Virgin Mary but incorporates the material of Margery's worldly life in order to surpass even Mary's level of intimacy with Christ." See "Manipulating Mary," 529.

[153] Ibid., 531.

[154] Ibid., 529.

[155] Elsewhere Lynn Staley and Anthony Collin Spearing discuss the accuracy and supposed fictionality of the *Book*. Both authors concur that Margery's *Book* is to be understood as a largely fictious work. However, Staley and Spearing's attitudes on authorship vary. Staley assumes Margery to be the author of the text, while Spearing suggests that parts of it could also be the work of her amanuensis. Nicholas Watson and Felicity Riddy, while agreeing mostly with these scholars, note that it is difficult to determine the exact authorship of the work. See Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press,

While the *Book* certainly documents Margery's journey from worldly woman to spiritual mother, in most parts of the work the different sides of the author's personality co-exist. Margery takes up the role of the spiritual mother, but she does not do so by completely abandoning her worldly standing as mother and wife. The *Book* does not simply document the transformation from worldly to spiritual person but creates an identity that surpasses more traditional concepts of womanhood. Margery's autobiography is not solely the documentation of the transformation from worldly to spiritual person, but an attempt to create space for a female voice and agency in an ecclesiastical setting as a laywoman. It is an attempt to reconcile two exclusive and seemingly incompatible social roles.

3.1 Between Eve and Mary: Medieval concepts of womanhood

To fully understand the significance of motherhood in Margery's work, it is necessary to look at prevailing medieval concepts of womanhood. In the Middle Ages, the idea of motherhood, considered to be the highest status of a woman in the Roman Empire and the ancient world, is fundamentally changed— primarily by the often misogynistic interpretations of womanhood by churchmen and theologians. In a society centered around Christianity, the views of religious leaders quickly became commonly accepted truth. "[P]hysical maternity," as Atkinson explains, "was devalued" and soon considered to be "incompatible with devotion to God."[156] Generally, medieval women could only claim spiritual status if they denied their sexuality, since "[o]nly women who remained entirely apart from sex and physical maternity avoided the identification of the female with flesh, and sin and death."[157] Sexual women,

---

1994); Anthony Colin Spearing, "*The Book of Margery Kempe*; or, The Diary of a Nobody," *Southern Review* 38 (2002): 625–35; Nicholas Watson, "The Making of *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 395–434; and Felicity Riddy, "Text and Self in *The Book of Margery Kempe,*" in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages*, ed. Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 435–53.

[156]Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 66-67.

[157] Ibid.

even if they were married, were considered to be "descendants of Eve," and as such they were believed to have been "punished by subjection to men and by suffering in childbirth."[158]

Physical maternity was considered in relation to the Fall, primarily because biological motherhood was associated with sexuality. Attitudes towards sex, physicality and procreation, however, varied from one medieval theologian to another. Some, like St. Jerome, understood sexuality to be a result of the Fall and a sinful part of human nature. Sex, as these theologians observe, did not exist in paradise and was only performed after the humans' expulsion from Eden.[159] In this context, marriage and physical maternity were also rendered a byproduct of the Fall.[160] Peter Lombard, on the other hand, did not condemn marriage and sexuality as sin. He understood procreation to be an act initially intended by God. Henrietta Leyser illuminates the logic underlying arguments such as Lombard's: The first humans, "could not have chosen to be virgins in paradise or they would have been guilty of thwarting God's intentions" for them, which is "to 'increase and multiply' (Genesis 1:27-8)". According to Lombard, procreation is not fallible by nature but lost its sanctity through "the disturbing accompaniment of lust," which he considers to be a result of the Fall.[161] Lombard suggests that, had humans remained in paradise, procreation would have occurred without the sin of lust.

Jerome's and Peter Lombard's attitudes regarding the exact nature of procreation differ, but both agree on its implications in a post-lapsarian world: sex cannot be considered apart from sin and damnation. The sole aspect that "redeemed" copulation to some extent was parenthood.[162] The common understanding was that "Eve, and through her all women, might be saved 'through bearing children' (1 Tim. 2: 15)".[163] However, pregnancy was still a very

---

[158] Ibid., 71.
[159] "That you may understand that virginity is natural and that marriage came after the fall, remember that what is born of wedlock is virgin flesh and that by its fruit it renders what in its parent root it had lost." Ibid., 72.
[160] See ibid., 67-72.
[161] Leyser, *Medieval Women,* 94.
[162] Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 77.
[163] Ibid.

visible sign of the loss of virginity and a performed sexual union, and maternity was "sometimes also an obstacle to the way of life expected of saints."[164] Atkinson explains that virginity and sexual abstinence was still considered to be the ideal, as "[t]he hierarchy of sanctity (virgins first, then widows, then wives) was arranged according to sexual, not parental status."[165]

A religious life apart from temptation and worldly pleasure was considered to be the ideal way of life for a woman. In Atkinson's words: "If physical maternity was devalued, spiritual maternity soon took its place".[166] This twofold understanding of motherhood mainly derived from comparisons of two biblical maternal figures: Eve and Mary. Eve, representing physical motherhood, was associated with the material world, suffering, and death, whereas Mary, signifying spiritual motherhood, was connected to the spiritual world, salvation, and everlasting life.[167] Unlike physical motherhood, which was connected to lust and suffering, spiritual motherhood was defined by chastity, purity from sin, and the ability to provide spiritual guidance by example and speech. In other words, physical motherhood was incompatible with spiritual maternity. "Through the intense ascetic zeal of the Church Fathers," Atkinson explains,

> it had been accepted in theory that marriage and motherhood disqualified women for heroism and spiritual grandeur, except for the mothers of exceptional children. Production and reproduction were separated, with 'production' defined (in the spiritual and ecclesiastical realm) as active holiness, the work of prayer and charity, teaching and mission. Ordinary mothers could not be 'productive' in this sense; their work was reproduction—a lesser sphere. […] Spiritual motherhood was the only religious leadership

[164] Ibid., 144.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid., 66 -67.
[167] For a detailed analysis of Margery's worldly and spiritual motherhood and its associations to Eve and Mary, see Harding, "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse," 197- 209, and Smith, *A Poetics*, 64ff.

> permitted to women; the term "mother," transformed, retained its ancient power.[168]

Mothers and wives were considered to be the worldly counterparts to women with a spiritual vocation. Even if married women considered themselves to be spiritual people, they could only perform spiritual duties in a limited way. Mothers and wives were tied to the domestic sphere, where their main responsibility was to care for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of their family.[169] Worldly women were granted little time for spiritual contemplation and the reading of scripture, and the conversion of sinners and the oral transmission of spiritual knowledge was also primarily the domain of women whose spirituality and chastity had been recognized and sanctioned by society. The majority of worldly women had no time, authority, or freedom to fully express their spirituality in this way.

Furthermore, since worldly women were not officially recognized as spiritual people because of their sexual status and because they were not officially part of the clergy or any religious order, travel and public exposure made them vulnerable to violence like rape and verbal abuse. Only if they left behind their status as worldly women, if they became widows for instance, could they claim the status of a spiritual person to some extent. Birgitta of Sweden, an influential medieval mystic, for example, only commenced her spiritual life after the death of her husband.[170] But even as a widow, she was confronted with much adversity and was only reluctantly accepted as a holy person—mainly due to the support of her confessors.[171] For a woman whose husband was still alive, it was nearly impossible to be officially recognized as a spiritual person.[172]

---

[168] Atkinson, *Oldest Vocation*, 99-100.
[169] Leyser, *Medieval Women*, 122-141.
[170] See Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden*, 15.
[171] Ibid., 9-13.
[172] It is to be noted, however, that exceptions to this rule certainly existed. Marie d' Oignies for instance, lived with her husband in chaste marriage and was still recognized as a mystic. See Elizabeth Spearing, *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality* (New York: Penguin Books, 2002), xxiii.

