

1. Figuring Forth the Body of Christ: Devotion and Politics

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In her important study, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, Sarah Beckwith takes note of the basic "commonplace" around which this paper moves and to which it continually refers. She notes that, "It is a commonplace of late medieval histories of spirituality that the late Middle Ages witness a new and extraordinary focus on the passion of Christ."¹ That this is indeed a "commonplace" is due to a multi-disciplinary tradition of research, well exemplified by scholars such as Hans Belting, Carolyn Walker Bynum, Richard Kieckhefer, James Marrow, Sixten Ringbom, Miri Rubin, Gertrude Schiller and Rosemary Woolf. These historians have documented how the dominant representation of the Incarnate Christ became the body of Jesus, as an infant and, especially, in the Passion. This body was now displayed with an attention to physical details utterly unknown to the Gospels and to early Christian traditions, details richly exemplified in James Marrow's *Passion Iconography* and in Rosemary Woolf's study of late medieval religious lyrics.² The humiliated, tortured, whipped, nailed down, pierced, dying but life-giving body of Christ, the very body literally present in the eucharist, "Corpus Christi," "corpus verum et proprium": this body became the dominant icon of the late medieval church and the devotion that the church cultivated and authorized. This is the body at the heart of the "commonplace" on which this paper is a reflection, the bleeding dying body which had come to be identified "as the essence of Christ's humanity."

So normative was this identification that it has become conventional to reproduce it in modern scholarship, rather than to interrogate it. For example, after describing the tortured, twisted and agonized body of Jesus in standard late medieval representations of the Passion, Woolf classifies these representations as "Christ in His humanity," a move made similarly by scholars such as Marrow and Kieckhefer.³ Now while this move may seem an inevitable one in historical scholarship, a responsible reflection of the dominant iconography in the earlier

page 2

culture, it may become an impediment to our thinking about late medieval figurations of Christ, the devotion to which they belonged, and their relations to contemporary sources of power. How this may happen I shall now suggest by discussing aspects of Bynum's work.

I select her work because it centers on figurations of Christ's body; because it is immensely influential, outside as well as within medieval studies; because it is so copiously documented; and because it has explored late medieval devotion to Christ with an unprecedented attention to the constitutions of gender, sexual differentiations and human bodies in that culture. This major shift in historical paradigm enabled the study of power where that had once seemed irrelevant in the scholarship on the figuration of Christ's body. Whatever the force of Kathleen Biddick's critique of Bynum's work, and however critical my own comments, her work has certainly stimulated and guided my own inquiries.⁴

Yet Bynum's attention to gender, bodies and Christ in medieval discourses remains within the conventional approach I have described. It too *identifies* standard representations of the tortured body of Jesus with "Christ's humanity."⁵ Indeed her pursuit of the conventional identification is pervasive and enthusiastic. As she follows the attempts of certain women to imitate the dominant figuration of Christ's body, Bynum maintains that the "self-inflicted suffering" through which they "were becoming more wonderfully and horribly the body on the cross" comprised "a profound expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation: the doctrine that Christ, by becoming human saves *all* that human being is."⁶ Furthermore, it is within this framework of identification that she develops a major thesis of both *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* and *Fragmentation and Redemption*, one which I am particularly concerned to explore. This thesis maintains that the imitation of the dominant figure of Christ's body was one that empowered women, especially the women whose ascetic practices so fascinate her. I shall be seeking to present some objections to this thesis and to its assumptions about the political implications of the way Christ's humanity was being predominantly figured through the wounded, bleeding and nurturing body on the cross. I shall also consider some alternative sources of subversion *occluded* by her own work.