The medieval understanding of womanhood thus left relatively little room for movement between worldly and spiritual categories, which divided women based on sexual status. Women were either mothers and wives, or they were spiritual mothers. Women that identified as both were an enigma in medieval society. Only if their husbands cooperated and liberated them from their responsibilities as spouse and mother, and if men supported their spiritual endeavors, could married women follow their spiritual vocations. However, even in the rare case that this was granted, these women still had to constantly justify both their spiritual and worldly roles to the public. These kinds of struggles are evinced in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. As a wife and mother who experiences the desire to lead a publicly acknowledged spiritual life shortly after the birth of her first child, Margery faces many challenges. Her ambiguous identity as both laywoman and spiritual person goes beyond traditional understandings of womanhood, and because of that her standing in society and the authenticity of her spirituality is often challenged by clergy and members of the public alike.

3.2 Biological and spiritual motherhood in *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Margery introduces her *Book* by presenting herself as a worldly person. In the first paragraph of her work Margery recounts her marriage to John Kempe and the event of her first childbirth:

> Whan this creatur was twenty yer of age or sumdele mor, sche was maryed to a worschepful burgeys and was wyth chylde wythin schort tyme, as kynde wolde. And, aftyr that sche had conceyved, sche was labowrd wyth grett accessys tyl the child was born, and than, what for labowr sche had in chyldyng and for sekenesse goyng beforn, sche dyspered of hyr lyfe, wenyng sche mygth not levyn.[173]

[173] Kempe, *The Book*, 52.

Margery's worldly experiences are dominated by associations to suffering, sickness, and death. Like in Julian's *Revealtions*, motherhood is connected to pain and despair in Margery's work. Yet here the concept is exclusively applied to physical maternity. Julian clearly connects the Passion of Christ to a mother's labor and suffering. In Margery's account of the Passion, however, the Divine and maternal are clearly separated. Margery does not focus on Christ's suffering as such, but rather highlights her reaction to it.[174]

Margery's pregnancy and labor are entirely separated from the Divine and presented as catalysts for more suffering, rather than a necessary evil for the creation of new life. In the *Revelations*, it is the relationship between mother and child that dignifies motherhood, as childbearing and maternal instruction are understood to be God's work in women. In the *Book*, however, Margery only addresses the relationship to her children very generally. She does not disclose their names, and only uses impersonal terms like "chyld", "childeryn", or "sone" to refer to them.[175] Her son's conversion, documented in Book II, is the sole passage in the *Book* in which Margery gives insight into her life as biological mother. This interaction, too, however, emphasizes Margery's spirituality rather than her standing as mother, as I will show later.

Margery's first childbirth is already directly linked to illness, sin, and death. The moments after Margery's first delivery are dominated by a sudden awareness of mortality and the desire "to be schrevyn of alle hir lyfetym" through confession.[176] Maternity even triggers the author's mental illness, which scholars have identified as post-partum depression.[177] Physical maternity, as it is depicted in the beginning of the *Book,* does not focus on the

---

[174] See ibid., 345-351. The vision of the Passion further places Margery in the role of the *Mater Dolorosa* as McAvoy explains. See McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 44- 47.
[175] See for instance Kempe, *The Book*, 52, 235, and 385.
[176] Ibid., 53.
[177] See ibid.: "Wherfor, aftyr that hir chyld was born, sche, not trostyng hir lyfe, sent for hir gostly fadyr, as iseyd beforn, in ful wyl to be schrevyn of alle hir lyfetym as ner as sche cowed." For a discussion of Margery's illness see for instance Diana Jefferies and Debbie Horsfall, "Forged by Fire: Margery Kempe's Account of Postnatal Psychosis," *Literature and Medicine* 32 (2014): 348-364.

relationship between mother and child, but highlights Margery's suffering and the corrupted state of her soul, as the illness is partly the result of an unconfessed sin.[178] Liz Herbert McAvoy, too, notes the connection between Margery's maternity, illness and death. She explains:

> Both literally in her childbirth labour, and in her struggle with mental and physical collapse, Margery labours to the point of death. In this way, birth and death become inextricably linked at this early point in the text and, as a re-enactment of the punishment imposed upon Eve as a result of her first transgression, motherhood necessarily carries with it the punitive subtext of damnation. The implied correlation between the agonies of childbirth and the loss of Margery's virginal state at this point prefigure her later increasing anxiety about the impediments they provide to her desired goal of living the holy life and redeeming the primal sin of Eve.[179]

Margery's physical maternity is thus highly emblematic and connected to Eve's experiences. Margery is, as Sidonie Smith phrases it, "an avatar of fallen womanhood and Eve's true heiress."[180] Margery's violence towards her body, especially, is a symbolical expression of contempt towards corporeality and associations with lust and sexuality, and the emphasis on her verbosity places her in the stereotype of "sinful mothers".[181]

In this regard, Margery's illness, too, is significantly different from Julian's. While both women experience a life-threatening sickness that leads to their first vision of Christ,

---

[178] Kempe, *The Book*, 54. It is particularly interesting that Margery's recovery time is "significantly the length of a full-term pregnancy", leading McAvoy to the assumption that the scene was shaped in a way that supports Margery's perception of the illness as a "punishment which aptly fits the result of her own perceived concupiscence". See McAvoy, "Virgin, Mother, Whore," 123.
[179] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,* 37.
[180] Smith, *A Poetics*, 71.
[181] Smith notes the correlation of self-harm and the contempt towards the body in *A Poetics*, 70. Harding notes that postpartum demonic possession was a common theme in medieval drama. Postpartum madness was highly emblematic: it served as means to distinguish between "good mothers" and "sinful mothers": "The social dramas of the Middle Ages in which postpartum possession is followed by spiritual conversion and restauration to health confirm the cultural division of women into good mothers who, like the virgin are silent, and sinful mothers who, like Eve, are noisy and troublesome to men." See "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse," 206.

Margery's illness is clearly presented as the result of suppressed sin, whereas Julian's is depicted as divine blessing that enables her to connect with Christ more profoundly. In both cases, however, it is the failure of bodies and the seeming abandonment of this world that creates space for Christ to intervene. Only when Margery has reached the lowest point of her existence as a worldly woman—she has no control over her body, no hope, and no will to live—is her life turned around by the vision of Christ and the succeeding delivery from her suffering. Sidonie Smith understands this moment as Margery's spiritual birth.[182] The first chapter of Margery's *Book* is introduced by a natural birth, but it is concluded by a spiritual nativity wherein Christ calls Margery into a spiritual life.[183] Margery's conversion is further highlighted in the following two chapters, in which she overcomes sins like pride, envy, and lust, which define her existence as a worldly person. After suffering setbacks and failures in her worldly businesses, she gives up her proud and envious ways, and the sexual attraction to her husband is extinguished after she perceives heavenly melodies.[184]

Even though Margery overcomes most of her personal sins, obligations associated with motherhood and wedlock keep her from fully following her spiritual vocation. Child rearing prevents her from traveling, the marriage debt from living chastely.[185] Because of the connection between biological motherhood and sexuality, Margery is further associated with lust in the eyes of the public. As mother and wife, Margery occupies the least favorable social role for women in medieval understanding. She is neither widow nor virgin, the main stations associated with a spiritual vocation for women. These concerns and hindrances are addressed by Christ in chapter twenty-one. Not only does Christ recognize limitations associated with Margery's role as mother, but he also proposes solutions. Margery recalls:

---

[182] Ibid., 66.
[183] Kempe, *The Book*, 57.
[184] Ibid., 57-61 and 61- 66.
[185] See for instance ibid., 131-135.

> In the tyme that this creatur had revelacyons, owyr Lord seyd to hir: 'Dowtyr, thow art wyth childe.' Sche seyd ayen: 'A, Lord, how schal I than do for kepyng of my chylde?' Owir Lord seyd: 'Dowtyr, drede the not, I schal ordeyn for an kepar.' 'Lord, I am not worthy to heryn the spekyn and thus to comown wyth myn husbond. Nerthelesse it is to me gret peyn and gret dysese.' 'Therfor is it no synne to the, dowtyr, for it is to the rathyr mede and meryte, and thow schalt have nevyrthelesse grace, for I wyl that thow bryng me forth mor frwte.' Than seyd the creatur: 'Lord Jhesu, this maner of levyng longyth to thy holy maydens.' 'Ya, dowtyr, trow thow rygth wel that I lofe wyfes also, and specyal tho wyfys whech woldyn levyn chast, yyf thei mygtyn have her wyl, and don her besynes to plesyn me as thow dost, for, thow the state of maydenhode be mor parfyte and mor holy than the state of wedewhode, and the state of wedewhode mor parfyte than the state of wedlake, yet dowtyr I lofe the as wel as any mayden in the world.[186]

Christ releases Margery from her parental obligations and lightens the negative associations with wedlock by disrupting the hierarchical order that categorizes women. Christ confirms its accuracy, but he also creates space for movement between different categories. If wedlock (or rather the sexual union with which it is associated) is performed without pleasure and out of obedience, it is considered to be a virtue. If the woman keeps her body and soul clean from sin, not even her past or social standing can keep her from Christ's love. By far the most interesting aspect of Christ's declarations, however, is his wish for Margery to generate "mor frwte."[187]

The meaning of this phrase is ambiguous. In the context in which Christ uses it, it is connected to marriage and serves as a metaphor for "bodily fruit," that is, children. Margery's

[186] Ibid., 131-132.
[187] Ibid.

response, however, does not support this interpretation because she understands the phrase in a spiritual context. The meaning of "frwte" is connected to virginity and no longer tied to corporeality, sex, or marriage. The ambiguity of the word and the shift in its meaning reflects Margery's transformation from a woman with a mundane purpose to one with a spiritual calling. Because of Margery's exceptional faithfulness and virtue, she is granted the same mission as holy virgins or spiritual mothers. However, while the passage clearly focuses on Margery's spirituality, it also dignifies her role as worldly mother. Christ legitimizes Margery's physical *and* spiritual motherhood; he desires both bodily and spiritual "frewte". The worldly and spiritual aspects of Margery's identity are combined and both parts of her self are sanctioned by God. "Production," that is, "active holiness" which characterizes spiritual motherhood is connected to "reproduction," which is associated with biological motherhood, permitting Margery to be recognized as a spiritual leader while representing both forms of maternity.[188]

Later in the *Book*, when Margery's integrity as worldly and spiritual person is questioned (e.g., when her decision to live chastely in marriage is challenged, or when she is tried for heresy by the archbishop and mayor of York), she uses the same metaphor to defend herself. Chapter fifty- one, for instance, is introduced by a clerk's question about the nature of chaste marriage and its relation to God's command to increase and multiply. Here, too, Margery uses the metaphor of fruitfulness to explain her intricate personality. Margery recalls:

> Another tyme ther cam a gret clerke onto hir, askyng thes wordys how thei schuld ben undirstondyn, *Crescite et multiplicamini*. Sche, answeryng, seyd: 'Ser, thes wordys ben not undirstondyn only of begetyng of chyldren bodily, but also be purchasyng of vertu, whech is frute gostly, as be heryng of the

[188] See Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation*, 99-100 for a discussion on the medieval categorization of biological and spiritual motherhood and its relation to production/ reproduction.

> wordys of God, be good exampyl yevyng, be mekenes and paciens, charite and chastite and swech other, for pacyens is more worthy than myraclys werkyng.'[189]

The clerk addresses an important biblical passage that conflicts with Margery's decision to live chastely in marriage. God established marriage for procreation. The very nature of chaste marriage thus violates God's command. Margery does not deny that parenthood is a major aspect of marriage, but she considers maternity from a spiritual perspective. God's command to multiply is not only to be understood in its literal sense, but also figuratively as a bid to increase in virtue and service to God. Spiritual fruit are brought forth by the internalization of scripture and by leading a virtuous life. The conversion of sinners and the proclamation of God's word, too, are important aspects of Margery's spiritual calling as both actions underline the exemplarity of her spirituality.

In the trial with the archbishop later in the same chapter, Margery also uses a biblical example to justify her identity as both physical and spiritual mother. When the archbishop demands that Margery cease publicly speaking of God, she recalls a passage from scripture in which Christ addresses and blesses both forms of maternity. Michael Van Dussen observes:

> When the Archbishop commands 'Þow schalt sweryn þat þu [ne] xalt techyn ne chalengyn þe pepil in my diocyse,' she retorts, 'þe Gospel makyth mencyon þat, whan þe woman had herd owr Lord prechyd, sche cam be-forn hym wyth a lowde voys & seyd, 'Blyssed be þe wombe þat þe bar & þe tetys þat ȝaf þe sowkyn.' Þan owr Lord seyd a-ȝen to hir, 'Forsoþe so ar þei blissed þat heryn þe word of God and kepyn it.' And þerfor, sir, me thynkyth þat þe Gospel ȝeuyth me leue to spekyn of God.' This exegesis cleverly changes the focus

[189] Ibid., 243-244.

> from physical to spiritual nurturing, calling attention to her role as nurturer of spiritual offspring through keeping the word of God.[190]

Like elsewhere in the *Book*, the divine sanctioning of both physical and spiritual motherhood is also highlighted in the trial by the archbishop. Margery clearly uses this biblical example to defend her spiritual endeavors and to present herself as a woman with a spiritual mission. However, she mainly relies on scripture to justify the public expression of her spirituality. Even though Margery receives visions and Christ himself sanctions her spiritual vocation in the preceding chapters, she still does not mention these revelations in the trial. In chapter ten, for instance, Christ authorizes Margery's role as teacher and declares her to be "thy voys of God"—a confirmation that is entirely omitted in Margery's defense in the trial.[191]

It is interesting that Margery refrains from publicly revealing her personal relationship with Christ or disclosing the nature of her spiritual experiences, as "divine inspiration" and "direct encounters with God" were primarily the means that allowed women to publicly speak of spiritual matters as Claire Sahlin explains.[192] Visions, especially, were an important tool through which "a religious or intellectual woman could gain hearing."[193] Margery's reluctance to rely on personal experiences in the trial is thus significant. Because of her worldly station, Margery can only use methods that were traditionally employed by female mystics in a limited way. As already mentioned, laywomen were considered to be foremost mothers and wives, and as such they were not primarily regarded as spiritual people. In the context of the trial, a disclosure of personal spiritual experiences would therefore only enforce

---

[190] Michael Van Dussen, "Betokening Chastity: Margery Kempe's Sartorial Crisis," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41 (2005), 282.
[191] "And thei that heryn the, thei heryn thy voys of God. Dowtyr, ther is no so synful man in erth levyng, yf he wyl forsake hys synne and don aftyr thi cownsel, swech grace as thu behestyst hym I wyl confermyn for thi lofe." Kempe, *The Book*, 85.
[192] Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden,* 8.
[193] Ibid.

accusations of heresy. Unlike Margery's personal experiences, however, the significance and authenticity of scripture is indisputable.

Margery's accusers cannot deny the existence of the passage that Margery cites, nor can they challenge its meaning. Margery cleverly supports her identity as a spiritual laywoman by highlighting the fact that Christ blesses both spiritual and physical mothers. Here, as earlier in the *Book*, the authentication of her spirituality conveniently legitimizes her role as a worldly person following a spiritual vocation. In the quote that Margery deploys, physical mothers are presented as equally worthy of Christ's blessing as his disciples who abide by his teachings. Both arguments thus strongly support the twofold nature of Margery's identity. Margery's married state does not keep her from receiving divine blessing and Christ's legitimization of the female voice authenticates Margery's role as spiritual mother whose main mission is the conversion of sinners and the transmission of divine knowledge and spiritual counsel.