But before offering criticism I wish to recollect Bynum's arguments around food, its place in the society's division of labor and its symbolism. She claims that food was "woman's sphere," under woman's "control" and of "overwhelming concern" to women. Plausible as this sounds, it should be tested against the treatment of food production and symbolism in *Piers Plowman*, a poem that would suggest that these claims may be a little harder to defend than Bynum assumes. That exploration, however, will be undertaken elsewhere, and here it will suffice to recall her assertion that because food was an "overwhelming concern" of women rather than of men, it became a religious symbol of more importance to women than to men. Hence women's imitation of Christ's humanity tended to concentrate on practices around food extremes of physical fasting combined with holy feasting, whether on the eucharist or "in story after

page 3

story" on "pus and filth from the sick."⁷ But, she maintains, women did not only become "the macerated body of the Savior, the bleeding meat they often saw in eucharistic visions" (*Holy Feast*, p. 114). On the contrary women's bodies, as defined in the discourses of medieval culture, allegedly meant that women were always already such a body: "Women's bodies, in the act of lactation and of giving birth, were analogous both to ordinary food and to the body of Christ, as it died on the cross and gave birth to salvation" (*Holy Feast*, p. 30). She emphasizes that "medieval assumptions . . . associated female and flesh and the body of God" (*Fragmentation*, p.215): "Since Christ's body was a body that nursed the hungry, both men and women naturally assimilated the ordinary female body to it" (*Holy Feast*, p. 272). This is a very strong, and characteristically generalized claim about medieval "men and women," about their homogenized attitudes to "the ordinary female body." Whether it can withstand exposure to a range of medieval writings outside Bynum's attention, such as fabliaux, the *Canterbury Tales*, mystery plays or *Piers Plowman*, seems to me very doubtful, but not an issue for exploration here. Be that as it may, Bynum does not let her grasp of medieval misogyny prevent her from stressing her claims about the way medieval "men and women naturally assimilated the ordinary female body" to Christ's humanity and its dominant figuration.⁸

On the contrary, she stresses that "women" (this classless, regionless, universalizing term pervades and shapes her studies⁹) gained "power" through the constitution of their bodies in medieval discourse and through their corresponding convergence with Christ's body.¹⁰ She exemplifies this convergence, and its alleged "empowerment," through images of Christ's wound as a breast exuding "wine or blood into chalices or even hungry mouths."¹¹ As Christ's "flesh did womanly things: it bled food and gave birth to new life," so "women" allegedly found that "their flesh" could do what his could do: bleed, feed, die and give life" (*Fragmentation*, pp. 215, 222). Thus, so the argument goes, were women empowered.¹² A "feminized" Christ meant that "women" were always nearer than men to a "literal, bodily *imitatio Christi*" (*Fragmentation*, p. 218), nearer to God Incarnate than the men who ruled church and world. Whereas men had to cross-dress, as it were, women were already "there," "naturally."

At this point it may seem that Bynum's historical scholarship joins a strand of critical theory influentially elaborated by Luce Irigaray. Perhaps we should recall "La Myst,rique," a part of *Speculum* in which Christ is described as that "most female of men" while the writing woman contemplates him:

And she never ceases to look upon his nakedness, open for all to see, upon the gashes in his virgin flesh, at the wounds from the nails that pierce his body as he hangs there in his passion and abandonment. And she is overcome with love of him/herself. In his crucifixion he opens a path of redemption to her. . . .

From this the meditation moves to consider how a wound could be "holy," ecstatic "in that glorious slit where she curls up as if in her nest. . . . She bathes

page 4

in a blood that flows over her, hot and purifying . . . to know myself I scarcely need a 'soul,' I have only to gaze upon the gaping space in your loving body." She then writes that she recognizes hers in "the lips of that slit . . . by touching myself there (almost) directly." Contemplating the nails and spear piercing the body of Jesus, she observes: "if the Word was made flesh in this way, and to this extent, it can only have been to make me [become] God in my jouissance."¹³ So Christ's humanity, figured forth in the crucified body, undoes the specular logic of patriarchy while the abject and wounded woman lives out an *imitatio Christi* in which an abyss of "jouissance" opens up in, through, "the gaping space" in his body, "the lips of that slit." To many this may seem not dissimilar to some of Bynum's

materials, and the medieval historian seems to welcome such analogizing, although the footnote in which she does so is brief, vague and without reference to *Speculum*¹⁴. Yet the question that must be asked of Irigaray here, one equally relevant to Bynum's "empowerment" thesis where it seems to converge with Irigaray, was put by Toril Moi:

If her study of the mystics leads her to take pleasure in the image of woman imitating the sufferings of Christ, is she not caught in a logic that requires her to produce an image of woman that is exactly the same as the specular constructions of femininity in patriarchal logic?¹⁵