Further, the trial in its entirety highlights the legitimacy of Margery's spiritual vocation. The laywoman's defense does not only keep her from execution but depicts her as a vessel of divine wisdom and as a teacher. Public preaching and speaking ill of clerics are the central accusations brought forth against Margery in the trial. After citing the passage in which Christ legitimizes female speech, Margery is immediately accused of demonic possession and public preaching. When a clerk recalls St Paul's declaration that "no woman schulde prechyn," Margery replies: "I preche not, ser; I come in no pulpytt. I use but comowycacyon and good wordys, and that wil I do whil I leve.".[194] Genelle Gertz interprets this response "as a kind of *occupatio*, or denial of something in hopes of drawing attention to its possibility."[195] Gertz observes that Margery's denial of public preaching is followed by "sermon rhetoric such as scriptural quotation and exemplum, effectively undermining her

[194] Ibid., and Kempe, *The Book*, 253.
[195] Genelle Gertz, "Confessing Margery Kempe, 1413-1438," in *Heresy Trials and English Women Writers,* 1400–1670 (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), 62.

claim."[196] The method and rhetoric Margery uses in the trial are effective tools for the instruction of her accusers and even lead to the conversion of certain individuals, which makes it possible to read Margery's defense as a form of public preaching. The trial illuminates Margery's ability to confront and challenge even clerics of high rank with her extensive knowledge of scripture and her elaborate and impeccable rhetoric, and thus, underlines the authenticity of her spiritual vocation.

In the trial, Margery steps into the role of the spiritual mother, but she does so while hiding her personal spiritual experiences, and without directly claiming to be a spiritual person. The responses to questions regarding more visible tokens of her piety (e.g., her white clothing) are also elusive. When aspects of her identity are challenged, Margery shifts the focus from the mundane to the spiritual. Biological motherhood is overshadowed by spiritual maternity. When asked about visible tokens of her spirituality, however, Margery focuses on the worldly side of her personality. Instead of highlighting the spiritual implications of the clothing and revealing that she wears them on Christ's command, Margery focuses on her sexual status and worldly role. When the archbishop asks, "Why gost thu in white? Art thu a mayden?", Margery replies, "Nay, ser, I am no mayden; I am a wife."[197] Margery entirely ignores the first part of the bishop's question and remains remarkably silent regarding the true nature of her chosen attire. Instead, she emphasizes her role as wife and mother and openly proclaims that she is neither virgin nor widow as her clothing indicates.[198] At the same time, however, Margery refrains from dwelling on her standing as married woman and does not mention her husband or children. She denies neither part of her personality, but she also refrains from presenting herself as entirely a spiritual or worldly person.

---

[196] Ibid.
[197] Kempe, *The Book,* 249.
[198] See Mary Carpenter Erler, "Margery Kempe's White Clothes," *Medium Ævum* 62 (1993): 78-83, and Van Dussen, "Betokening Chastity," for a discussion on Margery's white clothing.

The seemingly incompatible co-existence of Margery's worldly and spiritual social roles is also addressed in her trial before the mayor of York. Here, too, the accuracy of Margery's faith is tested, but it is primarily Margery's integrity as a married woman that is questioned. The mayor's accusations ostensibly attack Margery's spirituality ("thu art a fals strumpet, a fals loller, and a fals deceyver of the pepyl, and therfor I schal have the in preson").[199] On closer inspection, however, his interrogation evinces a concern with Margery's worldly standing. Before inquiring about anything else, the mayor asks Margery about her heritage and worldly relations.[200] Later in the *Book*, when the trial at the Leicester court continues, it is again the integrity of Margery's character that is questioned. After various clerics confirm the truthfulness of Margery's spirituality, the mayor confronts Margery with "many reprevows wordys and ungodly, the whiche is mor expedient to be celyd than expressyd."[201] While Margery does not disclose the exact nature of his accusations, her response—"I nevyr had part of mannys body in this worlde in actual dede be wey of synne, but of myn husbondys body, whom I am bowndyn to be the lawe of matrimony, and be whom I have born xiiii childeryn"— suggests that the mayor accuses Margery of some kind of sexual sin.[202] When the sanctity of her body and her virtue are challenged, Margery relies on her worldly relations to defend herself. Her role as mother, too, helps to dissolve accusations of sexual improbity and adultery. "Margery's self- defense," McAvoy observes,

> draws heavily on her own position in society as wife and mother. […] the fact that she is and will always be a mother is irrefutable and at the moment of most intense danger in the Leicester court she conjures up the image of her fourteen absent children in her defense, representing herself before the eyes of the patriarchs and escaping through the fissure which this representation opens up

[199] Kempe, *The Book*, 229.
[200] Ibid., 235.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Ibid.

> for her. In effect, Margery uses the reality of her own motherhood to redefine herself in the face of accusations of sexual and religious impropriety, and is able to withdraw behind it.[203]

In the Leicester court, it is Margery's relation to her husband and children, which casts her in the socially accepted roles of the mother and wife, that evinces the sanctity of her body and presents her as a "chaste, loyal and godly woman."[204] It is also this worldly role that Margery draws upon when confronted with other dangers like imprisonment and rape. When threatened to be imprisoned with men and fearing physical assault by the steward of Leicester, Margery pleads for mercy by reminding her accusers of her worldly role as John Kempe's wife.[205] In the case of immediate danger, Margery takes up the role of the wife and mother. By doing so, she steps out of the "uncategorizable and marginal," and integrates herself into the medieval hierarchical categorization of womanhood, which enables her to protect herself against accusations of sexual corruption and physical abuse.[206]

Margery amends her identity to her immediate circumstances. Challenged by ecclesiastical leaders, she relies on scripture and her rhetorical abilities to fight accusations of heresy. Tested and threatened by worldly authorities, she fends for herself by primarily relying on her role as mother and wife. However, in both trials, Margery is reluctant to expose personal spiritual experiences and the true nature of the visible signs of her spirituality (i.e., her white clothing). Only a few clerics of her choosing are granted insight into her personal spiritual experiences. To these as well, Margery only exposes this information so that they may confirm the truthfulness of her spirituality, liberating her from the necessity to publicly expose her visions and revelations. The clerics' approval of Margery's spirituality is more valuable for her as a worldly woman than her subjective experiences.

---

[203] Liz Herbert McAvoy, "Motherhood*: The Book of Margery Kempe*" *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 24 (1997), 25.
[204] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,* 61.
[205] Kempe, *The Book*, 229-31.
[206] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body*, 62.

Margery's encounters with Christ are not mentioned in the trials. Nevertheless, her close relationship with Christ, illustrated in various personal visions, is what is at the very core of her existence as a spiritual person. Unlike in Julian's work, where the anchoress mainly perceives visions of the Passion and where the vision illuminates the greater connection between different events in God's divine plan, Margery's visions of Christ focus on Margery as a person. Like Margery's defense in the trials, the visions of Christ legitimize the spiritual *and* worldly side of her identity. Margery's spirituality is certainly the central theme in the visions, but the intimacy of the encounters is expressed by using imagery associated with worldly relations. The interaction between Christ and Margery is described as that between spouses or parents and their children.

In chapter thirty- six, Margery describes in vivid terms how she kisses Christ's body and how she lies with him in bed.[207] Various medieval mystics and theologians use sexual imagery to highlight the intimate relation to God.[208] In their works, however, the imagery is an abstract concept, and rarely based on what are characterized as literal experiences. Margery's relation to Christ, however, is dominated by the physical more than the spiritual. It does not illustrate the state of Margery's soul, but addresses her role as a spiritual laywoman. Williams explains: "For Margery, erotic descriptions are not as much about her soul being ravished or lifted up as about her closeness to Christ and the ways in which that intimacy is beyond what others can approach; she is as close to him as if she were his real and only wife or lover—even closer because she is also his daughter and mother."[209]

---

[207] See Kempe, *The Book*, 196. For an analysis of the significance of sexual imagery in Margery's work see for instance Williams, "Manipulating Mary," 528.
[208] Sexual imagery is frequently used in mystical works to illustrate an intimate relation to Christ, or to highlight the spiritual benefits of such a relation. Christ as husband is often depicted as much more favorable counterpart to the worldly husband. See for instance John Bugge, "Virginity Sexualized," in *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975), 80-110.
[209] Williams, "Manipulating Mary," 550.

Margery is Christ's spouse, daughter and mother. In fact, in most of the passages, Margery's role as spouse is overshadowed by her role as spiritual mother. In chapter thirty-six for instance, Christ reveals:

> For it is convenyent the wyf to be homly wyth hir husbond. Be he nevyr so gret a lorde and sche so powr a woman whan he weddyth hir, yet thei must ly togedir and rest togedir in joy and pes. Ryght so mot it be twyx the and me, for I take non hed what thu hast be, but what thu woldist be. And oftyntymes have I telde the that I have clene foryove the alle thy synnes. Therfore most I nedys be homly wyth the and lyn in thi bed wyth the. Dowtyr, thow desyrest gretly to se me, and thu mayst boldly, whan thu art in thi bed, take me to the as for thi weddyd husbond, as thy derworthy derlyng, and as for thy swete sone, for I wyl be lovyd as a sone schuld be lovyd wyth the modyr, and wil that thu love me, dowtyr, as a good <wife> owyth to love hir husbonde.[…] for thu art to me a very modir and to al the world, for that gret charite that is in the; and yet I am cawse of that charite myself, and thu schalt have gret mede therfor in hevyn.[210]

Christ is Margery's "derworthy derlyng," husband, son, and parent. All these roles, however, Christ only claims, because Margery (like Mary) is mother to him and the whole world. In other words, Margery's intimacy to Christ is based on her spiritual maternity, or rather the virtues that define it. In the account of Margery's marriage to Christ, too, different social roles are combined and her role as spiritual mother is emphasized. Christ proclaims:

> I take the, Margery, for my weddyd wyfe, for fayrar, for fowelar, for richar, for powerar, so that thu be buxom and bonyr to do what I byd the do. For, dowtyr, ther was nevyr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the, bothe in wel and in wo, to help the and comfort the. And therto I make the suyrte.[211]

---

[210] Kempe, *The Book*, 196-197.
[211] Ibid., 192.

Margery's marriage to Christ is tied to Margery's obedience. Only by following Christ's commands is she rendered his spouse. However, the most interesting aspect of Margery's espousal to Christ is presented in the line following the vow: Christ paradoxically addresses Margery as daughter and at the same time identifies himself as her child. Jesus introduces the sentence by referring to Margery as "dowtyr," but goes on to declare that "ther was nevyr childe so buxom to the modyr as I schal be to the bothe in wel and in wo." In this line, Christ elevates Margery to the standing of his own mother, the very epitome of spiritual motherhood. Moreover, spiritual motherhood and spiritual marriage are linked through the marital vow. Christ is spouse and child in "wel and wo". Margery's spiritual maternity is tied to her marriage to Christ, and the concept of worldly marriage in its entirety, with its close connection to parenthood, is carried over into the spiritual sphere.

Further, the intermingling of different social roles also illuminates the connection between worldly relations and the discipleship to Christ. In a central passage in the New Testament, Mathew 12: 50, Jesus discloses the nature of true discipleship. In this passage, Christ declares: "For whosoever shall do the will of my Father, that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother."[212]While we have no way of knowing if Margery had this passage in mind when she dictated her experiences, it is nevertheless striking that the message of the Bible verse is reflected in the passage that addresses Margery's relationship with Christ. In this verse—much as in passages discussed above— different social roles are merged into one and interpreted in a spiritual context. Christ clearly compares his worldly and spiritual connections. It is not the corporeal and worldly ties that render someone a relative of Christ, but discipleship and obedience. Discipleship is characterized by respecting God's commands and acting upon his will, which is essentially the sole condition for Margery's marriage to Christ.[213]

[212] This verse is cited from the Douay-Rheims 1899 American Edition.
[213] See ibid.,192.

In the *Book*, Margery's intimate relationship with Christ, her "homlynes" and familiarity with him, supports and legitimizes her role as spiritual mother. Christ himself proclaims:

> And for the gret homlynes that I schewe to the that tyme, thu art mekyl the bolder to askyn me grace for thiselfe, for thin husbond, and for thi childryn, and thu makyst every Cristen man and woman thi childe in thi sowle for the tyme, and woldist han as meche grace for hem as for thin owyn childeryn.[214]

The closeness to God encourages Margery to step into the role of the intercessor for her own family and the entirety of Christianity. The "homlynes" to Christ does not extinguish Margery's role as a worldly wife and mother; it rather extends it to the spiritual realm. As a spiritual mother, Margery does not deny the existence of worldly relations but extends her worldly standing. This is especially evident in the second part of the *Book*.

Book II is introduced by illuminating the relationship between Margery and one of her children, and it concludes with a lengthy intercessory prayer for Margery's own family and the entirety of humanity. In the first two chapters of this section, Margery recounts the conversion of her wayward son. He is characterized as a sinful individual, guilty of vanity and lechery, who repeatedly dismisses his mother's advice to turn from his worldly ways and lead a more God-centered life. Only after the son falls seriously ill— a result of Margery's prayer to God to "chastise" and "ponysch" her son for any sins, especially if they are of a sexual nature— the son reconsiders his ways, seeks God's help, and begs for his mother's intercession.[215] Margery's subsequent prayer eventually leads to his recovery and conversion.

The interaction with her son depicts Margery simultaneously as a biological *and* spiritual mother. Margery is, as McAvoy notes, "the anxious mother of the domestic sphere" and "the holy woman […] who must redeem" her son.[216] Unlike McAvoy, Williams argues

---

[214] Ibid., 374-375.
[215] Ibid., 386.
[216] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,* 42.

that Margery primarily "acts as a spiritual mother toward her son" and that her behavior is only to some extent that of a biological mother, as she "shows no greater or lesser concern for her biological son than for her many spiritual children, for whom she also weeps and intercedes."[217] This is only partly true, however. The first chapter of the second book reveals that Margery's interaction with her son is much more personal than her care for the entirety of humanity. Margery's concern for the son's spiritual wellbeing certainly aligns with the vocation of the spiritual mother. The way she achieves her son's conversion, however, places her in the role of the offended and even vindictive worldly mother.

The dispute between Margery and the son is personal and emotionally charged, and clearly that between a mother and son. For instance, Margery does not pray to God for the conversion of her son, as a spiritual mother would, but asks for his punishment. Her prayer does not primarily come from a place of deep concern, but is an impulsive, angry reaction to her son's stubbornness.[218] Margery's "prayer" rather resembles a curse. Even after the son falls seriously ill and various third parties advise her to pray for him, Margery shows no compassion or inclination to help him. She only takes action after he himself requests her intercession. "When her son does return to her," as McAvoy notes,

> we witness no cathartic mother–son reunion, however. Instead, Margery documents it in terms of the sinner begging for the intercession of Mary, Mother of God, thus subtly including a subliminal and personal vindication into her own narrative […] The son being unable to approach God directly in this instance, Margery stands in for the Virgin Mary and becomes her own son's mediator for divine forgiveness. Thus, Margery's son's contrition is a triumph for Margery's worldly *and* spiritual maternity, consolidating for

[217] Williams, "Manipulating Mary," 546.
[218] "He not consenting but scharply answering ageyn, sche sumdel mevyd with scharpnes of spirit, seyde: 'Now sithyn thu wil not leevyn the world at my cownsel, I charge the, at my blessing, kepe thi body klene at the lest fro womanys feleschep tyl thu take a wyfe aftyr the lawe of the Chirche. And yyf thu do not, I pray God chastise the and ponysch the therfor.'" See Kempe, *The Book*, 386.