Whatever answers readers of Irigaray's *Speculum* may produce to this question, Bynum herself asserts that the fusion of Christ on the cross with "women," and women's bodies, empowered "women" to gain "control" over their own bodies and circumstances, "their bodies and their world."¹⁶ Indeed through being identified with the body of Christ as it was figured forth in the late medieval church, women "controlled their religious circumstances as well as their domestic ones," even "controlling those in authority" (*Holy Feast*, pp. 237, 243). Not only "jouissance" then, which in Bynum's language may perhaps be "delicious grovelling" (*Holy Feast*, p. 290), but the actual exercise of control over the very patriarchal forces, institutions, symbols and authorities which monopolized the priesthood and the preaching offices as well as wielding the sources of power as these have been traditionally understood political, military, educational, legal and ecclesiastical. A sweet subversion, indeed, and, irony of ironies, apparently one sponsored by the church and its male rulers.

But what was the imitation of Christ that the dominant figuration of Christ's body shaped? The focus of the *imitatio Christi* practiced by the women Bynum studies was the crucifixion--as befits the dominant devotional iconography from which this paper set out. Their attempt was to achieve, if that is the right word, "a fusion with Christ's agony on the cross" (*Holy Feast*, pp. 211-12). Although Bynum's treasury of such imitations seems endless, it will suffice here to quote one of her own summaries of her central materials:

Deliberate and systematic physical punishment was part of the daily routine for many religious women. . . . Alda of Sienna, for example ...

page 5

whipped herself with chains, wore a crown of thorns. . . . Dorothy of Montau put herself through a pantomime of the Crucifixion that involved praying with her arms extended in the form of a cross and later, in imitation of Christ's burial, lying prostrate with the entire weight of her body supported only by toes, nose, and forehead. Jane Mary of Maillé stuck a thorn into her head in remembrance of Christ's crown of thorns. Reading the lives of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century women saints greatly expands one's knowledge of Latin synonyms for whip, thong, flail, chain, etc. Ascetic practices commonly reported in these *vitae* include wearing hair shirts, binding the flesh tightly with twisted ropes, rubbing lice into self-inflicted wounds . . . thrusting nettles into one's breasts. . . . Rolling in broken glass, jumping into ovens, hanging from a gibbet . . . lacerating their bodies until the blood flows, with all kinds of whips . . . (*Holy Feast*, pp. 209-10).

Following the same models of *imitatio Christi*, Angela of Foligno drank water that "came from washing the sores of lepers," exulting when one of the scabs stuck in her throat, and Catherine of Genoa ate scabs and burned herself (*Holy Feast*, pp. 144-45, 182). Not surprisingly, Rudolph Bell's *Holy Anorexia* provides many similar examples, such as Eustochia of Messini wearing a pigskin undergarment to gouge out her flesh, whipping herself, melting candlewax over her head, burning her face and using ropes "to stretch her arms in the form of a cross."¹⁷ All these practices allegedly exemplify what Bynum describes as "a profound expression of the doctrine of the Incarnation" (*Holy Feast*, p.294), a culturally normative, if exuberant, understanding of the dominant figuration of Christ's humanity. This, then, is the combination of model and imitation that *empowered* the subordinate, that *subverted* the logic and religion of a patriarchal and profoundly misogynistic culture.

I confess that I remain unconvinced by Bynum's "empowerment" thesis, and unconvinced by her interpretation of the "commonplace" from which this paper set out, at least in so far as that interpretation relates to power in late medieval society. And perhaps she herself may yet come to be equally unconvinced, for in an essay first published in 1989 she made the following observation in relation to "women's mysticism as a form of female empowerment":

This argument must also recognize that the clergy themselves encouraged such female behavior both because female

asceticism, eucharistic devotion and mystical trances brought women more closely under the supervision of spiritual directors and because women's visions functioned for males, too. . . . Moreover, theologians and prelates found women's experiential piety useful in the thirteenth-century fight against heresy . . . against Cathar dualism. (*Fragmentation*, p. 195)

However, this important comment is still not allowed to move from the margins

page 6

to the center of her inquiries, not allowed to unravel her own "empowerment" thesis. Yet in my view this observation should actually guide our attempts to understand the constitution of the humanity and the body of the late medieval Christ. Taken seriously, brought in from the margins, it will lead us to networks of force that are very relevant to our inquiries.