> herself, her contemporaries and her readers alike her synonymous subjectivity as dutiful earthly mother and privileged Mother of God.[219]

Even though Margery's "prayer" for the son's punishment derives from a place of contempt, and she acts coldly toward the son's suffering, in the scene of the reunion Margery steps into the role of the Virgin Mary. While the argument casts Margery in the role of the nagging mother, the subject of the argument (i.e., the son's conversion from sin) and the effect of the prayer (the son's recovery) emphasize Margery's role as spiritual mother. Through the intercessory prayer of his mother, the soul of Margery's son is saved from damnation, as he abandons his corrupt ways and lives a virtuous life after his healing.

The co-existence of the different forms of maternity is also reflected in the term that is repeatedly used in relation to Margery in the story of the son's conversion. In the beginning of the second part of the *Book*, and after her son's death, Margery is referred to as "creature"—a term that is also frequently used in the first part of the *Book.* However, in the chapters depicting the interactions with her son, Margery's identity is closely tied to his; the term "creature" is replaced with "modyr."[220] In the rare occasions the term is used in the first part of Margery's *Book*, "modyr" is primarily considered in a spiritual context. In Book I, Margery is primarily "modyr" to Christ, the entirety of humanity, and particular individuals.[221] A priest from Rome, who accompanies Margery's on her travels for a short period of time, and Thomas Marchale, a simple man from Newcastle, both recognize Margery as spiritual "modyr."[222] In the first part of the *Book*, Margery's spiritual motherhood is defined through service. To the priest from Rome and Thomas Marchale, Margery is spiritual mother because of her knowledge of scripture, and to Christ she is mother because of her virtue. The term "modyr," thus, symbolizes a strong spiritual and amical bond.

---

[219] McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body,* 43.
[220] Kempe, *The Book*, 386.
[221] See for instance ibid., 192, 196, and 197.
[222] Ibid. 207 and 223.

In the second part of the *Book,* however, "modyr" is explicitly used in relation to her son and signifies both biological and spiritual motherhood. Margery's role as a physical mother is not only emphasized by the term itself, but also underlined in the language Margery uses in relation to her son. He is not just her son, but also "the frute of hir wombe."[223] However, Margery, providing spiritual guidance and effecting the son's conversion, is also a spiritual mother to him, suggesting that the term "modyr" in Book II refers to both biological and spiritual motherhood.

The significance of this twofold presentation of Margery's character is also reflected in the structure of the *Book*. The events surrounding the conversion of Margery's son introduce the second part of her work and serve as a transition between the first and second Book. This is interesting, since "[t]he description of Kempe's son's conversion, visit to his parent's house, and death belongs, chronologically, to the previous book," as Rebecca Krug observes.[224] The separate consideration of the events surrounding her son thus emphasizes its significance in Margery's work. Her son's conversion is not integrated into the greater part of Margery's *Book*, nor is it a significant part of her transformation from a worldly to a spiritual person. Thematically, it seems to introduce the conclusion to her work by illuminating Margery's newly acclaimed role as a spiritual laywoman. Krug asserts that the transitory function of the passage focuses on the son more than the mother, since the first two chapters depict "the story of another conversion, of another spiritual son, another companion in the way."[225] Krug's observation that the passage serves as a bridge between the different parts of Margery's work is certainly accurate. The focus of the passage, however, is not the son, but Margery. The interaction with her son highlights her spiritual abilities and supports her identity as a spiritual and worldly woman.[226]

---

[223] Ibid., 387.
[224] Krug, *Margery Kempe,* 204.
[225] Ibid.
[226] In the interaction with her husband towards the end of Book I, Margery also occupies simultaneously the role of a worldly and spiritual woman. Unlike in the first part of Book I, where the relationship between Margery and

The first part of Margery's *Book*, while never denying Margery's worldly role, primarily illuminates her transformation from a worldly woman to a laywoman with a spiritual vocation. The second part, on the other hand, depicts Margery as a person who has already undergone this transformation. In Book II Margery is entirely a biological and spiritual mother. Her identity is no longer dependent on the legitimation of her character through Christ or people of the church, but it is primarily her actions that place her in the role of the spiritual laywoman. Margery's biological relation to her son and her mystical powers (i.e., the ability to inflict harm and heal through prayer), depict her as both laywoman and spiritual person.

The extent to which Margery's identity depends on her role as a physical and spiritual mother can also be seen towards the end of her *Book*. Margery concludes her work by praying for the entirety of humanity, including, amongst others, her confessors, accusers, heretics, and the King of England. A passage in her lengthy intercessory prayer is particularity interesting, as Margery specifically prays for her "gostly" and "bodily" children: "I cry the mercy, Lord, for alle my childeryn, gostly and bodily, and for al the pepil in this world, that thu make her synnys to me be very contricyon as it wer myn owyn synnys, and foryeve hem as I wolde that thu foryove me."[227] The last few pages of the *Book* emphasize Margery's role as intermediary.

---

her husband is dominated by sexual aspects of the relationship, Margery's caring for John Kempe during his illness, which is described in chapter seventy-six, clearly places her in the role of the spiritual person who sees John Kempe primarily as a representative of Christ ("sche […]servyd hym [John Kempe] and helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde a don Crist himself" (see Kempe, *The Book*, 332)). As a result, Margery's care for John is elevated from the mundane to the spiritual realm; she encounters John more as a fellow Christian who is in need of her help rather than her spouse. It is interesting, however, that—unlike the nursing of other sick people (see for instance chapter thirty-four)— Margery understands caring for her husband as a burden and as a punishment for the "fleschly lustys" she experienced in the earlier years of her marriage (Kempe, *The Book*, 332). She even emphasizes "that many tymys sche schuld an yrkyd hir labowr" (ibid.). This sentence implies that Margery's care for her husband did not derive from a place of love but was performed out of obligation. Margery does not decide to live with her husband after his fall and subsequent disability out of a selfless desire to help him in his need, but she rather obeys Christ's command to "take hym [John Kempe] hom and kepe hym" (ibid., 331). The ambiguous depiction of Margery's relationship with her husband thus places Margery in the role of the spiritual person who labors for the sick, while also casting her in the worldly role of the wife. Margery's care for her husband, while reminding the reader of her past as sexual woman, also portrays Margery as a wife who, to some extent, fulfills the social expectations imposed upon a spouse, and depicts her as a person who fulfills her spiritual obligations.

[227] Kempe, *The Book*, 425.

This passage, however, explicitly depicts her as a spiritual and biological mother. Here, too, Margery's "bodily" children are separated from her "gostly" offspring. In the passage, Margery differentiates between her worldly and spiritual roles, but at the same time also combines the different sides of her identity.

Margery introduces her *Book* by depicting herself as a worldly sinful mother and Eve's heiress. The first part of Margery's autobiography is dominated by the quest for her true identity and is largely a documentation of the struggles Margery faces in the attempt to establish an identity as a spiritual laywoman. Book II, however, casts her simultaneously in the role of the physical and worldly mother. At the end of the *Book*, Margery is characterized as a biological mother who has moved beyond the mundane and portrayed as a worldly mother who is fully dedicated to her spiritual vocation.

4. Conclusion: Between Eve and Mary? Two East Anglian women and their understanding of maternity and womanhood

In the course of this study, it was shown that Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich understand maternity to be a multifaceted concept. Applied to the spiritual realm, Julian mainly uses motherhood in connection to the Divinity, especially Christ, to illustrate the significance of the Passion and to illuminate God's concern for humankind. Divine maternity is defined by the ability to unite the body and soul to God, and by giving life into the spiritual realm. What makes Christ our mother is the corporeal sacrifice through which he joins the rest of humanity to his body, elevating it from the mundane to the Divine.

Margery, however, understands spiritual maternity mainly in relation to herself. In the *Book*, maternity is not associated with the Divine and God is mainly referred to as father, spouse or son. Nevertheless, Margery, too, recognizes a spiritual form of maternity, namely spiritual motherhood. In the course of the first part of her work, she describes the transformation from a worldly woman to a laywoman with a spiritual calling. Margery's life after her first childbirth is characterized by the abandonment of sin, estrangement from worldly relations, and the desire to proclaim the word of God and convert sinners. Her identity as a spiritual mother is especially highlighted in her relationship with the priest from Rome and Thomas Marchelle, who accept her as a spiritual mother and recognize her knowledge of God and scripture. The trial by the archbishop of York, too, places her in the role of the spiritual mother, as Margery convinces her accusers of the legitimacy of her spiritual vocation by citing scripture and elicits the conversion of specific clerics.

When a clerk inquires about Margery's understanding of God's command to procreate, and when the Archbishop forbids her to speak of God in his parish, Margery cites scripture to underline the divine sanctioning of female discipleship. Margery understands God's precept to multiply to be a command to produce both bodily and spiritual "frewte," that is, to bear children and guide people to God. The biblical passage cited in the trial also legitimizes both

spiritual and biological motherhood: Christ declares that not only the body of the woman that bore him is to be blessed, but also any person that hears and acts according to his teaching.

However, in both the *Revelations* and the *Book*, motherhood is also considered in its more traditional sense, and in both works the concept of biological motherhood is ambiguous. On the one hand, Julian and Margery seem to adapt contemporary attitudes towards the female, corporeality, and biological motherhood. On the other, the women also dignify maternity by emphasizing that it is intended and legitimized by God. In the parable of the servant, Julian links Mary's womb to the world and death. As the sole women mentioned in the tale, Mary clearly serves as representative of biological motherhood. In the parable, Julian clearly draws attention to Mary's reproductive qualities more than her obedience and piety. Mary's body is depicted as an instrument that enables the incarnation through the formation of Christ's body, which allows for the salvific process to take place. Just as Adam falls into the world, Christ falls into the womb of Mary. He takes on human form and becomes part of this world, which Julian understands as allegorical bruising since it is the incarnation that allows Christ's suffering and death.

This connection of the female to corporeality, suffering, and death can be understood if we consider Julian's comprehension of human nature: the human is constituted of body and soul, whereby the soul is one with God and the body is in substance one with the world. In this context, the body is understood as means of separating the human soul from God, and the mother, who forms the body of the child, is considered to be an active part in the process. This understanding of biological motherhood is also addressed in Julian's sole depiction of her own mother. In the short text, her mother is the person that attempts to close Julian's eyes and deprives her of the sight of Christ, which is the only solace in the anchoress's sickness. Hereby, Julian's own illness enables an exceptional proximity to God, as it is through her pain that she is united to Christ on the cross. This moment, however, is characterized by the abandonment of her body and estrangement from the person from which it originated,

namely, her mother. Julian's closeness to God correlates with the increasing estrangement from her body, which reflects to a large extent Julian's understanding of human nature and the relationship between God and human.

Margery, too, connects biological motherhood to corporeality, suffering, and death. Her *Book* is introduced by the depiction of her first childbirth, which is succeeded by a mental illness resulting from suppressed sin. Unlike Julian's depiction of physical motherhood, which is based on the anchoress's understanding of the Passion and the constitution of the human, Margery's depiction of biological motherhood is clearly formed around the model of Eve and the medieval understanding of sinful mothers. What characterizes Margery's first childbirth, and therefore the beginning of her role as biological mother, is the fear of death and the desire to be cleansed from previous sin. For Margery, it is not the connection to corporeality *per se* that renders physical maternity corrupt to some extent, but its connection to lust and sin.

Despite the negative associations to biological motherhood, both women also dignify physical maternity and womanhood towards the end of their works. In the parable of the servant, for instance, Julian does not consider Eve to be a counterpart to Mary but includes her in the collective that Adam represents. Julian connects biological motherhood with the world and corporeality, but this characterization does not derive from associations with Eve, her connection to original sin, or the sexual status of the woman, but from Julian's understanding of the human constitution and the salvific process. In fact, towards the end of the *Revelations*, Julian dignifies biological motherhood and depicts the biological mother as a means through which God creates, instructs, and nurtures children.

Margery, too, dignifies biological motherhood in her work. Christ himself sanctions her role as mother and wife and declares that her station is not a hindrance for the pursuit of her spiritual vocation. Furthermore, Margery simultaneously sanctions biological and spiritual motherhood through scripture. The second part of her *Book* further places the laywoman

simultaneously in the role of the biological and spiritual mother, suggesting that both forms of motherhood could indeed co-exist. The story of Margery's conversion shows that a woman could simultaneously occupy reproducing and producing roles, contesting Atkinson's assumption that the two spheres of maternity were exclusive.

The comparison of the works thus shows that medieval categorizations of motherhood were not as strictly divided as previously believed, at least in the minds of these two east Anglian women. Furthermore, the depiction of motherhood in the works gives insight into the authors' understanding of womanhood as both concepts are closely intertwined in Margery's *Book* and Julian's *Revelations*. Julian's work reveals that the connection between corporeality, the world, and woman did not solely derive from the comparison of Eve and Mary, but that it could also be rooted in other theological and philosophical understandings of creation. The story of Margery's life further discloses that women who occupied a secular standing in society could also be recognized as spiritual mothers. While womanhood is certainly connected to Christianity in the writings, and different forms of maternity are defined in association with religion, Julian and Margery do not entirely separate spiritual forms of maternity and biological motherhood. This suggests that (i) biological motherhood did not entirely obstruct the pursuit of a spiritual life or vocation and (ii) that women could be divine agents and proclaim God's word to their own offspring, as well as to the public. While Julian's work follows a contemplative approach and Margery's writing focuses on her personal transformation, and both women's considerations of motherhood differ to some extent, the *Book* and *Revelations* nevertheless evince that, at least in the minds of their authors, a woman could be God's instrument and voice, regardless of her social standing.

5. Bibliography

Primary Sources

Julian of Norwich. *The Writings of Julian of Norwich: A Vision Showed to a Devout Woman and a Revelation of Love*. Edited by Nicholas Watson and Jacqueline Jenkins. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

Kempe, Margery. *The Book of Margery Kempe.* Edited by Barry Windeatt. New York: Longman Annotated Texts, 2000.

Raymond of Capua. *The Life of Catherine of Siena*. Translated by Conleth Kearns. Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1980.

Tertullian. "Modesty in Apparel Becoming to Women in Memory of the Introduction of Sin Through a Woman." In *Ante- Nicene Fathers*. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans, 1885.

Secondary Sources

Alford, John. "Haukyn's Coat: Some Observations on 'Piers Plowman' B. Xiv. 22-7." *Medium Aevum* 43 (1974): 133-138.

Atkinson, Clarissa. *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.

Baker, Denise Nowakowski. "Reconceiving the *Imago Dei:* The Motherhood of Jesus and the Ideology of the Self." In *Julian of Norwich's Showings,* 107-134. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Baker, Denise Nowakowski. "The Parable of the Lord and Servant and the Doctrine of Original Sin." In *Julian of Norwich's Showings,* 83-106. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

Bugge, John. "Virginity Sexualized." In *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal*. The Hague: Nijhoff, 1975.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "'And Woman His Humanity:' Female Imagery in the Religious Writing of the Later Middle Ages." In *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion,* 151-179. New York: Zone Books, 2012.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "Jesus as Mother and Abbot as Mother: Some Themes in Twelfth-Century Cistercian Writing." In *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, 110- 170. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "The Blood of Christ in the Later Middle Ages." *Church History* 71 (2002): 685-714.