Basic to the shift in perspective here will be the acknowledgement that the dominant figurations of Christ's body, *including its alleged "feminization,"* were *made* dominant, *constituted* as dominant, *maintained* as dominant. So we will now approach the appearance of Christ's body in the late medieval church with the understanding that human bodies are produced within specific discursive regimes with specific technologies of power. This will enable us to ask whether "feminizing" the tortured body of Christ as maternal may not actually reinforce some basic premisses in patriarchal constitutions of "women." We will then want to ask whether this particular "feminization" of Christ may not contribute to the divinization of maternity as the essence of "woman." In elaborating such inquiries, as I am doing elsewhere, it is helpful to bear in mind Foucault's expositions of the ways in which pleasures and desires, including pleasures that view themselves as transgressive, may be produced by current relations of power as a move in the perpetuation of those relations of power. So the practices and symbols celebrated by Bynum as subverting the logic of patriarchy need to be explored as possibly being among the very effects of the ecclesiastical and normative powers that she thinks were being circumvented by making "women" the body on the cross, and the body on the cross "feminine." The abjections that she explicates as subversive might be better viewed, to put the issue here starkly, as themselves a product of modes of piety designed to make their practitioners objects of control, albeit, perhaps, sometimes, or often, ecstatic ones. Judith Butler's critical analysis of Kristeva's "body politics" identifies the issues I have in mind here. She argues that, "Kristeva fails to understand the paternal mechanisms by which affectivity itself is generated," while the very vocabulary of affect renders the relevant and productive paternal law invisible. [18](#)

This shift in perspective encourages a question that is a little different both to those shaping traditional research in this field and to Bynum's. The question can be formulated as follows: to what technologies of power was Christ's body being subjected, and with what consequences? When I have summarized some possible responses, I shall ask another question: did anyone in late medieval England resist what was being done to this humanity? Did anyone seek to circumvent the dominant figurations of the tortured, bleeding body on the cross? And if anyone did, can we discover the reasons and consequences?

In considering what the late medieval church did to Christ's humanity we can do no better than return to James Marrow's observation that, "The Man of Sorrows, or suffering Christ, does not really appear in the Gospels," nor does a focus on "the physical distress" of Christ. [19](#) This is true not only of the very "high" Christology of St. John's Gospel but of the synoptic accounts too. Characteristic of their vision of Jesus of Nazareth are descriptions such as the following:

page 7

And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing all manner of sickness and every infirmity among the people. (Matthew 4:23)

And Jesus making answer said to them: Go and relate to John what you have heard and seen. The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise again, the poor have the gospel preached to them. (Matthew 11:4-5) [20](#)

The Gospels' Jesus is what his disciples recollect on the road to Emmaus: "a prophet, mighty in work and word before

God and all the people" (Luke 24:19). Mobile, articulate, teaching, healing, he is a layman with a public and prophetic set of practices. Time and again the Gospels show his life and words as an unacceptable challenge to dominant institutions and traditions: "Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the ancients?" (Matthew 15:2). For this reason he can be classified as one who threatens the survival of true religion, a diabolic subverter of divine tradition and the customs of his people (for example: Matthew 9:10-14, 34; Matthew 12:22-24 and 26:1-5; Luke 8:43-48 and 11:14-15; John 8:1-11, and 11:45-50). Nor did he hold back in his own response to those who "occupy the chair of Moses" (Matthew 23:1-36)²¹, or in his challenges to key components of devotional norms (for example, Matthew 12:1-8; John 2:13-20; Luke 6:6-11).

Here it may be helpful, given Bynum's great attention to food practices and food symbolism in the late medieval "imitation of Christ," to recall the Gospels' own concerns in this domain. "The Son of man came eating and drinking" (Matthew 11.19), says Jesus, and the Gospels' emphasis here is on communal meals, table-fellowship and its symbolism. Typical of the practice and its symbolism is the following:

as he was sitting at meat in the house, behold many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Jesus and his disciples. And the Pharisees seeing it, said to his disciples: Why doth your master eat with publicans and sinners? (Matthew 9:10-11: for similar examples see Luke 7:36-50; 19:1-10).