Bynum, Caroline Walker. "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages: A Reply to Leo Steinberg." In *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion,* 151-179. New York: Zone Books, 2012.

Chase, Martin. "The *Elucidarius* and Julian of Norwich's Parable of the Lord and the Servant." *Notes and Queries* 58 (2011): 360–364.

Classen, Albrecht. *Reading Medieval Women Writers*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016.

Donohue-White, Patricia. "Reading Divine Maternity in Julian of Norwich." *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 5 (2005): 19-36.

Easton, Martha. "The Wound of Christ, The Mouth of Hell: Appropriations and Inversions of Female Anatomy in the Later Middle Ages." In *Tributes to Jonathan J.G. Alexander: The Making and Meaning of Illuminated Medieval & Renaissance Manuscripts, Art and Architecture*, edited by Susan L' Engle and Gerald Guest, 395-414. London: Harvey Miller, 2006.

Easton, Martha. "'Was It Good for You, Too?' Medieval Erotic Art and Its Audiences." *Different visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1 (2008): 1-30.

Erler, Mary Carpenter. "Margery Kempe's White Clothes." *Medium Ævum* 62 (1993): 78-83.

Ferrante, Joane. *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's Roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.

Garrison, Jennifer. "Julian of Norwich's Allegory and the Mediation of Salvation." In *Challenging Communion: The Eucharist and Middle English Literature*, 105-31. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017.

Gertz, Genelle. "Confessing Margery Kempe, 1413-1438." In *Heresy Trials and English Women Writers, 1400–1670,* 48-76. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Goodman, Anthony. *Margery Kempe and Her World*. London: Longman, 2002.

Harding, Wendy. "Medieval Women's Unwritten Discourse on Motherhood: A Reading of Two Fifteenth- Century Texts." *Women's Studies* 2 (1992): 197- 209.

Heimmel, Jennifer. "*God Is Our Mother:" Julian of Norwich and the Medieval Image of Christian Feminine Divinity*. New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1999.

Hollywood, Amy. "'That Glorious Slit:' Irigaray and the Medieval Devotion to Christ's Side Wound." In *Luce Irigaray and Premodern Culture: Thresholds of History,* edited by Elizabeth Harvey and Theresa Krier, 105-125. London: Routledge, 2004.

Jefferies, Diana, and Debbie Horsfall. "Forged by Fire: Margery Kempe's Account of Postnatal Psychosis." *Literature and Medicine* 32 (2014): 348-364.

Jenkins, Ena. "Julian's Revelation of Love: A Web of Metaphor." In *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy, 154-166. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008.

Kempster, Hugh. "A Question of Audience: The Westminster Text and Fifteenth- Century Reception of Julian of Norwich." In *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sarah McEntire, 257-90. New York: Garland, 1998.

Krantz, Diane. *The Life and Text of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Peter Lang, 1997.

Krug, Rebecca. *Margery Kempe and the Lonely Reader*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2017.

Larington, Carolyne. *Women and Writing in Medieval Europe*. London: Routledge, 1995.

Larsen, Vickie. "Julian of Norwich in the Fifteenth Century: The Material Record, Maternal Devotion, and London, Westminster Cathedral Treasury MS4." *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 14 (2011): 41–73.

Leyser, Henrietta. *Medieval Women: A Social History of Women in England 450-1500.* London: Phoenix, 1995.

Lochrie, Karma. *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991.

Lochrie, Karma. "Mystical Acts, Queer Tendencies." In *Constructing Medieval Sexuality,* edited by Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James Schultz, 180-200, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Magill, Kevin. *Julian of Norwich: Mystic or Visionary?* London: Routledge, 2006.

Makowski, Elizabeth. *A Pernicious Sort of Woman: Quasi-Religious Women and Canon Lawyers in the Later Middle Ages*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012.

McAvoy, Liz Herbert. *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*. Cambridge England: D.S. Brewer, 2008.

McAvoy, Liz Herbert. *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe*. New York: Boydell & Brewer, 2004.

McAvoy, Liz Herbert. "'For we be doubel of God's making:' Writing, Gender and the Body in Julian of Norwich." In *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy, 166- 181. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008.

McAvoy, Liz Herbert. "Motherhood: The Book of Margery Kempe." *Medieval Feminist Newsletter* 24 (1997).

McAvoy, Liz Herbert. "Virgin, Mother, Whore: The Sexual Spirituality of Margery Kempe." In *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made*

Flesh, edited by Susannah Mary Chewning and Robert Yeager, 121-38. London: Routledge, 2005.

McEntire, Sandra. "The Likeness of God and the Restoration of Humanity in Julian of Norwich's Showings." In *Julian of Norwich: A Book of Essays*, edited by Sandra McEntire, 3-35. New York: Garland, 1998.

McNamer, Sarah. "The Exploratory Image: God as Mother in Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* of Divine Love." *Mystics Quarterly* 15 (1989): 21-28.

Miles, Laura Saetveit. "Space and Enclosure in Julian of Norwich's A Revelation of Love." In *A Companion to Julian of Norwich*, edited by Liz Herbert McAvoy, 154-166. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2008.

Nuth, Joan. *Wisdom's Daughter: The Theology of Julian of Norwich*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

Palliser, Margaret. *Christ, Our Mother of Mercy: Divine Mercy and Compassion in the Theology of the Shewings of Julian of Norwich.* Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992.

Parsons, John Carmi. "The Pregnant Queen as Counselor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood." In *Medieval Mothering*, edited by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, 39- 62. New York: Garland, 1996.

Riddy, Felicity. "Text and Self in The Book of Margery Kempe." In *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Age*s, edited by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 435–53. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

Robertson, Elizabeth. "Medieval Medical Views of Women and Female Spirituality in the *Ancrene Wisse* and Julian of Norwich's Showings." In *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, edited by Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury, 142- 168. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993.

Sahlin, Claire. *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy*. Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001.

Sheldrake, Philip. “Two Ways of Seeing: The Challenge of Julian of Norwich's Parable of a Lord and a Servant.” *Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality* 17 (2017): 1-18.

Smith, Sidonie. *A Poetics of Women's Autobiography: Marginality and the Fictions of Self-Representation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

Spearing, Anthony Colin. “The Book of Margery Kempe; or, The Diary of a Nobody.” *Southern Review* 38 (2002): 625–35.

Spearing, Elizabeth. *Medieval Writings on Female Spirituality*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Staley, Lynn. *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994.

Stone, Robert Karl. *Middle English Prose Style: Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich*. Berlin: De Gruyter, 1970.

Tachau, Katherine. “God's Compass and *Vana Curiositas*: Scientific Study in the Old French Bible Moralisée.” *The Art Bulletin* 80 (1998): 7-33.

Thebaut, Nancy. “Bleeding Pages, Bleeding Bodies: A Gendered Reading of British Library MS Egerton 1821.” *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality* 45 (2009): 175-200.

Turner, Denys. *Julian of Norwich, Theologian*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

Van Dussen, Michael. “Betokening Chastity: Margery Kempe’s Sartorial Crisis.” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41 (2005): 275-288.

Wallace, David, and Carolyn Dinshaw. *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Watson, Nicholas. “The Making of The Book of Margery Kempe.” In *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Age*s, edited by Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, 395–434. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005.

Watt, Diane. *Medieval Women's Writing*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007.

Williams, Tara. “Manipulating Mary: Maternal, Sexual, and Textual Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*.” *Modern Philology* 107 (2010): 528-55.

Windeatt, Barry. Introduction to *Revelations of Divine Love*, by Julian of Norwich, ix-li. Translated by Barry Windeatt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Oi Yuen, Wai Man. *Religious Experience and Interpretation: Memory as the Path to the Knowledge of God in Julian of Norwich's Showings*. New York: Peter Lang, 2003.