Jesus's response to this orthodox attack is to re-direct attention towards the needs of the excluded, towards love and mercy (Matthew 9:12-13). Such conflicts around table-fellowship in the Gospels are, as Marcus Borg has shown, "about the shape of the community whose life truly manifests loyalty to Yahweh."²² The Pharisees' meal symbolized the construction of "a holy community," one demanding exclusion of the unreformed, the impure, the ritually unclean, the outcasts "sinners." Jesus's feeding, his "table-fellowship," was a public, and profoundly political challenge to this model: "table-fellowship with the unacceptable or outcasts was part of the restorative healing process."²³ It was a public image of community, of inclusiveness, one far removed from the

page 8

self-inflicted injuries and ecstatic swallowing of lepers' scabs so typical of the "imitatio Christi" traced by Bynum.

Perhaps the Gospels can thus help us see how the "holy" fasting and feasting she collects was strikingly separatist and, most important of all, under the confessorial direction and narrative authority of the official clerical elite. Here were a set of practices presented as an "imitatio Christi" and now described as such by historians. But such description *occludes* the way they were an "imitatio" of the dominant and officially produced body of Christ. Such an "imitatio" *occludes* the fact that according to the Gospels it was the official unacceptability of Jesus's public teaching and style of life which led to his trial and horrible death. As the Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx has pointed out, "Jesus did not seek his own death, and he did not even want his passion--Gethsemane is a radical contradiction of that."²⁴ Once the occlusion I have just noted has taken place, it becomes easier to transform "Christ's humanity" into his "wounds" and set up the dominant figure of Christ's body in late medieval devotion as the icon to be adored and the model to be imitated.²⁵ Furthermore we should recall that the "imitation" of this officially produced body, so lavishly illustrated by Bynum, was accompanied by narratives of miracles that vindicated "imitation," vindicated the official model of Christ's body on which the "imitation" was grounded and, in the crucial relationship to the eucharist and eucharist miracles, vindicated the presence of this very body in the eucharist--"corpus Christi," the "corpus verum et proprium," the body that only the institution's male officials could make.²⁶ Furthermore, juxtaposing the body of Christ figured in the late medieval church with the Gospel's Jesus can bring out a possible aspect of the later construction which seems not to be much discussed in current literary and historical work. It is, however, lucidly articulated by Edward Schillebeeckx in some observations on orthodox late medieval devotion:

Cradle and cross were an initiation into the 'suffering Jesus': a helpless child between ox and ass and a Jesus who goes staggering up to Golgotha. . . . However authentic this experience may be, here the Christian interpretation of suffering enters a phase in which the symbol of the cross becomes a disguised legitimation of social abuses, albeit to begin with still unconsciously. . . . 'Suffering in itself,' no longer suffering through and for others, took on a mystical and positive significance so that instead of having a critical power it really acquired a reactionary significance. Suffering in itself became a 'symbol.'²⁷

This is an important insight, whatever qualifications it invites, because it raises as a topic for reflection the flow of power, of official institutional power in the making of the late medieval body of Christ and in the incitements to "imitate" that body. Schillebeeckx maintains that Christ's suffering became isolated "from the historical events which made it a suffering through and for others because of his critical preaching."²⁸ In this way, he argues elsewhere, the dominant tradition side-lined the active preacher of the kingdom, the one

page 9

demanding "a new relationship of human beings to God" with "its tangible and visible side" in a new kind of community entailing "a new type of liberating relationship between men and women, within a peaceful, reconciled society."²⁹ Is the modern theologian guilty of what Bynum likes to call "presentism"? Is his perspective historically impossible in the later Middle Ages? Does the "commonplace" with which this paper began, the figure of the body of Christ that dominated late medieval orthodoxy, achieve an absolute hegemony?

All these questions, I am now convinced, must be answered firmly in the negative. The projects of those many late medieval Christians classified as Lollards certainly included a response to the Gospels, and to orthodoxy, quite congruent with aspects of Schillebeeckx's commentary. Let me recall an episode recounted by Susan Brigden in *London and the Reformation*:

Crosses were everywhere in Tudor London as a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice, but Lollards despised such reminders. Why should the cross be worshipped, asked George Browne, when it was but 'a hurt and pain unto our Saviour Christ in the time of His passion?'³⁰

Such a question marks a radical break with the representations of Christ's humanity sponsored by the late medieval church. But George Browne was, by then, himself in a long tradition. Beckwith, in a chapter on "crucifixion piety," considers the trial of Sir John Oldcastle, Lord Cobham, in 1413, before Archbishop Arundel. She quotes a Lollard account of Sir John's response to one of his clerical interrogators who was demanding if he would "worship . . . the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ": Sir John "spread his arms abroad" and replied, "this is a very cross."³¹ Out of context, the gesture itself could be taken as yet another orthodox "imitatio" of the officially produced body of Christ: perhaps like Eustochia of Messini using ropes "to stretch her arms in the form of a cross"; or perhaps like Margery Kempe's, in Jerusalem:

when þei cam vp on-to þe Mownt of Caluarye, she fel down pat sche mygth not stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd & wrestyd wyth hir body, spredyng hir armys a-brode, & cryed wyth a lowde voys.³²

But Margery is being helped by friars, as befits one whose approach to the body of Christ whether in the liturgy, in visions or in the eucharist unequivocally confirms official doctrine and iconography. However often she was interrogated her orthodoxy was always vindicated--hence her very charming encounter with Archbishop Arundel, in which "her dalyawns contynuyd tyl sterrys apperyd in þe fyrmament," an encounter utterly different to Oldcastle's.³³ As for Oldcastle, Beckwith quotes the following:

being asked what honour he would do to the image of Christ on that Cross, he expressly replied that he would only do it the honour to clean it and put it in good custody.³⁴

page 10

Oldcastle's reply involves a striking rejection of the dominant production of the body of Christ and the devotion organized around it. His subversion was recognized as such, with the full consequences.

We can find a similar understanding, though often expressed more fiercely, in the surviving ecclesiastical records of those Norfolk women and men rounded up by the church in 1428-1431.³⁵ Here are some characteristic views:

. . . no more reverence oweth be do unto the ymages of the crosse than oweth be doon to the galwes whiche men be hanged on. (p. 148)

. . . the signe of the crosse is the signe of Antecrist, and no more worship ne reverence oweth be do to the crosse than oweth be do to the galwes whiche men be hanged on. (p. 154)

. . . every suche crosse is the signe and the tokene of Antecrist. (p. 166)

To these people the cross itself had become "the signe" of institutional power: the language they used was an attempt to disenchant (in their terms) the cross, presenting it once more as the mark of actually existing power, "the galwes." Nor were they always satisfied with talk. In the record of John Burrell, servant ("famulus") to Thomas Moone of Loddon in a household devoted to Lollardy, we find that as he and Edmund Archer were walking to Loddon, at vespers, they saw a certain old cross placed near the gate of Loddon Hall. John Burrell struck through it ("percuciebat") with a "fagothook" he had been carrying (p. 76).³⁶ In an action related both to this and to Oldcastle's gesture at his trial, Margery Baxter of Martham supported her argument against the orthodox use of images, including crucifixes, by stretching out her arms and saying, "this is the true cross of Christ, and you ought and can see and adore that cross every day here in your own house" (p.44).³⁷ Little could bring home more sharply what was at stake (all too literally) in late medieval figurations of the body of Christ. And it is Oldcastle, Margery Baxter and the Lollards of East Anglia, not Bynum's women who threatened, and were seen to threaten, "the authority of the church."³⁸ The humanity of Christ that John Oldcastle or Margery Baxter followed was not the body that called for ecstatic self-torture, self-inflicted wounds and submission to the church. On the contrary, it was a model calling women and men to active and combined resistance to the actually existing power of the church, now fused with the crown and secular power in the institutionally produced body of Christ.

The models of Christ's humanity that the Lollards found in the Gospels encouraged images of Christian communities strongly opposed to current religious institutions, practices and sacralized order. Here it must suffice to note the words of another East Anglian woman arrested in 1428-31: Hawisia Moone maintained that "every man and every woman beyng in good lyf oute of synne is as good prest and hath as muche poar of God in al thynges as ony prest ordred, be he pope or bisshop."³⁹ In the contexts of this paper, it seems reasonable to note that this thoroughly radical dissolution of the sacralized hierarchy of

page 11

gender, and of the fundamental, hierarchical division between priesthood and laity, did not come from any "feminization" of Christ's humanity, not even from the dominant figuration of Christ's body. Nor is this cause for surprise once we have acknowledged that the conventional, suffering body together with its "imitation" was one of the effects of power, of an identifiable historical power. The resources for a collective, radical challenge to this power lay elsewhere. This the Lollards knew.

And their practices, their choices, their knowledge, I have been suggesting, can increase our understanding of what is encoded in the orthodox figuration of Christ's body. They help us see how politically loaded could be the "commonplace" from which this paper began, how politically charged was the conventional iconography that is so easily subsumed to a depoliticized history of iconography, ideas and spirituality. Those Norfolk Lollards, forced to abjure, to fast and to do penance, were also forced to receive public floggings on their bodies, as power imposed an *imitatio* of the official body as it reincorporated these rebellious members.⁴⁰ They could witness the ways power flowed, the ways that, in late medieval England, spirituality and politics, the body of Christ and the body politic were inextricably fused.⁴¹ To understand this fusion, to grasp the minute particulars in which the specific meanings of texts and practices reside, we will have to move in the way Foucault described the moves of his own genealogical history. Moving patiently, "in a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times," it "must record the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality; it must seek them even in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history."⁴² One must seek thus even when, or perhaps especially, at issue is he who, in the words of the early fourteenth century *Fasciculus Morum*, "stretched out his blessed body, as a parchment-maker can be seen to spread a hide in the sun.... his body like a charter to be written on (corpus suum benedictum extendit, sicut pergamenarius ad solem pergamenum explicare videtur . . . corpus suum ad cartam scribendam)."⁴³

Notes

1. Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body. Identity, Culture and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (London, 1993), p. 46.
2. Hans Belting, *The Image and its Public in the Middle Ages* (New York, 1990); Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* (Berkeley, 1987) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York, 1991); Richard Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls: Fourteenth Century Saints and Their Religious Milieu* (Chicago, 1984); James Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (Kortrijk, 1979); Sixten Ringbom, *Icon to Narrative: The Rise of the Dramatic Close-up in Fifteenth-century Devotional Painting* (Abo, 1965); Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, England, 1991); Gertrude Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 2 vols., vol. 1, *The Passion of Christ* (London, 1972);

Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968).

3. Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, passim, and Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, chapters 2 and 6.
4. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 303.
5. Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, p. 24; Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, for example pp .8, 9, 204; Kieckhefer, *Unquiet Souls*, p. 90.
6. See Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68 (1993), 389-418.
7. This identification pervades Bynum's work; for example, *Holy Feast*, pp. 294, 246, 252, 255, 263, 264, 274.
8. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 26, 296, 294.
9. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 193, 191, 93; see chapters 3-5; references to Bynum's work hereafter in text, see note 1 for full references.
10. For examples of clear statements about medieval misogyny, *Holy Feast*, pp. 22-23, 86, 261-63; *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 195.
11. For relevant commentary on Bynum's deployment of the term "woman," see Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders," pp. 391-97, 399-400.
12. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 208, 275; *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 195.
13. The quotation is from *Fragmentation and Redemption*, p. 206 (see pp. 205-22); and in *Holy Feast*, see pp. 268-79, 178, chapter 9 and plates 4, 12, 18, 19 and especially 25-30. Biddick's, "Genders, Bodies, Borders" includes important criticism of Bynum's uses of visual materials.
14. On Bynum's essentializing of medieval "women" see Biddick, "Gender, Bodies, Borders," p. 397.
15. Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca, 1985), pp. 199-200.
16. See Bynum, *Holy Feast*, p. 416, note 35.
17. Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory* (London, 1985), p. 138: this quotation was used by Beckwith in an important essay that greatly influenced my reflections here: "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," chapter 3 in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology and History*, ed. David Aers (New York, 1986), p. 41.
18. Bynum, *Holy Feast*, pp. 189, 208; see similarly, pp. 218, 220-22 and chapters 6 and 7.
19. Rudolph Bell, *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago, 1985), p. 143.
20. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London, 1988), p. 91: see chapter 3.
21. Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, p. 44.

22. I quote from the Douai-Rheims translation of the Latin vulgate, Holy Bible (London, 1964). For similar descriptions of Jesus's practice see: Mark 1:14-15, 32-33, 40-42; Matthew 9:35; Luke 4:16-22. The teaching and extended parables do nothing to shift this focus on preaching, love, mercy, forgiveness and renunciation of power, qualities that have nothing to do with the ecstatic self-inflicted wounds and self-tortures that pervade Bynum's pages.

page 13

23. For a characteristic commentary on Matthew 23, see *English Wycliffite Sermons*, Volume 3, ed. Anne Hudson (Oxford, 1990), pp. 88-91; and especially Wyclif's own "Expositio" printed in *Johannis Wyclif: Opera Minora*, ed. J. Loserth (London, 1913), pp. 313-53.
24. M.J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York, 1984), p. 81.
25. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics*, chapters 4, 5, and 9; on food and its symbolism see also J. D. Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 341-44, 360-67.
26. E. Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York, 1990), p. 794: here see too E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology* (New York, 1979), pp. 179-87.
27. Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 303.
28. Bynum's works are replete with eucharistic miracles, but see too Rubin, *Corpus Christi* and S. Beckwith, "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," chapter 3 in *Culture and History 1350-1600*, ed. David Aers (Hemel Hempstead, 1992).
29. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 699.
30. Schillebeeckx, *Christ*, p. 700.
31. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus in our Western Culture* (London, 1987), p. 19.
32. Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), p. 95.
33. Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 72.
34. See respectively, Bell, *Holy Anorexia*, p. 143, and *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. H.E. Allen and S. Meech (London, 1940), p. 68; see similarly Kempe, *Book*, pp. 70 and 140.
35. Kempe, *Book*, p. 37; see David Aers, *Community, Gender and Individual Identity ... 1360-1430* (London, 1988), pp. 108-16.
36. Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 72.
37. *Heresy Trials in the Diocese of Norwich, 1428-31*, ed. N.P. Tanner (London, 1977): references to pages in this edition follow in the text.
38. Asked by John Wardon's son why he had struck the cross with the fagothook, John Burrell replied that even if he'd struck it more fiercely and with a sharper weapon, that cross would never bleed (p. 76). He seems to be contrasting his action with the church's punishment of the living images of God (for example, Margery Baxter, Tanner, p. 44). At the same time he is suggesting that the church has, in effect, produced such devotional images to reify and control the humanity of Christ through the cross as institutional icon, a reification his action, symbolically undoes.
39. "Et prefata Margeria dixit, 'vide,' et tunc extendebat brachia sua in longum, dicens isti iurate, 'hec est vera crux Christi, et istam crucem tu debes et potes videre et adorare omni die hic in domo tua propria.'" She goes on to comment on the vanity of going to church to adore, or pray to, images or dead crosses.
40. Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, p. 72: on the forms in which the hunting and burning of "heretics" was legitimized, particularly in *De heretico comburendo*

page 14

(1401) and the Leicester Parliament of 1416, see the following: M. Aston, *Lollards and Reformers* (London, 1984), chapter 1; Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation. Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 144-68, 174-80; P. McNiven, *Heresy and Politics in the Reign of Henry IV. The Burning of John Badby* (Woodbridge, 1987); J. Catto, "Religious change under Henry V," pp. 97-117 in *Henry V*, ed. G. L. Harriss (Oxford, 1985); Lee Patterson, "Making Identities in Fifteenth-century England: Henry V and John Lydgate," pp. 69-107 in *New Historical Literary Study*, ed. J. N. Cox and L.J. Reynolds (Princeton, 1993); Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, chapters 2-4.

41. *Heresy Trials*, p. 142; for similar examples see pp. 49, 52, 60-61, 67, 81; on the role of women see Aston, *Lollards and Reformers*, chapter 2; C. Cross, "Great Reasoners in Scripture: The Activities of Women Lollards 1380-1530," pp. 359-80 in *Medieval Women*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978); A. Blamires, *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended* (Oxford, 1992), pp. 250-60 (translations around the trial of Walter Brut, 1391-1393); and A. Blamires and C.W. Marx, "Woman Not to Preach: A Disputation in British Library MS Harley 31," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 3 (1993), 34-63.
42. The quotation from Foucault is taken from "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rainbow (New York, 1984), pp. 76-100, quotation from p. 76.
43. *Fasciculus Morum: A Fourteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook*, ed. and trans. S. Wenzel (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1989), p. 213.